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PERFORMING THE NATION DISCOURSES AND DISPLAYS OF SPORTING BODIES IN MODERN JAPAN

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*When people shape the outer form of the body,
people also shape the inner form.*

Abstract

Since the global spread of modern sports started in the nineteenth century, sport played a useful role in aiding and abetting state sponsored nationalism. Yet the relationship of sport and nationalism is seldom straight forward and its nuances are only revealed when looking at sportive nationalism as “a complicated sociopolitical response to challenges and events, both sportive and non-sportive, that must be understood in terms of the varying national contexts in which it appears” (John Hoberman). Understanding sport as performance in the tradition of Erving Goffman’s model of the social world as theatre, and Victor Turner’s symbolic anthropology, the connection between the individual body, the nation and the state becomes increasingly complex. Writing in the tradition of Victor Turner’s binary model of structure and anti-structure, cultural anthropologist John MacAloon described cultural performances as “occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.” The performative lens lends itself to the social anthropological inquiry into sports for at least three reasons: the relevance of the bodily dimension; its ritual-like dimension; and its dramatic nature as an open-end, real life contest. Furthermore, sports can either be grasped as a particular form reflecting a larger culture, or as a human constant preceding the rich variety of cultural expression. In either case, the relatively autonomous realm of sports comprises a fundamental connection between the individual and the collective, between popular culture and identity. Therefore, by looking at the social practice of sports and what Pierre Bourdieu would have called the practical knowledge (of the body), the study of sports in Japan promises to come to terms with a fully integrated system with its own rituals and ceremonies, myths and symbols, ideals and ideologies, organizations, roles and actors, that reflect upon Japanese society. To show the varying meanings of sport and nation over the past century, this essay draws on a wide array of examples from the world of sports, including autochthonous sport traditions such as *sumō* and *jūdō*, and imported western sports, such as Japan’s new national sport, baseball, and her most international sport, football. As the dramaturgic and ritual elements of performance are most pervasive in the social context of sport events, my analysis will mainly start from the notion of the national in sport performances framed by local sport festivals, national contests and international mega-events.

Theorising sport as performance and performative culture

Performance in sport, games and daily social practices occurs largely at subconscious levels through which cultural dispositions are expressed and reproduced. Movements, actions and other uses of the body in sport are initially conscious but, as they become smoother, more natural and efficient through embodiment, they become embedded in the body. But there is an alternative way of grasping the relationship between culture, self and the body: reading sports as performative action. The performative lens lends itself to the social anthropological inquiry into sports for three major reasons: the relevance of the bodily dimension; its ritual-like dimensions; and its dramatic nature as an open-end, real life contest. While the first argument seems to go without saying, as the physical experience of doing sports requires immediacy and presence of the self simply because the physical activity cannot be delegated, the later points require that we consider controversial issues. Gebauer and Alkemeyer,¹ among many others, have conceptualised sports as mimetic activity. As a specific performative practice, albeit at a merely symbolic level, modern sports represent, construct and reproduce society. The performance is separated from everyday life, with rituals or ritual-like behaviour marking the boundaries, and is set within a particular spatial-time-frame. Yet as what Bakhtin would have called a secondary world, sports always symbolically refer to the social order of the primary world, both in form and content. Despite their far-reaching autonomous status, sports as any cultural institution are ruled and organised according to principles taken from the non-sportive realms of everyday life. Now if the practice of a sport is transferred from one cultural environment to another, localization strategies are required in order to accommodate the cultural import to the local standards, norms, and values of the host society. The cultural transformation can be highly problematic, as Korean anthropologist Kang Shin-Pyo² noted for the case of games in Korean society. As in any traditional society, social organisa-

- 1 Gunter Gebauer and Thomas Alkemeyer, "Das Performative in Sport und neuen Spielen" [The performative in sport and new games], *Paragrana. Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie* 10/1, 2001, pp. 117–136. See also Thomas Alkemeyer, "Sport als Mimesis von Gesellschaft: Zur Aufführung des Sozialen im symbolischen Rahmen des Sports" [Sport as mimesis of society: social performance in the symbolic framework of sport], *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 19/4, 1997, pp. 365–396.
- 2 Kang Shin-Pyo, "Korean culture, the Olympic and world order," Kang Shin-Pyo, John J. MacAloon and Roberto da Matta (eds.) *The Olympics and Cultural Exchange*, Seoul: Hanyang University, Institute for Ethnological Studies, 1987, pp. 85–103.

tion in Korea relies on hierarchy, group-ness, and drama-ritualism. Dramatic and ritual behaviour are essential for maintaining group harmony, and group membership is an essential part of identity building in Korean society, but the order of hierarchy within groups is established by status ascription, not by merit achievements. Sport games thus endanger to disrupt the natural order, as winners can be losers and losers can turn into winners under certain situations. In such instances, performance acquires transformative power by its own particular grammar.

