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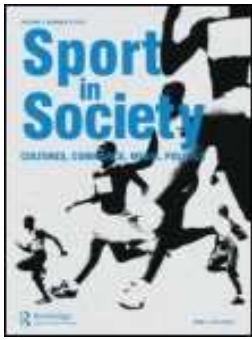
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## Reimagining athletic nudity: the sexualization of sport as a sign of a ‘porno-ization’ of culture

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This paper traces some historical and contemporary instances in which sporting and other bodies naked physiques have been utilized to affect religious, social, ideological or political agendas. We argue that inherent aesthetic values of performative flesh have been lost (or minimized) in recent times which have, intentionally or otherwise, degraded and objectified the naked body. To satisfy society’s insatiable consumer needs and desires, bodies, especially sporting bodies, have been sexualized to the extreme. This overt sexualization is symptomatic of a wider *porno-ization* of western (North American and European) culture and cultural products. Porno-ization (characterized by exploitative modes of production for pecuniary gain) has limited our contemporary readings, and respect for, the body and its educational, transformative, artistic and emancipatory potential. Tentative though our theorization may be, we call readers to appreciate athletic nudity *anew* to re-imagine the eroticism of sporting bodies in cultural and aesthetic terms, akin to artistic appreciation rather than as provocative objects of sports’ capitalistic desires.

### Introduction

In this paper, we propose a somewhat provocative examination of sporting bodies. Our particular intention is to investigate how meanings and interpretations ascribed to athletic flesh can be linked to, and understood as part of, a wider denigration of culture, which we term *porno-ization*. We acknowledge, foremost, that historical and cultural trends around the world have ascribed new meanings to, and assumptions about, bodies. In contemporary times, for example, bodies have become increasingly contoured by global market forces. For instance, in the modern sporting arena highly visible bodies have become mediated entities whose performing physiques are prostituted for the purposes of corporate capital accumulation and the publics’ excessively hedonistic consumption. Think, for example, about recent Rugby World Cup star Sonny Bill Williams’ T-shirt malfunction that generated a media frenzy over his ‘ripped’ muscular torso, or about Australian sporting icons Anthony Mundine and Danny Green who, as premier boxers, frequently exhibit their tattooed, tanned and chiselled bodies to hype media interest, maximize audience entertainment and procure commercial gain, or about footballer David Beckham whose unclothed, highly sexualized, body is postured across a range of market spaces.<sup>1</sup> In this way, sport and the bodies therein are enmeshed in what Douglas Kellner<sup>2</sup> refers to as the global popular. Invariably, we do not deny that societies’ fascination with, fixation on and fetish for sporting flesh has changed. We accept, of course, that bodies are constantly

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politicized by contextually specific symbolic, economic and social struggles, and that out of these struggles come new meanings, new identities, new readings and new experiences.

In this paper, however, we examine forms of athletic nudity and the aesthetic allure of sporting bodies. We argue (reiterating the sentiments of Guttman<sup>3</sup> and Caudwell and Browne<sup>4</sup>) for the raw beauty of corporeality – which we believe has been eroded by disdainful, demoralizing, disempowering and constraining (dis)appreciations – to, once again, come to the fore in articulations about sporting bodies. Our interest is with a variety of bodies that are sexualized in, through and around sporting contexts. Such bodies include, for example, athletes purposefully posing nude and those bodies that are effectively ‘revealed’ through insatiable media sport practices. Thus, some of our diverse examples include the eroticism of sport fandom and athletic observation, the prostitution of women to titillate Formula One fans and the narrow construction of female physicality within popular culture (e.g. sport magazines and posters). Our theorization is, we acknowledge, tempered by the need for more extensive empirical examinations of nudity and sport and, relatedly, for more serious considerations to be afforded to the inherent aesthetic qualities of contemporary athletic physiques. As alluded to above, promising signs in this regard are shown by Caudwell and Browne’s<sup>5</sup> book, *Sexualities, Spaces and Leisure Studies*. Consequently, the emphasis on this paper is on developing a dialogue about the junctures of aesthetics and sexualization in sport/sporting bodies. The contexts we draw upon are, we accept, not extensive, but rather our selective examples are intended to simply demonstrate some of the questions sporting bodies evoke about corporeality, bodily aesthetics and social provocation. We employ these examples, and others, to demonstrate an array of coherent, and discordant, social, cultural and ideological meanings and possibilities that athletic physiques may engender.

Our aims are twofold. The first is to emphasize the innate naturalness of nudity, which we suggest could still be respectfully revered in the context of sport. The second is to discuss how the overt porno-ization of sport has degraded this naturalness and, in a way, contributed to a collectively poorer human condition. To clarify, we are not necessarily concerned with unclothed bodies streaking their wares across courts and fields (although this is of peripheral curiosity). Rather, our interest is in examinations and portrayals of sport and athletes in which nudity, nakedness or specifically *the flesh* becomes the primary focal point.

