



DIDASKALOI

**RIVISTA SCIENTIFICA
DI STUDI PEDAGOGICI**

Direttore editoriale Antonio Ascione
Direttore responsabile Nicola Tenerelli

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Direttore editoriale Antonio Ascione

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DIDASKALOI, PER I LETTORI

La volontà di strutturare un progetto pedagogico nuovo è stata mossa dalla passione di un gruppo di docenti e ricercatori provenienti da varie università europee, diretti da Antonio Ascione.

La rivista Didaskaloi è solo un aspetto di un progetto più articolato, che intende essere nel contempo sia un laboratorio di ricerca, sia uno strumento di divulgazione delle scienze pedagogiche.

I contributi proposti nella rivista sono finalizzati a evidenziare che gli studi pedagogici rappresentano l'*output* di ogni impegno scientifico e culturale che le società, in ogni tempo e luogo, hanno profuso. Il sapere prodotto modifica la vita delle nuove generazioni: proprio per questo ogni scienza deve attrezzarsi in chiave pedagogica, perché deve affrontare il potere condizionante della percezione/azione del/sul mondo che le scoperte producono.

Lo sforzo intellettuale è sempre destinato ad accrescere non solo la sapienza, *tout court*, ma è coscientemente veicolato per inferire modelli di vita e cittadinanza. Qualesivoglia tipo di conoscenza, nel momento in cui diventa pubblica, assume una concretizzazione politica: tale consapevolezza è sempre sfuggita alla maggior parte degli studiosi e ai tanti esegeti della modernità.

Il gruppo scientifico che muove il progetto Didaskaloi è fortemente convinto che l'apporto delle scienze necessita di essere, per così dire, supervisionato da un filtro sociale, capace di promuovere la positività e responsabilità delle innovazioni destinandole a un reale progresso *umano*. Il post-post moderno che solchiamo, senza una ben definita meta, necessita di una *mens superaddita*, una forza intellettuale che si renda immortale non in senso ontologico ma in forza di una condivisione inalterabile di senso.

Per questo si rivendica la priorità della pedagogia, affinché il prodotto della mente umana sia concretamente destinato al miglioramento collettivo, al benessere qualitativo – non quantitativo, *sic!* – per un numero sempre maggiore di individui, ricondotti alla condivisione del senso e, al limite, anche di un modello valoriale.

La pedagogia che Didaskaloi intende promuovere è umana, *troppo umana*, concretamente mondana allorquando si muova per intercettare e condividere nuovi saperi, per trasmettere pratiche educative inclusive, per valorizzare il talento e promuovere strategie di relazioni positive.

Nella prospettiva suddetta, il trasferimento di ricerche e studi, nonché gli eventuali dibattiti ospitati sulle nostre pagine sono orientati a favorire la comunicazione tra quegli specialisti che siano disponibili a condividere l'idea che l'approccio critico sia la strategia per uno sviluppo *in primis* culturale e – perché no? – anche economico e sociale.

Benché consapevole dell'imprescindibile tradizione storiografica, l'attenzione del Co-

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mitato di Didaskaloi, preso atto della lezione ermeneutica, è orientato ad accogliere riletture del pensiero pedagogico; propone studi sulla natura umana nelle diverse fasi della vita; riconosce la necessità di educare all'agire mimetico le nuove generazioni, costrette alla crescita in una indistricabile complessità sociale; importante spazio è destinato allo studio della corporeità affinché si armonizzi con l'evoluzione tecnologica e la globalizzazione.

La rivista si propone quale *agorà* del progetto Didaskaloi, il luogo fisico dove scambiare le idee e le esperienze, mantenendo saldo lo statuto epistemologico e il valore professionale delle scienze pedagogiche.

Nicola Tenerelli

DIDASKALOI, TO READERS

The desire to structure a new pedagogical project was driven by the passion of a group of professors and researchers from various European universities, led by Antonio Ascione.

The journal Didaskaloi is only one aspect of a more articulated project, which aims to be both a research laboratory and a tool for the dissemination of pedagogical sciences.

The contributions proposed in the journal aim to highlight that pedagogical studies represent the output of every scientific and cultural endeavour that societies, in every time and place, have made. The knowledge produced modifies the lives of new generations: this is precisely why every science must equip itself in a pedagogical key, because it must face up to the conditioning power of the perception/action of/on the world that discoveries produce.

Intellectual effort is always intended to increase not only knowledge tout court, but is consciously conveyed to infer models of life and citizenship. Any kind of knowledge, when it becomes public, takes on a political concretisation: this awareness has often been ignored by the majority of scholars and the many exegetes of modernity.

The scientific team behind the Didaskaloi project is strongly convinced that the contribution of science must be monitored by the constant action of a social filter, capable of promoting the positivity of innovations, destined for real human progress. The Postpost-modernism that we are ploughing through, without a well-defined destination, needs a

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mens superaddita, an intellectual force that makes itself immortal not in an ontological sense but by virtue of an unalterable sharing of meaning.

This is why the priority of pedagogy is claimed, so that the product of the human mind is concretely destined for collective improvement, for qualitative well-being – not quantitative, *sic!* – for an ever greater number of individuals, brought back to the sharing of meaning and, at least, also of a value model.

The pedagogy that Didaskaloi intends to promote is human, *all too human*, concretely worldly when it moves to intercept and share new knowledge, to transmit inclusive educational practices, to enhance talent and to promote strategies for positive relationships.

In the aforementioned perspective, the transfer of research and studies, as well as any debate hosted on our pages, is geared towards fostering communication between those specialists who are willing to share the idea that a critical approach is the strategy for a development that is primarily cultural and – why not? – also economic and social.

Although aware of the inescapable historiographical tradition, the Didaskaloi Committee's attention, taken note of the hermeneutic lesson, is oriented towards welcoming reinterpretations of pedagogical thought; it proposes studies on human nature in the various phases of life; it recognises the need to educate the new generations, forced to grow in an indissoluble social complexity, to mimetic action; important space is allocated to the study of corporeity so that it can be harmonised with technological evolution and globalisation.

The journal proposes itself as the *agora* of the Didaskaloi project, the physical place where ideas and experiences can be exchanged, while maintaining the epistemological status and professional value of the pedagogical sciences.

Nicola Tenerelli

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TRANSGENERATIONAL RELATIONS, IDEOLOGICAL
INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE OF BODIES IN SHARED SPACES

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Abstract. Cultural changes can be accepted consciously or undergo social conditioning. Adults must understand that there is a generational force that induces the entire system to change, despite the resistance of older generations to new ones. This innovative potential of young people must be interpreted and fostered, because it represents the ability of the whole of humanity to adapt to the often unconscious evolution it generates. Young people must also overcome generational antagonism to understand the reactionary dynamics of the elderly. It is up to the educational institution and teachers to propose new educational dynamics, capable of stimulating a critical sense and the ability to channel energies towards a common well-being, far from the current pedagogy of exclusivity and exclusion, perhaps by reinventing common spaces and bodily relations.

Keywords: educational institution, new generations, social childhood, youth.

1. School institution and antagonism between young people and adults.

Any cultural change can be accepted and shared at the end of a conscious process, or, undergone through conditioning by the reality in which one is placed. Above all, teachers must operate by realising that the way they relate to young people produces cognitive and emotional style changes in adults.

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A deep-rooted culture continues to fail to understand that teachers and the entire educational institution produce mimetic reactions to the social reality in which they are related, since they are actors but at the same time users of change.

The *new social childhood studies*¹ consider childhood and adolescence to be social phenomena with axioms and autonomy, so the interpretation that children and adolescents have a subordinate status because they are considered human beings in the making has been abandoned.

Different social groups have forced a reinterpretation of the interactions between them and of the dynamic processes interconnected with adults; we are in the presence of a new pedagogical focus that in some respects leads one to speak of 'generational power': the different age groups, however much they disregard and disapprove of each other, inevitably build mutual interdependence. The change that takes place in one generation determines the change of the other².

The new social childhood studies focus both on young people, as social actors autonomously projecting their own subjectivity, and on the problems of the younger generations linked to economic, political and social conditions in which they act by producing symbolic and cultural defence mechanisms.

The view that young people claim an adult-centric paradigm is now outdated.

Teachers are increasingly called upon to understand how the lives of adolescents develop in order to examine the new generations' interpretations of social life, their friendship and love, work and play relationships, as well as their reinterpretation of religion and relationships with peers and adults³.

It must be made very clear that a group of interconnected subjects, with the same biological and social dimensions, the same vicissitudes, is the bearer of a new and autonomous culture⁴.

The processes of socialisation on the one hand acquire information from the lives of adults, but on the other hand condition them by taking on new points of view. Boys and girls are also able to influence adults and not just be influenced by them; all young people

1. A. James, *Agency*, in J. Qvortrup, G. Valentine, W. Corsaro, M.S. Honig, *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2009, pp. 34-45.

2. Cfr. J. Qvortrup, *Childhood as a Special Phenomenon: an Introduction to a Series of National Reports*, European Centre, Wien 1991; cfr. L. Alanen, *L'infanzia come concetto generazionale*, in H. Hengst, H. Zeiher, *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2004.

3. Cfr. N. Tenerelli, *Educazione, effetti perversi e difesa intellettuale*, 'Educazione giornale di pedagogia critica', vol. 11, n. 1, 2022.

4. W. A. Corsaro, *Peer Culture*, in J. Qvortrup, *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2002, pp. 301-315.

are energetic protagonists of social change with decision-making and productive capacities typical of adults⁵.

The analysis of young people's relations with their teachers and, in general, with adults, when there are conflict situations, makes it possible to understand that social and generational variables influence the perception of the conflict itself and its management.

First of all, the distinction between social groups can no longer be based on empirical data – wealth and/or educational qualifications – because the cultural and historical contexts in which individuals are embedded determine different social constructions⁶.

Egle Becchi suggests that each historical period, as it undergoes social transformations, has its own age class system: each class corresponds to a status and changing roles⁷.

For social historians, the period of life we call adolescence was first considered around the 19th century, a period characterised by a rapidly developing industrial society, which felt the need for schooling of the young.

Previously, families tended to bring up their children according to the canons of a cultural and value determinism that re-proposed similar subjects, with homogeneous and socially shared values also in a future projection⁸.

The relational change between adults and adolescents was mainly evident in more developed and industrialised societies, where greater social complexity and alternatives to lifestyles, roles and above all moral codes were present⁹.

The culture of the second half of the 20th century, infiltrated by *personalism* and *existentialism*, favoured attention to the child and the girl child, no longer considered as the repetitors of a cliché but individuals capable of bringing about structural changes in society.

According to De Lillo, adolescence is that age group in which 'young' subjects ascribe relationship behaviour – often in opposition – to the 'adult' world¹⁰.

With the advent of the boomers came the discontinuity between the parental model and the expectations of the children¹¹: from then on, the adult world had to deal with boys and girls anxious to build their own separate identity.

Despite the fact that with the advent of digitalisation the new generation has taken on specific characteristics within society, adolescents continue to suffer from an uncertain

5. Cfr. W.A. Corsaro, *Le culture dei bambini*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2003.

6. C. Satta, *Bambini e adulti: la nuova sociologia dell'infanzia*, Carocci, Roma 2012.

7. Cfr. A. Bandioli, *Egle Becchi: il bambino e la sua pedagogia*, 'Materiali di Estetica', n. 9.1-2, 2022.

8. J. Demos, V. Demos, *Adolescence in Historical Perspective*, 'Journal of Marriage and Family', 31, 4, 1969, pp. 632-638.

9. M. Flores, *Adolescence and Adolescents in Recent Historiographical Research*, 'Rivista di Psicologia Analitica', 37, 1988, pp. 127-140; P. Ariés, *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, Laterza, Bari 1968, p. 145.

10. A. De Lillo, *Preadolescence: a problematic age*, 'Quaderni di Sociologia', 62, 2013, pp. 7-21.

11. J. Demos, V. Demos, *Adolescence in Historical Perspective*, cit.

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status: they struggle to be recognised in the adult world, but at the same time they do not give up on realising their own, unprecedented roles and paths.

Each subject lives striving to realise his or her own future made up of unprecedented rules and functions linked to his or her own expectations; each can choose his or her image and role from the many possible ones generated by fashions and the mass media, scientific production and common sense, literature and influencers, all of which are also evolving models¹².

The regenerative will of the subject takes on meaning for its own context, just as every group has meaning in a collective reality: since the end of the 20th century, we have been speaking of peer culture as 'a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers'¹³.

The new generations are driven by the creativity of their age, and produce a mixture of languages and structures that they adopt in relation to their age.

Children and young people inevitably build their own culture by taking their cues from the adult world and, in so doing, are simultaneously part of their peers' and adults' culture.

For Qvortrup¹⁴, young people are subjected to the same social inferences as adults, so they realise and are conditioned both by their peers and by society as a whole, seemingly wanted and managed by adults.

Social reality is perceived by young people as a limitation, a cage, because adolescent culture is underestimated: the adolescent is judged by adults in relation to what he has not yet achieved, as if he were an unfinished subject¹⁵. Moreover, the intellectual autonomy of adolescents has always been regarded with suspicion, problematic and in eternal conflict with that of adults.

Within his studies, Corsaro found that there is an interchange between age groups, to the extent that many times children make adult decisions and, vice versa, adults behave like children.

From the 1960s, Coleman¹⁶ pointed out that in industrialised societies, due to economic and social changes, adolescents were developing a 'separate culture for adolescents', a 'language' different from that of adults, intercepted only for functional reasons: adults

12. M.C. Belloni, *Has childhood become a social phenomenon? Contributions to the debate on the foundation of a new sociological paradigm*, 'Quaderni di Sociologia', 42, 2006, pp. 7-39.

13. W.A. Corsaro, D. Eder, *Children's Peer Cultures*, 'Annual Review of Sociology', 16, 1990, pp. 197-220.

14. J. Qvortrup, *I bambini e l'infanzia nella struttura sociale*, in H. Hengst, H. Zeiher, *Per una sociologia dell'infanzia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2004, pp. 25-44.

15. P. Eckert, *Language and adolescent peer groups*, 'Journal of language and social psychology', 22, 1, 2003, pp. 112-118.

16. Cfr. J. Coleman, R. Bremner, B. Clark, J. Davis et al., *Youth: Transition to adulthood* (Report of the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee), University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1974.

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were engaged in knowing the language of youth – ‘youthism’, from jeans to music, from soft drinks to sport, useful for market and sales reasons – reducing the gap between youth and adults, but adolescentising the social system *altogether*.

As a result, the adolescent paradigm becomes the most represented – putting the model of parents and teachers into disuse – thus reducing the ability of adults to influence young people¹⁷: adults are isolated through the creation of self-normed social behaviour and language by young people.

In Italy, it is easy to recognise that the first manifestation of anti-system autonomy on the part of young people occurred with the 1968 revolts: at that time, young people conditioned adults by conditioning the socio-political system in a democratic sense.

The student population succeeded in eroding the pyramidal authoritarianism atavistically embodied by the school – appropriating Marcuse’s expression: imagination in power! –.

The young man of the beat generation opposed his parent who had been brought up with liberal-bourgeois criteria: he no longer recognised a value in being obedient and compliant, one had to be critical and anti-dogmatic.

Moreover, the generational power of young people challenged the knowledge and evaluation power of teachers, who slowly accepted to move according to less stringent selection criteria and with less authoritarianism.

Even the state was influenced by its young people: proof of this is the 1973 Delegated Law 477 with new regulations on the legal status of school personnel and the establishment of Collegial Bodies, for a new relationship between school and educating community, between young people and adults.

2. *Pathological construction of relationships*

1968 was a demonstration of the profound intermingling of all age groups: young people possessed the power to condition the policies of adults and to undermine their tension towards immobilism – reactionary conservation – that generally cloaks institutions.

Teenagers have always stigmatised their distance from the educational institution by comparing it emblematically to two other institutions: the hospital and the prison.

These two institutions are particularly evocative, as they have the most rigorous, panoptic social function of controlling bodies.

The students describe their school experience by evoking the prison as a place Foucauldianly delegated to supervise and punish, often capable of suppressing the imagination and freedom of young people¹⁸.

17. H.V. Bateman, *Sense of Community in the School: Listening to Students’ Voices*, in Id., *Psychological Sense of Community: Research, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by A.T. Fisher, C.C. Sonn, B.J. Bishop, Kluwer, New York 2002, pp. 161-179.

18. B. Hooks, *Insegnare a trasgredire. L’educazione come pratica della libertà*, Meltemi, Milano 2020, p. 34.

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According to the young people, the school-prison is emblematically depicted in the teachers, who are perceived as antagonists; this parallelism makes us realise that for the students, the goal of the school institution does not coincide with their own goal; worse, the students state that they suffer the goal of the adults to their detriment.

It should go without saying that the purpose of the educational institution and its teachers is to train young people to make them competitive and capable of taking on work and social roles independently.

The perception of being prisoners of the school induces young people to build defence, survival mechanisms. Every student would also like school to be a place for dialogue, where they can share their curiosity but also any inner problem that makes youthful minds restless, sometimes to the point of rebellion¹⁹.

When invited to reflect, the students are also aware that it is only through school learning that it may be possible for them to build a career path to fit into society.

Of course, it cannot be denied that school manifests certain contradictions, the first of which is that of offering young people knowledge without them feeling the desire for it: 'how can desire – the desire for knowledge – arise when learning knowledge must be compulsory?'²⁰.

In the minds of all students, the school also evokes the hospital.

It was Don Milani himself who used the same metaphor more than half a century ago: 'If you lose them [problematic children], the school is no longer a school. It is a hospital that cures the healthy and rejects the sick'²¹. Indeed, the school makes explicit a mechanism of inclusion that, paradoxically, certifies the difference between subjects.

On the basis of the 'care' strategy evoked by Barbiana's school, the contemporary school focuses its attention above all on those students labelled as 'difficult' – BES, DSA, bullies, inadequate, etc. –; attention to the weakest, however, produces as a metacognitive effect the concept of the school as a place of 'care'; the weakest are considered the bearers of pathological youthful fragility.

The institutional school system communicates a cultural imprinting²² that gives back to its young people the idea of their non-conformity with the social system: the democratic social structure, with its transparent voting, programmes and teachers equal for all attests to its limitations as it builds dissimilar citizens, some considered adequate and others less so. The educational institution can fail by producing spurious elements – second-rate, according to corporate logic, *sic!* –.

19. P. Freire, *Pedagogia degli oppressi*, Gruppo Abele, Torino 2018, pp. 52-53.

20. M. Recalcati, *L'ora di lezione. Per un'erotica dell'insegnamento*, Einaudi, Torino 2014, p. 67.

21. L. Milani, *Lettera a una professoressa*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 2007, p. 20.

22. E. Morin, *I sette saperi necessari all'educazione del futuro*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2001, p. 27.

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The school, emblem par excellence of democratic equality, turns out to be bifid and paradoxical, able to include and exclude, to do good and bad, to tell and contradict itself simultaneously²³.

The acronyms with which too many young people are stigmatised return subjects defined by their diversity and implicit social uncomfortableness; they are labelled as if they were a deviant fruit with respect to the homogeneity of the school system; the institution defends itself by highlighting them in order to concentrate resources towards them and tend towards the constitutional principle of pedagogical, didactic, training and regulatory uniformity but, in so doing, creates hierarchies of social value of citizens in training.

The school's desire for uniformity reveals a desire to construct an intellectual-sanitary *format* that identifies differences, passing them off as illnesses: in short, the school cannot rid itself of cultural prejudices because it constructs them itself.

3. *Teaching class and oppression*

Both young people and adults live in the school context; we need to examine how the school system can also be oppressive for school staff and educators.

Students see their teachers as alternately prisoners or doctors, not realising that teachers also experience the burden of role and institution.

Teachers often tell of feeling 'chained' whenever they feel burdened by their role; or they consider their state of mind pathological and confess to feeling drained, 'exhausted', in agreement with the many studies that define teachers' suffering as burnout syndrome²⁴.

There are many reasons why even teachers feel cornered by the institution, due to exasperated bureaucratisation, the government's desire to digitise school work, and the incommunicability between generations.

Government deafness always imposes new regulations on the educational institution, often unenforceable because they are only imagined in theory, without considering the complexity of the school and social context where they should be applied.

To give just one example, school rules dictate that children must be seated in their desks even though many studies indicate that a subject's concentration can last a maximum of twenty minutes. It is exhausting for teachers to manage the minds and bodies of young people by pandering to oppressive logic structures as suggested by the laws. Students do not understand that such oppressive formulas are also suffered by teachers.

In the educational relationship, the teacher experiences his status as a 'situated concept', as if he himself were an object, a prisoner of his role²⁵.

23. A. Mbembe, *Nanorazzismo. Il corpo notturno della democrazia*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2019, p. 23.

24. Cfr. V. Lodolo D'Oria, *Insegnanti, salute negata e verità nascoste. Cento storie di burnout in cattedra*, Edises, Napoli 2019; cfr. I. Monticone, *Stress e burnout degli insegnanti*, Sovera Edizioni, Roma 2015.

25. Cfr. J. Lave, E. Wenger, *L'apprendimento situato. Dall'osservazione alla partecipazione attiva nei contesti*

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The teacher's 'shackles' are constituted above all by the expectations of the institution and the students, their families and colleagues themselves – *hell is other people*, Sartre would say.

How can one 'cherish the space for surprise, excitement and the erotic beauty of knowledge'²⁶ if teaching is bound to the repetitiveness of timetables, exams, programmes, assessments, regulations?

And if a teacher wishes to assert his or her own identity, not to be conditioned, to repudiate any intellectual subalternity, he or she risks exclusion and stigmatisation; moreover, many teachers are victims of the paradox caused by the impossibility of accommodating the demands of adolescents and their families, of politics and the social system.

Hence, even teachers are judged with the same categories of judgement that affect students; when they claim their intellectual freedom, they are rebellious, refractory to forms of sociability if not downright squintern²⁷.

The experience of the pandemic has shown that the school institution can do without a norm-scheduled education, because in that unprecedented situation the school held up thanks to the commitment of individuals.

In that lockdown period, teachers digitally self-trained in order to be able to connect with students. Young people also adapted responsibly to the new reality of education without any obligation.

We can say that the pandemic has defeated the logic of vigilance, demonstrating how it is possible to educate to the freedom of formation, to the assumption of awareness of one's role, recognising one's responsibility.

The school must be able to generate that process of identity construction for each young person faced with the need to choose, just as it does for adults.

The educational process must stimulate the autonomy and responsibility of young people in the digital age and consider that new generations challenge the authority of old models when they realise that they will be forced to live in a totally different way from their parents.

This means that parents and teachers should become totally different adults.

It should be teachers who train the new generations towards such a conscious change; teachers themselves must understand that the so-called fragmented, liquid identity cannot be demonised because it is the result of the complexity of the globalising culture²⁸.

What is needed is a differently structured school, where the management of emotions, ethics and aesthetics become a lesson for young people.

sociali, Erickson, Milano 2006.

26. M. Recalcati, *L'ora di lezione. Per un'erotica dell'insegnamento*, cit., p. 95.

27. P. Freire, *Le virtù dell'educatore. Una pedagogia dell'emancipazione*, Centro editoriale dehoniano, Bologna 2017, p. 57.

28. Cfr. G. Porcelli, *Identity in Fragments*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2005.

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Young people should be educated in freedom and a critical sense, experiencing the usefulness of opposition, learning to argue in order to build common projects to be nourished by solidarity and peace²⁹.

Children should not be kept ‘with their mouths shut and their asses seated’³⁰ but they should be able to discuss, joke, argue and build their own knowledge.

‘Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the reflex form that freedom takes’³¹ : only in this way could young people be guided to deal with postmodern complexity.

4. *Intellectual autonomy*

Chomsky recounts how a young teacher approached him for advice on what to do when children asked for explanations outside the curriculum.

Every teacher is aware that he or she is often faced with the paradox of castrating the initiatives of the most inquisitive pupils, as it is necessary to study for assessment tests: ‘[...] teaching to test: that is exactly the opposite of education’³².

The effort of education should be to train critical young people and trustworthy people by teaching them values, instead of training them for economic and financial success: ‘What is important for a person, at any level, is to cultivate their ability to think for themselves. [...] There was this world-renowned physicist [at MIT, Chomsky’s university, ed.] who taught freshman physics, and he was famous for when he was asked in class, “What are we going to cover this semester?” He would answer, “It doesn’t matter what we’re going to talk about, it matters what you find out. That’s what education is all about’³³.

The methodology that leads to the homologation of ideas and needs must be eliminated because it annihilates individuals and their critical sense, a defect that the democratic school carries with it, convinced it is only a fascist or Putinist prerogative³⁴.

29. Educating for peace is one of the goals of the 2030 Agenda that is fundamental to ensuring inclusive and equitable education. Peace is a competence, not a feeling. Peace education means developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions that promote a peaceful and non-violent culture. Being at peace, making peace, seeking peace, keeping peace are competences for citizenship; see: *Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile*, ‘Agenzia Coesione Territoriale’; <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/comunicazione/agenda-2030-per-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile/>

30. M. Serres, *Pulgarcita*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires 2013, p. 52.

31. M. Foucault, *La ética del cuidado de sí como práctica de la libertad*, Gallimard, Paris 1994, p. 260.

32. A. Robichaud, *Interview to Noam Chomsky*, 26 March 2013; <https://chomsky.info/20130326/>

33. *Ibid.*

34. G. Savino, *Perché Putin si traveste da storico e (ri)scrive il rapporto tra russi e ucraini?*, ‘Formiche’, 17 July 2021; <https://formiche.net/2021/07/putin-russia-ucraina/>

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To be informed, to have curiosity, to ask questions, to experiment: that is what it means to be free. Pedagogy must decode fairy tales so that children are no longer afraid of dragons and darkness, so that they become adults capable of facing the difficulties and responsibilities that the near future holds, as never before for the new generations.

Overcoming the triad punishment-fear-direction that is reproduced daily in classrooms and then meeting in school spaces that possess a more convenient logic for communicating; renewing the conception and management of the bodily order to re-motivate the construction of knowledge and reproduce the sense of values in everyday life; the physical transformation could be followed by an emotional transformation that, starting from school spaces, could induce a new rationality, undoubtedly capable of overcoming the dogmatism that our school still preserves and exercises.

Freinet ventilated the need for a new school as early as 1929³⁵: the education process should have stimulated the aspirations and talents of young people; he spoke of 'education for work' and showed that any pedagogy should start from the most pressing needs of young people, without neglecting emotions and feelings³⁶.

Freinet knew very well how impossible it was to have teachers and publish books that could correspond to the peculiarities of each pupil, but he stimulated their creative writing, the free text, a method with which the young person could learn independently and, at the same time, discover himself.

Freinet considered it essential to teach freedom of thought, the ability to freely pursue particular interests and curiosities, constructing opinions to compare with others. It was necessary to educate the freedom of bodies, to make everyone understand their own physical needs and requirements, balancing them in relation to others, to economic potential, to natural resources: 'The children who are in our classes in ten years' time will be citizens we will have prepared for servitude and war... or for peace and freedom'³⁷.

Teachers could be trained in Sohail Inayatullah's technique³⁸, the so-called Stratified Causal Analysis; with this method, already known in the late 1980s, everyone has to communicate his or her own point of view to unite it with that of the others. The word conveyed in a group becomes an instrument of co-creation, with which to examine the complexity of the topic one wishes to investigate, perhaps by proposing solutions: solutions are alternative scenarios, possible futures for which to strive in the present.

The individual's opinion unleashes a future that needs to be explored, studied in detail to verify its true potential and negativity, not to predict the future or to prevail over oth-

35. J.G. Monteagudo, *La pedagogia de Celestin Freinet: Contexto, bases teóricas, influencia*, Secretaría General Técnica. Centro de Publicaciones. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia España, Sede Electronica 1987.

36. J.A.C. Muñoz, R.S. Melean, *Pensamiento e ideas pedagógicas de Célestin Freinet*, 'BibLat', 4, 2008.

37. G. Piaton, *El pensamiento pedagógico de Célestin Freinet*, Marsiega, Madrid 1975, p. 76.

38. S. Inayatullah, *Causal layered analysis: Poststructuralism as method* (1998), 'Metafuture', 28 April 2023; <https://www.metafuture.org/2023/04/28/causal-layered-analysis-poststructuralism-as-method/>

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ers, but to create a shared space useful for reflecting on the present, for trying to visualise alternative and sharable scenarios, projects for the collective well-being.

With these exercises of the mind, adults are induced to reflect, especially towards decoding dreams and expectations, moving from the choices of sociability and sharing.

Adults and young people could together also give voice to the negative feelings they experience, a strategy to build the relationship space that is now missing, which can offer psychological benefit and, through sharing and trust, build new ways of learning³⁹.

5. *Concluding remarks*

A study by McKinsey&Partners⁴⁰ confirmed that millions of hours of work will be lost with the advent of A.I.-related automation; moreover, so many jobs will be destined to disappear: what role will our young people carve out for themselves in society when half of the professions will be automated, vehicles will be driverless, healthcare will be entrusted to computers, and drones will pick fruit? On what value platform should the members of the society of the future harmonise with each other?

Adults' desire to re-propose their own lifestyle to young people is doomed to failure. If schools were really to act for the 'good of future generations', they would have to work with new pedagogical strategies that take into account the concrete training and role prospects of a social reality that is evolving exponentially.

We are aware that the vital dimension of contemporary man is in continuous osmosis between areas and sectors that communicate with each other – Floridi believes that human beings are no more only *on line* but now *on life*⁴¹ –.

Schools continue to lose credibility because they continue to carry forward the expectations of an old-fashioned liberalist model that promises glamorous goals belonging to a social system that has demonstrated its limitations and is being eroded by technological evolution.

Teachers, by continuing to direct the potential of young people towards a social future that is consciously already obsolete, lose credibility.

Still educating the new generations as if they were instruments of adult projects is creating resentment and antagonism in young people; the knowledge they learn, once the lifeblood of future prosperity, appears more like potential self-defeat.

39. Cfr. V. Gherardi, M. Manini, *Didattica generale*, Clueb, Bologna 2001; cfr. N. Tenerelli, *La lezione della pandemia per una scuola che educi alla scelta*, 'QTimes', XIV, n. 3, 2022, pp. 85-96.

40. J. Manyika et al, *A future that works: automation, employment, and productivity*, 'McKinsey Global Institute', January 2017; <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/overview>

41. '[...] man lives in hyper-historical societies where it no longer makes sense to ask whether one is online or offline'; cfr. L. Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, Springer, Berlin 2015, p. 1.

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It is necessary to demystify the present and implement pedagogical choices that favour autonomy in order to foster empathy and synergy between generations, promoting in adolescents the responsibility of their own knowledge, hence of their own being.