Critics of the mimesis theory are either in favour of a perspective that reads sports functionally as compensative or cathartic experience, or they dismiss the mimetic claim of sport as allegory. The game is what it is, staged tension, and nothing more.³ The critics acknowledge the aesthetic dimension as a basic pillar of the attraction of sport, but they emphasise the dramatic nature of the contest as a real-life event with an open end. In their reading, the aesthetic experience is related to the spectators' expectation of the realisation of form, such as a team's strategic move, a beautiful pass-through, or a skilled throw. The open nature of the game that can change direction anytime once it gets under way creates tension and the particular aesthetic dimension of sports.⁴

Notwithstanding the high autonomy sport has assumed in the course of its specific history, I do not follow the insularity hypothesis of sports. Rather I tend to propose that the explanation of sports phenomena requires relating the development of sport to the social and economic conditions of its environment. As I will show, the practice of sports is a function of supply – practice and consumption of sports in historically predetermined form – and demand – the actual expectations, interests and orientations of the potential athletes. But first of all, on a physical level, the practice of sports consists of particular body techniques, i.e. codified and especially studied movements of the body that are produced, enacted, and performed at particular occasions. As anthropologist Susan Brownell recognised in considering body culture in China, structured body movements may generate a moral orientation toward the world, if they are

3 Hans Ullrich Gumbrecht, "Die Schönheit des Mannschaftssports; American Football – im Stadion und im Fernsehen" [The aesthetics of team sports. American football, in the stadium and on TV], Gianni Vattimo and Wolfgang Welsch (eds.) *Medien – Welten Wirklichkeiten*, München: Wilhelm Fink, 1998, pp. 201–228.

4 Karl Heinz Bette and Uwe Schimank, "Sportevents. Eine Verschränkung von 'erster' und 'zweiter' Moderne" [Sportevents. Entanglement of 'first' and 'second' modernity], Winfried Gebhardt, Ronald Hitzler and Michaela Pfadenhauer (eds.) *Events. Soziologie des Außergewöhnlichen*, Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2000, pp. 307–323.

assigned symbolic and moral significance and if they are repeated frequently enough.⁵ Reading sport as cultural performance thus requires understanding the fundamental relationship between subjective practice and objective conditions and the impact of the individual's action on the construction of these conditions. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu, cultural performances are media of the "somatisation of the social"⁶ in a double sense: on the one hand, they are embodiments of objective conditions such as physical, social and symbolic structures. On the other hand, they are performing media of embodied attitudes, world views, or what he called cultural dispositions.

The first ethnographic inquiry into the world's largest single event for the production of national culture for international consumption, the Olympic Games, was conducted by anthropologist John MacAloon.⁷ MacAloon adopted Victor Turner's binary model of structure and anti-structure to explain the symbolic meaning of modernity's most widely watched and televised cultural event, or its performative genres of play, ritual, festival and drama. From the performative viewpoint he described cultural performances as occasions in which cultures societies reflect upon and define themselves, dramatize their collective myths and history, present themselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others. In his reading, the ritual dimensions of the Games unfold as a dramatic demonstration of the nationalisation of individual bodies, the individualisation of nations, and the humanisation of individual bodies and nations in their presentation as ontological features of mankind. As we can expect from the concurrent evolution of modern sports and the notion of the nation state, how people celebrate sporting performances will vary markedly from one situation to another, and indeed, from one sports contest to another. The concept of nation may be of global applicability, yet there is vast cultural variability in the construction of nations, nationality and nationalism. Alan Bairner demands a full accounting of the peculiarities of the situation in which specific nationalities are operating,⁸

5 Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China. Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 11–13, chapter 9.

6 Pierre Bourdieu, "Programm für eine Soziologie des Sports" [Outline of a sociology of sports], Pierre Bourdieu, *Rede und Antwort*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992, pp. 193–207.

7 John MacAloon, "Cultural performances, cultural theory," John MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festivals. Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984, pp. 139–165.

8 Alan Bairner *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization*, Albany: SUNY, 2001.

and we may expect that the interpretation of ceremonial style at performative events provides insights into the variability of these constructions.