To borrow from Durkheim<sup>6</sup> and later Prebish,<sup>7</sup> like with other cultural icons (religion, art, music and literature, for example), sport and the bodies that practise it have been transformed from the sacred into the profane. In this case, sport and its corporeal constituents have fallen prey to, and taken on somewhat perverse qualities to fulfil, societies’ collective voyeuristic and sexually insatiable needs and desires. We accept that the sexualization of sport may be here to stay. Nonetheless, by reminding readers of the body’s fundamental aesthetic, our hope is to turn attitudes about athletic erotica to more affective ends. That is, to encourage those who view sporting bodies to move *away* from banal, superficial and limiting perspectives transfixed on the overt sexualization of the physical body, *toward* a wider array of appreciations centred on the naturalness of the (at times nude) performing body and related artistic aesthetics. Our conceptualization of aesthetics encompasses the visual characteristics and appreciation of cultural products and the (at times complex) value processes ascribed to ways of seeing. Specifically in the case of sport, this entails appreciating the raw, innate, evocative qualities, or ‘sensuous and communicative presence’,<sup>8</sup> that reside within corporeal entities and their physical performances (for a more extensive articulation of the significance of aesthetics in popular culture writ large and in sport, see variously Willis and Inglis and Hughson<sup>9</sup>).

Our interest in the sexualization of sport has been informed by scholars who have continued to produce critical work on the body, its meanings and its forms. Studies of nude physiques abound in anthropology, cultural studies and sociology (for example Barcan, Boodakian, Daley, Krüger, Levine, Smith and Stewart<sup>10</sup>), but intellectual engagement with nude physicality has not drawn the attention of many sport scholars. Some notable exceptions include the authors who work on sport in ancient Greece, and of more contemporary bodies, such as Caroline Fusco's<sup>11</sup> study of (im)proper bodies in sporting spaces, Eric Alvarez's<sup>12</sup> cogent examination of gay gym cultures, Allen Guttmann's<sup>13</sup> critique of the erotic in sports, Jayne Caudwell's<sup>14</sup> arguments about women's footballing bodies and Jim McKay and Helen Johnson's<sup>15</sup> revelations about the pornographic objectification of black female athletes. We should also mention Jayne Caudwell and Kath Browne's<sup>16</sup> evocative work on sport, pleasure and the erotic. Caudwell and Browne analyse sport and leisure locales as a sensual space and a site of distinct sexual practice, in which, they argue, performing physiques become objects and subjects of gaze, desire and erotic encounter. Taking our cues from these works and others, in this paper we make a concentrated (re)evaluation of sport-specific nudity.

In recent times, the western cultural and social values and meanings of nudity have shifted from naturalness (an acceptance of the aesthetic of nude bodies) toward pornography (explicit exploitation, degradation and perverse performance of nude forms). This trend, we note, gathered particular strength in Europe, North America and elsewhere during the last 20–30 years. Shifting body discourses were, invariably, exacerbated by the growth of media sport, the health and fitness industry, and general spectacularization of the body. This development has continued and is evidenced by mainstream media's unquestionable acceptance of, and adoration for, sexually explicit athletic shots, commentary innuendos and production practices that enhance, if albeit furtively, the body's provocative and exhibitionary qualities. Think here about photographer Martin Elliot's infamous 1976 poster 'Tennis Girl'. In excess of 2 million copies of the poster were sold of the surreptitious composition that focused on the exposed buttocks of Elliot's then girlfriend, Fiona Butler. Akin to Elliot's work, attention has also been paid more recently to similar shots of tennis stars such as Anna Kournikova and Serena and Vanessa Williams.<sup>17</sup> To demonstrate the association between nudity and sport, we first explore some of the cultural dimensions of nakedness, for example the links between the religiosity and spirituality images of nude bodies and their utility for political and public figures who were advocating for their collective and individual interests. We, in brief, discuss arguments about the beauty in nude art, and we then segue into a critique of the depersonalization in pornography and its implications for athletes and their sport.

### **Contextualizing nudity and the body beautiful**

While we all are born naked, yet soon after we are clothed, and with that clothing comes the first physical and ideological distinctions about nudity and its acceptance. That is, the 'naturalness' of nudity becomes somewhat 'unnatural' through the processes of socialization and education in which specific cultural, social, moral and ethical values are ascribed to the (naked) body and its existence.<sup>18</sup> Recognizing that naked bodies, and indeed perceptions of nudity, are socially constructed, we begin by tracing a few selected instances that demonstrate the historical, cultural and political utility of the undressed.