The everlasting question repeated to the youngest 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' has become hypocrisy, if not, indeed, a mockery; in a scenario where future prospects are unpredictable, adults and teachers have a duty to educate the new generations in critical sense and autonomous choice.

The new generations will soon be called upon to take responsibility for responding according to their own discernment to postmodern complexity: they may do so in a puerile, deleterious and antagonistic manner.

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SPORT AND MARXISM: A THEORETICAL-PEDAGOGICAL
INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF LEISURE TIME

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Abstract. Human beings are spontaneously moved by an impulse that draws them towards those activities defined as secondary, if not irrational, including play. Marxist culture held that play too was functional to work and the improvement of productive performance. In the 20th century, play was considered an indispensable element of life; play, which became organised sport, restored an indispensable character of society – leisure – and gave meaning to human action that transcended historical processes. Sport embodies the image of present time: an overflowing succession of events, an uninterrupted flow of information. Every temporal space of our daily life is punctuated by sporting events; the game is no longer a separate activity, but a cultural product that carves out its own space in everyday life, accompanying the social process.

Keywords: leisure, work, sport, play.

1. At the origin of the great ideological division between Left and Right, we find another conundrum: in human prehistory, does work or play come first¹? The most important ideological opponents in this struggle are Marx, Engels and Plechanov, who argue for the anthropological primacy of work; conservative cultural theorists such as Scheler, Ortega,

1. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport: il corpo nelle ideologie politiche dell'Ottocento e del Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1988, p. 51.

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Huizinga and Pieper, while not despising work, assign it neither the meaning nor the dignity found in the Marxist tradition².

This debate presents two questions, one historical and one anthropological: 1) was primordial human society created by work-oriented or sport-oriented impulses? 2) Is work or play the absolutely primary category of life? Regarding the Marxist tradition, Marx and Engels realised that the new science of the 19th century was bringing to light the meaning of mythology and the irrational side of man. Puzzled as to how to deal with these new discoveries, they decided to leave out primitive societies in their treatment of historical materialism³.

In fact, according to them, both the myth and magic of prehistory and the unpredictable and unnatural character of poetry belong to the irrational field that also includes the impulse to play⁴.

One of Engels' merits as a theorist is that he directly addressed the anthropological question. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels state: 'Living implies first of all eating, drinking, dwelling, dressing and more. The first historical action is therefore the creation of the means to satisfy these needs'⁵.

In the last chapter of his *Dialectic on Nature*, Engels defines work as 'the first fundamental condition of all human life' and proposes a chronology: 'First work, after it and with it language'⁶.

The first Marxist thinker to interpret the apparent antithesis of work and play as an ideological problem is Plechanov, one of the founders of the first Russian Social Democratic Party⁷. He admits that human prehistory remains an enigma and recognises that Marxist theory must keep the field of prehistory in check otherwise it risks ignoring the most important authority. Plechanov's aim is to reject the idea proposed by the anthropologist Bucher who states: 'the work practised by primitive peoples was a vague phenomenon and the closer we get to its origins, the more similar it is, in form and content, to play'⁸. In doing so, Plechanov refers to Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Psychology*, which states: 'prey animals show that their game consists of simulated hunting and fighting'⁹. This means that the content of the game is determined by the activity by which they keep themselves alive. Thus Plechanov, with this ethological analogy, wants to show that the activity necessary

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ivi*, p. 52.

5. *Ivi*, p. 54.

6. *Ibid.*

7. G. Plechanov, *La concezione metafisica della storia*, Samonà e Savelli, Roma 1970, p. 55.

8. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 55.

9. H. Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, Legare Street Press, London 2022, p. 52.

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for the sustenance of individuals and society as a whole precedes the game and determines its content¹⁰.

However, Plechanov's argument has been criticised by more recent Marxist theorists. According to them, Plechanov's mistake was to have treated the two categories (play and labour) merely as antithetical essences. In fact, Maynard Salomon stated: 'the relationship between work and play is dialectical. Man, in order to participate in creative work, turns away from an instinctive and repetitive labour process and turns it into play. So when he returns to work', Maynard continues, 'this can be transformed into a creative-liberative activity. In this sense, play is the artistic aspect of work'¹¹.

On the other hand, Scheler, a philosopher and social theorist of the years between 1920 and 1930, on the problem of primordial human activity considered from the point of view of 20th century cultural conservatism, assigns play a subordinate status to the work function, which is criticised as lacking real creativity¹²; Ortega then divides the phenomena into two large classes of activity: the first is original, creative, vital, spontaneous and disinterested; the other, utilitarian in character, exploits and mechanises the first¹³. Thus, all utilitarian actions, which aim at adaptation, must be considered as secondary life functions, whereas the first and original activity of life is always spontaneous and overflowing. Finally, two essays by two conservative intellectuals: Huizinga and Pieper. The former, in his essay *Homo ludens*, a study of the playful element in culture, defines man not only as *homo ludens*, as one-dimensional man, but as *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*¹⁴. Moreover, his task is to demonstrate the absolute indefiniteness and irreducible character of play so that he can ultimately find a source of human action that transcends historical processes. Indeed, what makes Huizinga interesting is his insistence that 'the cultural historian should not treat history diachronically, but should instead study the past as if no chronological element were implicit in history. The absence of progress implies', Huizinga continues, 'that there was no progress for this historical process'¹⁵. This makes us realise that for him the game does not possess a materialistic quality and that history is therefore irrelevant to this absolutely primary category of life. Pieper's concept is analogous to Huizinga's notion of play, but his target is 'the inhuman state of labour in a totalitarian regime where man has no relation to reality'¹⁶.

10. G. Plechanov, *Lettera senza indirizzo*, Samonà e Savelli, Roma 1972, p. 56.

11. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 56.

12. Ivi, p. 69.

13. Ivi, p. 71.

14. J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, tr.it. C. Van Schendel, Einaudi, Torino 2002.

15. Ivi, p. 73.

16. J. Pieper, *Sintonia con il mondo. Una teoria sulla festa*, Cantagalli, Siena 2009, p. 44.

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These two primary interpretations of the work-life dialectic are irreconcilable; what has been recognised by the ideologues conducting this dispute is the fact that, just as conservatives recognise their Marxist adversary, so the Marxist adversary knows them.

This debate took place during the mid-19th century, a period when the reorganisation of work rhythms, linked to the industrial revolution, began to impose a new distribution of social time¹⁷. A number of claims demonstrate, particularly in Great Britain, the perception of change. For example, in England, as in the United States, a popular industry and culture of city entertainment was born!

The transport revolution brought about a new relationship with space. Thomas Cook organised his first voyage in 1841, the series of great universal exhibitions opened in London in 1851 and contributed to creating the image of a hitherto unknown collective leisure. At the same time, in the United States, sporting entertainment was born with the creation of the first sports clubs.

With the end of the Second World War, leisure time triumphed, understood as a commodity and perceived first and foremost as time available for consumption. The period immediately following the Second World War was a period of tension between the ideology of the rational use of leisure time developed in the 19th century, and the desire for distraction, which manifested itself through the development of mass entertainment¹⁸. However, in all western countries, the distinction between pastimes considered fruitful, which belong to the sphere of amateurism, and distractions considered not very respectable or, on the contrary, too closely linked to professionalism, was established in the 19th century¹⁹.

Thus, a multifaceted activity develops in Great Britain aimed at controlling and repressing distractions considered anarchist and encouraging rationalist ones. Thus, a process of regulation of squares, parks and other public spaces, the prohibition of animal fights, the surveillance exercised over boxing and the sale of drinks is affirmed; all this with the desire to multiply playgrounds intended to moralise youth gangs. The United States constitute the main laboratory of contemporary mass leisure, which sees leisure as time earned, time saved from work; not as a means of education, but as the way to achieve a certain degree of happiness. In France, on the other hand, although the question of leisure time remained for a long time associated with proletarian struggles with the monopoly of educated militants, we see sport achieving, in the second half of the 19th century, an autonomy and a temporal specificity. It is above all the opposition between play time and work time that becomes more marked²⁰.

17. A. Corbin, *L'invenzione del tempo libero 1850-1960*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1996, p. 4.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ivi*, p. 6.

20. *Ivi*, p. 215.

The figure of the sportsman is affirmed. The latter is a new character, belonging to a large family, a lover of horse riding, his passion is racing, he bets, he sets up stables, he watches over the weight of his jockeys and his intention is to compare his work with the games he plays in order to justify them and underline their usefulness²¹. But the novelty of the term *sportsman*, born around 1840, the birth of sports clubs in France, is even greater given that racing already existed in France. In fact, races had been held twice a year since 1777. The change lies in quantity: ten races in 1822, more than twenty in 1830²². In addition, the commentaries accompanying the races, the organisation involved in running them, made their first appearance. The sportsman defines himself as useful and aspires to an economic result. This is why, in 1833, the Jockey Club was founded, a society of encouragement to improve the horse breed in France²³. This society claimed a national role: to increase stables, select stallions, train animals by increasing their muscular strength. Thus from non-profit activity, racing becomes a useful activity. The declared perspective is to create a leisure that has its own validity, to transform someone's pastime into a practice beneficial to all. The sportsman of 1840 invents neither horse racing nor hunting, but gives them another purpose, thinking of them more from the point of view of production and labour²⁴. Another practice, also linked to work, develops and gains importance: rowing. We no longer find sportsmen belonging to large families, but young bourgeoisie men rich enough to buy a boat and turn simple pleasure trips into competitions. The rower does not aspire to make his leisure useful, but conceives of it as an escape, a way of breaking away from work and everyday life. We have on the one hand a leisurely break for the rower, on the other hand a productive leisure time for the sportsman; in both cases, it is a matter of justifying leisure in relation to work, and this represents the start of a new way of dividing time.

2. Beyond their differences, rowers and sportsmen resemble each other: they exist in relation to work. They also resemble each other in their organisational forms: both group together in a club or society. The Jockey Club of 1833, the Paris Nautical Club of 1853 change even more the practices of the games and exercises proposed: they establish and guarantee rules that apply to everyone, they are judges of performance and results²⁵. Another similarity is their focus on measurements and course speed: the sportsman has a watch with an independent seconds hand and a seconds dial for calculating speed, while the rowers time both their races and courses. In the beginning, however, these were only

21. Ivi, p. 216.

22. Ivi, p. 217.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Ivi, p. 219.

25. Ivi, p. 220.

private initiatives. The aim was to create a broader association of clubs grouped together to set up a framework of hierarchical meetings, local and national or even international championships. For the first time, a secular leisure activity imposed an autonomous programme and time frame. Thus in 1880 a first congress of the rowing societies was needed to reach an initial outline of convergence, but there was a split between a Federation of Northern French nautical societies and a Nautical Union of South-Western societies²⁶. It took a new congress, held in 1890, to succeed in imposing a national agreement on the hierarchy of championships, the ranking of rowers, the classes of boats. That same year, a French federation of rowing clubs was born from these regional groups, which made it possible to draw up a national calendar of nautical competitions. The creation of the calendar has an even more precise effect on the content of leisure time by facilitating the invention of preparatory periods, those in which apprenticeships and perfecting phases dominate. The calendar gives an order not only to the recreational events, but also to the preparatory phases that precede it. It allows the alternation between training and rehearsals by marking the time between rehearsals. Sport did not create training, but the calendar enhances its function and legitimacy as never before. With the regular succession of encounters, the annual rhythm and the specific training required to tackle them, sport creates an autonomous time²⁷. It is a separate duration that contributes not only to creating new time cycles, championships and their preparation, but also to inventing new calculations of time itself. The recurrence of competitions stimulates comparisons with previous results: each performance is compared with others, each trial is projected onto a table. Through these formalised, successive and repeated competitions, the chronological planning of sport helps to establish records. This results in course times that are increasingly monitored and compared with each other. Sport begins to become what compensates for work, a contradictory duplicity ensues: sport as a time of respite and acceleration²⁸. On the one hand the desire for respite, on the other for intensity of movement. The dominant idea at the end of the century is that respite is not always absence of movement: it can be part of the desire to separate leisure time and work time. It is leisure, and only leisure, that constitutes the element of rupture. The originality of the sporting time invented in the last two decades of the 19th century even becomes threefold: a time distinct from ordinary life, with its own autonomous rhythm and its own manifestations; a time of rupture that receives a considerable impetus in opposition to work; finally, a time characterised by intense activity, increasingly dominated by the anxiety for chronometric precision²⁹.

This time of sport is still identifiable with the organisation of secular festivities and its focus on values linked to both holiday and technical effectiveness. But we see the suc-

26. Ivi, p. 227.

27. Ivi, p. 230.

28. Ivi, p. 235.

29. *Ibid.*

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cess of sport above all in the 20th century through its presence in the press, its conquest of urban spaces or those of advertising posters³⁰. The sporting results rebroadcast and repeated over and over again accentuate the taste for news: a ritualised, creeping, omnipresent information that characterises the society of our day. It is in this sense that the time of sport could become the symbol of our time. In the 20th century, sport becomes the canonical example of constant information. This can be seen, for example, in the announcements from the first football World Cup, played in Montevideo in 1930: ‘Yesterday in Montevideo, France beat Mexico. This is a very flattering result’³¹.

Sport embodies the image of today’s time: an overabundant succession of events, an uninterrupted flow of information. There is no longer a simple space of time in our everyday life, it is not just a separate activity, but rather a faithful reflection of this everyday life: every result creates a new piece of information, every sporting encounter, every gesture made by a champion represents an event. The pages of the newspapers demonstrate this, accumulating news in the form of flashes: ‘French fifteen defeated for the first time in the tour of South Africa’; ‘French six at Wimbledon get to know their opponents’; ‘John Museeuw wins first stage of the Tour de Suisse’³². These are headlines that create events, events that only exist as they pass through the media. Sport feeds an overabundance of announcements and news because it is the desire for instantaneous communication that prevails over its content, it is the desire for information that is constantly renewed that prevails over its depth. Sport returns to us, even more effectively than anything else, the image of our modernity: a society that multiplies the event to better avert the new, out of a need to consume time like objects, out of fear of the event itself³³.

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30. Ivi, p. 236.

31. Ivi, p. 238.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

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SPORT, BODY AND CORPOREALITY BETWEEN
WELTANSCHAUUNG AND 20TH CENTURY IDEOLOGIES

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Abstract. The human body during the sport gesture stages performances that cannot be reproduced on the stage, making the audience experience them directly: the speed of the body, the physical power of the action, dexterity, gestures that possess a powerful symbolic-evocative force that is communicated in an instant. The ring becomes a stage where principles and values are transferred and shown, in a more subtle, less authoritarian and easily socially acceptable way. Emil Brunner added to the list of political ideologies the practice of sport by which a type of state, science, art, economy and social order is highlighted; sport creates a specific *Weltanschauung* for society. A full understanding of the dynamics of sport and its potential can contribute to the construction of a less conflictual society.

Keywords: *Weltanschauung*, sport, body, political ideologies.

The idea that sport was also an ideological affair has never been disavowed despite the fact that sport is better known for other reasons than its political-ideological values. An authentically ideological approach to sport, for example, could be seen in the official statement issued in November 1977 by Cuba withdrawing from the amateur baseball tournament to be held in Nicaragua¹. The official Cuban press agency considered the choice of Nicaragua, (then ruled by the dictator Somoza) as the venue for the matches, 'the most brutal denial of the principles that sport should uphold'² and stated that Ni-

1. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport: il corpo nelle ideologie politiche dell'Ottocento e del Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1988, p. 22.

2. *Ibid.*

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caragua did not present ‘the minimum moral conditions that any sporting event should represent’. Over time, societies have presented sporting ideals as expressions of ideologically defined models of exemplary citizenship. The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner, for example, argued in the first half of the 20th century that political ideologies are prescriptive because, he said, ‘if I know what your idea of life is, I can tell you what kind of state, science, art, economy and social order you will create’³; to this list of phenomena that derive from a specific *Weltanschauung* of society, Brunner adds sport⁴.

This is, after all, the stated ambition of all totalitarianisms, namely to spread their ideological contents into every sphere of life⁵. According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the term ideology is “a systematic scheme or coordinated body of ideas and concepts concerning human life or culture that includes ideas about sport, its cultural benefits and its negative effects on society”⁶. Ideology can also be defined as a vehicle of both explicit content and implicit assumptions i.e. a systematic set of attitudes and beliefs that can be explained by reference to a broader context of ideas and which can in turn be related to a deeper cultural structure⁷.

Classic texts on ideology, such as Marx and Engels’ *The German Ideology*, emphasise that it cannot be taken at its literal value because there are always two levels to consider: on the one hand, what is said; on the other hand, what this might mean given the ideologue’s intentions. Within a given historical context, an ideology can be seen as a philosophy with practical suggestions in the lives of individuals or entire societies. For example, Marxism has been defined as a “dynamic *Weltanschauung*”⁸ i.e., as Sartre states, “a philosophy that, born of social movement, is also movement and affects the future”⁹. In *A Worldview*, Freud defines the *Weltanschauung* as “an intellectual construction which, starting from a certain general hypothesis, solves all the problems of life in a unified way”¹⁰.

In sport, the concept of ideology is essentially practical for three reasons. The first is that the interpretation of the body and its athletic potential is functional to fundamental assumptions concerning political ideology. The second is that it serves to analyse the conceptual conflict on the politics of sport that pits Marxist dogma, in its variants, against those of its two historical adversaries: fascism, on the one hand, and liberal democracies,

3. Ivi, p. 23.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. S. Timpanaro, *Sul materialismo*, Nistri Lischi, Pisa 1975, p. 24.

9. Cfr. J.P. Sartre, *Questioni di metodo*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1976, p. 24.

10. Cfr. S. Freud, *Opere*, Boringhieri, Torino 1979, p. 25.

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on the other. The reason lies in the fact that the introduction of ideological content into sport during the 20th century revealed a more general phenomenon, namely the mystification of most forms of culture.

At the same time, however, sport exerts a profound influence on men's imagination, and the nature of this fascination and its supra-ideological dimension mean that sport is perceived as a kind of dramatic performance¹¹. Indeed, it provides the human body with dramatic possibilities that rarely occur on stage, such as body speed, the physical power of action, dexterity, acts that in the intensity of the moment in which they are expressed possess a powerful symbolic-evocative force within them.

Although sport and theatre represent two distinct types of drama, the fusion of these two forms of representation can be understood by examining two aesthetic and political doctrines that played an important role in the avant-garde theatre of this century: Futurism and Expressionism¹². Both 'movements' claim affinities with movement, speed, the dynamic body and the concept of sport that unites them. In this sense, sport can be considered a form of expressionism as seen in the writings of the German expressionists in the period from 1910 to 1925 where we find athletic images. For example, in an artistic manifesto from 1929 the expressionist playwright George Kaiser states that the purpose of life is to achieve record results in all fields¹³. For the Italian futurist Filippo Marinetti, setting a record added an extra element to his revolutionary theatre¹⁴. Revolutionary playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud also saw sport as something similar to avant-garde theatre. Brecht, in fact, considered the sports audience superior to the theatre audience and sport was evaluated by him as 'a form of spectacle whose principles were to be transported to the theatre, with the stage as a ring'¹⁵. For Artaud, on the other hand, the actor is 'an athlete of the heart' in that all means of wrestling, boxing, one-hundred metres and high jump find analogy in the exercise of the passions¹⁶. A characteristic feature of sports Expressionism then is that it appeals to all types of ideology. In other words, there is, at first, a universal aesthetic, which then differentiates into divergent ideological messages. Hegel refers to this undifferentiated stage when reflecting on the competitions of ancient Greece he states: 'in sport, Nature has penetrated into Spirit and through his physical abilities, man shows his freedom, i.e. that he has transformed his body into an organ of the Spirit'¹⁷.

11. J. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 28.

12. Ivi, p. 29.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Ivi, p. 30.

15. A. Artaud, *Il teatro e il suo doppio*, Einaudi, Torino 1968, p. 31.

16. J. Willet, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period*, Pantheon, New York, 1978, p. 30.

17. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lezioni sulla filosofia della storia*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1970, p. 34.

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Before the ideological differentiations of sport, Rousseau and Schiller had noted cultural differentiations; Rousseau recommends keeping national sporting traditions alive¹⁸ while Schiller interprets sporting recreation as a means of cultural diagnosis¹⁹. It would then be Marxism's task to transform the question of national tendency into one of ideological tendency. Indeed, Georges Magnane states: 'sport can be neither progressive nor regressive but is a continuous creation of the men who practise and organise it'²⁰.

Thematic conflicts such as amateurism versus professionalism, individualism versus collectivism, male supremacy versus feminism also belong to the world of sport. Such problems have long affected American sport particularly burdened by ideological issues such as masculinity, femininity, celebrity, patriotism, race, and violence. In fact, three theories of sport emerged in America twenty-five years ago: the neo-Hellenist one that incorporates typical internationalist themes; the conservative one that includes both critical and vitalist elements; and a leftist critique that proposes neo-Marxist positions.

Neo-Hellenism is evident in a sports manifesto published in *Sports Illustrated* in December 1960 by newly elected President John Kennedy. The author, evoking the idealised image of classical Greek athleticism, argues that 'the same civilisation that achieved many of the highest achievements in philosophy and drama, in art and politics, also gave us a belief in the importance of physical vigour, which has become part of the Western tradition'²¹. A variant of this position was announced by Robert F. Kennedy in 1964, who emphasised that it is 'in our international interest to recover our Olympic superiority, to give the world tangible proof of our intimate strength and vitality'²². The conservative doctrine of sport, on the other hand, was offered by an American politician and published by the most ideological of modern vice-presidents, Spiro Agnew. In this idea of sport, we find hostility towards those who philosophise against sports competition and the denunciation of Maoist sport. Then there is another more traditionalist-conservative position that harbours contempt and indignation towards neo-Marxists who fail to fully understand the capacity of sport to fascinate the working class. Finally, the position of the Left, which expresses typically Marxist views, criticises authoritarian and racist behaviour in the world of sport²³.

18. J.J. Rousseau, *Considerazioni sul governo in Polonia*, Laterza, Bari 1971, p. 34.

19. F. Schiller, *Lettere sull'educazione estetica dell'uomo*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1970, p. 34.

20. Cfr. G. Magnane, *Sociologie du Sport*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 35.

21. J. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., pp. 43-44.

22. Ivi, p. 45.

23. J. Scott, *The Athletic Revolution*, Free Press, New York 1970, p. 46.

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THE FASCIST IDEOLOGY OF SPORT

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Abstract. Fascism has always extolled the cult of virility. It is well known that right-wing totalitarian ideologies promoted the ideal of the warrior, of strength, drawing the theoretical assumptions of this vision both from Latinity and from a – limited and literal – interpretation of the Nietzschean lesson. Fascism produced a political aesthetics and became a phenomenon of style: with his often denuded torso, with his passion for speed, Mussolini was the arbiter who transformed the confused initial violence of the Blackshirts into the sport sensibility that is for us in the 20th century. Famous is the propaganda photo in which the Duce is filmed on horseback jumping over small obstacles that, with a cinematic trickery, give the impression of being formidable obstacles.

Keywords: Mussolini, body, fascism, sport.

1. Fascism presents examples of statesman-athletes, but there is no one who takes athletic culture as seriously as Mosley¹.

Nevertheless, the public image of Mussolini, the duce of Italian fascism, undoubtedly often resorted to glorifying athleticism as a vehicle for educating the masses. John Diggins, a professor of History at New York University, described him as a sports hero, and

1. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport: il corpo nelle ideologie politiche dell'Ottocento e del Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1988, p. 99.

Benito Mussolini's sense of sporting dynamism also involved aviation during the heroic phase of his early years². In fact, to celebrate the exploits of aviator Lindbergh, the Italian dictator declared: 'A superhuman will has conquered space by assault and subjugated it'. Fascism saw the aviator, and his athleticism, as a 'superman' (which he felt he was). Fascist ideology is based on the uncontested authority of the body, and the sacred authority of instinct. In this sense, fascism represents any political movement in which the leadership of masculinity and appeals to irrational impulses are combined³.

Fascism has always expressed a cult of virility. It is known to all that the Nazi-fascists promoted the virile ideal of the Aryan warrior and that its artistic manifestations have always been fascinated by an ideal body type. Less well known to the general public, on the other hand, has been the relationship between fascism and the masculine sporting style, the degree to which sporting values coincided with fascist values, and also how a sporting style characterised by para-athletic self-flagellation may have become a specific mode of the fascist imagination⁴. However, it cannot be denied that sport was not promoted by fascism. On the other hand, the sporting nature can be found within every political culture, and every political culture rewards its successful athletes. But while all cultures extol their sporting heroes, not all promote ideologies that encourage and ideologically display the specific traits of sport: competitive aggression, conscious physicality, indifference to pain. Ideologies, in fact, present different personalities derived from different political anthropologies, offering competing models of the ideal man. A comparison between the fascist and Marxist models leads to two important conclusions: fascist ideology utilises and exalts elements of athleticism, Marxism, despite the successes of communist athletes, cannot embrace certain fundamental factors of athleticism without violating the basic assumptions of its official ideology⁵. The sporting disposition is not, therefore, based on an interest in sport in and of itself, but is a disposition that the American psychologist Sheldon describes as 'the level of personality just above physiological function and below the acquired behaviours of beliefs'⁶. This syndrome rewards spontaneity and action, its secret source of inspiration and authority being the body itself⁷.

Since the end of the 19th century, a number of authors have begun to describe, with critical detachment, the specific forms of a sporting temperament that combines ath-

2. J. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: the view from America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1972, p. 99.

3. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 100.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Ivi, p. 129.

6. W.H. Sheldon, *The Varieties of Temperament*, Harper and Brothers, New York 1942, p. 130.

7. *Ibid.*

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leticism with aggressive and even sadistic impulses⁸. The best known of these polemical texts is *The Theory of the Affluent Class* by the American sociologist Veblen⁹. He proposes a characterology with two main categories: ethnicity and temperament. The three major ethnic types found in industrial civilisation are the dolichocephalic blond, the brachycephalic brown and the Mediterranean¹⁰. The two major directions of variation within an ethnic type are the peaceful or anti-predatory variant and the predatory variant. According to Veblen: 'The dolicho-biondian type of European man owes most of its dominant influences and its important position in recent culture to the fact that it possesses the characteristics of predatory man'¹¹. Veblen's interpretation of the predatory temperament as a sporting temperament is interesting. Males who are reaching maturity, he states, 'pass through an archaic phase that corresponds to the spiritual level typical of warriors and sportsmen, who show signs of blocked intellectual development'¹². Veblen, therefore, sees the sporting temperament as a rehabilitation of the primitive barbarian temperament. For this reason, the cult of the (predatory) sporting temperament found its full expression in fascism. Indeed, Hitler called war 'the most powerful and classical expression of life'¹³. 'Only war,' said Mussolini, 'brings all human energies to their maximum tension and imprints a seal of nobility on the peoples who have the virtue to face it'¹⁴. However, it is important to remember that the sporting temperament does not always assume a clear social identity, as the American sociologist Cesar Grana states: 'The magically powerful adventurous male, whom I have called the para-athlete, may be a soldier, an aviator or a sportsman; he represents a different symbolic content of our social heritage'¹⁵.

2. The fascist doctrine of the body finds its most important precursor in Nietzsche's call for the masculinisation of Europe. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche repeatedly refers to the physiological aspects of human beings: 'The majority of mortals are physiologically malformed and altered individuals, whose envy and resentment towards

8. Ivi, p. 131.

9. T.B. Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Allen & Unwin, London 1924.

10. *Ibid.*

11. T.B. Veblen, *La teoria della classe agiata*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Torino 2007, p. 102.

12. *Ibid.*

13. A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf. La mia battaglia*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2007, p. 215; E. Nolte, *I tre volti del fascismo*, Mondadori, Milano 1971, p. 132.

14. B. Mussolini, *I discorsi della rivoluzione* (1920), Alpes, Milano 1923-1931, p. 76.

15. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 134; cfr. also C. Graña, *Cultural Nationalism: The Idea of Historical Destiny in Spanish America*, University of California, Berkeley 1978.

prosperity is a cause of their ascetic outlook. This asceticism must be countered with a chastity that has nothing to do with an athlete's or jockey's abstention from women: instead, it is their (women's) dominant instinct that demands this¹⁶. 'It is physicality,' Nietzsche continues, 'that binds the noble races to the ferocious beast, greedy for prey and victory'¹⁷. Nietzsche therefore does not propose an athleticism per se, but rather a vitalism of which the body, dynamic and healthy, is an effective metaphor. It is the dominant instinct, not the performance of the athlete or jockey, that really counts. Nietzsche's doctrine of the body reappears in Sartre's essay on anti-Semitism.

Sartre states that: 'Inauthentic Jews, in response to the hostility with which anti-Semites comment on Jewish physical characteristics, deny that body which betrays them and thus alienate themselves from their vital values'¹⁸. Like Nietzsche, Sartre distinguishes between two different attitudes towards the body: while the inauthentic Jew abandons his body, the Aryan manifests a certain kind of self-affirmation that manifests the intimate functioning of the organism: grace, nobility, vivacity. Despite his hostility to fascism, Sartre thus ends up approving of the fierce gait of the fascist Italian while reproaching the Jew for not appreciating the vital values of his own body. Both authors, in fact, propose the body as an ideological variable, and both recognise its authority¹⁹.

It is now acknowledged that fascism was, more than anything else, a political aesthetic and therefore a style phenomenon. Mussolini was the stylist who clearly demonstrated a twentieth-century sporting sensibility. One strategic move was to have himself photographed on a horse jumping over small obstacles, which, with a clever camera tilt, gave the impression, for propaganda purposes, of being formidable obstacles²⁰.

The English writer Christopher Isherwood recalls that in Cambridge in the 1920s, sporting students took pleasure in following the manly style of the Italian leader. In fact, he says: 'Mussolini enjoyed a certain popularity: rugby players and rowers in those days frequently called their terriers Musso'²¹. 'Italy, Mussolini used to say, is a land that loves theatre and its leaders must orchestrate their public relations'²². Mussolini did this in the most athletic way possible. While posing for a photo, while arriving in Locarno on an outboard motorboat, or when he was exalting himself practising boxing with his instructor, Mussolini cultivated the image of a man manfully aware of the difficulties of reality

16. Cfr. F. Nietzsche, *Genealogia della morale. Uno scritto polemico*, tr.it. F. Masini, Adelphi, Milano 1984, p. 40.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Cfr. J.P. Sartre, *L'antisemitismo. Riflessioni sulla questione ebraica*, SE, Milano 2015.