The body in physical cultures

The field of sports comprises a fundamental connection between the individual and the collective, between popular culture and identity. Therefore, by looking at the social practice of sports, and what Pierre Bourdieu would have called the practical knowledge of the body, the study of sports in Japan promises to come to terms with a fully integrated system of rituals and ceremonies, myths and symbols, ideals, ideologies and practices, organisations, roles and actors that all reflect upon the social organisation of Japan. As in the case of any late-developing nation, the role of the Japanese state in promoting sports, among other modern techniques of the body, has been of utmost importance.⁹ The notion of state refers to the institution which claims to monopolise the legitimate use of power within a given territory. This claim is usually disputed, but legally encoded. A nation, which is a populace held together by a particular kind of lasting identity that encompasses common myths of origin, historical memories, a common culture, conceptions of common rights, duties and economic opportunities and, above all, attachment to a given territory,¹⁰ is more fuzzy but no less exclusive. In the course of the “short twentieth century,” during which Japan turned into a colonial power, the conception of being Japanese has changed a number of times. Even after the geographical meaning of Japan was reduced again to the archipelago (minus a few small islands in the north), nationality remains contested territory. As Bairner has observed for nation-states in gener-

9 The close relationship between the emergence of modern sports and the modern nation state in Europe has been observed by sport sociologist Inagaki Masahiro. In the nineteenth century, sports turned into a powerful cultural device for the new elites of the countries that spearheaded the path to modernity. The ideology of “sport for sport’s sake” was symbolized by the highly contested amateur status. The aspiration of imitating the lifestyle of the aristocrat “leisure class,” as well as the functionalist world view based on rationalism and accountability, were characteristic traits of the new middle classes and of utmost importance for the development of modern sports. Cf. Inagaki Masahiro “Kindai shakai no supōtsu” [Sport of modern societies], Kishino Yūzō (ed.) *Saishin supōtsu jiten*, Tōkyō: Taishūkan Shoten, 1987, pp. 231–240.

10 John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia: Catalan nationalism, Spanish identity and the Barcelona Olympic games*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

al,¹¹ there exists a hegemonic national identity that is not fully inclusive. In Japan, minority groups such as the Korean-born descendants of forced labourers who are denied full citizenship or subjected to outright ethnic discrimination, find it quite impossible to cheer for “their” country at sport, let alone represent it at international competitions, as they are also forbidden to play in national tournaments.

To show the multi-faceted relationships between “sporting bodies” and ideas of the nation in modern/late-modern Japan, I am going to draw on a wide array of examples from the rich fund of sports, including autochthonous sport traditions, such as *sumō* and *jūdō*, and imported western sports, such as Japan’s imported national sport, baseball, and international sport, football. As the dramaturgic and ritual elements of performance are most pervasive in the social context of sport events, my analysis will focus on the notion of the national in sport performances framed by local sport festivals, national contests, and international mega-events. The starting point of my discussion, however, is the body.

Any attempt to merge the variety and diversity of sports universes into a coherent definition will have to start from the physical dimension, or the purposeful actuation of the body, “mankind’s first and most natural technical device.”¹² The body has been noted and described as a signifier of cultural difference by travellers and ethnographers of all times. Yet it was Marcel Mauss who first elaborated on the socially mediated nature of any consciously or unconsciously initiated movement of the body. His ground-breaking essay on “The Techniques of the Body” (1934)¹³ turned the attention of the social sciences towards the constructed nature and cultural rooting of even the most profane everyday practices, such as walking or the movement of the hand. The sociologist argued that the entire inventory of body movements is formed by “education” and “contact” (with the social environment), and he called the ways in which people in their respective society know how to use their bodies according to situational requirements, the “techniques of the body.”

The conception that the body and its movements are shapeable and in fact have to be trained rigorously in order to achieve mastery has been central to most traditional Japanese crafts and martial arts. As P.G. O’Neill summarised,

11 Alain Bairner (2001), p. 168.

12 Marcel Mauss, *Soziologie und Anthropologie 2. Gabentausch – Soziologie und Psychologie – Todesvorstellungen – Körpertechniken – Begriff der Person*. [Sociology and anthropology. Vol.2] Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1989 (¹1950), p. 206.