In various places and times, particular cultures and individuals have afforded a significant, and often respectful and reverent, space to nude bodies. At many points, for example, the naturalness of nudity has become synonymous with sacredness because of

the body's alleged connections to earthly, spiritual and environmental realms. For example, the cultural–religious–athletic festivities that occurred throughout ancient Greece revered and honoured the sanctity of the nude form.<sup>19</sup> Egyptians and Mesopotamians thought of the naked body as divine. As such, to honour the deities of the time, naked bodies – particularly those of men – had to strive for perfection.<sup>20</sup> In ancient Greece especially, the naked body was also adored, celebrated and revered. For Hellenic society, bodily respect, and with it intellectual enlightenment, was what differentiated their culture from that of others, in this case, from barbarians.<sup>21</sup> In ancient Greece, as we know, nakedness was largely, though not always exclusively, a religious act. Events such as the Olympic Games were originally linked to sacred events. Orsippus of Megara, or as some authors (for example McDonnell and Mouraditis<sup>22</sup>) consider, Acanthus the Lacedaemonian, are known to be the first men to run naked in the Olympic Games in 720 BC.<sup>23</sup> Other Olympic competitors continued this tradition in the following centuries.

In other places, at other times, nudity again took on a cultural significance. In Pagan and Feudal Europe and parts of Africa, for instance, expressions of nudity were linked to harvest festival rituals and the promotion of agricultural fertility. Nudity, as expressed through dance, was an important way to embrace life's rhythms and synchronize with nature's dynamic cycles.<sup>24</sup> In these instances, sensual somatic expression was intertwined with material exchange, land ownership and wealth production. The performative naked body, in these contexts and others, emerged as a site of production and contestation, enfolded in the reverential rhythms of life and a corporeal signifier of agricultural and social fertility.

In Christianity, we can also find connections between nakedness, sexuality and religious ideology.<sup>25</sup> For example, in the Adamit sect (an early, pre-reformation Christian group) members practised intercourse as a sacral ritual.<sup>26</sup> Here, corporeal enlightenment was intertwined with satisfying the carnal desires of the flesh. Another example comes from records of the Spanish Inquisition's interrogation of a young woman in colonial Mexico during the seventeenth century, which revealed links to masturbation and spiritual fulfillment.<sup>27</sup> In other instances, we find that naked bodies can be the sign of a protest and political fight. In demonstrations for minorities' rights or against war, for example, the naked body provides a seemingly 'unnatural' site and, in so doing, can draw public attention to the activists' political causes. Contemplate, for example, women who, at times, employ nudity to protest for female emancipation, gay males who exhibit their bodies to challenge heteronormative public opinion, animal rights advocates who disrobe to show an affiliation with the animals whose plights they promote or performers such as the controversial Lady Gaga whose provocative (non-)dress aims to evoke individuality and eclectic creativity.<sup>28</sup>

We can also find instances in which exposed bodies have become vehicles for political activism and emancipation.<sup>29</sup> Seminal African-American French dancer Josephine Baker, for example, at times used her moving flesh not only to gain the attention of an adoring public, but also to challenge colonial ideas about racialized bodies. Baker was, as Dudziak<sup>30</sup> and Cheng<sup>31</sup> remind us, an important agent provocateur. With her infamous *Danse Banane* (in which Baker performs topless with suggestively placed bananas) and other works, Baker utilized her gendered, sexualized, racialized body to affect ideological and social change. The aesthetic qualities, and genuine spectacle, of Baker's nude flesh thus became an appropriate means to fulfil powerful political agendas. Provocative as Baker was, her nudity was rarely seen by cultural critics, scholars or interest media



commentators as pornographic, nor was it subjected to the same porno-ization witnessed in sport that, we argue, degrades the body beautiful.

One example of this degradation of the body beautiful can be seen in the use of semi-naked, or provocatively clad, girls during Formula One and National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) motor sport.<sup>32</sup> In this context, by appealing to spectators' salivations over petrol and petite physiques, these bodies help maximize the sport's commercial potential. Moreover, often these sporting events culminate in celebrations, exacerbated by alcohol and dancing, where the near-naked bodies gyrate to the satisfactions of the sport's victors. The considered exploitation of women's and men's bodies in these spaces, Pflugfelder<sup>33</sup> and Shackleford<sup>34</sup> variously contend, is an integral component to the (re)production of the (overtly sexualized) spatial politics and practices.

We accept that these may seem incongruent examples. Indeed, we are not suggesting that there are too many similarities between Olympic, Christian, Gaga, Baker or motor sport bodies. Each body, we respect, is a cultural-specific entity whose meanings ultimately derive from the nuances of their local and global context. Our intention, rather, is to suggest that such sorts of bodies (with their evocative and provocative modes of display) have frequently raised questions about the cultural value of appreciating the inherent beauty of nakedness, the aesthetic of performing bodies and the power relations, politics and socio-cultural conditions that come to bear on their physical practices. Moreover, although our focus is on sport, we respect that the increased sexualization and exploitation of bodies affects and has consequences in other domains (parallels could certainly, for instance, be made with the treatment of celebrities). Sport, for us at least, simply provides a highly visible, dynamic, terrain in which contested bodily discourses are actively played out.