19. *Ibid.*

20. J. Kirkpatrick, *Mussolini: A Study in Power*, Avon Books, New York 1968, p. 137.

21. N. Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, Columbia University Press, New York 1959.

22. Cfr. D.M. Smith, *Mussolini*, Rizzoli, Milano 1981.

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and ready to face them²³. He was fond of all kinds of sports, but preferred the more dangerous ones. His passion for horse riding became legendary, as did the speed with which he drove his car²⁴. From time to time, he would invite foreign journalists to see him fencing, playing tennis or riding, and urged them to report to the public on how skilled and experienced he was in this field²⁵. This interest in athleticism was not just a propaganda gimmick: it stemmed from both Mussolini's exhibitionism and his physical narcissism, which provided him with the energy he needed for public displays²⁶. Mussolini also did not tolerate the idea of growing old and had his head shaved to hide the first signs of age²⁷. The apotheosis of this physical narcissism was reached with a project conceived by the Duce himself in the 1930s, which was, however, never completed. The idea was to create the so-called 'Foro di Mussolini', a gigantic bronze colossus, the symbol of fascism: a half-naked figure of Hercules, brandishing a truncheon with one hand and raising the other in the Roman salute, with his face resembling that of Mussolini.

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23. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 137.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ivi*, p. 138.

27. *Ibid.*

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SPORT BETWEEN NAZI AND SOVIET IDEOLOGY

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Abstract. The value of the body is central to Nazi political anthropology. The aesthetics of the body is another element of racial doctrine. The basic racial categories are represented by Nordic and Oriental types. The body of the Aryans represents the tangible and vital proof of racial superiority, of the new human type to which Nazism gave birth. The culmination of racial doctrine is reached in the institutes for human procreation, designed to produce the aristocracy of the future. The body for Nazism must be educated politically; sport is a defence against one-sided intellectualism, it highlights the limits of the human intellect. As in other totalitarianisms, Nazi sport occupies a political role, as it aims to show both the strength of the state and the strength and courage of the Germanic man and woman. Such approach was maintained even after the Second World War.

Keywords: East Germany, physical culture, race, Nazism.

1. Unlike Mussolini, Hitler had no genuine interest in sport except for its use as a form of political expression, such as the 1936 Olympic spectacle in Berlin¹. According to the German writer Albert Speer, Hitler's view of sport was decidedly anti-heroic. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler associates the formation of his early ideals with having communed with

1. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport: il corpo nelle ideologie politiche dell'Ottocento e del Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1988, p. 231.

extremely robust boys; and there are, in his work, at least twenty favourable references to sport and the cult of the body². The primary significance of the body for Nazi ideologues was more about its racial properties than its sporting ones, which were, in turn, officially interpreted as manifestations of racial superiority. If National Socialism presents itself as a pedagogy that considers the body as a primary reality, this is mainly due to Hitler's demand for bodies that are robust to the core. Inferior to Hitler in ideological authority, Alfred Baeumler, an academic philosopher, was the only major sports theorist the Third Reich had³.

The body is the core of Nazi political anthropology. The body of the Aryans represents the tangible and vital evidence of the racial value, of the new human type that national socialism had given birth to. The culmination of racial doctrine was reached in the human procreation institutions that were intended to produce the aristocracy of the future. The German military officer Himmler, further extending this policy, planned to seek out selected women, with the following requirements: athletic grace, good intelligence, culture, delicate feelings, sharpness of expression, and who were to marry the SS leaders, once the latter had taken leave of their previous wives. In this case, the body is valued for its biological and aesthetic qualities as such. 'But in a racial community,' writes Baumlér, 'the body is *ein Politicum*, a public rather than a private element; the *Volk* itself is a collective body. Physical exercises are a public affair'⁴. Baeumler's emphasis on the political education of the body forces him to choose the *corpo politicum* over the *corpo athleticum*. Indeed, Baeumler states: 'Recognising the importance of the political character of our leaders excludes any absolute conception of the body. The honour of the body is a part of the collective honour of the nation'⁵.

The ideological concerns of Nazi sports theory are prefigured in the doctrine of Friedrich Jahn, the founder in 1811 of the gymnastics movement in Germany. It was Jahn who first used the concept of *Volkstum*⁶ to refer to nationalism as a racial cult that would only require a few Nazi additions. It is worthy of attention that Alfred Baeumler, who was one of Jahn's main supporters during the Third Reich, felt obliged to declare that the Nazi ideology of sport surpassed Jahn's doctrine for three main reasons.

Firstly, it ascribes a deeper significance to Jahn's racial mysticism than the master himself; secondly, it manifests a more convinced appreciation of the age of adolescence, seen as a time of initiation into manhood; thirdly, Nazi doctrine presupposes the awakening of a sense of public life (the body as *Politicum*). Despite these advances, the three funda-

2. A. Speer, *Memorie del Terzo Reich*, Mondadori, Milano 1971, p. 231.

3. Ivi, p. 232.

4. Cfr. A. Baeumler, *Dal simbolo al mito. Da Winckelmann a Bachofen*, Spirali, Milano 1983, p.149.

5. Ivi, p. 159.

6. F.L. Jahn, *Das deutsche Volkstum*, Wentworth Press, New South Wales 2018.

mental themes of Nazi physical culture, namely the sense of racial superiority, the salvation of the *Volk* and military education, are all present in Jahn⁷.

The latter, starting in 1811, disseminated the *Turnen* model in Germany: on the strength of Hobbes' consideration in *Leviathan* of the link between the aesthetics of the body and its social value, he came to theorise the body as a key factor in expressing a man's value and posited the Greek body as the canon against which all men should be catalogued⁸. Jahn, in order for his theory to appear to have even firmer roots, planned and designed the uniform for his athletes on the basis of the ancient Germanic model, to show that he was not infected by modernity that has difficulty recognising beauty in its purest form. In the German *Turnen*, any reference to fair play is absent: the improvement of one's body and spirit does not at all involve the simultaneous observance of the rules within which the limits of competition are set: on the contrary, this will be geared towards increasing the gymnast's sense of belonging to the German nation⁹.

2. The aesthetics of the body is another element of racial doctrine. The fundamental racial categories are represented by the Nordic type and the Oriental type: the former is characterised by strong superior emotions and heroic outlooks; the latter, on the other hand, has fiery feelings, is easily aroused, and has a lesser predisposition to war¹⁰. 'The steely muscles and solid constitution of the German', wrote Bruno Malitz in 1934, 'contrast with the softness and effeminacy of the Jew'¹¹. 'Jews', says Manrman, 'lack the heroic structure of the body'. An insulting axiom of this attempt at racial anthropology declares: 'Jews have no control over the functions of the body: observing the movements of a Jew, one has the feeling that his limbs are tied to the joints in a different way from the Germans. The arms and legs dangle, their movements are apparently uncontrolled, as if they were, for some reason, independent of the subject's will'¹². This principle is occasionally applied to dance, which, depending on the race, has given rise to different styles. The Nordic type dances with a nonchalant and distinct mastery of the body, in unison with others and in harmony with tradition, while the Oriental type dances with the excited virtuosity of the solitary dancer. The Nordic (male) dancer usually maintains a military and austere demeanour¹³.

7. A. Baeumler, *Dal simbolo al mito*, cit., p. 160.

8. *Ibid.*

9. D.F.A. Elia, *Lo sport in Italia: dal loisir alla pratica*, Carocci, Roma 2009, p. 34.

10. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 234.

11. B. Malitz, *Der Mensch im Dorf*, Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, Berlin 1938, p. 10.

12. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 240.

13. *Ibid.*

Without doubt, the best known Nazi para-athlete was the ruthless Waffen-SS warrior. The standard SS type, as Himmler envisioned it, is a combination of physical structure and character. Himmler insisted that the SS man had to be built in a well-proportioned manner: for example, there should be no disproportions between the lower leg and the thigh or between the legs and the body; otherwise exceptional physical exertion is required to sustain the long marches. Candidates with an inadequate physique were offered the opportunity to take a kind of lighter physical test. The SS man had to be one who fights for the love of the fight; he had to obey without question; he had to be not only well trained but also impervious to all human emotions; he had to be contemptuous of inferior beings and arrogant towards those who did not belong to the Order¹⁴. The athletic ideal of the SS was Reinhard Heydrich, who rose through the ranks of the SS in 1936 and became head of the Gestapo and criminal police. Heydrich was a tall, athletic man whom his subordinates often called 'the blond beast'. He was passionate about all forms of sport; he was a fencer, an equestrian, a pilot, a skier, a pentathlete; he was also an SS inspector for physical training. The SS fighter is essentially a man within an organisation who has no right to decide the meaning of his actions. The hard test to which he voluntarily submits himself is ultimately demanded by the bureaucracy to which he has sworn loyalty¹⁵.

Nazi sports doctrine is consciously anti-intellectualist. In his speech at the German Gymnastics Festival, Hitler declared: 'Life will not be protected by weak philosophers, but by strong men'¹⁶. Youth leader Baldur von Schirach demanded a decision between the soul and the cold intellect. Physical education for women is recommended as a counterbalance to the one-sided development of those mental tendencies that lead to a solitary existence and estrangement from the racial community. Sport is a defence against one-sided intellectualism. Jahn, too, highlights the limits of the human intellect, and it is interesting to see how Baeumler, who had sung victory in 1934 for his triumph over intellectualism, showed more caution three years later, if only to reject the outright denigration of intellectual workers like himself. Like other types of culture, Nazi sport plays a political role that prevents it from being an end in itself. The body, in practice, must be politically educated. Baeumler, somewhat paradoxically, argues: 'Non-political sport is, politically speaking, as harmless as it is harmful. Sport, without political content, does not touch the individual deeply'¹⁷. But further on he argues: 'Nothing is more instructive than the philosophical and political neutrality of sports associations. The non-political character of sport is an invention of bourgeois sports clubs'¹⁸. From the point of view of

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ivi*, p. 234.

16. Cfr. A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, cit., p. 230.

17. Cfr. A. Baeumler, *Dal simbolo al mito*, cit., p. 120.

18. *Ivi*, p. 130.

totalitarianism, the non-political or neutral stance is equivalent to dissent, the refusal to conform with ideological norms.

This Nazi norm was pure aggression. Boxing represented, for Hitler, the idea of a politically healthy sport that even Baeumler would have approved of. Sporting internationalism, on the other hand, represented an international pacifist plot hatched by the Jews to weaken the German man and to replace war-oriented sport with faith in universal reconciliation. Baeumler considers forced adherence to international regulations and standards a practice foreign to Nazism¹⁹.

The Nazi critique of sport is also forced to take a profoundly ambivalent stance towards high-level sport practised for the sake of records. On the one hand, the pursuit of the record is an expression of undisciplined individualism, of an abstract, non-political technical endeavour that distances itself from the larger community. On the other hand, the record performances of Nazi athletes represent a positive expression of state vitality. Alfred Baeumler, as usual, takes the most ambiguous position. Indeed, he states: 'It is all too easy to reject the mania for records and the objective qualities that make them possible; this belongs to the essence of sport and prevents its degeneration into mere play. But the mania for records and the industrial approach weigh on sport like a curse, once the first phase, with the tests of courage and the conquest of space, has been overcome'²⁰.

The Nazi critique of sport is linked to a critique of modern (liberal) civilisation that closely resembles the position of (non-fascist) cultural conservatives. For example, the statement 'Our civilisation is characterised by an excess of nervous tension' recalls de Coubertin; but to associate this condition, as a Nazi author does, with effeminacy of body and spirit suggests an infatuation with virility, which de Coubertin did not share. A further issue addressed by conservatives is that of the fragmented and incomplete condition of the modern individual, against which the secular state presents itself as a weak substitute for the lost organic religious culture. This is a problem that every totalitarian government claims to have solved, and along with the solution it offers a critique of inauthentic existence. This is Baeumler's diagnosis: 'Modern man finds himself in a world devoid of symbols that bind him to the earth and secure points of support'²¹. What Baeumler offers is the reintegration of man in a Nazi context. In fact, he states: 'The awareness of the importance of physical culture recently awakened in our time is a major historical phenomenon, a sign that the reintegration of man, the recovery of his space, has begun'²². A third theme specific to conservatives, and also explored by Baeumler, is the critique of the passive spectator. Jahn imagined a human type superior to the mere spectator. In fact, he states: 'It is the sport of exceptional performances, focused on the achievements

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ivi*, p. 110.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ivi*, p. 111.

of the individual athlete, that creates an audience similar to a crowd of passive spectators, more or less experienced²³. But even here, appearances are deceiving, as the Nazi idea of passivity is not the same as that of cultural conservatives. For Baeumler, passivity is in practice the refusal to participate in the political system, whereas for conservatives it is rather a lack of autonomy or energy that tends to alienate the individual. Thus, different values give rise to different critiques of modern civilisation. In this sense, Nazism is in fact pseudo-conservatism.

Nazi sports texts generally emphasise self-control rather than the spontaneity of the game: German historian Hajo Bernett points to the tendency of Nazi ideology to distort the game²⁴. But Baeumler emphasises the non-instrumental character of physical culture, and for this reason breaks away from Nazi doctrine. Baeumler speaks of a spontaneous joy without which gymnastics loses its character. Baeumler also corrects the work-leisure dichotomy by introducing exercise as a third factor in which the body works for itself. Another non-instrumental aspect of Baeumler's sports doctrine is his hostility to the interpretation of sport as a hygienic measure. The difference lies in the fact that while Baeumler's hygienism is focused on the well-being of the German citizen, the hygienism he fought is deficient precisely because of its narrow medical outlook²⁵.

The broader context in which the Nazi ideology of sport can be interpreted is that of totalitarianism. Both Nazi and Soviet sports doctrine promote a new human type to replace the mediocre and venal bourgeois. Both have to deal with the contradiction between those who achieve exceptional performance and a collectivist ethic. Both reveal what Hajo Bernett has called the 'utopian initial phase' that despises competition²⁶. 'The leaders of Soviet Russia,' readers of *Foreign Affairs* were told in 1956, 'have always attached primary importance to sports for the state and have made their position clear in numerous Communist Party communications and *Pravda* editorials. They established that there can be no sport for sport's sake and that hunters, for example, should not simply seek recreation, but should consider themselves explorers who have obligations to Soviet society'²⁷.

Thus sports cannot have an independent existence in the USSR and are regarded as mere means to an end, namely the consolidation of state power through education and mass indoctrination. The American impressions of these years highlight the fervour and utilitarian function of Soviet sport. Indeed, they state: 'Russia is building the largest mass army of athletes the world has ever known. Sport is everywhere. The ideal of physical fitness is symbolised by the countless statues of sports figures that can be seen everywhere

23. *Ibid.*

24. H. Bernett, *Sport Und Schulsport in Der Ns-Diktatur*, Brill Schoningh, Paderborn 2017.

25. A. Baeumler, *Dal simbolo al mito*, cit.

26. H. Bernett, *Sport Und Schulsport in Der Ns-Diktatur*, cit.

27. Cfr. J.N. Washburn, *Sport as a Soviet Tool*, 'Foreign Affairs', April 1956.

in Soviet parks. Their athletes are deadly serious. When Mikhail Krivonosov broke the world record in the hammer throw, he simply sat on a bench and pulled his cap over his eyes. He was given a job to do and he did it'²⁸.

The foundation of Stalinist sport is the promotion of competition as a socially useful way of life²⁹. The official turn in the direction of sporting productivity occurred in 1936, when the party sanctioned a change from purely physical culture to physical culture combined with competitive sport as a means of politically socialising the population against the new dominant forms. Emphasis was placed on the utilitarian function of sport³⁰. The transformation of Soviet sport corresponds to the transformation of Soviet political anthropology: fraternity is devalued in favour of hierarchy. In other words, the collectivist ideal and, for a certain period, the cult of technology and the machine, are replaced by an ideal of leadership and the cult of individual performance. It is in this context that the heroic cult of work, known as stakhanovism, can be understood. The stakhanovist was not simply to be the greatest compared to all previous human models, but also to represent a qualitative leap forward in anthropology³¹. And it is very interesting that the most characteristic epithet used for the stakhanovist was 'bogatyř', which places him in the tradition of the fantastic Russian epic heroes, authors of superhuman feats. Endowed with special innate powers, the 'stakhanovist' possesses the sheer audacity to disregard the established empirical rules and scientifically determined technological limits³². But the modern East German or Soviet athlete is not a pure stakhanovist for two reasons. Firstly, because he or she does not symbolise contempt for the limits imposed by scientific calculations and technology; secondly, because the athlete is not a figure outside the system. After all, the Soviet concept of sport, from whatever period, has always been identified with work. Indeed, in 1930, a common slogan on factory walls was: 'Every sportsman should become an assault worker, an assault worker a sportsman'. But an assault worker stood at a lower level than the workaholic. This, in fact, is the celebration of stakhanovism even before its time, i.e. when it becomes the great, essentially stylistic temptation to imaginatively fuse sport and work, beauty and hard physical labour become one.

Stakhanovism as a cult has disappeared from Soviet society, but not the problem of the extraordinary individual and egocentrism³³. What the Soviets cannot tolerate is the star syndrome: the open conceit, exhibitionism, and the fall into an antisocial egomania. For example, in 1958, football champion Eduard Streltsov was expelled from the national

28. *Ibid.*

29. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 271.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ivi*, p. 272.

32. *Ivi*, p. 273.

33. *Ivi*, p. 274.

team and sentenced to twelve years in a labour camp for hooliganism³⁴. In 1978, a player who transgressed the rules was banned for drinking and displaying an overly egocentric attitude. This criticism of athletic egocentrism is part of a broader condemnation of adolescent perversity encouraged by Western values. In 1966, the popular Soviet poet Evgenij Evtušenko criticised the image of James Bond as an example of the seductive cruelty of the modern superman³⁵. The cult of individualism can also have a pragmatic aspect. According to a Danish observer, the Russians, in 1971, abandoned the collective style in ice hockey in favour of individualism: the result was that they won a world championship two years later. It is somewhat ironic that after being derided by Westerners as machines and robots in the late 1950s, Russian players finally triumphed by adopting the Hellenic ideal of the complete development of the individual³⁶.

In this period, it is the cosmonaut who represents the para-athlete par excellence, symbolising the development of physical endurance and skill in the context of human-machine symbiosis. He (or she) is also an officially sanctioned human model. Indeed, when an official Soviet author of atheist culture was asked by an Anabaptist in 1981 who or what atheists believe in, he replied that they believe in people with initiative, on a par with stakhanovists or the late cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. The importance of the cult of this model is expressed by a sculpture that stands in front of the cosmonautical training institute near Moscow: in the centre of the forecourt, stands a statue of a heroic figure, larger than life-size. The face is modelled on that of Yuri Gagarin, but the character is a legendary creature³⁷.

Polish sports sociologist Andrzej Wohl is of the opinion that sport plays an evolutionary role in the development of human motor skills³⁸. Wohl also believes that people, like machines, can change qualitatively, dreams of a transformation of the human body to make it fit for the world, and believes that sport aimed at breaking records is an invaluable tool to achieve this. In the Soviet Union and East Germany, much more than in the United States, the cosmonaut is an official heroic sports figure, celebrated in these terms³⁹.

Soviet hygienism condemns three categories of sport: games contrary to reason, exhibitionist sports and philosophically foreign forms of physical culture. Soviet dogma places great importance on the rational use of time and human energy. The condemnation of

34. *Ibid.*

35. E. Evtušenko, *Arrivederci, bandiera rossa*, Tascabili Economici Newton, Roma 1995.

36. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 235.

37. *Ivi*, p. 276.

38. A. Wohl, *Philosophical Problems of Physical Culture*, 'International Review for the Sociology of Sport', Vol. 18, December 1983.

39. A. Wohl, *Physical Culture as a Social Product and as a Social Value*, 'International Review for the Sociology of Sport', Vol. 8, March 1973.

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exhibitionist sports refers to women's football, which produces damage to female organs and causes unhealthy arousal, handless fighting and male body-building⁴⁰. An example of a philosophically foreign sport is yoga, which in 1973 was severely condemned as potentially harmful to health, but particularly for two ideological reasons: firstly, that yoga does not involve teamwork; it encourages individualism and claims that yogis can lead a strictly ascetic life outside of society and even the family; secondly, it is based on an idealistic philosophy and mysticism⁴¹. This criticism was also extended to karate. Karate, however, struck a chord with modern and less scrupulous Russian hygienists: in 1979, a healthier and less foreign type of karate gained official approval. Of course, this is traditional non-contact karate, because contact karate is extremely forbidden, as it does not conform to the humanitarian principles of the Soviet system of physical education⁴².

The Soviet critique of sport ultimately stems from communism's salvific attitude towards human time, which must be liberated from the outrageous characteristics of bourgeois experience. The ideological experience is that sport is both salutary and uplifting. In truth, these categories are dynamically linked, for if it is not uplifting, it allows the growth of harmful habits that then require hygiene. This is why sport should not lapse to the level of entertainment, which are by definition culturally empty. Instead, sport is placed on the same level as art.

The East German sports culture, from a statistical and percentage point of view, is by far the most successful in the world⁴³. This achievement has given it a notoriety that stems, in part, from Western assumptions about the effects of communist ideology on sporting practice. Indeed, in 1979, the *New York Times* described an Eastern European style of football in which fluidity, precision and technical production turned teams into machines. Moreover, not all the comparisons presented by East German athletes who switched to Federal Germany reflect unfavourably on the sports culture they left behind. In fact, in 1972, a football player commented on the superiority of East German sports medicine and stated: 'In the Federal Republic, however, the professional athlete is exploited at any cost'⁴⁴. In 1977, another football champion stated: 'There are selfish methods here that you do not find in the GDR. Here the human element is neglected'⁴⁵.

Sport in East Germany was made possible by two historical factors. Firstly, Walter Ulbricht, the dominant political figure in the country from 1945 until his retirement in 1971, became interested in sport both from a personal point of view and as a means of

40. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 279.

41. Ivi, p. 280.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Ivi, p. 283.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

demonstrating the political superiority of socialism⁴⁶. Ulbricht decided, immediately after the foundation of the GDR, to create a high-performance-oriented sports culture, which would serve as a model for other sectors of East German society. The goal was achieved to the extent that today, East German social scientists regard the sports apparatus as the most developed subculture of the GDR⁴⁷.

If Walter Ulbricht was the first initiator, the Soviet Union was the ideological leader of East German sport⁴⁸. The official start of physical education in the Soviet occupation zone took place on 1 July in 1946, in the context of a general reform of the educational system⁴⁹. In 1952, the official organ of the United Socialist Party published an article entitled *Learning from the Soviet Union's Physical Science Education*. This is an essay that speaks in two voices, one representing the past while the other announces future developments. The first denounces the pursuit of records and decadent manifestations such as mud wrestling, women's boxing and other degenerate practices; the second, on the other hand, speaks of the scientific manipulation of emotions by athletics, the importance of high-level performance, the futility of individual achievement compared to collective performance, and the Soviet instructor who is both a pedagogue and a political educator⁵⁰.

East German culture, compared to the communist regimes, was a culture totally based on the ideals of Marxist-Leninist humanism within which sport enjoyed an official position. A 1968 resolution of the State Council called for sport to promote the participation of all in the development of a healthy, optimistic and creative way of life. A 1971 text stated: 'Physical culture and sport belong to the way of life of our culture-rich, life-affirming and creative socialist community'⁵¹. In the GDR, leisure time was integrated into the ideal of complete human development and was also linked to the theme of productivity as a symbolic expression of maximum effort⁵².

Sport in the GDR achieved a scientificity that generated awe and wonder in many foreigners. Indeed, in 1970, *Le Monde* presented its impressions of an East German handball team, stating that rarely has the comparison between a team and a machine been more apt; the GDR team seemed to be composed of tireless human robots that maintained the

46. Ivi, p. 285.

47. G. Carr, *The Use of Sport in the German Democratic Republic for the Promotion of National Consciousness and International Prestige*, 'Journal of Sport History', vol. 1, University of Illinois Press, Champaign 1974, pp. 123-136.

48. M. Fincardi, *Lo sport e il movimento operaio e socialista*, 'L'Almanacco', no. 59, June 2012.

49. *Ibid.*

50. M. Ritschard, *Culture and Physical Education in the Soviet Union*, 'Youth and Sport: Journal of Sports Education of the Federal School of Gymnastics and Sport Magglingen', no. 32, 1975

51. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 290.

52. *Ibid.*

same rhythm for an hour; morale of iron, nerves of steel, muscles of brass. It was almost as if one were talking about a team that was actually metallurgical in nature⁵³.

'Training in East Germany,' said one sports scientist, 'is based on the concept that the human body is meant to adapt to the demands placed on it. However, great care is taken not to push the system to the point of collapse'⁵⁴. Indeed, East German sports physicians were accused by incompetent critics of subjecting children to inhuman athletic regimes, until those critics came to accept the results of the research of science⁵⁵. It should be noted, however, that the new sports medicine was for many years contested within the East German medical system, where a faction representing traditionalist medical ethics observed with increasing concern how children, in particular, had become experimental subjects for high performance theorists. In the end, the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) itself intervened, transferring responsibility for sports medicine from the Ministry of Health to the sports research apparatus, supporting the faction that advocated high-level performance⁵⁶.

The ambiguity of advanced sports medicine is made clear in the concept of mental illness. Critics of the GDR system still argue that scientific procedures contradict traditional concepts of sport. GDR sports scientists respond by asking whether it is sport to allow a cyclist to ride in a race where the going is tough when his haemoglobin level is dangerously low. Is it sport, they ask, to let a cyclist continue a race without knowing his or her actual physiological condition? And this is where the concept of 'athletic disease' is introduced, a theory which holds that if a cyclist's blood, or his muscles, are deficient in some essential element, he is as ill as a person suffering from severe vitamin and mineral deficiencies. The idea of 'athletic illness' in East Germany constitutes a reversal of traditional attitudes to athletic regulations: perfection is here considered not the exception but the rule of the state of the body⁵⁷.

It has long been rumoured that pharmacological technology played an important role in the development of athletes in East Germany; there are also rumours that chemical-pharmacological experiments were actually carried out. In 1974, sports doctors in France and Sweden publicly stated that female swimmers in the GDR were given male hormones to increase the volume of their muscles. In 1978, German theologian Willi Knecht reported that the initial procedures of drugging athletes were soon discontinued in favour of more advanced methods that had not yet been identified. Still in 1978, East German sprinter Renate Neufeld carried pills, which she said she had been prescribed to take regularly.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Ivi, p. 195.

55. G. Turdo, *Synthetic Medals. The Shocking Journey to Hell of East German Athletes*, Lulu.com, Raleigh 2018.

56. *Ibid.*

57. A. Donati, *Lo sport del doping. Chi lo subisce, chi lo combatte*, Gruppo Abele, Torino 2013.

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She was assured that they were dehydrochloromethyltestosterone, male sex hormones, otherwise known as anabolic steroids. These compounds are known to be medically risky for both men and women⁵⁸.

Wayne Wilson also described the psychological pressures that athletes who were preparing to break records were under⁵⁹. The instructors of the special sports schools that he attended demanded regular self-analysis sessions. Pupils were also required to prepare written evaluations of their parents' social behaviour. Shortly after Renate started taking the prescribed vitamins, Wilson noticed that her upper thighs were becoming harder and sore, and a slight hair had appeared above his upper lip. When she refused to continue the treatment, she was asked to defend her decisions before the *Free German Youth Collective* of which she was a member. After threatening her that she would end up as a factory labourer, her trainer sent her to a psychologist. Eventually, the State Security Police questioned her as to why she refused to join the SED and why she refused to take her medication. Nor was it surprising that students in special sports schools were forced to take a vow of silence. A less important, but revealing indication of the relationship between sport and technology in the GDR appeared on 11 April 1979 in the *Neues Deutschland*, when the sports editor rejected as meaningless the proposal that sports employing any mechanical apparatus should be banned from the Olympic Games⁶⁰.

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THE BODY IN MAOIST IDEOLOGY AS A FORM
OF SOCIAL-RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. Maoist sport promoted sport ethics based on the elimination of hostile or aggressive feelings towards the opponent. The Chinese policy of ‘friendship first, competition second’ impressed Westerners, who were more inclined to agonism. Chinese sport ethics taught that you win even when you are defeated; this left foreign competitors in a state of emotional disorientation. During the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, the defeated Chinese athletes all looked amused; they were the tangible representation of the motto ‘the important thing is to take part’. The exaltation of strength could have distracted the Chinese people from the ideal of collectivism, which is intellectual culture. The importance of sport would have encouraged the emergence of the cult of the champion, hence the superiority of one over others. This approach was intended by Maoism as a form of social pedagogy: discouraging competitive behaviour meant opposing liberalism, social Darwinism; China was educating the strong to help the weak, the rich to help the poor.

Keywords: Maoist sport, physical culture, Mao, sport.

The Chinese idea of physical culture encompasses three types of activities: physical education (*tiyu*), sport and athletics (*yundong*), and good form and fitness (*duanlian*). This is an essentially utilitarian conception, within which the Western notion of sport plays a subordinate role. The importance with which the issue of hygiene is treated is evident in the *Common Programme*, a social development printout published in 1950, and in Mao’s official directive of 10 June 1952, which urged the Chinese people to promote physical culture and sport and to build the health of the people. The parameters of the National Physical Education Programme, revised in 1975, were originally based on the Soviet *Ready for Work and Defence Programme* of 1931.

The myth of a burgeoning Chinese sports colossus has emerged periodically during the last two decades. ‘Even Russian experts,’ Larmer wrote in 1961, ‘are impressed by the emergency programme launched in Communist China four years earlier. Its terrifying impressiveness could quickly propel Chinese athletes to the top ranks of world sport’. In 1979, a well-informed German football coach predicted that the Chinese would dominate football throughout the next century. However, it is easier for foreigners to make these predictions than for the Chinese to realise them, due to the fact that their physical culture is much more interesting from an ideological point of view than the athletic results it has produced¹.

Maoist sport, in fact, promoted a sporting ethic based on the eradication of hostile or aggressive feelings towards the opponent. It is an ethic that is valid both when winning and losing, and can leave non-Chinese competitors in a state of emotional disorientation. In 1977, it was reported that Chinese behaviour, combined with Chinese dominance in the world table tennis championships, was causing psychological problems as table tennis stars were beginning to complain. The Chinese policy of ‘friendship first, competition second’ had affected their pride, mocked their skill and put the sport in danger². Maoist athletes also had to lose with unflappable grace. During the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, the defeated Chinese athletes appeared aglow with smiles of exquisite amusement³.

Referring to the 6th Asian Women’s Basketball Championship held in Hong Kong in November 1976, the Chinese news agency commented on the clear Chinese victory over the Japanese team as follows: ‘During the clash, the Chinese and Japanese players committed only a few fouls, as they fully demonstrated the spirit of “Friendship first, competition second”’. The players would rather lose the ball than hurt each other’. Even during competitions, the Maoist athletes were required to read political articles that said they had to study the latest techniques of other societies and they had to train well in the fundamental exercises; they had to possess basic techniques and be able to use them flexibly; they had to learn humbly and then they had to have the courage to be creative; they had to look for the success factor in defeat and be able to perceive the aspects of imperfection in victory; they had to, through practice and recapitulation of facts, continually translate matter into spirit and spirit into matter, putting the revolution into practice without interruption and moving forward without stopping⁴.