13 Marcel Mauss, “Die Techniken des Körpers” [Body techniques], Marcel Mauss, *Soziologie und Anthropologie 2*, Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1989, pp. 197–220.

the precise imitation and repetition of set models of action, as demonstrated by teachers, is the method of learning in all the traditional performing arts of Japan, and by way of extension, a preferred model of appropriation in Japanese culture.¹⁴ Particularly in early modern times, instructors usually relied on non-verbal and kinetic modes of training. Beginners, but also advanced students, were expected to learn a craft, a movement or other body techniques by carefully observing and imitating the performance of their superiors. *Kata*, a pattern of movements which contains a series of logical and practical attacking and blocking techniques, were developed as mnemonic vehicle through which the skill, or technique, could be passed down from one generation to the next. In the peaceful period of Tokugawa Japan, martial arts lost their ultimate purpose of lethal effectiveness and in consequence were adapted to the Confucian ethic of self-cultivation. *Kata* in early modern martial arts thus came to emphasize exact form, not immediate effectiveness. Even in modern Japan, when Kanō Jigorō or Funakoshi Gichin, the founders of modern *jūdō* and *karate* respectively, developed new didactic methods including free sparring, oral tuition, and the use of written texts for transmitting their knowledge to their pupils, the learning style of imitation and frequent repetition remained among the dominant patterns of practice in most martial arts. *Kata* serve the body to memorise the techniques properly, *randori*, or free practice, serves to revise the practical knowledge and to confirm that the disciplined body is able to act instinctively. In case of perfect balance between skills and challenge, the practicing subject occasionally enters a state of no-mind (*mushin*). The sensual experience seemingly complies with flow, the intrinsically motivating and rewarding state in which an individual derives optimal sensual experience from an activity that demands the individual's utmost mastery, yet without putting it under stress.¹⁵ According to Cox,¹⁶ a social anthropologist who knows the art of *shōrinji kenpō* by heart, the transcendence of mind control in martial arts is a result of the individual's efforts to develop a sense of inner self. This requires the accomplishment of an outer self which is in harmony with the social order and the environment; this is in fact

- 14 P.G. O'Neill, "Organisation and authority in the traditional arts," *Modern Asian Studies* 18/4, 1984, pp. 631–645. See also the observations by Peter Ackermann, who analyses the training of Japanese salespersons in this volume.
- 15 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.
- 16 Rupert Andrew Cox, "Dancing For Buddha" – *Conceptions of 'self' in a Japanese Martial Art*. Unpublished dissertation submitted to the Dept. of Social Anthropology at Oxford Brooks University, 1990, pp. 68–70.

established by the subjugation to the dominant social idea of the primacy of the collective over the individual.

Similar observations on preferred training methods (albeit minus the spiritual component) can be made for a great number of sports in Japan, particularly in institutions of formal education. Herrigel noted that practice, repetition and repetition of the repeated are distinctive features for long stretches of the way to mastery in archery.¹⁷ William Kelly carefully plotted the way Japan's king of homeruns, Oh Sadaharu, learnt to swing the bat in endless sessions of repetitive drills and supervised practice.¹⁸ Baseball itself acquired its popularity in Japan in the social context of educational culture. In particular the baseball club of the First Higher School in Tokyo (*Ichikō*) gained wide attraction after a series of victories over American teams in the 1890s. Beating the foreigners at their own game comprised a surprising experience that matched the rising patriotic sentiments of nationalist currents within the population and the dominant elites of the time. Popular folklore attributed the success to the impressively displayed fighting spirit (*konjō*) of the Ichikō players, which was infamous for its arduous training regime. Throwing several hundred curveballs in a row, or firing series of fastballs at the catcher from a mere five, six meter distance belonged to the standard repertoire of training sessions at Ichikō. Stoic endurance, strict obedience, and self-sacrificing rigour were core qualities of the elite ethos furnished within the sport clubs. Japanese teaching staff who coached baseball at universities and high schools in the early years had a lasting impact on the newly martial art of baseball, simply because of their own class background.¹⁹ The tradition of autonomous self-administration and physical self-discipline, which was borrowed from the English public boarding school system, and the Neo-Confucian intellectual background characteristic of the social class that provided the teaching staff merged into the ethos of "muscular spirituality."²⁰ Many

17 Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Boston: Kegan Paul and Routledge 1953, p. 44.

18 William W. Kelly, "Learning to swing: Oh Sadaharu and the pedagogy and practice of Japanese baseball," John Singleton (ed.) *Learning in Likely Places. Varieties of Apprenticeship in Japan*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998, pp. 265–285.

19 Kiku Kōichi, '*Kindai puro supōtsu*' no rekishi shakaigaku. *Nihon puro yakkyū no seiritsu o chūshin ni* [A social history of modern professional sports. With particular reference to the establishment of professional baseball in Japan], Tōkyō: Fumaidō Shuppan, 1993, pp. 92–93.