### Sexualization and porno-ization

Accepting the messiness of sociological concepts, our attempts at definition that we offer here are tentative. We realize that we cannot find some 'objective' boundaries or accuracy because the criteria for sexualization and pornographic exploitation are exclusively individual. For instance, in one context certain forms of sexual proclivity might be deemed socially acceptable, however, and depending on your values and beliefs; at other times the same behaviour might be considered by some as pornographic. In other words, 'if someone believes that the sexuality represented in a work of art (or embodied in an athletic performance) is morally or aesthetically objectionable, then the work (or performance) is – for that person – pornographic rather than erotic'.<sup>35</sup> We cannot thus dictate the terms and conditions of individuals' personal perceptions, predilections and passions. However, what we can do is provide some general terminological distinctions that help frame our conceptualization of sport and the naked body.

The term *sexualization*, as we define, generally encompasses the transfer of sexual phenomena from the sphere of intimacy into public areas. *Sex*, to clarify, specifically refers to our biological composition, innate animalistic corporeality and related copulation. *Sexuality*, by extension, is the ideology associated with individual's identity expressions based on the complex relationship between their biological entity and gender(ed)-related modes of being. *Sexualization*, to continue, goes beyond this biology and includes the overt, and often public, emotional, mental, spiritual and gendered expressions of that sex into particular social realms and cultural contexts. The work of Paul Davis<sup>36</sup> is useful here to further affirm some key distinctions between sexuality and sexualization. Progressing that way we think about sexualization and 'sexy bodies', Davis posits that there is nothing

fundamentally problematic about reading/viewing bodies as sexual entities. The issue, which we agree with in this paper, is when bodies are overtly and provocatively sensationalized and sexualized in the media. For Davis, sexualization can be categorized by any of the following three conditions: the first being the explicit and intentional focus on aspects of the flesh to engender provocation and excitement; the second the attention given to, and creative/exploitative interest in, bodily postures and poses to sexually excite; and third, and with particular regard to photographs involving the above conditions, the employment of captions, comments and journalistic puns that serve to reaffirm the material as sexualized. Thus, enjoying the odd sight of flesh during women's tennis or men's football matches, for example, might involve some sexual contemplation by individual fans. However, this is quite distinct from the intentional sexual objectification of those same athletes in media coverage, and the use of sexualized imagery to endorse fans' derogatory readings, attitudes and behaviours of athletic bodies. Davis' articulations are useful as we proceed with our conceptualization of porno-ization.

The term *porno-ization*, we believe, is when aspects commonly envisaged as a part of pornography (the hyper-commodified and commercialized packaging of sexually explicit behaviour, acts and ideas), and the transfer of pornographic discourse, are extended into other avenues of social and cultural life. The key to these terminological differences is that porno-ization intentionally goes beyond just the explicit visualization of the naked body or sexual scenes, or as Schiff calls it, the "close-up gaze at the details of female [and, we contend, male] genitalia",<sup>37</sup> to promote and encourage the aggressive characterization of sexuality. In pornography, the substantive moment of the transformation of sex/sexuality is its financial valorization. Except in the case of erotica (where the primary goal is to show beauty), pornography is profit driven. As such, artistic and aesthetic interpretations of the naked body are sublimated in favour of maximizing the impact of its performative potential. Think here again about the partially clad bodies of 'pit-stop' women who are unnecessarily prostrated across pistons and pumps for punters' petrol-infused pleasures.

This is, however, not to say that porno-ization in its various forms may not be beautiful or sensually erotic, but rather that this is not pornographies' primary aim or purpose. The pornographic industry has become a commercially lucrative market by capitalizing on the commodification of sex. Moreover, where in the past there were clearer distinction between pornography and other forms of mediated sexual imagery (as seen in film, television and sport), nowadays these lines are becoming increasingly blurred. More often, movies, tabloids and magazines are maintaining their all-important consumer popularity with systematic and permanent shows of nudity that are ever more and more risqué, controversial and provocative.

To differentiate further, sexualization, we believe, involves the transmission of sexuality into public spheres (and a reception by audiences in those spheres, which is often shallow, superficial and one-dimensional), whereas porno-ization is a heightened engagement of individuals with sport and sporting bodies that kills any sense of the erotic by reducing the performance of the body down to technical parameters (such as the visualization of genitals, transmission of intercourse, the slight of the hand or the slip of the tongue) for the aim of financial profit. Confessing our own altruistic and humanistic beliefs, we believe the porno-ization of (sport) culture is a sign of society's inability to inculcate in its citizens an appreciation for the innate erotic beauty of the human form and the evocative power of this corporeality when it performs. We accept that today's athletes perform fully clothed, and as such are not as such nude. However, it is increasingly obvious that media technology now seems to exhibit pornographic tendencies and, as a result, often the public gaze strips athletes of any physical dignity. That is, very aggressive



and ubiquitous attacks of media (advertisements and news) use sophisticated methods (e.g. subliminal stimulation) to make viewers accept profane features of sexuality.