It is clear that Maoist sport, according to its ethics, attaches far less importance to competition than Western or Soviet bloc sport. This is certainly a natural tendency for a

1. B. Larmer, *Operation Yao Ming: the Chinese Sports Empire, American Big Business, and the Making of an NBA Superstar*, Gotham Books, New York 2005, p. 59.

2. M. Bagozzi, *La racchetta di Mao. Politica e tennis tavolo nella Cina rivoluzionaria*, Bepress, Lecce 2022.

3. *Ibid.*

4. P. Angelini, G. Mamone, *Il podio celeste. Storia dell’educazione fisica e dello sport in Cina*, Stampa Alternativa/Nuovi Equilibri, Viterbo 2008, p. 182.

collectivist ideology that has so far refused to make the sporting champion an exemplary and uplifting figure. This can be seen as a result of the early doctrines that influenced Mao, which would have discouraged the acceptance of competitive behaviour. Educator Yang Changji's ideal of the royal road, which encouraged the tendency to help the poor, barred the way to pure social Darwinism. Another figure who may have influenced Mao in this regard is Kang Youwei, a reformer whom he greatly admired in his youth and whose teachings he still remembered half a century later. Kang was a devotee of universal harmony. The essence of his conception lies in the following quote: 'I was born on this earth, so I come from the same womb as human beings in all countries, even though our blood belongs to different types. It is as if we are all part of an electric force that connects all things or participate in the pure essence that comprises all things'⁵. Not surprisingly, Kang describes the competition as extremely evil for the whole world. Nevertheless, Mao decisively rejected Kang's theory of earthly unity. 'Struggle is absolute', he stated in 1967, 'while unity is relative'. So why did Mao reject that the sporting competition symbolised the historical struggle? Firstly, because Mao would not have tolerated pure struggle taking precedence over the ideal of collectivism. As an editorial in the *People's Daily* stated in 1958, 'individualism and particularism will never be eradicated until every member of the community professes the communist ideology. Every communist society is obliged to limit the stature and consequently the implicit authority of the champion'. Finally, Mao must have considered competitive sport too marginal and too gratuitous an activity to become the symbol of the historical struggle. In fact, Mao never presented high-level sports performance as illustrious metaphors for heroic labour. Even the famous Yangtze swim of 16 July 1966 was pedagogy rather than performance. Mao, more than the athlete, was the living example of good health, and his miraculous physical fitness served a health ideal rather than a competitive ideal. Mao had, in fact, an ideal of high performance that was not abstract and unrelated to the work process, as an essentially sporting endeavour is⁶.

In 1976, the year of Mao Zedong's death, a Chinese sports magazine accused the disgraced Deng Xiaoping of only being interested in raising the level of manual skills while ignoring mass sports: 'How do you measure success? According to Deng Xiaoping's thesis, all athletes have to do is to win fame and first place in the championship competition, and then here are the heroes. But what line they should follow, what thoughts they should be guided by, how these successes will be achieved, this has never been asked'⁷. Less than three years later, Deng, who had become prime minister of the People's Republic, re-

5. Cfr. J. Riordan, R. Jones, *Sport and Physical Education in China, London and New York*, E&FN Spon, London 1999, pp. 103-104.

6. Mao Tse-tung, *Politics and Strategy in the Chinese Revolutionary War*, b. 1, fasc. 12. 1968 Social Editions.

7. F. Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, C. Hurst & Company Publishers, London 1992, p. 121.

called during a White House lunch how the Red Guards had denounced him at the start of the Cultural Revolution for his decadent passion for the game of bridge.

During the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1970), competitive sport was severely criticised in China and international sports contacts were drastically reduced. The Commission for Physical Culture and Sport was placed under the control of the General Policy Department of the People's Liberation Army. The hostility towards sport continued even until Mao's death in 1976, thus surviving the advent of table tennis diplomacy in 1971. Interestingly, some enthusiastic ideologues of the Cultural Revolution promoted a form of ersatz sport in the service of Maoist orthodoxy: speed competitions in reciting quotations (champions had to recite them not only in the normal sequence but also backwards) and rhythmic gymnastics of quotations where the movements did not follow the rhythm but rather the quotations of Chairman Mao.

After Mao's death, the arrests of the 'gang of four' and the ideological shift towards pragmatism and productivity, Maoist sport became a target of revisionist politics. An article in the Chinese news agency made an enigmatic accusation: 'The gang of four labelled those who trained hard as followers of the revisionist theory of productive forces, and those who did not show good form in international competitions as detractors of national dignity'.

The decline and fall of Maoist values within Chinese sports culture can be followed in great detail in the official sports periodical *Xin tiyu*. During 1975 and 1976, the Maoist line of clearly subordinating sport to broader ideological demands goes unchallenged. Sport is an integral element of the superstructure and the newspaper reports the most important ideological documents, even those unrelated to sport, to emphasise the subordination of the athletic community to ideological orthodoxy. The left-wing heretic Lin Biao is denounced for fostering the venomous effect of medals and trophies, for proclaiming the slogan 'Skill comes first', and for finding inspiration in Confucius⁸. The right-wing deviationist Liu Shaoqi is accused of depriving poor and middle-class peasants of their right and ability to exercise their bodies, and of encouraging athletes and instructors to play stupidly with the ball instead of studying the principles of the revolution. Deng Xiaoping was reviled for advocating the pursuit of athletic success and being only interested in raising the level of technical skills. Towards the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979, there is a move away from sporting practice to illustrate ideological principles, and a tendency to present sporting forms as such. The primacy of ideology is gradually replaced by an interest in sport seen according to the western meaning of the term. The post-Maoist cult of disciplined productivity and the acquisition of technological skills demands a competition-oriented athleticism. Hua Guofeng, Mao's immediate successor, issued a call for world-class performance. The result was an expansion of the school sports system, awards for good performance, the introduction of scientific sports

8. X. Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge 2000.

medicine, and even the importation of professional athletes from West Germany to act as instructors. Both the sporting ethics and the hygienic content of Maoist sport were in decline. In January 1980, Deng Xiaoping lifted the ban on boxing to allow Muhammad Ali to help Chinese boxers train for the 1984 Olympics. During the Asian Games held in Bangkok in December 1978, Chinese basketball players were involved in a brawl with their opponents during a match that created such an uproar that fifty policemen had to be deployed. That society, which during the period of the Cultural Revolution had shut itself off from sport, was leaving the civilised rules of Maoist sport well behind.

In 1978, *Xin tiyu* published the confession of a self-described sports fanatic, a concept that the Maoists would have considered politically obscene: 'I am a sports lover and I particularly love watching films that deal with sports themes. During the period when the Gang of Four' exercised its power, this passion of ours had to remain unfulfilled. Not only did feature-length sports films disappear, but even documentaries did not have much luck. The great mass of sportspeople and spectators waited a long time before seeing more sporting performances on the screen. Officially authorised films of this kind represent a spectacular abandonment of the asceticism of the senses characteristic of the Maoists⁹.

Maoist sport, therefore, demanded too much from those it was attempting to transform: the renunciation of aggression, factionalism, egoism, virile pride, and the worship of a sporting spirit that humbled and preoccupied Western thought. With the appearance of the first Chinese sports fanatic, Maoist sport had lost its battle against the halting of progress. The anti-competitive sports cultures of the 20th century were definitively extinguished¹⁰.

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DIDASKALOI

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DIDASKALOI

RIVISTA SCIENTIFICA DI STUDI PEDAGOGICI

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

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Abstract. The first studies of sociology of sport were carried out in the first decades of the 20th century. Thinkers such as Risse and de Coubertin, though from dissimilar theoretical and ideological sides, were able to make their contemporaries understand that participation in sports was something more than just a game. The promotion of sport was a promotion of values and habits that could change the lifestyle of a people. Interesting are the studies carried out on the behaviour of the crowds and how such behaviours can be conditioned. The two scholars' different interpretation of the value of sport also represents the cultural and political difference of the nations that will face each other during the Second World War. To the extreme competition of Risse, de Coubertin responded with his motto – it is important to take part – to invite to a sport practice capable of strengthening body and mind.

Keywords: Risse, Coubertin, sport, social.

1. The *Soziologie des Sports* by German author Heinz Risse is the first systematic, sociological treatment of sport that has ever appeared¹. Risse's essay differs from others of the same type in that it gives more weight to social science rather than to praise for sport or

1. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, A. Reher, Berlin 1921.

projects of rejuvenation through the body. Like most of the works on sport and society published during the period from 1900 to 1940, Risse's *Soziologie* presents both a cultural diagnosis and a conception of the therapeutic potential of sport; and, in the final analysis, Risse also recognises sport's considerable curative powers².

Risse's study can be compared, for example, to another of the German interpretations of the social significance of sport: *Der Sport* by the American historian and economist Robert Hessen³. The latter represents the work of an observer who admires the sporting culture of Victorian England. The author's main aim is to persuade his compatriots that sporting exercises on the English model would have a strengthening effect on the entire nation and therefore served the nationalistic interest. In addition to formulating the link between sport and nationalism, Hessen presents several interesting arguments. He draws a moral from the well-known English homosexual aesthete Oscar Wilde by stating: 'He would have resisted his effeminate instincts better if he had been a practising sportsman; there is no better preventive measure against such degeneration than open-air sport'⁴.

Hessen mentions the ideal of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the ancient Romans and the Victorian educators who made sport an element of national pedagogy. The monograph ends with a passage that may seem to contain the seed of the future. In fact, it states: 'Our race has reached too high a place in world history to end up as a mishmash of sickly rickets and catarrhal, weak-armed and pot-bellied'⁵.

Hessen, therefore, assigns sport two main functions. Firstly, it promotes a respect for the dignity of the physical body that ultimately also strengthens the social body; secondly, it promotes a limitation of the competitive interest and a respect for the rights of the opponent. This is, in practice, the aim of Hessen's social theory: a nationalism combined with a vague notion of the capacity of the sports system to mitigate social conflict⁶.

Absent from Hessen's work, however, are most of the issues that would later preoccupy the many European sports theorists of the inter-war period, such as: the relationship between sport and industrial society, professionalism in sport, the spectator problem, sport as an index of cultural decline, and performance-record. Furthermore, Hessen's book is clearly incapable of associating sport with a conception of modernity and answering the specific questions of a new age.

All these issues, however, are dealt with in the writings of Pierre de Coubertin, a Frenchman whose work as a social theorist of sport seems to have remained unknown to sports theorists of the inter-war period, while in Germany he is known as the founder

2. Ivi, p. 47.

3. R. Hessen, *Der Sport*, Dogma, Savona 1908.

4. Cfr. O. Wilde, *Aforismi*, Foschi, Santarcangelo 2020, p. 40.

5. Cfr. R. Hessen, *Der Sport*, cit., p. 53.

6. Ivi, p. 186.

of international sports culture, which is still alive today⁷. Less well known, however, is the fact that de Coubertin was also a prolific author (he wrote something like sixty thousand pages) whose interests encompassed pedagogy, history, contemporary politics, and most aspects of private life that had some relation to sport⁸. Like his more famous contemporary Gustave Le Bon, author of the 'Psychology of Crowds', de Coubertin considered himself a social engineer, an 'applied psychologist' according to Le Bon's term, who would contribute to what de Coubertin once called *la bonne humeur sociale*⁹. Like the French sociologist Frederic Le Play, who was his main intellectual mentor, de Coubertin's dominant obsession was what Le Play called 'the restoration of social peace in my country' through the influence of non-ideological institutions. Having dedicated himself to this mission, de Coubertin saw himself as a social physicist who would introduce to France the salutary influence of contemporary English sport modelled on the public school type¹⁰. In this sense, de Coubertin can be seen as the one who made a contribution to the hygienicist doctrine of his time.

If we were to define hygienism in late 19th century France from its main concerns, such as a fight against a declining birth rate, rising crime rates, mental illnesses such as suicide tendencies, the spread of venereal diseases, and the fear of a degeneration of the race, then de Coubertin is not a hygienist. His writings do not deal with these issues. One could argue, however, that these social phenomena were in fact symptoms that could have been explained within a more comprehensive hygienist doctrine¹¹. In fact, de Coubertin found the medical community insufficiently vigilant. He protested that doctors were all too ready to condemn sports therapy out of ignorance, because they preferred their prejudices to empirical studies, because their inclination to oppose muscular exercise to cerebral exertion led them to ignore the nervous system, and because they exaggerated the expenditure of nervous energy due to physical exertion, in order to discredit what he saw as an effective remedy for neurasthenia¹². De Coubertin criticised doctors, in practice, as ineffective hygienists for their neglect of the psychological dimension of health. It was this interest in mental well-being that made his version of hygienism an approach to culture as a whole, rather than exclusively from the perspective of organic diseases. De Coubertin's hygienism was first and foremost a philosophy of culture, with its implicit conceptions of cultural illness and health. Indeed, he states: 'Our existence is contrary to good health to the same degree that we were never able to enjoy ourselves as the Greeks

7. P. de Coubertin, *Leçons de Pédagogie sportive*, La Concorde, Lausanne 1921.

8. P. de Coubertin, *Histoire universelle* (I-IV), Société de l'histoire universelle, Aix-en-Provence 1926-1927.

9. P. de Coubertin, *Essais de Psychologie sportive*, Payot, Paris 1913.

10. P. de Coubertin, *L'Éducation anglaise en France*, Hachette, Paris 1889.

11. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 188.

12. *Ibid.*

did¹³. On the Greeks he goes on to say: ‘Their civilisation considered the state of health more perfect and the state of illness more despicable than contemporary generations’¹⁴. De Coubertin, in one word, was the heir, not the inventor, of the athletic pro-Hellenism that was also adopted by the socialist movement in Germany in the 1920s¹⁵.

De Coubertin pointed to sport as a therapeutic means of society required by modern life, which gave rise to what he called ‘the universal neurosis’. Two chapters of his book *Essais de psychologie sportive* are in fact entitled: *Can sport stem the universal neurosis* and *Sport remedies for the neurasthenic*¹⁶. ‘Sport,’ Coubertin writes, ‘is an unparalleled and, it should be noted, dynamic psychic instrument, which can be profitably used in the treatment of many psychoneuroses’¹⁷. ‘Indeed, very often, psychoneurosis is characterised by a certain decline in virility, and there is nothing better than sport to invigorate and maintain it’¹⁸. ‘The trend today,’ he writes, ‘is for a total culture. It is not exactly democracy that is pushing in this direction, but precisely the transformation of work, the industrial character of the age, the all-powerful goddess Activity that now reigns supreme’¹⁹.

It is important to remember that de Coubertin was a democrat of the Third Republic who saw in the triumph of democracy one of the four *faits nouveaux* from which history had better be free²⁰. These internal tensions that characterise de Coubertin’s ideology are most significantly expressed in two of his major themes: the nature of democracy and the search for a social and psychological balance in an increasingly feverish society²¹. His repugnant attitude towards democracy must be assessed against the backdrop of his deep disgust for the revolutionary impulse and socialism, which he saw as uncivilised, and as the most formidable opponent of *enseignement supérieur*²². Coubertin’s second theme considers the stimulating and tranquillising functions of sport from a social point of view. According to de Coubertin’s terminology, there is a dynamic relationship between balance and excess. ‘The point that makes sport important in the social question,’ he writes, ‘is

13. P. de Coubertin, *Essais de Psychologie sportive*, cit., p. 60.

14. Ivi, p. 72.

15. P. de Coubertin, *L'Éducation anglaise en France*, cit.

16. P. de Coubertin, *Essais de psychologie sportive*, Jérôme Millon, Grenoble 2008.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. P. de Coubertin, *Notes sur l'éducation publique*, Hachette, Paris 1901, p. 189.

20. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 190.

21. P. de Coubertin, *L'Évolution Française sous la Troisième République*, Plon-Nourrit, Paris 1896.

22. P. de Coubertin, *L'éducation des adolescents au XXe siècle: II. Éducation intellectuelle: L'analyse universelle*, Félix Alcan, Paris 1912.

its pacifying character. Sport loosens the spring that has been stretched by anger; and it advocates an educational system that is capable of bringing about collective calm²³.

The idea of *calme* plays a greater role in the *Essais*, de Coubertin's hygienist text. Sport is seen as a calming therapy on both a social and an individual level. Indeed, he writes: 'Precisely because, in the emerging modern world, sport can play an important role in promoting progress, we desire it purer, more chivalrous, more transparent, calmer'²⁴.

Another issue that worried de Coubertin was that of the crowd. The French historian considered the rush and the crowd to be the two vampires of contemporary society. One manifestation of the crowd phenomenon, de Coubertin points out, is the sports press, which exerts a harmful influence by virtue of its hyperbolic sensationalism²⁵.

In their intellectual substance, de Coubertin's writings on sport remain first and foremost an attempt at a pragmatic social strategy. He is, as a man of order in the Third Republic, far more inclined to exorcise class problems than to analyse them. His criticism of degenerate sporting forms is thwarted by his mission to promote sport as an international movement²⁶. His pronounced aversion to the political left leads him to ignore the important socialist sports movement in Western Europe.

Risse's *Soziologie de Sports* deals with these same issues, and others, but in much more detail than de Coubertin did. The crucial difference between de Coubertin and Risse is that while the former fears the new era, the latter welcomes it even as he recognises its negative aspects. Like de Coubertin, Risse speaks of the unhealthy life of modern man. But unlike de Coubertin, Risse separates this hygienic problem from his final assessment of the era itself, whose dynamic potential he emphasises²⁷. This important difference may be due, in part, to the different intellectual context. Unlike de Coubertin, who found Nietzsche's Superman repugnant and at the same time a threat to social stability, Risse approves of Nietzsche and sees the 'will to power' as the fundamental characteristic of the modern age, which he sees as the age of capitalism²⁸. A second probable source of influence is German Expressionism, a thematically diverse artistic and literary movement whose apogee coincided with the publication of Risse's essay. One passage is striking precisely in this respect. In fact, Risse calls the marathon runner 'a strange expression of our overall world-view, which wants to establish its dominion backwards and forwards, a dominion for which there are no limits and which continually exceeds itself. We are always men of the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow. Temporally and

23. Cfr. P. de Coubertin, *Essais de psychologie sportive*, cit., p. 87.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 192.

27. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, cit., pp. 120-125.

28. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 190.

spatially we are at all times with one foot in some beyond. This world view or sport fits in perfectly. And only a form of escape sought by the chained individual²⁹. This piece, then, by its extreme subjectivism, its need to transcend the boundaries of everyday life, its intoxication and sheer dynamism, is the quintessence of Expressionism. Moreover, Risse's language can be compared to that of the expressionist playwright George Kaiser who states: 'The purpose of life is to achieve record results. Records in all fields. The man of record achievements is the dominant type of this age'³⁰. Risse interprets the record as an expression of the will to power, rejecting those who condemn the pursuit of the record as a distortion of sport³¹.

An unusual aspect of Risse's book is his denunciation of the contemporary German intelligentsia, which he describes as 'people with flowing hair and high collars, questioning eyes and a slight vibration in their beautiful voice'³². Risse's contempt for intellectuals stems from two factors. Firstly, he draws a comparison between the aesthetic boastfulness of intellectuals and the willpower that is formed not in literary cafés or cabarets, but on sports fields. Here, intellectualism is contrasted with the Nietzschean education of the will. Secondly, he accuses intellectuals of an effeminate effectivity that has alienated them from the masses³³. The influence of sport has supplanted the leadership of intellectuals, who have come to reject the sporting movement as unworthy of their interest. This is an important problem, and a question must be asked: did the intellectuals of the Weimar Republic really despise sport? According to German writer Thiess, the crisis of sport is the fact that it was ignored by intellectuals³⁴. This is also the complaint of Risse who states: 'The movement is classified as anti-intellectual. It is crude, it is for country boys, it is child's play and it has absolutely no meaning'³⁵. As Rothe has shown, the intellectuals of the Weimar Republic of the 1920s did not simply ignore sport; many were *aficionados* or even athletically active. Indeed, it was not until the 1930s that thinkers such as Jaspers and Mannheim treat sport as a tool for social engineering in the manner of de Coubertin.

Risse divides his sociology of sport into two parts, which he calls 'positivistic and meta-physical' respectively. The first part consists of the doctrine of the socialising effect of sport, which does not examine the social effects of specific sports but rather the ways in which people, who are bound by sporting ties, react and connect with each other, and how old class formations are transformed and new ones are produced. The second mean-

29. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, cit., pp. 110-115.

30. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 193.

31. *Ibid.*

32. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, cit., p. 90.

33. *Ivi*, pp. 90-109.

34. F. Thiess, *Ideen zur Natur und Leidensgeschichte der Völker*, W. Krüger, Hamburg 1949.

35. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, cit., p. 150.

ing of sociology is an extension of the first. In fact, Risse states: ‘The interrelationship of all the elements of a culture, its origin from an entirely specific human community, its derivation from a very specific spiritual disposition, and its location within an entirely individual cultural sphere, an emanation of spiritual identity, all mean nothing more than an extension of the interpretations of the forms we have analysed to what these forms contain’³⁶. What is essential, therefore, is not the content itself (sport), but the way in which a specific perspective is expressed. The sociologically relevant factor is that sport somehow fits into a cultural sphere or that a social structure gives rise to specific values. Sport, therefore, takes the form of ideology, firstly, because it derives from a social structure (e.g. industry) and then because it expresses itself (e.g. in record performances) in a way that refers not so much to economic circumstances as to an original perspective.

Risse proposes two genuinely sociological questions for his sociology of sport: firstly, he identifies the social classes that generally participate in the different types of sport and secondly, he indicates what criteria produce these types of sport³⁷. Finally, at what level is sport, as a form of socialisation, capable of forming classes, i.e., on the basis of what principles does it lead to the formation of cliques, for example, within sports clubs³⁸. In response to the first question, Risse points out that class ideology plays a decisive role in selecting specific sports to participate in; furthermore, he states that the upper classes do not feel the need for sport to assert their individuality as much as the lower classes. As for the sociological point of view, Risse finds it interesting that talented athletes, regardless of their class or social position, constitute a new elite of society both within the sporting world and in societies in general. For Risse and all those interested in sport in the inter-war period, the central problem is not social science per se, but rather the critique of European culture and its values. His *Soziologie*, in short, is the product of an age of controversy.

Risse defined this period as an era of mechanisation. ‘The fundamental contradiction of world capitalism’, he states, ‘is the contradiction between man and machine, that is, the destruction of human individuality’³⁹. He also makes a distinction between gymnastics and sport. Organised groups of gymnasts express the illiberality of existence in an industrial society; sport, on the other hand, is the antithesis of this type of existence, since it exalts the body of the individual. Referring to the working class, Risse speaks of the dispossession of man by the machine. The modern age brings with it a tendency towards rationalisation. At the same time, Risse delineates two dichotomies: on the one hand, he distinguishes between the bureaucratic rationality of the age and the rationalisation of alienation; on the other hand, the rationalisation of the body and the rationalisa-

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ivi*, pp. 230-250.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

tion of the sporting equipment. The one is a mass phenomenon, the other an individual phenomenon. The second point is that Risse sees the rationalising tendency of the era countered by irrational factors inherent in the athletic individual. 'The problem of the individual in modern society,' says Risse, 'is his ability to demonstrate his creative will in order to find himself, without his self-expression being limited by mechanical forces'. Risse, however, draws an unusual conclusion from this description of modern illiberality: 'Mechanised man has at his disposal a form in which he can express this will in everyday life: the sphere of physical culture. For the mechanised worker, sport is the only path to self-realisation'⁴⁰. This is the most radical sociological premise of Risse's book.

Risse also introduces the problem of professionalism by stating that this is an example of how Roman physical culture is really a distortion of the Greek ideal. Risse's argument against professionalism includes, at the same time, two themes that rarely appear in social commentaries on sport in this and other periods. First, he states that professionalism creates a situation in which sport becomes a profession and a professional activity turns into farce⁴¹. Secondly, Risse raises the issue of the possible comparison between the professional athlete and the professional artist: his answer is that these are two distinct types. To confirm this, Risse presents two arguments: in the first, he asserts that the athlete engaged in a competition is corruptible in a way that the artist certainly is not; in the second, and more important, he asserts that sport as professionalism appeals to the baser instincts⁴². In fact, sport, as Risse points out, can appeal because it is fashionable, because it offers a venue in which to perform or because it offers spectators a perverse gratification to their blood lust (e.g. boxing matches)⁴³.

2. These arguments began to appear in the late 1920s in socialist sports posters. Risse, however, is anything but a socialist. In fact, he begins by interpreting the spiritual and physical degeneration of the working class as the result of the dispossession of man by the machine. In fact, he states: 'The workers' sports clubs result from the socialist effort to separate themselves clearly from the other classes, in every sphere of existence. It is difficult to say what is more important here: whether the idea of class struggle or sport'⁴⁴. In the end, it is clear that Risse sees socialism as a pathology whose efforts to introduce the ideological question into sport counteract sport's ability to reconcile the classes. Indeed, he states: 'The worker who joins a bourgeois sports club will feel like an outsider

40. Ivi, p. 199; on this point see also S. Spinsanti, *Il corpo nella cultura contemporanea*, Queriniana, Roma 1990.

41. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 198.

42. Ivi, p. 199.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Cfr. H. Risse, *Soziologie des Sports*, cit., p. 160.

among socially and intellectually superior people. He feels rejected and through resentment, comes to the idea of class struggle. At this point he is ready to join the workers' sports clubs⁴⁵. Risse's hostility to socialism does not, however, make him a bourgeois. In fact, he states: 'Leaving aside piety, the bourgeoisie has only succeeded in producing the industrial apparatus of a technical civilisation and is no longer capable of intimate cultural supremacy'⁴⁶. Having separated himself from the socialists and the bourgeoisie, Risse chooses the path of Nietzsche, whose new form of asceticism must replace the old. Indeed, he states: 'Zarathustra, which is the new ideal, is the effort to reach beyond the limits of the self. And Zarathustra must become for the masses the expression of their striving for individuality'⁴⁷.

Risse's *Soziologie* is, therefore, more an anti-modernist treatise than a sociological one. This is because Risse's concept of sociology consists essentially of a critique of culture, in the context of which sociological concepts are merely scientific ornaments.

Karl Jaspers and Karl Mannheim were two other thinkers who addressed the issue of sport, but they are separated from their contemporaries by the hegemony of their liberal values and their tone of detachment from sport as a cultural problem. This is not to say that Jaspers, in particular, renounced the practice of cultural critique. In fact, Jaspers approves of sport for three fundamental reasons. Firstly, it promotes the instinct of self-preservation as a form of vitality: that is, through physical activities subject to the control of the will, for the strengthening of energy and courage. Secondly, sport as a mass phenomenon organises within the rules, sublimating man's primordial impulses that might otherwise damage the social system. Finally, sport is not just play or record-breaking, but is like something sublime and refreshing. In fact, he states: 'The sublime element constitutes a challenge to the petrified present. The human body is demanding its rights at a time when the system is mercilessly annihilating one human being after another. Modern sport, therefore, is enveloped in an aura that makes it in some ways akin to the sport of the ancient world'⁴⁸. Like Risse and others also hostile to the claims of the proletariat, Jaspers admits that the industrial revolution has made inhuman demands on the human body, which is now claiming its rights through sport⁴⁹.

Jaspers' approval of modern sport coexists, however, with a criticism that can be summarised in two main points. The first is that Jaspers refers to the analogous Roman example to point out that the appeal of sport is contrary to the clarity of rational thought. This

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ivi*, p. 162.

47. *Ivi*, p. 170.

48. *Ibid.*

49. K. Jaspers, *La rivoluzione industriale*, Fabbri, Segrate 1993.

is the opinion of the psychiatrist Jaspers⁵⁰. The second objection to sport comes from the philosopher Jaspers, who states: 'Sport lacks transcendent substantiality: if sport marks one of the limits of the rationalistic order of life, it is not only through sport that man cannot achieve freedom. Indeed, it is not only by keeping one's body fit, rising in vital courage and respecting the rules of the game that man can overcome the danger of losing the self'⁵¹. Jaspers' sense of the limits of sport also emerges in another context: 'What is clear to everyone nowadays,' says Jaspers, 'is the decadence of the essence of art. To the extent that art becomes a function of this life, it approaches sport as an object of pleasure. Like sport, a degraded art cannot promote the subjectivity of the individual'⁵².

Mannheim, on the other hand, is essentially a liberal democrat who is forced to announce the decline of 19th century liberalism as a viable doctrine for late liberal mass society. For Mannheim, sport in itself can be based on very different psychological satisfactions. It can, for example, degenerate from a social game into a craving for primates. These are psychological degeneration processes that are common in a mass society and can be corrected by teaching people to enjoy the genuine pleasures of the pastimes offered by society⁵³. Mannheim, moreover, emphasises that liberal capitalism encourages the urge to compete, which originates not from the desire to achieve objective achievements and serve community, but from egocentrism and very often from neurotic anxiety that, on the other hand, makes competition a mania⁵⁴.

For Mannheim, the legitimacy of centralised propaganda (newspapers, radio) during the years of totalitarianism lay in its use to try to neutralise the public's desire to participate in political decisions by favouring sport and spectacular events. Mannheim was therefore one of the few commentators of those years for whom it was not a problem to consider sport as a subculture⁵⁵.

During the inter-war period, there were critics who saw sport as not so much ambiguous in its effects as futile or worse. The American sociologist Lewis Mumford's treatment of sport, for example, monotonously points out that sport has now been corrupted by the civilisation it was intended to improve⁵⁶. There is within modern civilisation a whole series of compensatory functions that, far from making better integration possible, only serve to stabilise the existing state. Chief among these institutions is perhaps

50. G. Cantillo, *Introduzione a Jaspers*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2014, p. 200.

51. R. Wisser, *Karl Jaspers. Philosoph unter Philosophen*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1993, p. 313.

52. K. Jaspers, *Psicopatologia generale*, Il Pensiero Scientifico, Roma 2012, p. 308.

53. C. Loader, *Karl Mannheim's Sociology as Political Education*, Taylor & Francis, Milton Park 2018.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. L. Mumford, *Critic of Culture and Civilization*, Peter Lang, Bern 2009, pp. 93-94.

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mass sport. Thus sport, which originally began as a spontaneous reaction against the machines, becomes one of the mass duties of the machine age⁵⁷.