20 Kiku Kōichi, "Kindai no puro supōtsu no seiritsu ni kansuru rekishi shakaigakuteki kōsatsu. Wa ga kuni ni okeru senzen no puro yakkyū o chūshin ni" [A historical-sociological study on the development of modern professional sports – particularly on the development of

Japanese who taught at universities were descendants from the former samurai class. Because of their value system and rigorous training ethos they regarded baseball as a moral discipline and preferred body techniques they were most familiar with. While the “budofication” of Western sport²¹ certainly helped to facilitate the adoption of sport, it also fatally shaped the way sport in Japan has been assessed ever since. The role model of Ichikō became mandatory for the social construction of sports inside and outside of the school system. Even a century later, traits of the particular sports view, the value system and the social orientation are abundant in the social practice of sports.

Field notes from sport lessons and training hours with school sport clubs in Japan reveal that today too great proportion of time is consumed by repetitious training exercises performed over long periods of time with little or no variation. Writing on school football, Dalla Chiesa concludes that football is more about work than play. The way it is practiced in training as well as in competitions actually serves to shape the players’ moral (*seishin*) and social skills utilising the body as a physical or physiological tool. The social frame of the school sport club (*bu*) conveys a sense of stability and certainty to them which might be a surrogate for the pleasure of play.²² Observing a Japanese university rugby club, Richard Light noted that the students often referred to concepts that are subjectively understood and learnt through the body such as the notion of *seishin* (which Light translates as ‘human spirit’), *seishin ryoku* (‘spiritual power’) and *gaman* (‘restraint’). The regimes of training adopted by the rugby players typically require commitment of the individual, group ethos and neglect of the self, perseverance and endurance of hardship, and reflect a general belief in the need to learn specific patterns.²³ These are all characteristics highly valued by Japanese society and are also values that underpin education in contemporary Japan.

Nonetheless, until the 1950s, for most living in Japan, the meaning of sport was practically synonymous with physical education. According to Inagaki

professional baseball in Japan before World War II], *Taiiku Supōtsu Shakaigaku Kenkyū* 3, 1983, pp. 1–26, pp. 10–11.

21 Kiku Kōichi, “Bushido and the modernization of sports.” Unpublished paper, presented at the International Conference on “Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan,” New Haven, Yale University, March/April 2000.

22 Simone Dalla Chiesa, “When the goal is not a goal. Japanese school football players working hard at their game,” Joy Hendry and Massimo Ravieri (eds.) *Japan at Play. The Ludic and the Logic of Power*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 186–198.

23 Richard Light, “Regimes of training, seishin, and the construction of embodied masculinity in Japanese university rugby,” *International Sports Studies* 21/1, 1999, pp. 39–54.

Masahiro, the repetitive practicing of collective movements provided a powerful device to instill group orientation and consciousness of hierarchy. Therefore late-developing states such as Germany, Sweden and others regarded gymnastics as useful and effective tools to catch up to the leading nations.²⁴ In Japan as well, bureaucrats and educators soon realised the potential of educating the nation through physical training. While team sports were regarded as essential for developing leadership qualities, gymnastics were thought to be sufficient to discipline the masses and to nurture the formation of diligent workers and strong soldiers.²⁵ Whereas the “pugnacious body” of the elitist samurai had been the ideal of the body culture in feudal Japan, modernizing Japan preferred the “docile body” of the masses, trained in calisthenics. The school edict of 1872 already included the subject of gymnastics (*taisō*), and the Tōkyō Taisō Denshūsho, a special research and education college for sport teachers, was established in 1878 under the first director Izawa Shūji (1851–1917). Basically two currents of interest determined the physical education policy in early Meiji Japan. Liberal-minded educationalists such as Izawa Shūji and Tsuboi Gendō, sympathising with the humanist thought and pedagogic philosophy of Herbert Spencer and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, advocated a holistic approach to education that acknowledged the unity of mind, body and soul. Physical education thus was regarded an indispensable part of educating the individual character.²⁶ Mori Arinori, who served as Minister of Education from 1885 to 1889, was also influenced by the writings of Spencer. Mori, however, emphasised the merits of physical education for the nation as a whole and promoted the spread of relatively rigorous gymnastics, including marching, the use of school uniforms, and military lifestyle in dormitories.²⁷ Although a strong lobby advocated the recognition of Japanese martial arts as school sports, it was only in 1911 that the

24 Inagaki Masahiro (1987). See also Wolfram Manzenreiter, “Moderne Körper, moderne Orte. Sport und Nationalstaat in Japan und Österreich 1850–1900” [Modern bodies, modern spaces. Sport and the nation state in Japan and Austria 1850–1900], *Minikomi – Informationen des Akademischen Arbeitskreis Japan* 2001/2, 2001, pp. 14–21.