Changing perceptions about the body, least of all in relation to sexuality and nudity, are, we concur with body of scholars such as Barcan,<sup>38</sup> Butler,<sup>39</sup> Crossley<sup>40</sup> and Shilling,<sup>41</sup> somewhat inevitable but, in more recent times, have been exacerbated. In sport, for example, insatiable audiences, corporate maxims and new modes of media production have attuned themselves to ever-more revealing exposes of athletic skin.<sup>42</sup> We recall here the examples of Sonny Bill, Vanessa and Serena Williams, Beckham, Mundine and Green, to which we could also add the exploited bodies of American NASCAR driver Danica Patrick<sup>43</sup> and Aboriginal Australian sprinter Cathy Freeman.<sup>44</sup> The fetish for, and fantasizing of, flesh has been swayed by (among other processes) increasing globalization, neoliberal market economies and shifting social attitudes, all of which have helped accelerate our practices of hyper-consumption as we attempt to fill our lives with material meaning and satisfying experiences. To this end, the sexualization of culture and cultural products has become arguably the most effective means of placating our consumer desires. To put another way, while the practice of purveying naked bodies might have become a natural part of consumer behaviour, nude bodies – that are overtly objectified and spectacularized – are no longer all that natural. Our belief is that in sport, which is one of the most pervasive producers and reproducers of cultural values and meaning about the body, this sexualization has been taken to its most extreme. Thus, the porno-ization of sport, we diagnose, has become symptomatic of the new *modus operandi* of contemporary times.

### **Nudity, movement and expression**

Our conceptualization of the porno-ization of sport stems first from our assumption that there is something inherently poetic, aesthetic and sensual about naked bodies and, in particular, naked bodies in motion. Moreover, that these innate qualities have been lost amidst more contemporary discourses that have, at least in sport, rendered nude bodies pornographic entities stripped (metaphorically and physically) bare of a corporeal currency (that is one not linked to pure capital gains driven by x-rated needs and desires). However, there is, we think, still some hope for sport and sporting bodies, and for us to be reminded of the essential qualities to be found in the unity of movement, nudity and expression. For example, we can look to the work of the naturist and nudist movements whose members have long enjoyed the delights of physical activity and bodily exposure. For members of these communities, the practice of undressing is not only a physical act, but also an ideological one. That is, taking off one's clothes is also a way to disrobe one from the constraints of modern life and its associated social, cultural and religious pressures. In this way, naturists believe their bodies can be liberated and returned to their intended 'natural' state.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in Great Britain, Germany and elsewhere, the stifling conditions of modernity (alienating labour practices, rapid technological progress, political unrest and state interventions, mass urbanization and repressive social mores) led some individuals and their peers to celebrate what were then relatively liberal ideas about nudity. The collectivities irked the general population by embracing common saunas, naked swimming and co-sex exercise. Into the 1920s and 1930s, many clubs, colonies and associations (some with tens of thousands of members) were established. There were also journals and other periodicals created to very actively promote the wonder of a lifestyle free from dress.<sup>45</sup> In Germany, America, England,

Turkey and elsewhere, as offshoots of the physical culture movements, there were gymnosophical societies (from old Greek *gymnos* = naked, *sofia* = wisdom) that celebrated nude physical activity.<sup>46</sup> There were, inevitably, differences in the way some countries accommodated these nude movements. Although initially shocked by naked exercise and sauna culture, England, for example, took its cues from progressive countries on the continent that held more liberal views on the body and its exposition. In some cases, organizations gained legitimacy through establishing affiliation with national sport bodies. German nudists, for example, are organized into an association that falls under purvey of the German Sport Federation.<sup>47</sup>

While not as publically pervasive as sport, naturist/nudist organizations are still, by definition, public gatherings. Like sport, these are social groups whose activities take place in familiar, and at times, popular spaces (camps, beaches, parks, forests). As in sport, naturist/nudist bodies are effectively put on display through regular social interaction, which often includes participation in a range of sport and physical activity. These similarities aside, the treatment of nudity in sporting contexts and naturalist/nudist settings is largely underpinned by particular assumptions about the naked body. Naturists, for instance, believe that social shame of being undressed is learned at an early age, though most children start off being relatively unashamed about their bodies. Furthermore, the need to be clothed, they contend, is oppressive to the human condition. Thus, to embrace nakedness is to advocate social equality and justice. For naturists and nudists, there is nothing initially sexual, let alone pornographic, about the naked body, even when engaged in athletic endeavour. Moreover, just because their naked bodies are inevitably made public, the gaze is not inherently sexualized or pornographic. There is simply an appreciation for a fundamental athletic aesthetic, an acknowledgement of the body beautiful.