In this period, there are more radical forms of criticism that tend to appropriate sport. This type of scepticism includes the sports essays of the Austrian novelist Robert Musil, for whom the cultural vacuum that remains after rapid sporting encounters, in which it is desirable to behave like animals, is dangerous. In the end, Musil addresses the social dimension of sport by disapproving of the vacuum into which sport has fallen⁵⁸.

The German poet, essayist, and physician Gottfried Benn considered the cult of sport not only non-therapeutic, but as part of a disease of culture⁵⁹. Echoing Jaspers, Benn speaking of man in the Nazi era stated that the existential emptiness of the German man could not be filled by historical chatter, by presumptuous political falsifications of the regime, and by a Nazi sport that was part of a flawed and vulgar attempt to heal an enormous spiritual wound⁶⁰.

This perception of an enormous and unfathomable cultural disaster links Benn to the critique of modernity by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who wrote in 1935: 'The spiritual decadence of the earth is so far advanced that the peoples are in danger of losing the extreme strength of spirit, that which would at least allow them to perceive and evaluate this decadence as such. Europe, in the grip of an unwatchable blindness, now finds itself in the grip of Russia on the one hand and America on the other'⁶¹. Like Benn, Heidegger pays cautious but sincere homage to the beauty of the body, although he too thinks of Greece rather than modern Germany⁶². Heidegger also does not agree at all with finding a perspective of renewal in a vitalism based on sport. He is determined to consider physical performance and health above the Marxist conception of intelligence, but this is a very conditional endorsement, since Heidegger despises Marxism and insists that all vital qualities are rooted in the spirit, and any increase or decrease in them can only be justified in the power or impotence of the spirit⁶³.

In the inter-war period, the criticism of the passive, indiscriminate, sensation-hungry sports spectator spread everywhere and became a dominant sociological theme⁶⁴. Frank Thiess (1927) describes this attachment to sport as a fashionable phenomenon motivated by a need to seem purely up-to-date wonder. Ortega y Gasset in 1930 despises the enjoy-

57. *Ibid.*

58. C. Salzani, *Crisi e possibilità. Robert Musil e il tramonto dell'Occidente*, Lang, Buccinasco 2010, pp. 10-11.

59. G. Benn, *Primal Vision. Selected Writings of Gottfried Benn*, E.B. Ashton, New York 1971, p. 153.

60. *Ivi*, p. 160.

61. M. Heidegger, *Introduzione alla metafisica*, Mursia, Milano 1972, p. 208.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. J.M. Hoberman, *Politica e sport*, cit., p. 223.

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ment of football⁶⁵. Lewis Mumford in 1933 defines mass sports as those forms of organised games in which the spectator is more important than the player⁶⁶. The Nazi philosopher Alfred Baeumler and the German socialist Helmuf Wagner emphatically criticised the type of passive spectator in search of sensations. Bertolt Brecht, on the other hand, who made spectator awareness the main issue of his epic drama, considered the sports spectator actually superior to contemporary theatre-goers⁶⁷. Finally, the American sociologist Christopher Lasch declared that the sports spectator possessed unusual knowledge and unexpected critical skills⁶⁸.

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66. L. Mumford, *Critic of Culture and Civilisation*, cit., p. 21.

67. J.M. Hoberman, *Politics e sport*, cit., p. 223.

68. *Ibid.*

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THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND NEO-MARXIST THEORY
ON THE BODY AND SPORT

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Abstract. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School proposed their own interpretation of sport in the light of their own Post-Marxist education and aware of the discoveries of psychoanalysis. Besides the analogy between sport and work, an abused metaphor, sport practice was interpreted as an expression of aggression to the point of self-harm, or as an expression of the search for pleasure. In the Seventies of the last century, Brohm spoke out for a new culture of the body that could return to the subject all its rights: aesthetic, playful, erotic and intellectual. The possibility of making one's body an expressive and experiential instrument restored cultural dignity also to the sport.

Keywords: Frankfurt School, Adorno, sport, body.

Both the French and West German schools are related to Marxist-Leninist ideology, but in very different political contexts. The French group clashes, from its extreme left-wing position, with the French Communist Party. This rift between the PCF and its neo-Marxist opponents also appears in their respective doctrines. The PCF, having rejected the anti-sports theory of the French extreme Left, instead declares itself in favour of high performance sport, Olympic ideology, the educational value of sports champions, and French success in international competitions. The PCF's neo-Marxist condemnation of sport is inevitable¹.

West German neo-Marxists relate to Marxism-Leninism in the GDR and are pro-East German. The psychologist Gerhard Vinnai, however, rejects the idea that East and West cultures are essentially identical, although he does not explain precisely why; the point is

1. A. Molinari, G. Toni, *Storie di sport e politica. Una stagione di conflitti 1968-1978*, Mimesis, Milano 2018, p. 150.

that in the GDR, socialism has been held captive by its capitalist past and needs to free itself through radical democratisation².

Both neo-Marxist schools reject what Vinnai calls the principle of absolute performance, which is the purest expression of sport³. For French sociologist Jean Marie Brohm, competition is the very essence of sport and is alienating⁴. The German writer Christian Graf von Krockow rejected the criticism that sees high-level sport as self-hatred⁵, and the philosopher Hans Lenk responded extensively to the New Left and its criticism of performance and competition⁶. Both neo-Marxist currents exalt the body as a sphere of pleasure and freedom. In the preface to the 1961 edition of *Eros and Civilisation*, the German philosopher Marcuse speaks of the liberation of the repressed body, an instrument of labour and entertainment in a society that has organised itself against its liberation. In 1973, Jean-Marie Brohm argued for a new culture of the body in the full sense of the term, a culture in which the body could rediscover all its rights: aesthetic, playful, erotic and intellectual⁷. Both neo-Marxist schools idealise the sphere of play, of the ludic, and both see it perverted in modern sport. Sport, in Brohm's view, is the perversion of the agonal ludic instinct, caused by competition⁸. Vinnai sees in modern football an absence of playful fascination⁹.

The most detailed critiques of neo-Marxist sport theory have been made by the German sociologist Henning Eichberg and Wilhelm Hopf, who argues that being a Marxist also means making analogies between the labour process and sport; although in doing so, one does not come to grips with the real problem, which is to explain the phenomenon of sport. The analogy between sport and labour is one of the many metaphorical equations employed by neo-Marxists¹⁰. Henning Eichberg, on the other hand, condemns the team principle as a reflection of the dominance of collective labour and economic criteria. Football can be interpreted as a mechanical activity, referees can appear to be policemen, and, for example, the loss of the ball to the opposing player could involve a form of symbolic castration¹¹. These analogies are an authentic expression of the intellectual

2. *Ibid.*

3. G. Vienni, *Calcio come ideologia. Sport e alienazione nel mondo capitalista*, Guaraldi, Rimini 2003.

4. J.M. Brohm, *Saggi di teoria critica dello sport e dei Giochi olimpici*, PM edizioni, Bologna 2020, p. 50.

5. G.C. von Krockow, *Sport*, Hoffmann & Campe, Hamburg 1974.

6. H. Lenk, *S.O.S. Save Olympic Spirit. Toward a Social Philosophy of the Olympics*, Agon Sportverlag, Kassel 2012.

7. J.M. Brohm, *Saggi di teoria critica dello sport e dei Giochi olimpici*, cit., p. 29.

8. *Ivi*, p. 56.

9. G. Vienni, *Calcio come ideologia*, cit.

10. W. Hopf, *Kritik der Sportsoziologie*, Lit, Berlin 2021⁴, p. 56.

11. H. Eichberg, *Der Weg des Sports in die industrielle Zivilisation*, Henning Eichberg & Graf von Krockow,

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aggression cultivated by Marx and many of his later admirers as a form of intellectual virility. The neo-Marxist analogies between sport and labour prefigure the critique of the core of sport, the performance principle itself is seen as an enslaving discipline, which impoverishes the individual rather than liberating him. According to Eichberg, the critique of the performance principle can also have an emancipating influence, by virtue of its egalitarian system, with respect to a stagnant or rigid social structure that has stifled the possibilities of openness arising from competition. The neo-Marxist theory of sport will exhaust its resources precisely because of this diagnostic arrogance, which can be traced back to the influence of the Frankfurt School theorists who achieved their greatest fortune during the anti-authoritarian uprisings of the late 1960s.

The sociology of the Frankfurt School can be defined as penetrating the essence of society from a critical point of view. It means observing social reality beyond what it claims to be, in order to explore in its contradictions the potential and possibility of a change in the entire social structure¹². The sociology of the most important Frankfurt School theorists (Max Horkheimer and Adorno), however, is neither Marxist nor sociological in the strict sense. For one thing, in its deviation from classical Marxist epistemology and ontology, in its refusal to synthesise theory and praxis, and in its radical critique of modern science and technology, the theory of the Frankfurt School can only be said to be partly Marxist¹³. The critic Zoltan Tar defines the Frankfurt School's theory of society as an amalgam of artistic reflections, combined with Marxian categories and elements, and a pessimistic philosophy of history¹⁴.

At the age of nineteen, Max Horkheimer wrote of a yearning for perfection that cannot be achieved as long as we are in possession of a body and perceive it through the senses¹⁵. Adorno, among the Frankfurtans, recognised the body as a political and cultural issue¹⁶. The fundamental disdain for the vibrant, athletic body found in Adorno is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage in that without this hostility he would not even have considered the body¹⁷. But this contempt is also a disadvantage in that Adorno seems literally incapable of imagining sport as anything other than a complex of pathological attitudes and instincts. The Adornian critique of the body is best described as a critique of the beauty of the body, of the body as a narcissistic object, of the body from

Germany 1973.

12. T.W. Adorno, *Prism*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1981, p. 50.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Z. Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken 1977, pp. 155-156.

15. M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, London 2016, p. 234.

16. *Ivi*, p. 132.

17. *Ivi*, p. 88.

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which perverse masculinity is in fact removed¹⁸. Adorno wrote in 1951: ‘The physical body can no longer be transformed back into a living body. It remains a corpse however much it may be trained and strengthened. All those who pride themselves on their strength and intact vitality could be considered laboratory corpses’¹⁹.

Adorno’s treatment of the subject of sport is both inexorable and naive. The most expressive concept that appears in his work *Dialectics of Enlightenment* is the relationship between sport and the emotionless sexuality found in the works of the Marquis de Sade²⁰. Here, sport represents the emptiest emotions. Another idea that Adorno never abandoned is: ‘Artistic performance’, he writes in a report on jazz, ‘is reduced to sport on the basis of systems of tricks. He who remains master of himself proves himself practical. The performance of the jazz musician or connoisseur is reduced to a series of easily passed tests’²¹. A more captious comparison between art and physical dexterity appears in the *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, where Horkheimer and Adorno criticise the stubborn and meaningless bravura of horsemen, acrobats and clowns²².

Adorno and the French sociologist Roland Barthes are two of the sharpest intellectuals who have ever thought of sport as a cultural issue. Both, moreover, are proud critics of bourgeois civilisation. But the fundamental characteristics they find in sport, beyond some important similarities, are ultimately very different. Adorno and Barthes agree in despising the body as a cultural ideal²³. What separates them is Barthes’ ability to distinguish the sphere of the body as a cultural space and sport as a form of social life that is not without value²⁴.

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18. Ivi, p. 234.

19. *Ibid.*

20. M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialettica e illuminismo*, tr.it., R. Solmi, Einaudi, Torino 2010.

21. T.W. Adorno, *Minima moralia*, Einaudi, Torino 2015, p. 59.

22. M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, cit., p. 233.

23. Ivi, p. 88.

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SPORT IN ITALY FROM 1861 TO THE PRESENT DAY

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Abstract. In Italy, sports were introduced in the late 19th century, but this does not mean that there was no competitive spirit. With the advent of Fascism, sport was encouraged. Much to the chagrin of the Fascists, the greatest support among the after-work clubs was given to the game of bowls, so much so that in 1937 the bocce clubs constituted 6,434 of the approximately 8,000 sports sections. Soon the results came: the successes at the 1932 Olympics, the victory in the 1934 Football World Cup and the conquest of the world heavyweight title by the boxer Carnera. The success of sport brought changes in social customs and traditions; the success of the champions changed the way people approached sports.

Keywords: physical education, young people, sport, football.

1. Until most of the 19th century, modern sport did not take root in Italy. The small numerical and cultural size of the national industrial bourgeoisie and its weak homogeneity prevented it from introducing innovative models of behaviour, in the manner of the English elites¹. Yet some favourable conditions for the revival of sport also existed in our

1. R. Bassetti, *Storia e storie dello sport in Italia: dall'Unità a oggi*, Marsilio, Venezia 1999, p. 39.

country. For example, in the propensity for idleness and a taste for games and parties². In the form of advanced urbanisation, five cities such as Rome, Naples, Milan, Palermo and Venice were among the most populous in Europe. However, the block to the spread of competitive disciplines in Italy occurred during the Risorgimento where, alongside secret associations of Carbonara matrix, semi-secret associations had sprung up in which people met and attended for a purpose other than the declared and tolerated one. Prominent among these were societies that, under the pretext of gymnastics, organised hotbeds of revolt and trained young people for future battles³. After the Unification, these societies retained the same characteristics. Their aim was to keep the spirit of the fatherland alive, and gymnastic exercises were completely subordinate to this goal. The post-unification state encouraged this line and reinforced it in its own right. Sport was only to serve to harden the defenders of the newly conquered fatherland, muscles were at the service of the soldier, not the athlete. Every statute of a sports club or federation proposed the generalisation of those gymnastic exercises that could make young people agile and strong, and therefore more useful to them and to the fatherland⁴. A gymnasium without a call to the fatherland had no reason to exist. Sporting meetings were therefore never real competitions but military parades in which a pompous ritual, which referred to contents outside the sporting ones, totally outclassed the competitive aspect, even if this had been there⁵. Gymnastics societies spread from Piedmont to the rest of the North, remaining a sporadic phenomenon in the South. By the end of the century, there would be 76 in the North, 30 in the centre and just 4 in the South. Gymnastics was also being introduced permanently in the army and in schools, where the programme had to pass the scrutiny of the Ministry of War, but met with boycotts from a large part of the education sector, which found it inconceivable to devote time to physical activity that could have been allocated to the study of humanistic subjects⁶. The 1878 Reform by Francesco De Sanctis introduced gymnastics into the school curriculum only nominally⁷. And even when it did take place, it resolved itself into lazy stretching among the desks, into a couple of barbarous push-ups from which the pupils tried to wriggle⁸.

In England, on the other hand, and later in other European countries, the spread of the sporting mentality gradually allowed some competitive disciplines to emerge from their embryonic condition and take on the full form and dignity of sport. In Italy, the opposite

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ivi*, p. 40.

6. *Ivi*, p. 41.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

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phenomenon occurred; there was, in fact, already a game in existence in the 18th century that was very close to the characteristics of modern sport, but it lost importance during the 19th century and then almost completely disappeared. It was the game of football, that concentrated small crowds of fans⁹. Goethe, an exceptional spectator in Verona in 1786, tells of a match enthusiastically attended by 5,000 people. The game was a cross between modern tennis and volleyball. The teams on the court had four players each who tried to win points either by forcing the opponent to foul or by means of shots that were called 'hunting' or 'overhand'. The essence of the game, however, consisted in sending the ball back beyond the string placed in the centre of the court so that the opponents would not do the same before the ball had hit the ground twice¹⁰.

The ideal spot to hit it was a wooden armband tied around the forearm, but the left fist and one of the feet would also do. Born in aristocratic palaces, the game of football soon moved to the squares and was one of the earliest moments of exchange between the social classes, enthralling young people from all walks of life. Amidst the shouts of the players and the cries of those who sided with one of the teams, numerous were the complaints that rained down on the table of the public authorities from those who were disturbed in the peace of their homes¹¹. From the 1920s onwards, buildings were built to hold matches. By mid-century, football, which had Piedmont, Veneto, Liguria and central Italy as its main centres of diffusion, was at its apogee. Italian unification could have given it the definitive boost and was instead its tombstone. For the whole of the 19th century, however, sport ceased to be a healthy escape for young people and a departure from vice and became an injection of patriotism. Shooting ranges were opened in areas that had previously been used for games. Shooting was the sport that the state promoted. Garibaldi himself travelled from one side of the peninsula to the other to inaugurate the shooting ranges¹².

The first sporting environment to emancipate itself from the patriotic aura was rowing¹³. It developed mainly in Turin, along the Po, sailed on flat boats by scions of the aristocracy and the upper middle class, their heads covered with wide, flat caps adorned with tassels falling over the ears or wide-brimmed straw hats, sailor-style shirts, brightly coloured striped scarves tied tightly to the hips, long trousers and white boots. Rowing was the first friendly, cheerful and goliardic sporting environment, in which the athletic gesture was an end in itself¹⁴.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. R. Bassetti, *Storia e storie dello sport in Italia: dall'Unità a oggi*, cit., p. 42.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. Ivi, p. 43.

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It was only at the very end of the century that a more compact bourgeois class was formed, particularly in the North, capable of creating collective customs. British imported customs included tennis, football, polo¹⁵. The spirit of the Risorgimento blew with less intensity and had divested itself of its hold on sporting activity. Even school gymnastics, albeit slowly, was changing its approach: worthy theorists such as Emilio Baumann and Angelo Mosso, known as the apostle of sport, achieved a reform of the subject that was renamed Physical Education, to emphasise that through it they wanted to carry out a healthy pedagogical operation and not a pre-military instruction¹⁶. Leisure became popular heritage, in the sense that it also extended to the petty and petit bourgeoisie.

Before the 20th century, the reasons why it was unthinkable for a non-poor man to take up sport were trivial: he did not have the time, he had no money, he had no health. The trouble was that the State, outside the school and the army, once the fundamentalism of the Risorgimento had weakened, did nothing to promote the pursuit of sporting disciplines by the less well-off, who, if they were unable to celebrate their marriage with sport, would console themselves by becoming its lovers¹⁷.

Proof of the sudden qualitative leap in the attention paid to sport in Italy was the awarding of the 1908 Olympic Games to Rome. The first step was taken by the gymnastics federation, which in 1903 asked the Olympic Committee that the Italian capital be granted the honour of hosting the fourth Olympic Games. The secretary of the gymnastics federation, Fortunato Ballerini, set to work and drew up a programme of competitions that included, in addition to predictable specialities such as athletics, rowing, football, gymnastics and fencing, more bizarre ones such as pigeon racing, firefighting and water rescue. De Coubertin went to Rome to reconnoitre possible competition venues: he identified Caracalla for wrestling and fencing, Piazza d'Armi for gymnastics, the Tiber between Ponte Milvio and Ponte Margherita for swimming and rowing, Tor di Quinto for horse riding and the Campidoglio for the prize-giving ceremonies. Ballerini suggested the construction of a 50-metre wide road from Villa Borghese, via Viale Parioli and Viale della Regina, to the Colli Albani for the car and cycling trials, and a contractor offered to rebuild the Colosseum with timbers, cardboard and canvas, to hold the athletic competitions¹⁸. However, nothing came of it, not only of the cardboard Colosseum but of the entire Olympiad, and the reasons remain obscure. Angelo Mosso campaigned for the renunciation because, convinced as he was of Italy's physical backwardness, he feared that the country would be exposed to a disgrace. Italy's conversion to sport was probably too fresh and there was a lack of structures that could seriously coordinate the

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ivi*, p. 44.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ivi*, p. 46.

organisation. So, after Rome renounced, the Olympics were awarded to London and the athletes gave it an Italian touch.

With the outbreak of the First World War, sporting activity was reduced to the bone. Many athletes were called up to fight at the front and some of them would never return, like the captain of Inter and the national football team, Virgilio Fossati. Apart from that, it did not even seem in good taste to have fun while people were dying all around. However, for the trade press, ten war dead were better than ten national team goals¹⁹. The *Gazzetta dello Sport* was sent to the trenches, following this proposal to readers: 'You pay us the subscription and we send the newspaper free for a year to a combatant in a war zone: will you say no?'²⁰. The initiative, although inspired by cunning marketing, is already revealing of the seduction exerted by the front on sporting circles. And there were also those who used the newspaper for a demonstrative gesture: it seems that a brave man named Genisio, at the end of a raid on the enemy lines at Capo Sile, placed a copy of the *Gazzetta* on the other side of the last trench, under a firecracker, as if to point out that the Italians were far from demoralised and even had time to devote themselves to sport²¹. For Marinetti, the *Gazzetta* was almost as essential as the *Manifesto of Futurism* and he extolled it as the mirror of Italy's instinctive and muscular strength. He also stated: 'To the continuous initiative of this newspaper in favour of the outdoors, strength and physical agility we owe much for our alpine victories in the inaccessible Trentino'²². The *Gazzetta* extolled individual valour and virtue. Little harm in dying, in other words, as long as it was done with full honour.

During fascism, the organisation of sport was concentrated in three different institutions: the Opera nazionale Balilla, the Opera nazionale dopolavoro and the Comitato olimpico nazionale, better known as CONI²³. The first two were the institutions that, together with the party, were to give the decisive turn to the fascisation of the nation and physical activity was an important but not exclusive component of their work²⁴.

However, the competences were clearly separated: the ONB, which catered to children aged eight to eighteen, was responsible for physical education for military training; the OND was responsible for the recreational and associative leisure activities of the adult population; CONI was responsible for the training of professional athletes²⁵. This distinction did not prevent the bodies from quarrelling among themselves. In particular,

19. Ivi, pp. 67-68.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Ivi, p. 61.

22. *Ibid.*

23. F. Fabrizio, *Sport e Fascismo. La politica del regime*, Guaraldi, Firenze 1976, p. 74.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Ivi, p. 75.

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the leaders of the OND and the ONB, interested in acquiring more personal power by expanding their membership base and envious of the abundance of funds allocated to CONI, indulged in outright boycotts against the latter. The ONB, for example, jealous of its facilities, had 24-metre pools built so that they would be unusable for official competitive swimming competitions, which required 25 metres²⁶. The ONB, however, had the institutional task of looking after the physical and moral education of Italians and instilling in young people the feeling of discipline and military education. Compared to the school, it had a function of complementarity and support but also an alternative. If, on the one hand, the ONB was responsible for the formation of the school programme of physical education, on the other hand, the organisation managed the leisure time of childhood and adolescence itself. And above all, from a pedagogical point of view, it stood as an outgrowth of the liberal school, to which it was to deliver a new imperative: it is not important to instruct but to educate. The programmes drawn up for the third grade included: the Roman salute for educational and instructional purposes, collective greeting in and out of class, individual greeting, alignment, team numbering, counted steps, marching in groups by rows, counter marching, backtracking, distance intervals. The ONB's most significant achievements were pursued outside the school, taking the boys on trips and sea and mountain colonies, in gymnastic recitals, but above all in parades and parades in uniform and with a mini-mosque on their shoulders, which was meant to accustom the adolescents to consider military life a beautiful game²⁷. In 1937, the ONB was dissolved and merged into a similar structure called the GUL and controlled directly by the party, which was able to enjoy subsidies that the ONB had never dreamed of receiving. The university students who came out of the ONB's tutelage were initiated into serious sporting activity through the university sports groups, called GUF²⁸. The climax of this activity were the Littoriali, a university championship open to artistic and athletic disciplines that began with a solemn oath: 'I will fight to overcome all trials, to conquer all records. With vigour on the competitive fields, with knowledge in the scientific arenas, I will fight to win in the name of Italy. I will fight as the Duce commands: I swear it!'²⁹. As the years went by, however, the Littoriali regressed to a goliardic and *caciarona* party, with which the most muscular caretakers, passed off as students, were associated³⁰.

The OND, on the other hand, was the leisure management body whose aim was to nationalise and standardise associative life³¹. The sports activities promoted by the OND

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ivi*, p. 76.

28. *Ivi*, p. 77.

29. E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1993, p. 77.

30. *Ibid.*

31. R. Bassetti, *Storia e storie dello sport in Italia: dall'Unità a oggi*, cit., p. 77.

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were popular ones, such as tug-of-war or tambourine, or even volleyball³². These were preferably team games, or if individual, competitions in which, rather than direct competition between the participants, the will to perform well was stimulated, which would be followed by those of the others. At the end of each competition, patents were awarded, which initially responded to a selection criterion, and later obeyed the imperative to keep enthusiasm high by ensuring that no one went home empty-handed³³. Much to the disappointment of the fascists, the greatest support among dopolavorists was given to the game of bowls, so much so that in 1937, bowls clubs made up 6,434 of the approximately 8,000 sports sections of the OND. Having overcome initial reluctance, the Fascists adopted petanque and, after organising the first Italian championship in Rome in 1936 on the occasion of the celebrations for the founding of the empire in Ethiopia, they declared it a truly national sport in 1937, stating that it was the favourite pastime of Pius XI, Mascagni and Badoglio³⁴. Bowls, however, did not seduce the younger workers, who would have preferred to kick a ball around. The OND, therefore, promoted a national variant of football. This was the 'sprint' (*volata*), described as an alternative to the English degeneration of football, a kind of middle way between football and rugby. On the wings of propaganda, 809 teams participated in the first Italian championship, which, however, had already halved two years later. The regime realised people did not like the 'sprint' and the *volata* was never spoken of again.

2. CONI already existed before Fascism but limited its function to the preparation of the Olympic Games³⁵. Starting in 1927, the regime made it the federation of federations, assigning it the role of governing body for all agonistic activities; the first president was Lando Ferretti, then for a short period the governing powers were concentrated in the hands of the party³⁶. CONI's policy was decidedly top-level, aimed at looking after and pampering the champions of the speciality, who were required to keep the nation's prestige high in the great international competitions³⁷. It was intended that these athletes should make the common people proud and also act as fascist role models for them. Thus, for example, in 1934, the handshake between opponents was banned on the eve of every team sports match or individual sports match, to be replaced by the Roman salute. It was precisely the Roman salute that many champions addressed to the public at the be-

32. Ivi, p. 78.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Ivi, p. 79.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

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ginning or end of the competition that led some commentators to censure these athletes as propagandists of the regime. In reality, they cared little about politics and the Duce, they won for themselves. The regime, however, assisted them, even pampered them with economic incentives: a medal for athletic valour meant a free life insurance policy of up to 10,000 lire for the first-born son.

One of the measures that followed the consolidation of the regime was the abolition of press freedom³⁸. Even sports newspapers were reduced to faithful vehicles of the regime's policy which, in order to chew and digest them, resorted to two different systems: the first was to introduce trusted men into the editorial offices or boards of directors, as was the case with the *Gazzetta dello Sport* or the *Corriere dello Sport*, which even changed its name and was renamed *Il Littoriale*; the second was the creation of sheets of direct fascist emanation, such as *Milizia e Sport* and *La Palestra Fascista*³⁹. Yet, the sports pages of the time must be credited with the ability to move in an anticipatory direction from a graphic point of view, with the move from six to eight columns, a greater movement of the page, colouring of the headlines, and a pioneering use of photos⁴⁰. The first photos in newspapers were the ones that closed sporting events, and they even went so far as to publish reproductions of fractured shinbones⁴¹. The macroscopically disastrous aspect of the sports press was the language, an emphatic fourth-class D'Annunzianism, lacking in measure, irony, technical and human depth, and in the long run even standardised. Speaking of language, sports newspapers were one of the main theatres of the purist struggle to first reduce and then eliminate foreign words from common usage: it was not acceptable, for example, for a football team to be called Inter, which stood for Internazionale, and so the club was renamed Ambrosiana; the Italian tennis champion Kucell, who was born in Fiume, had to change his surname to Cucelli, which he preferred to Cuicchi and Cucchioni, alternatives that the regime had democratically offered him. The boom of the sports press during Fascism is witnessed by the birth of new newspapers, no less than 73 between 1924 and 1928. The period between 1932 and 1934 was the one in which the sports pundits were able to drown in rivers of ink and blow the trumpets of the most trumpeted rhetoric. In the course of those two years, the sporting events of which the regime would be most proud took place: the resounding successes at the 1932 Olympics, the victory in the 1934 World Cup and the conquest of the world heavyweight title by boxer Carnera⁴². Of the rhetorical veneer with which fascism had covered it, the language of sport was unable to free itself. However, the heterogeneity of the classes of fans and the growing popularity of the sport made it interesting

38. Ivi, p. 91.

39. Ivi, p. 92.

40. Ivi, p. 93.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Ivi, p. 94.

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and dynamic, constantly changing. The young sports language was knocking at the door of just about every sector to borrow from it. Military jargon was the most significant provider, but certainly not the only one. Many, for example, were the terms borrowed from the cinema, the theatre or generally from the world of entertainment: just think of 'director', 'slinger', 'debut', 'playbill'; and even more words were transferred from one sport to another. One of the most important post-war journalists was Gianni Brera. After a past as a paratrooper and partisan, he landed in 1946 at the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, of which he became editor at only 30 years of age⁴³.

He soon left office having realised that his absolute vocation was writing, pure and simple. In two hours, he could churn out eight to ten pages⁴⁴. His style set him far apart from all other columnists; as did his literary ambition, which had even produced a few not-so-excellent novels. He certainly did not understand as much about football as he claimed. When someone pointed out to him the recurrent errors in his predictions, he would reply that predictions are made by those who make them⁴⁵. As for his writing, he left behind memorable pages but also heavy and baroque columns. Umberto Eco wrote that Brera was Gadda explained to the people: in truth, some of his articles would have exhausted Gadda himself⁴⁶. Brera's great strength was his instinctive and total harmony with the spirit of sport⁴⁷. No one has ever balanced so harmoniously, in the narration of competitions, the right seriousness and the rightful irony, the bare chronicle and the ingenious metaphorisation, the aristocratic nobility of the sporting gesture and its popular viscerality, no one has ever grasped with such happy freshness the inseparability of the human aspect and the technical one⁴⁸. It can be debated whether Brera always wrote about sport in the most pleasant way. Certainly, however, he always wrote about it in the right way. In this sense, in his articles, Brera and sport were one and the same. This explains why he was able to flood the sports lexicon with an impressive amount of neologisms (free, midfielder, slider, pre-tactic, goal-ball), helping to reformulate the technical jargon of the various disciplines: it was not sport that drew on Brera nor vice versa, it was rather a single source⁴⁹.

Throughout unitary history, the school's relationship with sport has remained dramatically unchanged. The main problem in Physical Education is space, since a large space

43. Ivi, p. 178.

44. G. Brera, *Storia critica del calcio italiano*, Bompiani, Milano 1975, p. 179.

45. *Ibid.*

46. U. Eco, *I signori del gioco*, Liguori, Naples 1982, p. 179.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Ivi, p. 180.