25 Takenoshita Kyūzō and Kishino Yūzō, *Nihon kindai gakkō taiiku shi* [History of modern school sport in Japan]. Tōkyō: Tōyōkan, 1959.

26 Irie Katsumi, *Nihon kindai taiiku no shisō kōzō* [The ideational structure of physical education in modern Japan], Tōkyō: Akashi Shoten, 1988.

27 Kimura Kichiji, *Nihon kindai taiiku shisō no keisei* [The formation of ideas on modern sport in Japan]. Tōkyō: Kyorin Shoin, 1975.

modernised, reinvented martial arts of *jūdō* and *kendō* were officially admitted as a deliberate part of sport education at middle and higher schools.²⁸

The belated public acknowledgement of martial arts resulted from the activities of Kanō Jigorō, the founder of the modern sport of *jūdō*. In all likelihood, the international acknowledgement of *jūdō* as well as the political weight of the principal at various higher schools and regular advisor to the Ministry of Education was responsible for his nomination to the International Olympic Committee in 1909. In 1911, the Japan Amateur Sport Association, the quasi National Olympic Committee, was founded with Kanō as its first president. Although a private association, its lack of independent funding propelled collaboration with political and economic elites whose presence became a characteristic feature soon after. The proximity to the realms of education was also deepened because of the high proportion of educators among the officials of the associations and its subordinated organizations that were established later on.²⁹

Sport and the habitus

The notion of “habitus,” that helped Mauss to understand the human being as a totality in which the tangible aspects of human life are related with the body and its material experience, the techniques of work, control of emotion and the enactment of ritual and ceremonial performances, has been used by authors as different as Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Polanyi and Levi-Strauss. It was Pierre Bourdieu, however, who sharpened the concept of habitus as an explicative concept as well as an analytical tool.³⁰ For his sociology of social practice, habitus became the central pillar, referring to a complex set of dispositions, a habitual way of being, that rests upon the objective conditions everyday life is subjugated to, such as race, class, wealth, etc., as well as the cultural expres-

28 Hayashi Takatoshi, “Dainippon Butokukai no seikaku to tokuchō ni tsuite” [On the character and particularities of the Great Japan Association of Knightly Ethics], *Taiiku Supōtsu Shakaigaku Kenkyū* 1, 1982, pp. 59–76.

29 Fujita Motoaki, “Dainihon Taiiku Kyōkai no seijisei ni tsuite no kenkyū” [Research on the political nature of the Great Japan Amateur Sport Association], *Taiiku Supōtsu Shakaigaku Kenkyū* 7, 1988, pp. 35–53.

30 Pierre Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft* [Distinctions. A critique of the social judgement of taste], Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987.

sions, media, rituals, games etc., that represent society's stratification. The habitus is constructed through and manifested in the shapes of bodies, gestures and everyday usages of the body ranging from sitting, and eating to ways of walking, running and using the body in sport. Because Bourdieu grasped habitus as "a system of structured (and) structuring dispositions, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions,"³¹ he moved beyond the subject-object dichotomy of sociological theory.

The physical experience of sports practice mediates between the private world of everyday body techniques and the public world of shared performances. Sports engagement thus must be read as strongly related to the individuals' habituation. Analysing the type of relation to the body that a particular sport favours or demands reveals a lot about the way certain sports resonate with the tastes of particular social categories.³² The education system and the place to which the body is assigned within official institutions of education play a leading role in disseminating collective ideas about society and its reflections in physical culture. But it is wrong to assume that the place and meaning of sport in everyday life is simply socially imposed as they are open to debate and negotiation. As a cultural manifestation, the appearance of sports, that is the meanings associated with the playful yet in many cases also competitive and achievement-oriented practices of the body, have been changing with time and space, as well as the societies that created them. Johan Huizinga's seminal study on the culture of play³³ has clearly demonstrated that all societies have known how to transform the basic play drive into a cultural expression by giving order to the moves, subduing the chaos of natural play to the rules of social play, by commonly shared practice and by the intergenerational trading of the knowledge how to play the game. Huizinga deserves credit for his efforts to emphasize the inventive power of play, which he evaluated as the central and distinguishing feature of man, in the process of cultural change. But he also disqualified the sports of the twentieth century as a corrupted version of games, having lost their original play-like qualities, a negative attitude which was echoed by the Critical School. Theodor Adorno wrote that '*sportification*' has played its part in the

31 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 53.

32 Pierre Bourdieu, "Historische und soziale Voraussetzungen modernen Sports" [Historical and social conditions of modern sport]. Gert Hortleder and Gunter Gebauer (eds.) *Sport – Eros – Tod*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986, pp. 91–112.