### **Sport, sexualization and the diffusion of porno-culture**

At the most basic level (that is, in their unclothed state), there is nothing too different about the bodies of naturists/nudists and those of athletes. Biologically, they are just bodies. However, what matters most – especially for our argument about restoring aesthetic appreciation – is that social perceptions and the acceptance of nudity, especially in sport, have drastically changed. We know, in the first instance, that the Greeks made nakedness a frequent habit and especially revelled in the naturalness of nude exercise and competition.<sup>48</sup> In this particular context, nakedness was a by-product of religious and moral enlightenment, and not necessary a precondition of sport. In this instance, signs of the flesh were not immediately associated with the sins of the flesh. And while Greeks were renowned for their liberal attitudes toward homosexual behaviour, this did not necessarily impede on the reverence and respect afforded to athletic nudes. Moreover, as much as the Greeks may have appreciated athletics as a form of erotica, they also applauded the physicality of perfect sporting performance. Participation in, and consumption of, naked sport was more a question of morality than of sexual satisfaction. In Ancient Greece, nude sportsmen may have performed without any, or at very little, prejudice, but, as we know, such attitudes do not prevail today (think only here of the limited number of professional athletes who publicize their homosexuality and who speak of the fear of ‘locker room gaze’<sup>49</sup>). The naturalness of the performative naked body in sporting contexts, we feel, has been lost by the process of porno-ization. Essentially, overtly sexualized conceptions of the moving body, characterized by lurid shots designed to satisfy spectators’ gaze and fulfil corporate agendas, have prevailed.<sup>50</sup>

We can also find further amalgam of nakedness, sexuality and sport beyond the sport field. As evidenced by the ever-popular *Sport Illustrated* magazine, for some time, a growing number of nude sportspersons have graced the covers and pages of journals, calendars and other print media.<sup>51</sup> For the athletes, and models who dress as athletes, sport (as seen in the use of uniforms, apparel and kit as photographic ‘props’ which often exhibit qualities akin to those found in mainstream pornography) serves to entice readers and appeal to their athletic affectations. The nudity, invariably, heightens this excitement and adds to the various pleasures readers gain from these texts. In the case of *Sports Illustrated*, and other such magazines, it is largely inconsequential whether the figures on the cover possess any athletic potential (although this may add in some way to the ‘credibility’ of the image and its affects). The shots, which are often quite explicit, have very little to do with the common essential values of sport (achievement, fair play, excellence, dedication, etc.). In these cases, exhibiting nudity may be seen as impressive and evocative, but it creates often false, or at least skewed, associations of the connections between sport and its inherent eroticism.

In the case of sport-based magazines, in which athletes’ physicalities are sexualized to an extreme, and some might argue an unnecessary, degree, the nudity is particularly intentional and overt. That is, athletes and publishers alike accept that nude bodies ‘sell’. However, at other times, the sexualization of the athletic body, and what we would argue contributes to the porno-ization writ large of culture, does not necessarily involve explicit displays of nudity. Indeed, like with pornography where often the value lies in what is concealed as much as revealed, the athlete’s clothed, or partially clothed, body can still be utilized for explicit ends and means. Often, of course, this occurs without the athlete’s knowledge. Thanks to audiovisual techniques, sport spectators have become voyeurs who now have the capacity to look at performing bodies, again like in pornography, that they would not have been able to see or even necessarily wanted to see otherwise, or without creative camera intervention.<sup>52</sup> For example, consider the numerous instances in sport (women’s tennis and beach volley ball being two obvious examples) where television coverage focuses on a breast visible under a sweaty shirt. Or, when a lifted skirt exposes a sportswoman’s parts (and generally, it happens more often with women), various parts and their bodies are captured by photographers who snare piquant moments and consequently publicize them on the Internet or other media. Remember the incident involving the cracked shoulder strap of Russian figure skater Ekaterina Rublevová in January 2009. The photo of her breast was among the main television news items, and it also received significant coverage in newspapers and magazines. This excessive attention toward highlighting and publicizing (dressed and undressed) body parts is a distinct sign of the extreme sexualization of sport. Moreover, such sexualization, and its frequent misuse and abuse in sport, can be seen as symbolic of the broader porno-ization of culture in which the erotic and aesthetic value of the performing body has become fodder for crass corporeal consumption.

### **The aesthetic hope for sporting nudity**

As is, we believe, sport and sporting bodies are on a trajectory to become ever-more sexualized, caught up in the necessity of appealing to public audiences, satisfying consumer needs and placating our innermost human desires. In addition to pushing the limits of performance, sexualization has become an inevitable maxim of many contemporary sports and the athletes therein. Given the trend toward the broader porno-ization of culture, the sexualization of sport and sporting bodies may be here to stay.

However, can we, amidst the maelstrom of modern life, restore an appreciation for sporting nudity and a genuine respect for sports' aesthetic qualities? For some tentative answers, we can perhaps turn to art, a cultural realm that, like sport, has at various times embraced, celebrated, adorned and vilified naked bodies and their meanings and interpretations.