49. R. Bassetti, *Storia e storie dello sport in Italia: dall'Unità a oggi*, cit., p. 315.

is required. Law has stipulated the construction of a gymnasium in a school building as compulsory since 1958, but the discipline has been widely violated, so much so that a 1990 census showed that 7,529 out of 22,699 schools did not have one, and, in particular, 4,854 out of 13,697 in the South; not to mention the fact that one third of these gyms had a surface area of less than 200 square metres. Rather than carelessness, the issue has often been one of money: the difficulty of containing construction costs has led, having to save something, to cut back on gyms. In such a framework, the figure of the PE teacher took shape, especially in high schools, as an attentive reader of the daily newspaper during working hours or at best referee of volleyball matches⁵⁰. The most profitable training of the body the males did was by going to play football on some improvised and dusty field, after playing hooky from class, or taking advantage of the proclamation of a strike⁵¹. If anything, it was the teachers of other subjects, especially those of the older generation, who inculcated agonism in adolescents, transforming teaching into a competition between students, encouraged to excel by a psychological mechanism very similar to that of athletic competition, all too often forgetting that the most gifted must also be employed to pull and stimulate the less ready elements. Physical education teachers, not infrequently, have been ghettoised by their colleagues, who have looked at them with a certain air of superiority, and ignored by students who are not too keen on sweating, the younger ones because their mothers have explained to them that they risk getting hurt. A curtain of unease has descended over the category of physical education teachers, aggravated by the very high unemployment rate, which has been partially reabsorbed in recent years by employment in private gyms.

While the school stands still, the way in which the body is considered in society changes; at the root of the transformation is a more open attitude towards sexuality. Hiding the body, in a country like Italy in the 1950s, meant first and foremost hindering sexuality⁵². Starting in the 1970s, but more disruptively in the following decade, the body became free to emanate seduction, and not only that of women. A privileged way of getting to know the body becomes, of course, motor activity and morning jogging⁵³. The body, at the moment of athletic expression, is also a bundle of perceptions that are translated into information. In fact, the French historian Georges Vigarello writes: 'The ideal model of the body is no longer just strength and aesthetics but exhaustive and immediately available information. The content of practices increasingly gives way to games that favour sensory information... the new practices are based on information, the work of the surfer or the parachutist is directly in the sphere of surveillance of information from the envi-

50. Ivi, p. 316.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Ivi, p. 318.

53. Ivi, p. 319.

ronment rather than the exercise of a force directly applied to the environment itself⁵⁴. Civilisation has scaled down its goals: it is not important to know, but to know oneself. Knowing oneself and staying healthy are two complementary if not consequential aspects. We must escape stress for at least an hour a day, devote it to fitness, gymnastics, jogging: only in this way can we know ourselves, keep healthy and be happy.

Doping is defined as the taking of substances intended to increase a sportsman's performance in a non-physiological way⁵⁵. The etymology of the word is uncertain. Perhaps it derives from dope, a liquid that was used in England around 1880 to waterproof shoes, or perhaps from doop, the name given to a mixture of grass and alcohol, or from to doop, which means to cheat⁵⁶. What is certain is that it was first used in North America in 1889, to refer to an opium and tobacco-based beverage intended for horses that were to run a race. There are two types of doping. The first follows that of the ancient marathon runners and consists of prolonging physical tone for a single performance, thanks to drugs that raise the threshold of resistance to fatigue. The second type of doping acts at a structural level, strengthening the athlete's muscles. In this category, particularly effective are anabolic steroids, chemically synthesised products that select the basic molecule of the male sex hormone, testosterone.

In Italy, the phenomenon of doping found fertile ground in the confidence with the use of drugs, linked to national pharmaceutical consumerism, to that perverse pleasure of swallowing pills at the first sneeze. For years, doping in Italy was an exemplary type of 'you know but you don't say', until the scandal of the Athletics Federation came to light between 1985 and 1988. The federation not only tolerated the athletes' initiatives but directly promoted the taking of anabolic drugs, making the samples subjected to the treatments sign a release form in which they declared that they were fully consenting and aware of the risks involved.

Then it came to light that some of them, two weightlifters, a hurdler, and others, discovered one bad day that they could no longer lift their arm, or that they could no longer make love because they could not get an erection. Something similar happened in the Weightlifting Federation, when as many as six nationals were all found to be positive, but in time the affair was hushed up, attributing it to the revenge of a jealous girlfriend⁵⁷.

Until 1998, the CONI claimed in triumphalist tones that it had adopted a strict control policy since the 1990s and cited the number of controls carried out, which, at more than ten thousand a year, would make up ten per cent of the total number of controls in the world. However, the doping case came resoundingly and violently back into the limelight in 1998 when at the Tour de France a major cycling team was found in pos-

54. Ivi, p. 320.

55. Ivi, p. 321.

56. Ivi, p. 322.

57. Ivi, p. 324.

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session of an unprecedented amount of dopant products. A few days later, the coach of Roma, Zdenek Zeman, stated in an interview that football was in danger of coming to the same end as cycling: the declarations received threatening and angry responses from the environment, but gave rise to investigations that began with the CONI Anti-Doping Prosecutor's Office and the Turin Prosecutor's Office⁵⁸. Searches were ordered by Prosecutor Guariniello, famous for his actions to protect the health of workers. They showed that controls in football were hardly ever carried out; it was discovered that the Federcalcio, violating a CONI regulation, did not carry out essential analyses to ensure that test tubes were not altered. In the eye of the storm ended up the Acqua Acetosa laboratory in Rome, delegated to carry out the checks, on which at first the sports institutions tried to shift sole responsibility. The earthquake spread to the Federation of Sports Doctors and finally to the top management of CONI, forcing the painful resignation of President Pescante⁵⁹.

The political class, therefore, is showing that it finally wants to intervene and is studying criminal sanctions for doping. Surely a serious fight against doping is unthinkable without the investment of substantial sums of money, in part to carry out costly controls and in part to finance research that seems to only meet with success if it is studied in favour of doping. This delay in anti-doping research calls into question the responsibilities of the pharmaceutical companies, which have so far been reluctant even to introduce a marker into drugs, a harmless chemical that would allow traces of the substance to be detected by analysis. On the other hand, doping now constitutes a business of colossal proportions, with an estimated turnover of 3.9 trillion, a figure that can be quadrupled if the black market is taken into account; and, with its movement of 110 billion, Epo is the fourth most sold drug in the world, despite the narrowness of the pathologies that, used correctly, it should cure. It is easy to get hold of those products, sometimes even mutable: growth hormone, then, is offered via the internet for seventy-eight dollars⁶⁰.

In the opposite hemisphere of doping and the production of bionic men are the competitions between the disabled, which pursue the humble and grandiose aim of bringing back to a normal life individuals whom physical or psychic impairments have placed in an inferior condition⁶¹. The disability federation includes the physically and mentally disabled. Among the physically disabled, there are some that, in reality, do not make comparison with intact individuals impossible. The boxer D'Agata, for example, was deaf-mute and yet became European champion. The same, however, would not have been conceivable for a blind or paraplegic person. There were exceptions, however: at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Italy fielded a paraplegic girl for the first time, in archery. In

58. Ivi, p. 325.

59. Ivi, p. 136.

60. Ivi, p. 327.

61. Ivi, p. 334.

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some sports, the minority condition leads to a completely different athletic gesture: the paraplegic's race consists of quickly pushing the wheelchair with his arms. The disabled, however, experience the race with the same motivation as 'healthy' athletes⁶². Precisely because they want to escape the trap of compassion, the disabled compete with great competitive fury. Sport gives them the habit of moving actively and in a self-determined manner, escaping the pitiful overprotectiveness with which the family environment tends to stifle their personality. For some, sport even expresses a sign of continuity with normal life: Luca Pancalli, a former national pentathlon hopeful, who was paralysed at the age of 17 after a fall from a horse during a riding competition, has reknotted the thread of his existence by taking part in disabled people's tournaments. The situation is different for the mentally disabled⁶³. For them, competitiveness remains in the background, it is a value that they do not perceive or that they cease to perceive in the middle of the competition, perhaps stopping at the pool to help a fellow swimmer. The Federation of the Disabled was incorporated into CONI in 1979. In 1974 it was born as an association and started receiving financial contributions in 1977. Then, fully affiliated to CONI, it was included in the body's percentage allocation of funds, to an extent of just over 1%⁶⁴.

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62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ivi*, p. 336.

64. *Ibid.*

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SEXUAL MORALITY BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL BODY
AND THE SOCIAL BODY

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Abstract. In Italy, it took Unity governments a couple of decades to understand that the state should be responsible for the physical education of its young people. In addition to being a cultural and medical, hygienic and moral problem, sport practice also acquired a political significance. The opportunity to spread sexual, health and productivity ideals emerged; furthermore, the process of renewing the moral and social conscience of the young nation was underway. The direct impact of practicing school sports on the world of work in terms of wealth for the individual was understood. The connection between correct sexuality, health and working capacity has become the recipe for guaranteeing 'public happiness'.

Keywords: sex education, sexual question, social, sex.

1. In May 1878, Minister De Sanctis presented a brief but rich bill whose guiding concept was this: '[...] that the teaching of gymnastics be considered not as a vain amusement, but as a national institution, the foundation of our educational methods from an early age, and made compulsory not only in secondary schools, but also in teacher-training courses

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and primary education, determining the obligation in the spirit of the law of July 1877¹. For Minister De Sanctis, this is an obligatory path if the Italian people are not to remain inferior to the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon races. In fact, he states: 'If we are to recover our nation's rightful place, we must ensure that these exercises penetrate customs and become an integral part of our national festivals and institutions'². The project thus formulated found almost unanimous support in Parliament.

There were very few oppositions and mostly all of a technical nature. The country's ruling class thus had the opportunity to express its own idea of gymnastics, to which it assigned a specific role and content. The political class almost unanimously, without major differences between the Right and the Left, thus had the opportunity to formulate a homogeneous thought on gymnastics, with clear and unequivocal contours, placed at the service of an ethical-moral education considered decisive in unifying the ideals of Italians and inculcating in them the highest values of patriotism³. In this way, all other forms of gymnastics that were more properly educational, from hygienic to therapeutic to recreational, were strongly penalised, as were certain movements and personalities that had promoted them, meeting with a not inconsiderable consensus⁴.

At the turn of the 19th century, the sexual question definitively asserts itself. In addition to being a cultural and medical, hygienic and moral problem, it also acquires political significance. There emerges the need and the opportunity to spread new sexual ideals that, together with the health and productivity ones, should be able to start the process of renewal of moral consciences and subsequently also of the social one⁵. The opinion of many is that without sexual health, and thus physical health, it is impossible to hope for a better future. One must be convinced that sexual health puts the citizen in a position to fulfil those duties towards society that are imposed on him by nature, namely to procreate and be useful. A person with a weak physical constitution and lacking in morals has no right to citizenship in a society that wants to be founded on the primacy of labour and whose goal is social wealth and public welfare according to the design of a progressive, more specifically bourgeois capitalist national society. What is needed is the creation of the ideological and political conditions to open up the 'rich coffer of the human body' and thus favour the affirmation of its best energies, especially the physical and mental energies that manifest themselves with the complete development of the entire organism. It is indeed the physical energies that mainly characterise the qualities of the worker, who

1. Cfr. G. Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione: l'educazione ginnica, igienica e sessuale nell'Italia liberale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 1990, p. 82.

2. Ivi, p. 83.

3. Ivi, p. 85.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Ivi, p. 393.

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thus becomes the essential factor in industrial evolution⁶. The more the worker is active, intelligent, quick, the more his productivity or quantity of work produced increases, thus allowing wages to rise; on the contrary, the more the worker is clumsy, slow, not very resistant, the more his productivity decreases and wages remain low. Finally, the ideal opportunities must be created to foster a chain reaction between sexual health, physical strength and economic wealth, which is the only condition that can guarantee the 'public happiness' that has been pursued for years and was only achieved in the second half of the 19th century with the advent of modernity promoted by national forces.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the problem of sex education became, in our country and throughout the continent, one of the problems most addressed by pedagogy⁷. In Italy, only sex education is considered the right opportunity to create in the male respect for himself and the woman. The family and school must work together to achieve a healthy sexual personality. 'Let the mother', Montessori urged, 'enlighten and sanctify with maternal affection and reveal, in her sorrows as a woman, the grandiose facts of motherhood; the school could then, with method and consistency, continue this education'⁸. And it is precisely in the school that the greatest hopes for a new educational future are placed, inasmuch as it not only already represents the educational social institution par excellence, but is also today crossed by the political and popular will to make it regain the moral strength it deserves. There is a desire for education, and particularly that given within school walls, to become the sovereign ruler of the biological becoming of the species⁹.

Arising from the general social discontent, also grafted into the overall social question, in the crisis of sexual mores, the pedagogical party of the sexual economy of the early 20th century represents the secular way to overcome the sexual question¹⁰. It brings together intellectuals and personalities who tend to develop a spiritual and civilised consciousness capable of administering individual sexual energies in the service of national welfare¹¹. They want to open a new era in the way sexuality is conceived and experienced. They start from a bitter, dramatic sociological observation, shared by the entire world: the sexual instinct has become savage, it seeks its satisfaction wherever it finds it and passes over it without scruple, without mercy, making a massacre of the honour, happiness, and life of individuals as well as families and entire peoples. 'This use of the sexual instinct for purposes that do not conform to its nature,' they say, 'is to be condemned categorically as an abuse and an immoral thing. In order to suppress this behaviour, a struggle must

6. Ivi, p. 394.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Ivi, p. 398.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Ivi, p. 413.

11. Ivi, p. 414.

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be waged for a new ethical consciousness and one that moves from certain operational certainties in full and sympathetic awareness of the ends. Quite different must be the attitude of parents and educators in general towards the sexuality of their children, for there will be no other force, like sex, that can so vigorously influence and direct the moral career of the child. They, from the moment they open their eyes, must grow up in the full consciousness of the sex that nature has given them, creatures who are free and proud of their own sex: the child, who is the man to come, must inherit and perpetuate his own gender. The new generations, therefore, will have to imbibe the importance of their sex. The more they have in sexuality, freedom and security of movement, the more energetic will become the hand called upon to guide their existence¹².

Providing the most qualified contribution to the formulation of the secular project was the movementism stirred up by Pio Foà, a distinguished university professor and Senator of the Kingdom, who at the end of the first decade of the 20th century devoted himself body and soul to the sexual question and propaganda for race hygiene by holding conferences in major Italian cities and stirring up lively debates on the subject¹³. Foà denounced the fact that, despite the existence and work of driving forces, Italy still opposed progress. The most disastrous consequence produced by this traditional force is to conceal the existence of evil, and the intensity with which it manifests itself. The direction to follow is given by modern pedagogy, which tends to teach that the sexual instinct is a high and most noble function destined to give man a series of physical and psychic satisfactions to be achieved in such a way that it is not detrimental to the health of the individual, that it does not threaten collective health, that it maintains the high vigour of the race and that it is carried out in harmony with all the other energies of life. As a first and immediate objective, sex education wants to fight against the direct consequences of the educational regime of silence, namely the early loss of naivety and purity, the early gratification of instincts, and the increasing spread of sexual diseases. For these and other, more general objectives, sexual pedagogy has two aims: first, to educate the character of the young person, so that he arrives at the age of puberty with pure feeling and with a real knowledge of the importance of propagation in the animate world; second, to make the young person aware of the real nature of the dangers he faces in entering social life, and how these can be prevented. For Foà, sex education must begin at birth¹⁴. It should not only be domestic, even if the family remains the primary educational agent. In fact, it is necessary for the school to assume the high office of instructing and educating the child also in sexual life. Hence it is the school's mission to instruct in sexual life where the teacher assumes importance, who first and foremost must teach the child to speak frankly about natural things and with naive feeling and that sense of religious veneration that the

12. Ivi, p. 415.

13. Ivi, p. 418.

14. Ivi, p. 420.

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great facts of nature inspire. And so until puberty, and then talk about sex *apertis verbis*, albeit always with linguistic and moral caution¹⁵.

In issue 9 of 10 February 1910, the prestigious Florentine paper *La Voce* collected a series of articles on various aspects of the sexual question written by authoritative exponents of Italian lay culture and beyond. Thus there were more or less weighty articles by Romolo Murri on *Il celibato del clero* (*The celibacy of the clergy*), by Giovanni Papini on *Mantagazza il sessualista* (*Mantagazza the sexualist*), where the contribution of the hygienist as a constituent part of Italian sexual thought was recalled, by Roberto Assagioli on *Le idee di Sigmund Freud sulla sessualità* (*Sigmund Freud's ideas on sexuality*), by Giulio Levi on *Ottone Weininger*¹⁶. Of course, there could be no lack of educational contributions, and these were entrusted to illustrious names. Giovanni Amendola in his *La morale sessuale* affirms the need for the modern man to master his passions, that is, to act on his reality, and not passively accept it. August Forel recalls what he wrote in the preface to the eighth edition of his book *The Sexual Question*. Forel urges that a clear and effective sex education be activated from an early age. As an overall remedy, then, in addition to a campaign against sexual dangers, the facilitation of divorce, the division of goods and labour in marriage, he proposes the regulation of procreation as an ethical-social duty in the sense of a methodical, qualitative improvement of our race with regard to physical strength and health, but also ethical faculties, character, firmness of will and intelligence. Georges Sorel, in *The Social Value of Chastity*, says he is certain that the world will only become more just when it becomes more chaste. In this issue of *Voce*, of course, Pio Foà's piece could not be missing. He, using the typical arguments of sexual degeneracy, draws two youthful portraits: the first, that of the virtuous youth who prepares the future man: fruitful, active and healthy; the second, that of the vicious youth who prematurely digs the grave into which he will descend after much agony. Of course, the two types are two different products of sexual life: the first learned to fight and win against his instincts; the second did not feel the brakes on his will and imagination. This, says Foà, is the most agonising dilemma of modern humanity¹⁷.

From 12 to 14 November, closely followed by the national press, a heated debate took place in Florence, a review of ideas attended by personalities from the flowering of Italy, who met to discuss the sexual question¹⁸. The main papers were those by Pio Foà, *L'educazione sessuale nella scuola*, by M. Bossi, *Il malthusianismo*, by Gennaro Avolio, *Il celibato del clero*, by Roberto Michels, *I diritti e i limiti etici della sessualità* and by Paolo Orano, *Le organizzazioni operaie e la questione sessuale*¹⁹. The reports did not bring anything new from the point of view of sociological interpretations. Interesting were the

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ivi*, p. 426.

17. *Ivi*, p. 427.

18. *Ivi*, p. 428.

19. *Ivi*, p. 429.

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debates and resolutions that emerged, the prevailing and converging orientations that were determined among the various conference participants. One notes the emergence of new political attitudes, that is, the affirmation of that unitary tendency towards the formulation of a moral educational theory that sought to reconcile religious and lay demands, spiritualist and scientific positions²⁰. Undoubtedly at the Florentine conference, sexual morality education constituted itself as a centripetal force that emancipated the various educational aspirations from their respective political positions. In fact, the wish expressed at a German conference on sex education, made by Foà and addressed by him to Italian public opinion, in particular to the Catholic and anticlerical ones, seemed to materialise: 'We are mature enough to contain ourselves in the face of the two aforementioned philosophical currents, and we can be united on the practical terrain'. According to Catholic morality, the goal can be defined as follows: to do the Lord's work in the world; according to a secular and naturalistic view, the goal can be expressed in these words: to act for the progressive development and healthy preservation of the species. In practice, the two definitions can lead to the same result²¹.

The first five decades of the 20th century saw the most important and varied components of the cultural and political world slowly converge and focus decisively on an educational project that, as its primary objective, posits integral and absolute chastity up to marriage²². A neo-Malthusian practice was thus affirmed. It was a simple doctrine, based on a few rules: to render sexual intercourse infertile on general ethical, social and economic grounds, it was enough to use a few expedients such as interrupting coitus, occluding the uterine cavity to retain the male's sperm or covering the member with a sack condom²³. The inspirational principles of Neo-Malthusianism, and of Italian Neo-Malthusianism in particular, which in 1913 formed the Italian Neo-Malthusian League, are also rooted in the sexual question. The neo-Malthusians in our country fought first and foremost to restore a high sense of responsibility to a morally inflated act such as that of procreation, since it provokes a very complex issue, involving considerations of time, place, personal, family and class conditions. Consequently, in the act of conception it is to be assumed that consideration of the quality of offspring must take precedence over that of quantity. It is therefore a great family and social mistake to bring children into the world whose life and education are not assured, given the conditions of the environment in which they are born; in other words, it is a grave fault to beget more children than can be conveniently reared and educated²⁴. To achieve these results, and thus avoid adultery and mercenary love, a new mentality would be needed to prepare and support the development of a new sexual regime. To this end, in addition to a

20. Ivi, p. 431.

21. Ivi, p. 432.

22. Ivi, p. 438.

23. Ivi, p. 439.

24. Ivi, p. 440.

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general educational work, it would be indispensable to lower the age of marriage, it would be necessary to reverse the customs of nuptiality, to marry at an early age. The movement had to give itself an organisation and propaganda tools. Under the operational impetus given by Luigi Berta, the leader with the most credit, the Italian Neo-Malthusian League was created in Turin in 1913 and, in the same year, its propaganda organ *L'educazione sessuale*, a monthly journal of neo-Malthusianism and eugenics, was founded²⁵.

In the immediate future, the Italian Neo-Malthusians, in order to form a conscious generation capable of human regeneration, propose to tear away the traditional veil of falsehood, of absurdity, of malice; to co-operate in the modernisation, reform or replacement of the forbidden systems of sexual education, by introducing into them the healthy and vigorous currents of new scientific ideas, of new pedagogical methods and of a new morality inspired by naturalness and sincerity; to disseminate the principles of sexual hygiene; to proclaim the vital necessity, for the future, of the race and propaganda of civilisation; to affirm a general and profound reorganisation of sexual relations, of the institution of marriage, of relations in general between spouses, of family life; to give a strong impetus to what is called, in a word, eugenics, i.e. to research, studies, initiatives and social provisions of all kinds, aimed at introducing rational and scientific criteria into the procreation and education of men; to illuminate the question of Neo-Malthusianism in its various connections and interferences, clarifying its great importance especially for the development and liberation of women, for the improvement and elevation of the working class, spreading the knowledge and the exact and healthy practice of the means of procreative prudence, especially among the individuals and classes that most need it²⁶.

2. Putting in the background the growing collective fear for the extinction of the species aroused by the decline in fertility during the eve of war, those wary of neo-Malthusian scientific practical systems for limiting mortality were in that Giolittian Italy four classes of people: that which was afraid of novelties, whatever they might be, especially if the novelties meant an increase in responsibility and human control; that of the bourgeoisie, which saw wages rise as competition diminished due to the low birth rate in the proletarian class; that of the sentimentalists, who resisted all reasoning in matters of love and sex; that of the Catholics, who obeyed the orders of the Church and what the Lord had revealed with conscious hypocrisy and wanted the doctrines of hygiene, economics, ethics and even the price of bread to agree with the word of the Lord²⁷.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ivi*, p. 441.

27. *Ibid.*

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The great hope and confident faith that had been nurtured in sexual education was in fact dashed²⁸. The primary and original aspirations that had promoted them were thwarted, and the institutional opportunities to spread sexual awareness to the vast majority of the social classes were not created. The ideological debate, by insisting excessively on the moral dimension of the sexual problem, considered resolvable only in terms of education and moral identity, penalised the formation of a store of scientific knowledge indispensable to all members of the modern civil community²⁹. Thus, all the coordinates of educational and instructional intervention were lost, in particular the conception and pedagogical sense of the times and modes of the real processes of personal growth and scholastic formation³⁰. In the moralistic *impasse* in which Italy found itself in the early 1900s, on the one hand there was no institutionalisation of ethical and hygienic sexual education, and on the other hand, when it came to formulating and disseminating the new pedagogical knowledge on sexuality, there was a didactic bifurcation, that is to say, there was a didactic for males and one for females³¹.

The former set out on the educational path that had been outlined in the mists of moralism. The second practically did not take place, since a conservative instinct caused a blanket of silence to fall over female sexuality and its educational transmissibility. The strategy of the most convinced moralists was thus affirmed, according to which sexual education was to be administered only to those who were thought to be already spiritually educated and endowed with firmness of character, Christian morals, purity and truth, and therefore self-control, and the conscious exercise of chastity, and not to those who, lacking ideas and moral restraints, without any inhibiting power, were accustomed to giving in to the lure of erotic sex³².

Given also the political and economic emergencies, and also the military ones, that arose especially in the second decade of the 20th century, and considering the concrete impossibility of realising a school project with sexual education content, the sexuality of the other social classes, proletarian and peasant, working class and not wealthy, rather than being educated, had to be controlled by a regime of police morality, intolerant, prevaricating, psychologically punitive and selective of social destinies³³. In addition to the parents, great reliance was placed on the schoolmaster for this task of supervision, by virtue of his scholastic figure of great educational value³⁴. From the height of the role conferred on him by the

28. Ivi, p. 450.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Ivi, p. 451.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. Ivi, p. 452.

34. Ivi, p. 453.

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State, through his magisterium he translated the written sexual culture to illiterate children, or rather announced what was not sexually licit, coinciding with what was morally and religiously wrong. Such an educational project will then be enriched with another didactic tool. This would come about when certain Freudian theories became widespread, a culture about the mechanisms that regulate the human personality that had never been known before, and in particular the one that holds that sexual energies are influenced by our psyche. By virtue of this, one began to urge the use of sexual energies in an educational sense, that is, to channel at least a part of sexual energies and transform them into other activities. In other words, the educational perspective of the sublimation of sexual instincts is affirmed. The most tried and tested field, the one in which sublimation will yield the best results, is undoubtedly the artistic field, although the use of the techniques of art does not then seem ideal for developing effective forms of sublimation in mass society. It is no longer the activity of creative genius that is to be nourished with the instinctual surplus of sex: it is instead useful to educate to corroborate through the sublimation of sexual energies the strength of the body to be placed at the service of national production in times of peaceful economic belligerence and at the service of the army in times of military belligerence³⁵.

The statute of sex education in the new bourgeois Italian is not only classist but also sexist: from an educational point of view it is formulated for males only. The programme of sexual regeneration through education, which hinted at a more direct involvement of women, is instead placed far away from it. The total primacy of men in sexual life, and genital life above all, is thus re-proposed, despite the fact that a more current and relevant social protagonism was desired for women. It was only for the woman's companion that broadcasts dedicated to sexual knowledge were conceived and activated, and didactics in a naturalistic spirit and modelled on botany were prepared. These were the years in which the translation of *The Mental Inferiority of Woman* (1904) by Paul Julius Moebius circulated, stating that woman is something between a child and a man and that nature wants love and maternal dedication from woman³⁶. For the formation of such a woman, therefore, no special instructions and erudition are needed: what is needed is the dissemination of the virtuist myth of the heroine woman of the maternal function, in the dual procreative and educational role³⁷. For the woman, finally, there is no instruction, since her social role through the exercise of her sexuality, first physiological and then affective, does not require knowledge but awareness of tasks, firmness of ideality, tenacity and resoluteness in operating, and above all fixity of identity as a human machine for the procreation and education of new generations³⁸. In the changing and transforming world, with women's roles themselves changing by projecting themselves into the non-domestic

35. Ivi, p. 454.

36. P.J. Moebius, *L'inferiorità mentale delle donne*, Einaudi, Torino 2021.

37. Ivi, p. 81.

38. Ivi, p. 82.

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world and into the dynamics of urban and industrial relations, women are given the task of conveying the representation of the perpetuity of life³⁹. Woman, in fact, with her maternal-sexual specificity is identified with the founding, immutable, ahistorical element of humanity, on which the most diverse forms of society have been built and are still being built. That is, she is identified with that element that always and in any case ensures the reproduction of humanity under any form of economic and political regime. Woman is the immutable identity of the species, she is the guarantee of reproduction, she is the vestal of the cultural continuity of the value system that orders that civilisation in which she herself plays vital but subordinate, hierarchically subordinate roles⁴⁰.

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39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ivi*, p. 43.

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DESIRE, IDENTITY AND SCHOOL IN THE SOCIETY
OF CONTEMPORARY NEOLIBERALISM:
HERMENEUTIC-PEDAGOGICAL INTERCONNECTIONS

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Abstract. In this study we would like to attempt a critical review, in a pedagogical key, of the interferences that Desire, understood in different ways within the philosophical-psychoanalytical tradition that we will examine, can bring into being within the educational dimension in the school context: not being able to disregard the ontology of pedagogical knowledge as being in situation and as historically embodied knowledge, we turn to analyse the characteristics of today's society in which the school lives, expresses itself – phenomenologically – and at the same time acts. In a sort of internal dialectic, Desire, Identity, School and Contemporary Society converse following dynamics and trajectories that often seem to escape the mind's eye of the adult educators of the present time.

Keywords: teacher training, identity, desire, school, didactics.

Introduction

What can the interconnections between Desire, Identity and School be in our contemporary society? What existential level do such interconnections play out at for the human being living the present time? What benefit can be derived from a problematisation of such concepts?

In this study I would like to propose a critical review, in a pedagogical key, of the *interferences* that Desire, understood in a different hermeneutics from the philosophical-psychoanalytical tradition that will be examined, can bring into being within the educational dimension in the school context: not being able to disregard the ontology of pedagogical

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knowledge as *being in situation* and as “historically embodied” knowledge¹, I will turn to analysing the characteristics of the society in which the school lives, expresses itself – phenomenologically – and at the same time acts.

In a sort of internal dialectic, Desire, School and Society, with their interconnections with Identity, interact together following dynamics and trajectories that often seem to escape the mind’s eye of adults, educators, of the present time: they are always called upon to become interpreters of contemporaneity in the view of possible answers to educational needs and formulations about what the *educational* itself is.

I will proceed, then, in the opposite direction: I will outline the internal characteristics of contemporary society and try to see how the school – in the broadest sense – hinges and expresses itself within this social framework, painting the traits of the students, children, teachers, parents, educators, men and women who meet daily in the school “the society” itself: this will be the beginning of our journey. In what sense Desire intervenes in the composition of those human traits will be, in filigree, the ultimate aim of this study, to verify whether this faculty of the human being plays any role, even a relevant one, in grasping or giving a significant meaning to the existential dimension of each of us who has lived, lives or will live precisely in the school, perhaps the most important educational time of life.

1. *Society in the Order of Neoliberalism: the ‘Sunset of Desire’ as hermeneutics of contemporaneity*

E. Mounier, in one of his works, states: “The person enters into a somewhat paradoxical relationship with society: on one hand, he needs it to *fulfil* himself”², on the other hand, society itself can also “be a threat to the full realisation of personal life”, resolving this individual-society relationship in a paradoxical dialectic.

What, then, are the structural features of a society that emerge as a kind of epiphenomenon in the particular of the individual of our time and in what relationship do these features stand to the Desire and the school community?