33 Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955 [1938¹].

dissolution of aesthetic semblance. Sport is the imageless counterpart to practical life. And the more aesthetic images participate in this imagelessness, the more they turn into a form of sport themselves.³⁴

On the other hand, the anthropologist Roger Caillois, shifting away from such cultural pessimism, expanded Huizinga's original observations in order to differentiate between societies according to the games they prefer.³⁵ He developed a matrix of types of game, based on whether the role of competition (*agon*), chance (*alea*), simulation (*mimicry*), or vertigo (*ilinx*, being physically out of control) is dominant within the stock of games held by society. Even though most games tend to belong to more than only one category, the typology is well suited to classify social entities by marking the structural analogies between a society's stock of games and its value system and normative orientation.

Most sports are characterised by a competitive moment and rules that help to determine the outcome of a contest. Examples for Japan's traditional games with a strong competitive stance and various rules include horse riding, falconing, archery, fencing with stick swords, *sumō*, boat racing, polo and *gichō*, a team play roughly comparable to field hockey; all of these activities flourished from the later Heian period (794–1185) well into the Edo period (1600–1867). But the term of sports was not available for cognitive work or linguistic categorisation until the early twentieth century. According to Abe Ikuo's study of the etymology of sport in Japan (1988), it was only in the Taishō period (1912–1926) that references to the contemporary usage of the word started to appear in Japanese-English dictionaries. Japanese monolingual encyclopedias listed the loanword of sport only since the 1930's.³⁶ Until Japan had come to import modern sports from the West in the nineteenth century, her own native linguistic inventory lacked any functionally equivalent cover term. It was missing because it was not needed for indexing purposes. Each of the games and body techniques mentioned above was rooted in quite different social and cultural contexts, so that only modern observers are tempted to classify them as sports. The unification of previously unconnected games of physical movements, after they were disassembled and reconfigured in the way most appropriate to the orientation of

34 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 85–92.

35 Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1958.

36 Abe Ikuo, "A study of the chronology of the modern usage of 'sportsmanship' in English, American and Japanese dictionaries," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 5/1 1988, pp. 3–28.

individuals living in the world of modernity, is in fact one of the most eye-catching achievements of modern sports.

With the spread of literacy, freedom of the press, and supra-regional media, newspapers, the radio and television have come to play a pivotal role in boundary making, as their way of covering or excluding sport forms shapes popular conceptions about what sport is. Due to the commercial appeal of sports and the global reach of its main sponsors and administrators, the idea of sports in contemporary Japan matches globally available images. Sport's core image still corresponds to a Weberian ideal type, formally and informally codified by a set of seven systematically interrelated formal-structural characteristics, i.e. secularism, equality, bureaucratisation, specialisation, rationalisation, quantification, and the obsession with records.³⁷ Yet the boundaries are fuzzy, as they have always been. Particularly in early modern times, the body culture of Japan did not necessarily comply with these notions of sport, and in some instances, it still does not nowadays. While *sumō* and the martial arts are openly displayed contests for the winner, it is not necessarily the strongest or the technically most refined athlete who wins the tournament.

The notion of equal opportunities to all contestants was virtually unknown in premodern times. Combatants in martial arts were wise to consider factors such as the circulation of the blood in a twenty-four hour day, the vulnerability of the vital points in relation to the time of day, and cyclic laws of nature such as the rising and setting of the sun, and the rise and fall of the tides, if that knowledge was of advantage. Attempts to strengthen one's position by taking into account the physiology of the human body, nature and its relationships to combat were all part of the individual strategy to maximise outcome. Access to contests as well as to the arts was exclusively regulated and socially discriminating. *Heihō*, the art of sword fencing, was originally restricted to the social class of the sword-bearing aristocracy. Yet economic conditions forced many samurai in the long-peaceful Edo period to instruct commoners in their trade – but did they accept each and every pupil or any challenges from people of lower rank?

In professional *sumō* of current times, wrestlers usually do not have to fight against members of the same stable (*heya*) or the same *ichimon* (an informal coalition of stables the *rikishi* of which regularly practice with each other). The purpose of this rule is to avoid collusion, i.e. *yaohō*, among overly cooperative,

37 Allen Guttman, *Vom Ritual zum Rekord. Das Wesen des modernen Sports* [From ritual to record – The nature of modern sports], Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1979, pp. 25–62.

lower-ranked wrestlers, who could help a stablemate win a tournament by throwing a match. Yet although it was intended to preserve fairness, in the 1990's it produced the opposite result by inhibiting fairness and helping former *yokozuna* Takanohana to build up his reputation. When his Futagoyama-beya dominated *sumō* with at least three members in the highest ranks, his main antagonist Akebono usually had to fight against a considerably higher number of the most capable wrestlers. According to this regulation that prevents the game from transcending quotidian relations, social relatedness is not sacrificed to the sportive notion of equality of opportunities. The rule is also in harmony with the cultural preference of submitting individual members' benefits to the higher-ranking bounds between two groups and their common interest.