In art, the nude body, particularly athletic bodies, has long been attractive subjects (think of the ancient Greek sculpture *The Discobulus* of Myron, Michaelangelo's *David* or Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man*). The intention in such works is effectively to demonstrate, as best as possible, some of the essential qualities of the human physique, and in doing so make some comment on the core (and corporeal) elements of the body and the human condition.<sup>53</sup> Da Vinci, for example, tried to amalgamate his scientific interest in anatomical artistry with his philosophies of human cognition in expressive works that were not only technically accurate, but also beautifully evoked identifiable traits, characteristics and emotive qualities, the twofold affect of which was to inform and educate as much as it was to inspire contemplation and meditation. Whether it is in sculpture, painting, drawing, photography or other media, the emphasis is typically first and foremost on using nudity to convey to the audience the body's essential beauty (and, of course, also often its fetishes, foibles and fallibility). To this end, the visualization of the body is not necessarily, or intentionally, meant to be sexualized (although artists can, of course, have no control over individual interpretation). In spite of the content, nude art is often usually appreciated by a majority of people who, we might conclude, appreciate something about the artists' abilities to portray in their works essential human elements and narratives with which viewers may identify with.<sup>54</sup> Invariably, nurturing interpretations and the public acceptance of nude art can be difficult. However, there are promising signs within art education where curators and teachers are working to challenge stymied attitudes toward nude art and foster a greater appreciation for the naked form.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, public tolerance for nude art has not extended into sport.

However, could it be possible to re-educate sport audiences to view their sport and its constituents another way? Consider the example of the controversial 2005 'BODIES ... the Exhibition', and even the earlier 1995 exhibition 'Body Worlds'. By utilizing the latest techniques of polymer preservation, these international travelling exhibitions aimed to engage audiences with the inner beauty of human body and remove some the stereotypical attitudes about the grotesque nature of human flesh. In some case, the bodies are posed in a variety of day-to-day scenarios, including demonstrating sporting activities. The exhibitions drew heavy criticism from the public, media and academic commentators, but have remained extremely successful. Of course, we do not deny that these exhibitions could be considered somewhat pornographic. They have, for instance, generated huge revenues from the explicit and provocative use of human imagery. They have also, undeniably, prostituted the essential sanctity of the human form to satisfy some individuals' bizarre inclinations for the macabre and morose. These concerns aside, these exhibitions have their utility, in particular in blurring the lines between the sacred and profane, and raising critical questions about the boundaries between art and science. For our argument, these exhibitions – with their emphasis on challenging social conventions on the body and its meaning – may provide some clues as to how we might change perceptions and values regarding nudity in sport.

We have argued that contemporary society and its cultures have become more receptive to porno-ization. To remind readers, this is not to say that all cultural products are becoming pornographic, but rather that there are increasing incidences where we witness pornographic tendencies and qualities becoming part of cultural life. Think, for

instance, of pop music and its frequent use of pornographic expressions, gestures, lyrics and productions modes.<sup>56</sup> The proliferation of porno-ization has, by large, led to somewhat of a desensitization toward nudity, certainly, at least, to the consumption of nude bodies divorced from any notion of a conventional aesthetic enjoyment or respect for the beauty of the performing physique. The overt, and often degrading, disempowering and distasteful sexualization of sport and sporting bodies, we argued, has become an anathema to a classical appreciation for corporeal form.

Our proposed redirections derive from our shared philosophical desire to reinvigorate appreciations for the body and its ethical, moral, humanitarian and aesthetic dimensions. In so doing, and by examining the philosophical existentialism of bodies, including nude performing bodies, we believe we might learn something about the greater human condition, that is about social behaviours, such as the aforementioned de-eroticization of the human physique, the personal dimension of love and corporeal desires, and the superficial renderings of the body (such as those seen in and through pornography). We perhaps need, in our call for new ascriptions of nude body, to listen more closely to the philosophers of sport, who, in their work, aim to remind us not only about the holistic elements of sport, but also about potential and possibilities to be found in the body's naked, and arguably natural, state.

Given the fluidity of meanings and understandings, we accept that it may not be possible to advocate 'for' or 'against' nakedness in connection with the body in movement. Indeed, to reiterate, we are not advocating the proliferation of nudity in sport settings, rather for revisions in the way naked bodies are seen, conceived and perceived. We could, if we try, fashion a more inclusive movement culture in which we might, at least tentatively, reinvigorate the (historical, aesthetic and innate) interconnections between nakedness and physicality. This is our altruistic intention. Nevertheless, our more humble hope is to exclaim critical arguments against the superficial values of sexualization and porno-ization of sport environment. In so doing, we might open up opportunities for other to again realize the beauty of the human body in movement in ways that transcend our current sexual excitability and respective financial valorization.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Andrews and Jackson, *Sport Stars*; Cashmore, *Beckham*; Falcous and Anderson, 'Fighting Whose Corner?'; Johnson, Chloe, 'Sonny Bill Stunner: He's ripped Alright', *New Zealand Herald* online edition, [www.nzherald.co.nz/rugby-world-cup-2011/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=522&objectid=10750959](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/rugby-world-cup-2011/news/article.cfm?c_id=522&objectid=10750959) (accessed September 12, 2011); Rahman, 'Burdens of the Flesh'.
- <sup>2</sup> Kellner, *Media Culture*.
- <sup>3</sup> Guttmann, *Erotic in Sports*.
- <sup>4</sup> Caudwell and Browne, *Sexualities, Spaces and Leisure Studies*.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.
- <sup>7</sup> Prebish, *Religion and Sport*.
- <sup>8</sup> Willis, *Common Culture*, 12.
- <sup>9</sup> Willis, *Common Culture*; Inglis and Hughson, *Sociology of Art*.
- <sup>10</sup> Barcan, *Nudity*; Boodakian, *Resisting Nudities*; Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure*; Krüger, 'There Goes This Art of Manliness'; Levine, 'Status of Undress'; Smith, *Exposed*; Stewart, *Art, Desire and Body*.
- <sup>11</sup> Fusco, 'Spatializing the (Im)Proper Subject'.
- <sup>12</sup> Alvarez, *Muscle Boys*.
- <sup>13</sup> Guttmann, *Erotic in Sports*.
- <sup>14</sup> Caudwell, 'Sporting Gender'.
- <sup>15</sup> McKay and Johnson, 'Pornographic Eroticism and Sexual Grotesquerie'.