Oliver Marc Hartwich, in the celebrated *Neoliberalism: the genesis of a Political Swearword*³ introduces, on one hand, the concept of neoliberalism and, on the other, portrays Alexander Rustow as the inventor, so to speak, of the term itself, of the economic order in which we frame the contemporary society: we are presented with Rustow – from 1930

1. Cfr. E. Felisatti, C. Mazzucco, *Insegnanti in ricerca. Competenze, modelli e strumenti*, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce 2013.

2. E. Mounier, *Il Personalismo* (edited by G. Campanini and M. Pesenti), Ave, Roma 2004, p. 14.

3. O.M. Hartwich, *Neoliberalism: the genesis of a Political Swearword*, in *CIS Occasional Paper*, The Centre for Independent Studies, St. Leonards, NSW, July 2009, pp. 1-31.

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– and Kevin Rudd, the Australian Prime Minister in 2009, who displayed the same kind of concerns despite belonging to two very distant historical times.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, Rustow, influenced by the ideas of Franz Oppenheimer, began to think about the hypothesis of a *third way*, a new economic order *between Marxist socialism and liberal capitalism*⁴: involved in the drafting of the *Cartel Act of 1923* in Germany, in his *The failure of economic Liberalism* and in his essay *Between Capitalism and Communism*⁵ he speaks of this as the only solution he saw for the economy to be at the service of human beings and not vice versa:

(The crisis) has called into question the prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy that has underpinned the national and global regulatory frameworks that have so spectacularly failed to prevent the economic may them which has now been visited upon us. In the past year we have seen how unchecked market forces have brought capitalism to the precipice (...) neither governments nor the people they represent any longer have confidence in an unregulated system of extreme capitalism⁶.

Originally, then, neoliberalism was understood as that ‘third way’ between the two philosophical-economic visions of socialism and liberalism: it was supposed to be that solution to the paradoxes of both previous theorised orders, aimed at correcting exaggerated capitalism; over the years, then, those *market police measures*⁷ that the state⁸ was supposed to put in place as a guarantor of protection against the unruliness of capitalism never took shape, and with them the philosophy and spirit that was supposed to grow and develop within society.

It is contemporary Byung Chul-Han who warns us that

According to (...) Rustow (...) society handed over solely to the neo-liberal law of the market becomes more and more inhuman and generates within itself phenomena of social rejection. He therefore mentions the need for neo-liberalism to be complemented by a ‘vital politics’ capable of creating solidarity and civic sense. In the absence of the correction of neo-liberalism produced by ‘vital politics’ there arises a mass made insecure and driven by anxiety, which easily becomes monopolised by nationalist and racist forces⁹.

By introducing us, on one hand, into the heart of the interference of the order of neo-liberalism as Rustow wanted, and, on the other hand, into the new dimensions of society

4. Ivi, p. 14.

5. Ivi, pp. 17-18.

6. Ivi, p. 3.

7. Ivi, p. 18.

8. Ivi, pp. 19-21.

9. Cfr. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, Nottetempo, Milano 2017, p. 22.

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– Network-Digital-Global – the contemporary author helps us to clarify in what ways the element of Desire intersects with these vectors of the philosophical-economic order; of further help will be Marcuse in clarifying at what level the neo-liberal order intervenes with the faculty of Desiring:

The self as the entrepreneur of itself, produces itself, is the performance of itself and offers itself as a commodity¹⁰:

such an iconic expression gives much food for thought. In fact, capitalism and unbridled liberalism seem to leverage precisely on the phenomenon or “need” of Desire, as Rustow predicted some time ago; the advent of the Net, as a new endemic dimension of society and the individual, seems to have created a new human condition that ends up becoming paradoxically anti-human: *functionality and performance*.

Presenting themselves in the form of emancipation, the characteristics of the Digital, the Net and the Global can move not in the service of humanity and progress. The neo-liberal system combined with the Net and the all-pervasive digital market can bring into play new onto-gnoseological-ethical elements, feelings and emotions, interconnected with each other, capable of causing unprecedented damage.

Starting from the primary and original Desire for identity, the subject, in the neo-liberal climate, can be ‘manipulated’, especially when it comes to the younger generations, and somehow the desire for singularity is ‘bartered’ with that of authenticity, resulting in a complete inauthentic and paradoxical homologation.

Like the object, so the subject perceives itself as “performing” and “functioning”: the whole of life presents itself, in the form of emancipation, as “production” and “performance”. The subject, like machines or computers, must function and be performant. Humankind perceives itself as a performing being, totally assimilated to a computer, and as such either works or is broken, which means therefore to be useless and unusable. Hence the idea of self-optimisation. The advent of the Net and Global has exasperated the concept of optimisation through visibility, a visibility that is advertising; and through social networks, relationships become nothing more than “showcases” from which and in which to advertise one’s self, perhaps optimised and fit.

Here the reference to *hyper* as an interpretative cipher of our time begins to become clear: *hyper-visibility*, *hyper-acquisition* of goods, *hyper-Self* as optimisation and, one might say, *hyper-authenticity*. Byung Chul-Han states:

“Inherent in globalisation is a violence that makes everything interchangeable, comparable and therefore equal”¹¹: the concept of the equal and the proliferation of the equal that passes under the guise of the search for originality seems to be generated precisely at this level.

10. Ivi, p. 30.

11. Cfr. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, cit., p. 19.

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It is paradoxically the constant comparing in order to ‘make oneself different’ from the other that leads to the homologation, assimilation and proliferation of the equal¹²:

being the same is affirmed through being different. The authenticity of being different enforces conformity even more effectively than repressive normalisation¹³.

A theme already dear to the Frankfurt School, a consequence of the capitalism of the *advanced industrial society*¹⁴, is that one sees the individual today in a kind of state of repression masked behind the face of emancipation and a higher standard of living:

(...) our society differs from others in that it knows how to tame centrifugal forces by means of Technology rather than by means of Terror, on the dual basis of overwhelming efficiency and a higher standard of living¹⁵.

We could then understand this as the point at which we can speak of the transformation of the original structure of desiring as a lever for the manipulation of the individual by the vectors that innervate society: in fact, totalitarian does not only mean a regime with its clear intentions, anti-democratic or repressive of the various individual freedoms, since it can very well apply to “an economic-technical organisation, not terrorist, which operates through the manipulation of needs by constituted interests”¹⁶; in other words, the totalitarian nature of today’s society consists in its imposing its demands on individuals, the demands of capital, of course, economic and political “on working time as on leisure time, on material culture as on intellectual culture”¹⁷. And the instrument, the privileged means by which it poses and implements this manipulation of needs is the media, which today we would call, first and foremost, *digital-social networks*:

no account is taken of the fact that people actually ‘feel’ the needs imposed by propaganda as their own (...); pre-conditioning does not begin with the mass production of radio and television programmes and the centralisation of these media. By the time we reach this stage, people are already long-conditioned beings¹⁸.

12. B. Chul-Han draws attention to the example of Socrates: “The Socrates (..) is atopos, uncomparable and singular (..) he is different from everything else”, in *L’espulsione dell’Altro*, cit., p. 31.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ivi*, p. 8.

15. H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional man. Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*, transl. it. by L. Giannelli, *Luomo a una dimensione*, Einaudi, Torino 1967, 19th ed., p. 23.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ivi*, p. 28.

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Paraphrasing Marcuse's discourse, it can be said that the manipulation, conditioning and transformation of original structures operate precisely at the level of Desire, even deeper, therefore, than needs, since Desire is, on one hand, itself a need, on the other hand, it goes beyond the regime of needs touching instead the domain of representation, design, creativity up to the dimension of the dream of realised life¹⁹.

Responding to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it could be assumed that the conditioning Marcuse speaks of can be inserted at the level of *introjection*: "It is possible that the term introjection no longer serves to describe the way in which the individual reproduces and perpetuates on his or her own behalf the external controls exercised by society": it is in fact, when we speak of introjection, "a variety of relatively spontaneous processes by means of which an ego (Ego) transfers the external to the internal"²⁰; Marcuse notes that this presupposes an individual consciousness, an inner dimension separated from the public dimension; it is precisely the affirmation of the presence of an inner freedom, of a private space in which human beings can always be themselves²¹.

And this is the key point: "Today, this private space has been invaded and diminished by technological reality"²², and it is precisely in the inner dimension that the generation of the desire and longing for singularity or even the authenticity sought today takes place; it is then necessary to analyse more deeply and consider the consequences of the *invasion and diminution of private space* invoked by Marcuse.

Under the promise of efficiency, of a higher standard of living, of higher performance, the advanced industrial society creates the conditions whereby "non-conformity to the system seems to be socially useless"; such a society can rightly demand "that its principles and institutions be accepted as they are and reduce opposition to the task of discussing and promoting alternative conduct within the status quo"²³: thus, under the guise of freedom and democracy, real manipulation, subjugation and alienation is disguised.

It is here that we are confronted with the irrationality of the disturbing *rationality* of advanced industrial society as it seems to be characterised in the following way:

The rational character of its irrationality: its productivity and efficiency, its ability to increase and spread conveniences, to transform waste into need and destruction into con-

19. We would like to refer to some of our work on Desire, cfr. D. Savino, *Il desiderio nella relazione affettiva: una possibile pedagogia del desiderio per la genitorialità contemporanea*, 'Attualità pedagogiche', vol. 5, n. 1, 2023, pp. 187-200.

20. Ivi, p. 24.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit., p. 15.

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struction; the extent to which this civilisation transforms the object world into an extension of the human mind and body, make the notion of alienation itself questionable²⁴.

It is in fact an unconscious alienation that today has the features of a *smug* self-alienation.

It is remarkable to think that these reflections were made in the absence of the Global, the Net and the Digital; it is relevant thinking that Marcuse did not know about smartphones, since the most obvious symbol of the *object world that becomes an extension of the human body and mind* is precisely the smartphone today. The weakening or even elimination of critical thinking, of what we call negative thinking, by virtue of the interior space being clogged and invaded by the public space and imposed needs, coincides with this alienation insofar as “if the typist dresses and wears make-up as attractively as the master’s daughter”²⁵, if this assimilation occurs, we are in the presence not of the disappearance of classes but of the levelling of class distinctions with an ideological function: under the apparent category of social equity, through unprecedented and immensely powerful means of communication, – such as the Net and the Global with social networks – such as to break down the natural coordinates of space and time, needs, desires and satisfactions are felt to be their own by the majority of the population, and socially imposed desires are felt to be their own and personal: it is the disappearance of critical thinking, of negative thinking that would appear irrational if understood as opposing, as already mentioned, a higher or comfortable standard of living.

Indeed:

the prevailing forms of social control are technological in a new sense (...) in the contemporary era technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason’ and ‘the transplantation of social needs into individual needs is so effective that the difference between the two appears to be purely theoretical²⁶:

the inability of the subject to distinguish between an authentic desire or need and an induced one, or even more fundamentally, the inexistence of a personal thought aimed at the search for the meaning of one’s vocation, of one’s existential desire, which we could define as universal, the apparent inconsistency of such a question that has always inhabited the interiority of human consciousness, and which today appears useless, especially in young people, is, unfortunately, the real success of advanced industrial society.

And through the hypnotic manipulation of individual particular desires, one slowly comes to unhinge the “existential desire”, the sense of singular vocation, the very questioning of meaning of life and the consequent search for one’s destiny.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Ivi, p. 22.

26. *Ibid.*

Marcuse warns:

False needs are those that are superimposed on the individual by particular social interests whose repression presses upon him (...) and it may be that the individual finds extreme pleasure in satisfying them, but this happiness is not a condition that must be preserved and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the capacity to recognise the illness of the whole and to grasp the possibilities offered to cure it²⁷.

That is, negative, critical thinking, capable of opposition and discernment.

2. The vectors of neo-liberalism as premises of Desire: the fall of the pre-conditions for the development of Desire

Totally unnoticed but in a manner identical to viral behaviour, the *totalitarian* in our society has become so amalgamated into the minds and bodies of human beings that it has managed to be pervasive and omnipresent where, in contrast, it seems to be occupied in a totally personal and original sense:

Singularity is something completely different from authenticity. (...) he who is authentic is different from others (...) the culture of continuous comparison does not admit of any negativity of the atopos because it makes everything comparable (vergleichbar) i.e. Equal (gleich). (...) the consumer society aims to eliminate atopic diversity in favour of consumable, heterotopic differences²⁸.

In the *whole* of the totalitarian system in which one is embedded, one does not perceive how the production apparatus of goods, commodities and services one is offered on a daily basis is ideological in itself, as such ideology is embedded in the very concept of production: it is the products themselves that sell the social system as a whole, homogeneous, uniform, simulated by the diversity of the goods themselves, as mentioned above; “the goods we use to live, feed and clothe ourselves (...), the irresistible flow of information and entertainment bring with them attitudes and prescribed clothes that bind consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and through them to the whole”²⁹; so much so that the products themselves manipulate and indoctrinate, promote a pseudo-consciousness that is immune to its own falsehood and as they reach an ever greater number of people, they cease to require advertising as they become a lifestyle, at one with the subject to the point of becoming a veritable *Weltanschauung*.

27. Ivi, p. 24.

28. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, cit., p. 32.

29. H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit., p. 26.

2.1 *The Disappearance of Critical-Negative Thinking*

Alan Ehrenberg – quoted by Byung Chul-Han³⁰ – talks about the fact that the spread of depression may be a consequence of the lost relationship with the dialectic, with conflict and tensions: “The current culture of performance and optimisation does not allow for any management of conflict, because it takes a long time”. This rationalisation of society “has produced a way of thinking and behaving that has justified and absolved even the most deadly and oppressive characteristics it has manifested”³¹ and at the same time it “has reproduced itself in an increasing technical set of objects and relations that has included the technical utilisation of man (...) Scientific management and the scientific division of labour have increased productivity (...) Result: a higher standard of living”³². But a reflection, especially for the educational sphere with which we are concerned, emerges powerfully: the sense of conflict, properly interpreted, of dialectics, as an epiphenomenon of relationships, is actually life-giving, giving rise to critical thinking, discernment, creativity: “conflicts (...) have a positive side because only from conflicts are stable relationships and identities born. The person grows and matures in the management of conflict”³³; in other words, the educational point would be not to avoid or ensure that conflicts do not emerge: this is precisely where the tragedy of our young generation lies, since youngsters do not know dialectics, dialectic relations with their parents, who have on the contrary zeroed out differences and levelled their presences to those of their children, thus generating identity crises and, precisely, the “sunset of Desire”³⁴.

Here, “the nature of things (...) has been defined in such a way as to justify repression and even suppression as entirely rational” and it is “by this means” that “one-dimensional forms of thought emerge”³⁵ and negative thinking, as mentioned, disappears, giving way to the society of the positive that organises the soul of man in a completely new way³⁶.

The society of the positive does not even tolerate any negative feelings and “thus unlearns to relate to suffering and pain, to give them for”³⁷.

The society of the positive then abandons dialectics and hermeneutics: dialectics feeds on negativity, on that movement that nourishes the life of the human spirit in vital confrontation; the myth of transparency of the positive society, which abandons the negative, the lack,

30. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, Nottetempo, Milano 2014, p. 16.

31. Ivi, p. 154.

32. *Ibid.*

33. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, cit., p. 36.

34. Cfr. M. Recalcati, *L'ora di lezione*, cit.

35. H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit., p. 26.

36. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 16.

37. *Ibid.*

the nostalgia, the lacuna and instead makes the Void proliferate in the commercial world of worthless entities, eliminates all tension: transparency, also in the form of emancipation and civil progress, under the guise of anti-corruption, has entered the interpersonal space, the Relation, the inner space has become hyper-visibility and exposure and “therefore the society that no longer admits any negativity of the gap is a society without happiness”³⁸.

Then the individual-society relationship seems to have been reversed: it is the individual at the service of society with its imposed order and not vice versa, as was Rustow’s best intention in conceiving *the third way*. Today, we are witnessing the “immediate identification of the individual with ‘his’ society, and through this with society as a whole”³⁹; in fact “people recognise themselves in their goods, they find their soul in their car, in the high-fidelity record player, in the two-storey house, in the kitchen equipment”⁴⁰. The *influencer* phenomenon could be argued that finds its origin exactly here.

2.1.2 *The disappearance of Otherness*

Mimesis, then, stands at the antipodes of *negativity* in that it is only the Other, the Otherness that introduces the beneficial negativity, the dialectic, the conflict as confrontation, as real *being in front of* the Otherness, essential to the development of the Self: here, instead, we witness the “negativity of the totally Other that gives way to the positivity of the equal, of the Different equal”⁴¹ that proposes as authenticity, paradoxically, what Heidegger understood as its opposite, as inauthenticity, as the dictatorship of *Yes*: for the great philosopher, *Yes* embodied social conformity and Anguish wrenched the Being away from the conformity of *Yes* and from inauthentic life in order to confront it with its own being; it arose when the *feeling-at-home* characteristic of publicity, of the *public interpretative state* i.e. of social conformity, of feeling the world-environment as *one felt it*⁴² collapsed; today, on the contrary, to be inauthentic, according to heideggerian terminology, is *the authentic self*, that shows itself as the *commercial form of the self* and that is *realised in consumption*⁴³ and in this world full of entities, multiple that simulate a diversity of being, the individual experiences not the heideggerian anguish, in front of Nothingness, in front of Being that subtracts itself, that emerges as totally Other with respect to the entity; the mystery, the abyssality, the negativity, the totally Other of Nothingness, which provoked Anguish, or of the Being proper, of the authentic Being

38. Ivi, p. 15.

39. Ivi, p. 30.

40. Ivi, p. 29.

41. Cfr. ivi, p. 32.

42. M. Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, translated by P. Chiodi, Longanesi, Milano 1976, pp. 235-237.

43. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 39.

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of which Heidegger spoke, is today, foreign, it is the true ‘stranger’ or, better, the ‘inconceivable’. For what has been completely eliminated from common experience is precisely Otherness itself.

Marcuse again observes:

This immediate identification (...) reappears in high industrial civilisation; its new immediacy, however, is the product of an administration and organisation as sophisticated as it is scientific. In this process, the inner dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is dissolved⁴⁴.

It seems, then, in the light of these reflections, that the concept of Alterity understood as opposition, inhabiting interiority, has been dissolved.

The proliferation of the self, the publicity of the self through the use of social networks have transformed the common feeling about the Other, in fact “today, uniformity, characteristic of being everyone-other, does not dominate. It makes room for diversity of opinions and options. Diversity (...) represents the otherness that can be consumed”⁴⁵: the barter that has taken place with respect to Otherness is with apparent diversity and multiplicity; in this way, the apparent violent *multiplicity prevents recognition of the systemic violence of the equal*⁴⁶. In this sphere, Anguish and Libido take on objects to which to address themselves that are completely different from those for which these categories were conceived by Heidegger on the one hand and Freud on the other: Anguish, linked to authenticity in Heidegger is today addressed to the Void and not to Nothingness, while Libido, the drive, is today addressed to the Self and not to the Other, whether it is to be understood as a thing or a human being.

The first ontological premise for the faculty of Desiring to develop is the presence of Otherness, and it seems to have been deviously eliminated.

Having eliminated all Otherness from the horizon of understanding of the meaning of human life, having eliminated all sense of conflict as ‘having to do’ or confrontation, the enemy, today, has become invisible; and Anguish is in the face of this Void that meanders within multiplicity, within the simulated opportunities for all, within the democratisation of luxurious commodities within everyone’s reach. Once Otherness is eliminated at the root, replaced with the Self, an incessant Self, photographed with selfies, fed to market theorists through social media, self-publicising, in an incessant mimesis, and the sense of conflict and negativity eliminated, man’s critical spirit wanes and with it his very ability to distinguish between his own and imposed desires, and even before desires, between true and false needs.

44. H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit., p. 24.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Ivi, p. 40.

We have seen how Marcuse pointed out that false needs are those superimposed and over-imposed by special social interests that are interested in suppressing the real needs of the individual, and they are those that ‘provide’ for toil, misery, aggression, injustice: “most of the needs that prevail today, the need to relax, to enjoy oneself, to behave and consume in accordance with advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category” and although one can give the possibility that the individual finds gratification in fulfilling such needs “the result is euphoria in the midst of unhappiness”⁴⁷.

It is an episodic, intermittent euphoria, like that found in our youth⁴⁸, in that it does not arise in *relation to a presence*, in which Eros and Libido are involved in the same euphoria:

The imperative to authenticity generates a narcissistic compulsion. Narcissism is not identical with self-love, which does not exclude love for the other. Narcissism is blind to the other. The other is thus bent at length until the ego recognises itself in it: the narcissistic subject perceives the world only in the nuances of itself. Fatal consequence: the Other disappears, the boundary between the Self and the Other vanishes, the Self merges and becomes diffuse. The self drowns in the Self⁴⁹.

Interestingly, even the concept of authenticity, to which we would like to turn for an education about Desire, would need to be re-thematised in the light of these reflections.

This self-referentiality due to the libido’s withdrawal from the Other, from the object-Other, generates a feeling of emptiness, as the new only happens in the synthetic and the synthetic only happens in the relationship with the Other; hence “the narcissistic congestion of the libido directed at the ego makes one sick by generating negative feelings such as anguish, shame, guilt and emptiness”⁵⁰.

Paradoxically, instead of being diametrically opposed, intimately linked, Anguish and Libido, the latter not finding its ‘way back to objects’, generate a sense of Emptiness in a world clogged with interchangeable entities, easy givers of immediate identities that atrophy the faculty of desire, having boycotted its preconditions.

Transcendence, the ontological character of the faculty of Desiring, while not having, in such a horizon, disappeared entirely from consciousness, (a sign of this are the most diverse recourses or refuges in our West in movements that CENSIS has called *irrational*)⁵¹ nevertheless does not contradict the status quo and it too no longer has a negative charac-

47. Ivi, p. 25.

48. A. Bellingreri, *La sfida dell’educativo nella società liquida*, in G. Elia (ed.), *Le sfide sociali dell’educazione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2014, p. 16.

49. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 33.

50. *Ibid.*

51. CENSIS, *55° Rapporto sulla situazione sociale del Paese 2021*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2021.

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ter: it seems “rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviourism, its harmless negation (...) readily assimilated by the status quo as part of its hygienic diet”⁵².

Transcendence and erotic force that characterise the faculty of desire need their counterpart to be, they need the Other. They are a fervour. Already rendered harmless by the disappearance of negative thinking, they have lost their dialectical counterpart: Libido and Eros, as life-giving forces, are directed outwards, to Other; first and foremost, to the other human being with whom they enter into relationship. And for a relationship to happen, a certain closeness, or a certain distance, is needed; there must be a certain interpersonal space.

From the relationship with Other, every single I is transformed into a We: this is where the fascinating concept of the people can arise; and with the people can come an action that is epic, that carries with it a fullness of meaning and gives identity and soul to a community.

Another evidence of the epochal paradigm shift we are witnessing is the disappearance of the authentic We; the We has in fact been replaced by a “swarm”: “the digital inhabitants of the network do not come together”⁵³ since they are precluded from the capacity for inspired representation, since a *Weltanschauung*, a common vision, has vanished, they do not have an ideal that drives them to conceive of themselves with a We, to find the We. And finally to think and act in common.

More distressingly, they can be likened, online, to the movement of swarms: they gather occasionally in fleeting gatherings, often sustained by indignation against individual persons who become, precisely, the momentary object of *hate*, without meeting, without a real reunion since they lack the *spirituality of coming together*⁵⁴; rather, they move unpredictably, often contradictory in time, without a real direction, without a soul or identity that can generate a *sense of being with* nor a consequent action, and without a definitiveness but are rather volatile and quickly vanish as they appeared.

Nothing significant or definitive happens in the interiority of the individual because no vision, or ideal, or soul is born in that fleetingly formed pseudo-us.

We have seen how both inner and interpersonal space have been invaded precisely by transparency, visibility, publicity; let us now see what consequences these characteristics of the society of the positive entail for the relationship between Otherness, Relation and Space, all intimately linked to another human ontological coordinate that is Temporality, and see how they are related and interconnected to Desiring.

52. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 33.

53. B. Chul-Han, *Nello sciame. Visioni del digitale*, Nottetempo, Milano 2015, p. 25.

54. *Ibid.*

3. *The Alteration of Space and Time: Digital Transparency and the “Loss of Difference”*

Otherness, Negativity, as critical thinking and as Dialectics, on the one hand, and Relationality on the other, understood as the ontological premises of the faculty of Desiring, seem to have been dismantled by the neoliberal system, and alongside it the advent of the Global and the Net, instances unknown to Marcuse, are co-responsible for the fall of other premises that we consider equally constitutive for the development of Desiring. They concern the inter-relational dialectic between subjects understood as the relationship between distance and proximity, – the Space – and the sense of waiting and maturing understood as Time, on the other hand.

Turning now to the analysis of Space, it could be said that the Net has made everything always and immediately close; it seems to be a common perception of Net surfing that all spatial limits, all distances in kilometres, have been cancelled; objects can be purchased anywhere in the world and from anywhere in the world with a click of the mouse; the concept of the unlimited, of an *everywhere* always reachable seems to have become a natural ontological coordinate.

One can contact anyone in any place, the remotest of places, in an instant, and in this regard, the pandemic seems to have further amplified this perception with a massive use of ‘distance’ technologies for what used to be dealt with ‘in presence’, i.e. meetings between people. The spatial and geometric distance limits, with which man has had to measure and clash in every historical epoch, which objectively imposed a certain limit on everyone, now appear to have been almost annulled. All human activities can be carried out in a virtual physical distance by breaking down the physical limits of spatiality as always understood. The concept of limit, by extension, seems, therefore, to fall into an ambiguous category, seems to be misunderstood with respect to its nature: today it can always be subverted, circumvented, overcome.

This is the context in which the concept of transparency comes into play, which will also lead to further new consequences for the concept of Time.

Understood as a value and misunderstood as a synonym for honesty or sincerity, transparency in the digital world contributes to the subversion of space-time hinges, and Byung Chul-Han again offers us important reflections on this: “the network is now transformed into a particular resonance space, into a resonance chamber from which all otherness, all extraneousness, is eliminated”⁵⁵ and with it also any human presence that could be considered *erotic*, that is, the bearer of generative eros.

Space as limit, distance, proximity and time as expectation, promise, maturation no longer have any place in the digital and global world; just as the spatial dialectic of distance-vicinity, limit-limit, and the temporal dialectic of the not-yet, past-present-future, expectation and maturation seem to have no more consistency; the anthropological con-

55. B. Chul-Han, *Nello sciame. Visioni del digitale*, cit., p. 26.

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sequences of this alteration all lie in the desiring capacity, which is visibly altered, and human anthropology itself seems to have been definitively altered.

It thus seems that the category of transparency, re-categorised and rethought within the digital and the global, takes on new characteristics, at the same time imposing new values on things and people: on the one hand, in fact, in the society of the positive, things, reduced in their essence to pure commodities, *must be exposed in order to be*⁵⁶ thus losing their intrinsic and hidden cultural or symbolic value to the *advantage of the value of exposure*; on the other hand, the human face in the age of Facebook and Photoshop has become a face “that is completely dissolved in its value of exposure. The face is the exposed face without any aura of the gaze, and is the commodity-form of the human face”: that which for Lévinas “represents a lofty place, in which the transcendence of the Other bursts forth”⁵⁷ has become transparent, and by virtue of this transparency seems modified in its scope of otherness and negativity – as dialectic, as *in-counterpoint* – placing itself in antithesis to transcendence itself, of which by nature, it was the bearer.

Tied to the structural concepts for human anthropology of space and time, the transparency of the digital imposes exposure as a reference value, dare we say, for the human and relationality, as a figure of interpersonal relations, of the body, of the face and alters the dialectic between distance-vicinity, proximity; in fact, paradoxically, it seems to be precisely the mysterious, transcendent reach of the Other that maintains the dialectical spatiotemporal familiarity and relationality between distance and proximity with the Other: such coordinates, as seen, are essential to desire. If everything is always and everywhere accessible, if faces are hyper-visible and exposed, public where they should be private and intimate, reserved, the very foundations of human anthropology are probably being undermined.

Conversely: “The very lack of transparency of the other is what keeps the *relationship alive*”⁵⁸.

Transparency, experienced as a value in our contemporary digital-global world, lacks a “delicacy, which is none other than the delicacy of respect for that otherness that cannot be completely eliminated”⁵⁹.

It seems paradoxical to be able to say, especially after the experience of the absence of relationality due to the social distance imposed by the pandemic, that “faced with the pathos of transparency that binds today’s society, we should exercise the pathos of *distance*”⁶⁰; but it seems equally clear, in the light of the reflections made, that it is necessary to understand what the premises of any categorical interpretation are: here, *distance*

56. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 24.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ivi*, p. 13.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

would mean a dialectic between remoteness and closeness that respects the transcendence and sacredness of the Other, without eliminating, alienating or swallowing it up, and that attests to it as vital for relationality itself; *pathos of distance* would mean “proximity” to the Other – which cannot be had with transparency!

Similarly, the author’s subtle reflections lead to a consequence that can probably be attested to by many: “distance and modesty do not allow themselves to be integrated into the accelerated circuits of capital, information and communication. Thus all reserved spaces in which to withdraw are eliminated in the name of transparency. They are illuminated and exploited. The world becomes, in this way, naked and shameless”⁶¹.

Transparency, moreover, does not tolerate gaps, voids, skips in either information or vision: therefore, a society that *no longer* admits “any emptiness, any negativity of the gap is a society of unhappiness”⁶² since both thought, vision, imagination, creativity need a gap, a lack in order to express themselves, to be activated – as we have seen – in order to develop; all those coordinates necessary for the development of Desiring need a “jump”, a negative moment, of absence, of distance, of waiting, precisely in order to have a space and time of development and growth to be able to “fill”. And it is probably this gap that can generate what we succinctly call happiness.

Transparency is ultimately posed as a “systemic coercion that involves all social processes and subjects them to profound mutation”⁶³ and it is this social system that exposes all its processes to the obligation of transparency in order to accelerate them more and more, standardise them, and make them equal, homogenous and ultimately manipulable and controllable. As happens with Desiring, which arises as a result of this whole series of alterations of categories and processes that, through the reading of the authors mentioned, we analyse in their interconnections from within the anthropological-social fabric.

The transparent, naked, obese world overflowing with information and exposition does not allow for intuition, also a pivotal element of Desiring: “intuition, for example, transcends the available information and follows its own logic. Because of the growing and indeed exorbitant mass of information, the higher capacity for judgement is atrophied”, also an element of Desiring. And a world overflowing with information and images, which is transparent, becomes obscene and unattractive because such a society or world “dominated by transparency and obscenity of information in a universe deprived of *events*”⁶⁴ does not allow the human soul to be:

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ivi*, p. 15.