- <sup>16</sup> Caudwell and Browne, *Sexualities, Spaces and Leisure Studies*.
- <sup>17</sup> Harris and Clayton, 'Femininity, Masculinity, Physicality'.
- <sup>18</sup> Barcan, *Nudity*; Carr-Gomm, *Brief History of Nakedness*; Synnott, *Body Social*.
- <sup>19</sup> Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*; Hawhee, *Bodily Arts*; Miller, *Arete*.
- <sup>20</sup> Heller, *Starověká náboženství*.
- <sup>21</sup> Olivová, *Lidé a hry: historická geneze sportu*.
- <sup>22</sup> McDonnell, 'Introduction to Athletic Nudity'; Mouraditis, 'Origin of Nudity in Greek Athletics'.
- <sup>23</sup> Shaw, *Discrepancies in Olympiad Dating*.
- <sup>24</sup> Gimbutas, 'Earth Fertility'; Levack, *Witch-Hunt*; Mackenbach, 'Social Inequality and Death'; Tiérou, *Dooplé*.
- <sup>25</sup> Novotný, 'Nahota a moudrost v Bibli'.
- <sup>26</sup> Čornej, 'Potíže s Adamity'.
- <sup>27</sup> Tortorici, 'Masturbation, Salvation, and Desire'.
- <sup>28</sup> Meyer, 'Representing Bisexuality on Television'; Capulet, 'With Reps like These'.
- <sup>29</sup> See, for instance, McLellan, 'State Socialist Bodies'.
- <sup>30</sup> Dudziak, 'Josephine Baker, Racial Protest'.
- <sup>31</sup> Cheng, *Second Skin*.
- <sup>32</sup> Pflugfelder, 'Something less than a Driver'; Shackleford, 'Masculinity, Hierarchy, and Auto Racing Fraternity'.
- <sup>33</sup> Pflugfelder, 'Something Less Than Driver'.
- <sup>34</sup> Shackleford, 'Masculinity, Hierarchy, and Auto Racing Fraternity'.
- <sup>35</sup> Guttmann, *Erotic in Sports*, 179.
- <sup>36</sup> Davis, 'Sexualisation and Sexuality in Sport'.
- <sup>37</sup> Schiff, 'Nude Dancing', 10.
- <sup>38</sup> Barcan, *Nudity*.
- <sup>39</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.
- <sup>40</sup> Crossley, *Social Body*.
- <sup>41</sup> Shilling, *Body and Social Theory*; Shilling, *Body in Culture*; Shilling, *Changing Bodies*.
- <sup>42</sup> Caudwell and Browne, *Sexualities, Spaces and Leisure Studies*.
- <sup>43</sup> Pflugfelder, 'Something Less Than a Driver'.
- <sup>44</sup> McKay, 'Enlightened Racism and Celebrity Feminism'.
- <sup>45</sup> Jefferies, 'For Genuine and Noble Nakedness?'.
- <sup>46</sup> Carr-Gomm, *Brief History of Nakedness*; Martin, 'Deceit of Dress'.
- <sup>47</sup> Krüger, 'There Goes this Art of Manliness'.
- <sup>48</sup> Olivová, *Lidé a hry*; Hejduk, *Od eróta k filosofii*.
- <sup>49</sup> Alvarez, *Muscle Boys*.
- <sup>50</sup> McKay and Johnson, 'Pornographic Eroticism and Sexual Grotesquerie'.
- <sup>51</sup> Weaving, 'She Strips ... She Scores!'.
- <sup>52</sup> Pelcová, 'Elita a marginalita'.
- <sup>53</sup> Kemp, 'Leonardo Da Vinci'.
- <sup>54</sup> Inglis and Hughson, eds., *Sociology of Art*; Wolff, *Aesthetics and Sociology of Art*.
- <sup>55</sup> Poling and Guyas, 'Removing Fig Leaf'.
- <sup>56</sup> Levande, 'Women, Pop Music, and Pornography'.

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