63. *Ivi*, p. 11.

64. *Ibid.*

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the human soul needs spheres in which it can dwell within itself, without the gaze of the Other: it is endowed with impermeability. A total enlightenment would set it on fire⁶⁵.

Through this obesity of images, what is further altered in the human being is precisely the representative capacity in that it seems to be the very perception of reality itself that takes on a sort of filter: every experience seems to have to be filmed, seems to have to be automatically converted into video, into digital, in order to have value and meaning, in order to be enjoyed.

B. Chul-Han warns of the fact that man today seems to have become a consumer whose “binge-watching” seems to be his system of perception; the same unlimited video consumption causes a sort of dizziness: the bulimia of images causes not only a distortion at the level of representation and therefore of perception of reality, a fundamental mental operation for the origin of desire, but also a simultaneous ‘emptying’ and alteration of the natural coordinates of space and time.

Rebounded by video without any temporal limitation, stunned and dismantled of the natural conception of space-time, contemporary man seems to be characterised by an ‘empty’ gaze: vision is empty, imagination and ideal representation seem to have lost depth, transcendence; and given way to naked ‘transparency’, which in itself, theoretically carries a value, but which here once again under the form of emancipation and progress seems to be instrumentalised generating a vision emptied of ideal that cannot, consequently, give rise to any desire – being, as seen, every desire intimately linked precisely to the capacity for representation, so to speak, ‘inspired’ by the transcendent movement that is in the spirit of man –.

Where there is a vision and a capacity for representation no longer capable of generating a *Weltanschauung*, consisting mainly of a vision of the world that carries with it an internal sense, a coherence of conceptions that are then translated into behaviour, where there is a lack of inspiration within a representation, precisely, there can only be a lack of action that is the bearer of sense and meaning.

Contemporary man takes on the features of a *homo digitalis* who has lost the sense and usefulness, as well as the beauty, of his own acting, of what Guardini calls “moral creation”⁶⁶ because “homo digitalis does not act, he plays with his fingers”⁶⁷ in front of the digital screen.

Every otherness one has to deal with, being a ‘against’ presupposes and imposes an acting, an encounter with something other than oneself that arouses vision and action: where the vision is deprived of the ideal and thus an impoverished *Weltanschauung*, so to speak, devoid of vigour will also be the action.

65. Ivi, p. 12.

66. Cfr. R. Guardini, *La coscienza, il Bene, il Raccoglimento*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1967.

67. Ivi, p. 49.

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And as the digital eliminates all resistance, as the weight of the corporeal, of matter vanishes, all difference also evaporates: the “loss of difference” seems to be the general interpretative cipher of the contemporary paradigm that we have outlined here in its relative characteristics and pregnant with consequences for human being’s capacity for representation and ultimately for an anthropology, for relationality, for identity.

It seems to us that all desiring is a kind of *ontological difference* between what one is now and what one would like to be, between what one has/is and what one desires.

Consequently, for all the path taken so far, it would be plausible to think that in the pedagogical sphere, the impoverishment of the educational relationship, of the adults of reference in contemporary times, can be found precisely in this recognised *loss of difference*, responsible for the withdrawal of the capacity for desire in young people.

Loss of difference: in this regard, a typical phenomenon of our time comes to mind; the Neet⁶⁸ present in a particular way in our Southern Italy, the *laid-back*, our so-identified adolescents and young people, traversed by anything but a turbulent and restless force.

The last two surveys of the IARD Institute on the condition of young people in Italy at the beginning of the new century make it possible to analyse the propensities characterising these young people (...) they perceive themselves first of all immersed in the present. Almost as if it were the only ecstasy of time and according to a consensual mode that we would define as punctual⁶⁹.

This passage brings us back to the altered spatio-temporal dimension: how can one grasp the depth of the movements of consciousness in the context of the present alone?

Fear and mistrust in the future and distancing from the past, life only in the temporal dimension of the instant: with ever renegotiable goals⁷⁰ where *the principle of reversibility seems to prevail*⁷¹: here the concept-dimension of liquidity is generated.

The 2010 CENSIS report reading *The Man without an Unconscious*⁷² speaks of this new disease of the West: *the decline of desire*. The capitalist West emerges in a new form of slavery: its desire has turned into a jouissance flattened on the compulsive consumption of the object, always unsatisfied.

The hyper-hedonism of our time has within it a drive that seems infinite, unstoppable, free and free of any law: this freedom, however, is unable to generate any satisfaction, it

68. SVIMEZ, *Rapporto Svimez 2021 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno. L'economia e la società del Mezzogiorno*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2021.

69. A. Bellingreri, *La sfida dell'educativo nella società liquida*, cit., pp. 16-18.

70. Ivi, p. 17.

71. Ivi, p. 18.

72. Cfr. M. Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio. Figure della nuova clinica psicoanalitica*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2010.

is an empty, sad, unhappy and apathetic freedom. The capitalist discourse, in its promise to liberate desire from material needs, ends up proclaiming its killing⁷³.

Outside of any narcissistic dialectic that closes the educating person in the emulation of self founded on the repetition of the equal, arid, we believe it may be possible to intentionally 'construct' an education to desire and of desire, returning to Desiring. And by teaching how to desire, questioning the interferences of the contemporary societal order on Desiring, at School, recovering an authentic Desiring, knowing its ontological premises (Alterity-Space-Time-Relation-Negativity, Dialectics-Difference) albeit altered and dismantled by postmodern neoliberalism⁷⁴.

4. *Ideal and artistic sublimation in connection between Desire and Weltanschauung*

Marcuse again offers us other elements of reflection that enrich our journey with further insights. The theme is the internal characteristics of the paradigm that makes up our contemporary society and which thus originates a common *Weltanschauung*, within the framework of which, constituting and passing through an ideal-real dialectic, the *System of Desiring* is structured, recalling the recent discoveries of affective neuroscience⁷⁵.

The author refers to the relationship that has always been present in a society between what is called *high culture* and social reality, indicating how this relationship has always been dialectical, vital, antagonistic: typical of advanced industrial societies, on the other hand, seems to be the levelling, the flattening of the antagonism between high culture and social reality, through the destruction of the nuclei of opposition that were contained in high culture and that were the guarantee of transcendence and *extraneousness*.

Man today can accomplish greater things than the heroes and demigods of culture; he has solved insoluble problems. But he has also betrayed the hope and destroyed the truth that was preserved in the sublimations of high culture⁷⁶:

whereas high culture with its diverse artistic expressions, if on one hand was elitist, on the other hand represented and embodied an "other" dimension of existence, represented opposition to reality, transcended it, sublimated it. With the general flattening of the dialectic, the liquidation of culture takes place precisely through its mass insertion into the established order, certainly not through repression: in this way, the internal tensions

73. Ivi, p. 9.

74. Cfr. J.F. Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna, rapporto sul sapere*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2014.

75. Cfr. J. Panksepp, L. Biven, *Archeologia della mente. Origini neuroevolutive delle emozioni umane*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2020.

76. H. Marcuse, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, cit., p. 70.

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within the individual are dismantled, ideals no longer have any reason to exist, the dimension of the beyond, of the dream, loses its vigour and its true meaning for existence.

Artistic alienation consists in the conscious transcendence of alienated existence; it is a mediated alienation of a higher order (...) and the traditional images of artistic alienation are indeed romantic insofar as they are aesthetically incompatible with the developing society⁷⁷.

By this Marcuse means the typical character of the *masterpiece*: what is only of the work of art, of profound culture, is its subversive power, is its truth that comes from another dimension than that of the given society, of the mere economic order. Indeed, beauty, understood as the form and promise of happiness, is given by the presence of a tension, a dialectic between the actual and the possible transfigured into an insoluble conflict whose reconciliation takes place in art.

Again, the politicisation of society takes place through the elimination of critical thinking and of everything that can promote its existence: the dismantling of high culture, of schooling, of art takes place through the inclusion of these expressions of the spirit on a massive scale with their reproduction and display⁷⁸. The assimilating power of industrial society ultimately empties the artistic and cultural dimension by re-proposing on a global scale, today, its 'products' devoid of a dialectical and antagonistic dimension; the tension between the ideal and the real is depicted in art, it gives life to the impetus, even subversive, to the dream, it is the flame of desire.

"Sing to me, O Muse, of Pelides Achilles the baleful wrath": it is with wrath, with its furious and fiery invocation, that the first narrative of Western culture begins: "wrath is sung here because it supports the narrative form of the Iliad, it structures it, animates it, gives it life and rhythm. It is the medium of heroic action par excellence"⁷⁹.

In the society emptied of ideal there is no place for *wrath*, no place for epic action because there are no images, no representations to suggest its meaning or an inner vision with its introjection.

Much more banally, in today's society, epic wrath is replaced by indignation, and "indignation is not singable" because "it is capable of neither action nor narrative"⁸⁰.

This *fury* that gives rise to epic action resembles Plato's 'fire' when, in the celebrated Letter VII, the author speaks of what gives rise to the philosopher's speculation, of the

77. Ivi, p. 75.

78. Ivi, p. 70.

79. B. Chul-Han, *La società della trasparenza*, cit., p. 16.

80. *Ibid.*

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initium of philosophy⁸¹: *what moves* one to a quest or an action has the character of fire, of flame, of the drive *towards* and ultimately of the ideal that demands to be attained and which thus sets something in the human being in motion: this is the fire that the Neets lack.

Epic μῆνιν has nothing to do with the contemptuous indignation that is rampant among the debates on social networks: it has nothing to do with the hatred that manifests itself, in waves and also very often contradictory, on the digital screen of today's man in the form of haters because it completely lacks an ideal, an inspiration, it lacks the drive *towards* and possesses no transcendence; this is why it does not generate any future, since it is a hatred without *pars construens*, empty in terms of a vision or project that could be individual or common.

Paradoxically, in a society emptied of the ideal, a swarming of images reigns; the proliferation of information, often originating from non-authoritative sources, increasingly takes the form of the image, of the video: "but from a certain point onwards, production is no longer productive but destructive; information is no longer informative but deformative"⁸².

The School's task, then, in this unprecedented societal paradigm needs to be revisited: it would be necessary to solidify the sense of the Self through the sense of Identity, adequately and critically brought to the fore according to the hermeneutic lines presented. It would be necessary to rethink the ontological cornerstones of Identity within and from within, so to speak, our contemporary society while *at school*.

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81. Cfr. Plato, *Opera completa*, edited by G. Giannantoni, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2000.

82. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, cit., p. 8.

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TEACHING IDENTITY: A POSSIBLE PEDAGOGICAL
PROPOSAL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

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Abstract. Attempts at integration have often been a failure, whether we want to look at the uniculturalist approach (which proposed an education aimed at the denial of diversity de facto), or whether we want to look at the multiculturalist approach (which on the one hand respects and welcomes diversity but on the other hand effectively ghettoizes the “hosted” people by allowing them to live in different spaces of the same city). Identities are singularised, juxtaposed, conflictual, and so too, as seen above, are the desires and life projects that arise in the same territory; hence the social tensions that are becoming increasingly acute. Pedagogical knowledge is always called upon to interpret contemporary society in view of possible answers to the questions and educational needs to be offered to contemporary Italian schools.

Keywords: Italian identity, identity, life, education.

1. *School, Desire and Society: Interconnections between Identity and Representation of the 'Italian and Intercultural' Self-World*

In the reflections that follow in this study we would like to show the possible interconnections between the representational capacity, which is inherent in Desiring, and the question of Identity.

We turn, therefore, to the problematisation of what has been brought to light so far through the interweavings that the instances discussed can create within the school in general and within the pedagogical-didactic action, in particular, that each teacher can put in place in his or her classroom with his or her students. Furthermore, since every educational action must move in a 'given' situation with specific and peculiar characteristics, at the moment in which we face a correlation between Desire-School-Society and, linked to these, we arrive at the formation of Representations, if we speak of Identity and of representations of identity that mature in the development of the child – future adult and citizen – we cannot but speak of 'Italian' Identity, within Italian society and school.

Let us begin again with Identity, then. In emphasising the importance of *teaching a point of view*¹, Loredana Perla points out how the theme of Italian identity is viewed with distrust by contemporary pedagogy insofar as, historically associated with the ethnic construction of states, it appears to be precisely the *root of power and the source of distrust towards all diversity*². The desire for identity, linked to the discourse on the origin of power, is perceived, in a certain sense, as dangerous precisely because, according to critics on the subject³, identity would itself constitute the greatest obstacle to what B. Chul-Han calls *the hospitality of reason*⁴, that is, the welcoming of the Other. The translation that contemporary pedagogy has made of such arguments has been condensed into radical support for the Ministerial Directions for the History and Geography curriculum intended for the first two cycles of Italian schools (as early as 2012, up to those of 2018), which sees an entire paragraph devoted to education for citizenship and sustainability from an intercultural perspective. Rightly so, we might add, except that this integration between peoples can only take place if, in some way, identity is not tied to a specific territory or historical pathway. The whole problem already highlighted in Morin⁵ of integration and interculturalism, of the *metissage* that started with the Via Francigena,

1. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l'Italia. Una proposta per la scuola dell'obbligo*, Scholè Morcelliana, Brescia 2023, p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ivi*, p. 56.

4. Cfr. B. Chul-Han, *L'espulsione dell'Altro*, cit., p. 22.

5. We would like to refer to some of the themes developed in our contribution, cfr. G. Elia, A.D. Savino, *L'educazione all'identità come scoperta della coscienza e della cultura della persona*, 'Pedagogia e Vita', 78 (2020/1), pp. 160-184.

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resurfaces powerfully even today. In short, the question to be asked is how it can be possible, at the same time, to retain on the one hand a legitimate desire for identity – one’s own particular historicity and territorial belonging – and on the other the acceptance of what is posed as diversity from this belonging, the acceptance of the Other, of the different, in fact. And this is precisely because it would be absurd to imagine an education to a sort of global or general, universal, abstract super-identity, divorced from the particular conditions in which each people lives, conceived apart, therefore, from its own ‘being in situation’ – a typical aspect, the latter, of the pedagogue himself.

“Today, however, the time seems ripe for a revision of this document, also in the light of two crucial events that have changed the face of the planet: the crisis of globalisation (...) and the re-emergence of tribalism even in nations that, due to their democratic tradition, seemed *immune* to it”⁶. The question of the effectiveness, and perhaps or above all, of the philosophical spirit that has guided our educational-training system on citizenship and identity in recent years therefore arises as urgent.

The phenomena of social marginalisation in which immigrants become protagonists precisely because of an inappropriate school education on citizenship that is not adapted to the intimate movements that are stirring within society, are accompanied, almost creating an oxymoron, by further proud claims to their own particular identity as a people: diversity and inclusion risk being concepts that are easy to instrumentalise for the most diverse purposes. The need to trace or reconstruct clear values and ideas around these issues becomes crucial since today “the young second- or third-generation immigrant discovers pride in his diversity, refuses cultural assimilation in the host country and demands to cultivate language and culture of origin in educational institutions that are obviously congruent with his own *culture*”⁷.

At the educational level, what emerges in the light of these phenomena is, unfortunately, certainly a failure: whether one wants to look at the uniculturalist approach – which proposed an education aimed at the factual denial of diversity through educational actions that proposed and encouraged a renunciation on the part of the foreigner of his own culture/traditions –, whether one wants to look at the multiculturalist approach – which on the one hand respects and welcomes diversity but on the other hand effectively ghettoises the ‘hosted’ people by allowing them to live in different spaces in the same city – in fact, one could say, one is faced with a lack of integration of identities that meet and are *forced* to share spaces.

Identities are singularised, juxtaposed, conflicting, and so are, as seen above, the desires and life plans that are stirred up in the same territory; hence the social tensions that are becoming increasingly acute.

6. Cfr. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l'Italia*, cit., p. 57.

7. Ivi, p. 58.

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Pedagogy must therefore deal with and seek solutions to the profound fracture of consciences, especially for the younger generations, which occurs precisely because a territory can no longer offer a sense of belonging, community, support, a virtuous breeding ground in which to grow and solidify diversity and different identities, above all through social relations that are virtuous⁸.

The educational emergency we are talking about, in its ontological and axiomatic depth, echoes, albeit in different historical circumstances, what Jhon Dewey invoked⁹: the socio-historical premises that, according to the author, make it urgent to ‘change’ the school and its educational actions are deeply connected to the changing socio-economic conditions. Arguing his contemporaneity, the author describes how the transformation process set in motion by the Industrial Revolution had profoundly changed the face of American society; the same can well be said of our times.

“Not only production processes and the economy have changed,” Dewey argues, “but our entire social life, from lifestyles within and outside the family to ideas, moral and *religious* interests”¹⁰.

An intertwining, therefore, between school and society that propagates through time and recurs in every era.

In a kind of *ex post* dialogue with our contemporary world, we are surprised by the author’s words:

We are inclined to consider school from an individual point of view, as something that is limited to the relationship between teacher and pupil, between teacher and parent. What interests us at most is the progress made by that particular child of our acquaintance, his physical development, his gain in the ability to read, write and draw, the growth of his geographical and historical knowledge, the improvement in his manner of behaviour, in his habits of readiness, order and diligence;

these, in short, would be our touchstones to judge the school’s performance. He adds: “And we are right. However, we need to broaden our *horizon*”¹¹.

Dewey’s reference is precisely to the absolutely inextricable interdependence that exists between school and society at all times.

In fact, by virtue of this relationship, the school can also, and in several respects, “compensate, if not even restore social life from the loss of certain *values*”¹², to this in fact the

8. Ivi, p. 59.

9. Cfr. J. Dewey, *Scuola e società*, Edizioni Conoscenza, Roma 2018.

10. Ivi, p. 14.

11. Ivi, p. 39.

12. Ivi, p. 14.

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author refers when he speaks of the transformations that the industrial revolution had brought to the humanity of human beings, as mentioned above, as

a productive transformation certainly full of contradictions – since on the one hand it has impoverished human experience, on the other hand it has brought benefits in terms of the growth and dissemination of knowledge – but of which one must take note¹³.

Here it really does seem that Dewey speaks to our contemporary digital age.

One example for all of the impoverishment brought to the human experience by the economic transformations the author speaks of, but which could easily be ascribed to the socio-economic changes we spoke of earlier in our era, is to be found in the fact that in pre-industrial societies, the child was fully involved in the production processes, which also took place at home, so that a powerful educational force was exerted precisely by life experience: “individuals were formed in action and were wise and tempered by *action*”¹⁴, whereas with the advent of industrialisation or, today we might say among other instances, the digitisation of work, this is no longer possible.

In the Deweyan vision, the school, then, must be one of the inspiring organs of social life, not uncritically adhering to social transformations or undergoing them but interpreting them, surprising them and reacting to them in an educational and meaningful sense.

There is, then, a profound connection between school and society that should perhaps, today, be rethought as well as decisively enhanced; Dewey’s educational renewal inspires us, therefore, in this sense by emphasising the role that life itself must play in the life of the child:

life is what really matters after all, the life of the child in its own time and scope, no less than the life of the adult (...). To live with our children certainly means, first and foremost, that our children must live; not that they must be jammed up and saddened by subjecting them to a series of conditions that are completely unrelated to their actual lives¹⁵.

It is, then, precisely from this perspective that we intend here to pose the problem of identity, and of the Italian identity, so connected to the desire, meaning, relationality and sociality, the life of children who live school and society: there is an urgent need, from an educational point of view, to establish

how a community fractured into multiple cultures (as ours can now also be said to be) is able to decide which values to share in order to ensure social cohesion and to what extent

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ivi*, p. 42.

15. *Ivi*, p. 75.

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it is necessary to affirm these values even when they clash with the traditions and beliefs of some of its citizens¹⁶.

The problem of interculturalism, integration, diversity, inclusion and participation within a lack of an urgent social cohesion resurfaces today more than ever.

Where could values be affirmed and taught and learned if not in and through school? According to Dewey, to operate in this way, it is necessary, however, to

change the entire school system, both with regard to the relationship with knowledge (the way teaching and learning is done) and with regard to the relational climate within the school (the relationship between teacher and pupils, as well as the relationship between students). An educational change that abandons traditional methods, so that individuals who are formed in the climate of industrial society can fulfil their double task of inserting themselves in the life of the time and transforming it¹⁷.

The school has a double task: to ensure that pupils can, on the one hand, fit into the life of their time and, on the other hand, transform it.

Crossing, then, the question of identity – with particular reference to Italian identity – with the question of desire, relationality and planning capacity that would lead pupils to become *agents of real change*¹⁸, what is hoped for for the school is precisely that it, going beyond ministerial or ideologically prearranged approaches, can propose educational pathways close to children's lives, teaching what they themselves live¹⁹, as Dewey already called for, capable of activating in them the development of social-relational and metacognitive capacities that can guide them in learning processes connected to life as a whole. It is precisely by teaching what they themselves experience that one can develop skills such as to make them capable of interpreting reality and critically managing change, as Dewey states “so that individuals govern change without being overwhelmed by it”²⁰.

In fact, following Dewey's suggestions, one can well understand this perspective that sees and understands the school with its teaching of knowledge not as a sort of preparation for future living, but rather “let it be life itself”²¹ so as to conceive education as a unique and exemplary system of “structuring social relations, communication processes, learning processes”²². In this perspective, in fact, when we speak of structuring the very

16. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l'Italia*, cit., p. 59.

17. J. Dewey, *Scuola e società*, cit., p. 15.

18. Ivi, p. 16.

19. Cfr. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l'Italia*, cit., pp. 55-81.

20. J. Dewey, *Scuola e società*, cit., p. 16.

21. Ivi, p. 42.

22. Ivi, p. 16.

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representation of Italian identity, we understand how an intellectualistic approach to this does not lead to real learning and awareness because

In the vast majority of human beings, pure and simple intellectual interest is not what dominates. What are known as practical impulses and dispositions dominate in them. (...) Consequently, most pupils leave school as soon as they have acquired the rudiments of knowledge, as soon as they have learnt the symbols of knowledge (reading, writing and arithmetic) to the extent that they are able to use them practically in life²³.

This supremacy, so to speak, of life and practice over the notional aspect – unfortunately still pre-eminent in our schools today – is clearly seen when we discuss the construction-representation of identity in general and Italian identity in particular: it

is not something established once and for all. It is born out of history, it is the outcome of a laborious process of cultural contamination and sedimentation that evolves and changes over long periods of time in relation to the most diverse variables²⁴

those, that is, that are part of the fabric of life lived.

The perception, then, of this identity is “for a child, first and foremost a feeling that comes from experience”²⁵ and in turn, this feeling comes from a geographical, linguistic, material and experiential reality, in which and by virtue of which Self-Other-World representations can develop and take shape: from such a process in which different variables intersect, the *feeling of identity* and Italian identity is born, within a macro and micro intercultural reality and “the role of the school becomes fundamental: to reveal the meaning of this heritage both to those who encounter it by birth (because they have Italian parents) and to those who encounter it coming from a family of immigrants”²⁶.

Going through the ministerial indications, to which we have alluded, paradoxically one can end up accentuating a feeling of confusion and instability precisely because placing the horizon of a child’s experience at the global or world level, by virtue of a poly-identity that can safeguard diversity from an intercultural point of view, turns out to be an abstract, didactically paradoxical and ultimately fruitless operation: it is from a given historical, social and geographical situation that a child begins, as mentioned, to develop representations and “the child, social being par excellence, forms his or her self within a specific society and *culture*”²⁷.

23. Ivi, p. 18.

24. Cfr. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l'Italia*, cit., p. 60.

25. Ivi, p. 61.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Ivi, p. 65.

What is needed, then, is a reversal of direction in order to recover a clear path towards the development in children of a national identity feeling that is hospitable to a concrete prospect of active, relationally virtuous citizenship that is therefore truly Italian and intercultural.

“How, then, do we teach Italian identity?”²⁸

2. *Teaching Italian Identity: A Possible Didactic Device in Research-Training*

Teaching Italian Identity, therefore, within an intercultural conceptual framework. According to the reflections made, there is a need to nurture the ability to represent and Desire authentic, and at the same time *Italian and hospitable*. How, on a didactic-pedagogical level, and according to what premises?

Starting from the original need – thinking of the first cycle of education and the very first moments in which a child enters school – to *have* objects of reality *at hand in* order to later develop the symbolic-representational capacity that replaces the concrete with the sign²⁹, one wonders how it is possible to teach Italian identity and foster the development of representations in this regard without passing from references, first of all, to the world of the concrete: in fact, the indications in the 2012 Miur document concern a generic reference to certain historical facts of Italy, while “What is pedagogically overlooked is that what remains in a pupil’s mind are never abstractions but what he experiences in the concreteness of today. And what ‘today’ is more significant for him than the material place where he is born and grows up?”³⁰.

It would be necessary, then, following this process, to create pedagogical-didactic actions oriented towards a learning of Italian identity that is *revelatory and memorable*³¹ i.e. such as to be and construct a sort of conceptual paradigm, systems of ordering criteria of that informal lived experience which needs, in the phase of schooling and categorisation, to be precisely codified in categorical representations of reality data. Teachers, by searching for and proposing, then, paths and above all interdisciplinary concepts capable of categorising the multiplicity of data of experience that fall within the multiple socio-cultural variables that the child experiences, should be able to foster the construction of

28. Ivi, p. 68.

29. We refer to the extensive literature in this regard, pointing to Heideggerian speculation on ‘signification’ on the one hand and L. S. Vygotskij’s speculation on the other precisely on the ‘rehabilitation’ of historical knowledge with regard to the possibility or legitimacy of being taught to children by virtue of the so-called socio-cultural variables; cfr. in this regard M. Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, cit.

30. E. Galli della Loggia, L. Perla, *Insegnare l’Italia*, cit., p. 67.

31. Ivi, p. 68.

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the “unity of the student’s conscience and his need to achieve, in the course of his learning and analysis of reality, an overall unitary sense of the object, of the subject, of the whole experience that he is carrying out”³².

In this regard, it would suffice to recall Gino Corallo’s pedagogical-didactic reflection, all centred on the ‘*categorical nature of the content*’³³ of teaching, the fundamental *intellectual and educational act* of the teacher in the transmission of knowledge, capable of rendering a full educational form, precisely and not empty, because it is purely formal, echoing the abstract and not the concrete!

Far from being, then, a mere aggregative device of multiple data, the Italian Identity, understood as a conceptual and categorical paradigmatic representation, is rather understood and performs a synthetic function that performs, as mentioned, a very important educational and constructive function of identity, precisely. And this, in an intercultural, hospitable and inclusive sense. The Italian identity, properly understood and taught by teachers, responds to the needs of the learning mind and requires interpretative categories of reality, tools and structures that serve to put order in the world, understand it, deal with it and ultimately change it: *starting from* the Italian identity and opening up to other particularities. Overcoming and embracing fragmentation, as in the case of the identity issue, so for what happens – almost specularly – in contemporary school teaching, which sees a curriculum comprising different disciplines completely unrelated to each other – albeit within the attempt at competence didactics – “untied from ordering principles that restore their formative meaning to the *student*”³⁴.

Interpretative criteria of the world and of reality, and first of all of the Self: this is first and foremost the disciplines and, understood as *learning*, the Italian identity – which according to our reflections, we would say, would also structure an Italian *Desire* that would *solidify* the identity representation taught, for example, through the collection of documents, photos, objects from the daily life of one’s family of origin, or through the direct walking of ancient roads of Roman ancestry in one’s own territory, or even by looking at and touching a living and absolutely peculiar geographical landscape, must be conquered, regained, authenticated³⁵.

Ultimately, *understanding who we are and where we come from* are the archetypal questions that every boy and girl asks their parents and even their teachers, to which a society that wants to call itself attentive to the care of its young future citizens must be able and

32. Ivi, p. 69.

33. G. Corallo, *Pedagogia*, Vol. 1, *L’educazione. Problemi di pedagogia generale*, Introduction by G. Zaniello, Armando editore, Roma 2010, p. 261.

34. Ivi, p. 71.

35. *Ibid.* Various other instances – such as that of ‘*constitutional patriotism*’ or that of ‘*personalisation and contextualisation*’, the reinterpretation of *Cuore*, etc. – are addressed in the text we are examining and which, here, we cannot speak of in full; we refer you to the full reading of the text for a more in-depth examination of the issues mentioned here.

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know how to give a precise answer, which refers to precise evidence: such an answer would act as a “centre and reference point for many other concepts taught at school and this, for the purposes of learning that wants to be meaningful, has a great *didactic* value”³⁶ and, ultimately, in the light of our reflections, an equally great and necessary existential value. Coming to didactic practice – we would say – we believe that the conceptual framework of Research-Training³⁷ can offer, being at the same time a theoretical and methodological-didactic matrix, and fully realise a *Didactics of identity* and in particular of Italian *identity*, as we have outlined it in its theoretical elements up to this point.

Research-Training is in fact characterised by a double face, namely that of being and presenting itself on the one hand with a very precise methodological *physiognomy*, and on the other as a political instrument capable of overcoming various dichotomies: it enters with great relevance both into the debate on the relationship between theory and practice, and into the school-university debate on teacher training.

In this regard, Anna Ascezi’s investigation is also interesting: she proposes a long historical excursus, particularly in the 19th century, on how the ethical-civil values that embody and construct the Italian sense of identity have been taught and passed on throughout the history of schooling and teacher training in our country³⁸.

We conclude our reflections by recalling Corallo’s words – leaving them to the reader’s reflection, who will be able to extend them to the concepts and problems relating to Italian identity that have been discussed – which, for the topics we have dealt with in the course of this study, we feel can offer very modern insights, relevant philosophical-pedagogical contributions and suggestions for contemporary teacher training as well:

The necessity of the presence of content in education, is therefore of a ‘categorical’ necessity: a physical content, for example, is necessary, but no single physical act, is necessary, precisely because from each one of them one can start for that intellectual and ethical generalisability of which we have spoken. The prescription of a single act, (a single physical, intellectual, religious...) in education, will not derive from a mere (and abstract) pedagogical consideration (since education is only interested in the category), but from different considerations: hygienic, juridical, social, psychological, religious, etc., as we shall see. Content, apparently devalued in education when we stopped at considerations of form, is thus redeemed for its necessary presence³⁹.

36. Ivi, p. 72.

37. The literature on the subject is diverse; the main reference for this approach is G. Aquini, *La ricerca-formazione: temi, esperienze, prospettive*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2020, but see also E. Nigris, R. Cardarello, B. Losito, I. Vannini, *Ricerca-Formazione e miglioramento nella scuola. Il punto di vista del CRESPI*, ‘Ricerca-Azione’, vol. 12, n. 2, December 2020.

38. Cfr., A. Ascezi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell’identità nazionale. L’insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell’Ottocento*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2004.

39. G. Corallo, *Pedagogia*, cit., p. 264.

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