The sportification of Japan's martial arts and the integration of its central role model, *jūdō*, into the Olympic program, assigned them to the realm of sports, but perhaps only in the eyes of the analyst, while the practicing *jūdōka* may have had different ideas about the art. *Kemari*, the traditional ritual-like art of kicking the ball into the air, is hardly discernable as a sport because of the missing athletic component, the ceremonial appearance of the players, whose bodies are wrapped by long and definitely un-sportive robes, the temporary nature of the ball ground that is usually used as a religious domain, and the sheer lack of skill many participants display. But for some aficionados who practice regularly and participate in competitions, rather than in tourist festivals, *kemari* certainly is sport.

Within late-modernity and the differentiation of life-worlds and lifestyles, different conceptions of sports and differences in preferences and practices are inevitable. To understand a single sport requires considering its position within the wider field of sports. I argue that the relationship between sports in late-modern societies and their hierarchical order depend on their relationship to "world sports." World sports by definition are everywhere recognisable and recognised as sports (that is, not as any other secular or ritual practice); they enjoy popular support on a global scale; they have strong appeal to cultural industries and are highly attractive to the commercial trinity of sponsors, advertisers, and television; and there usually is involvement of global governance exerted by a civil based association, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) or the Federation International de Football Associations (FIFA), football's world governing association. However, with the ongoing process of the sportification of non-sports (marathon dancing, or the obsession with charts and ranks, sport wear in class rooms, sporting bodies in advertisement, etc.) and the de-sportifica-

tion of physical culture (the staged contests of American professional wrestling, or cage fights unrestrained by rules), the relational arrangement of sports has started to change again. Sport forms in compliance with world sports still provide the hegemonic sports model. But there is an increasing number of alternative sport models reconquering the urban space, and due to the dominant position of urban culture, rural and natural topographies as well. Sports typical of the urban consumer society, such as inline skating, skateboarding, rock climbing and mountain biking, celebrate the spectacular performance of the body in a way clearly different from the production society with its emphasis on accomplishment and success.³⁸

Rituals and spectacles: The eventisation of sports

For long time, sports had been excluded from the study of ritual. For Emile Durkheim, who focussed on their social purposes, rituals were about regulated symbolic expressions of sentiments or values that hold society together.³⁹ Leading social functionalists among British anthropologists, such as Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski, inherited his view of ritual as social control, as a means to maintain group ethos and to restore the social order. But writers in the tradition of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, the central figures of symbolic anthropology, grasped ritual as a social drama in which society is told about itself what it usually does not envision. In general terms, Turner regards rituals as prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects.

In order to demarcate time and space of the ritual, the natural order must be transcended or reversed. According to Levi-Strauss, rituals postulate asymmetry, and in the progress of the “game,” all participants become winners by virtue of participating in the ritual; sports, however, are based on the notion of equality and fairness; all differences are annihilated as soon as the games get on their way. Hence sport is about generating difference, as in the end the outcome clear-

38 Uesugi Masayuki, “Shōhi shakai ni okeru supekuteitā supōtsu” [Spectator sports in the consumer society], *Japan Journal of Sport Sociology* 3, 1995, pp. 2–11.

39 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915.

ly distinguishes between winner and loser. In other words, rituals are about unification, while sports are primarily about differentiation.

A *sumō* bout, as any other sports event, can be read as a series of concentric circles with the actual *competition* – the race, the game, the match – in the centre. *Rituals* or ritual-like behaviour patterns are grouped around this inner circle: opening and closing ceremonies, tossing a coin or firing the starting gun, awarding trophies, hissing the national flag or singing one's national anthem. At these levels, nowadays, television technology excels, creating close-ups to the action exceeding the opportunities of those in actual attendance. But to participate fully in the *sport festival*, one has to be there personally, cheering, singing, waving flags, and experiencing the excitement of the crowd. Major sports events operate at the level of *spectacle*. Accompanying parades, advance preparations, victory celebrations, the touting of civic or ethnic pride invite the members of the society (whether school, city or nation) to assign the event a particular position within their commonly shared idea of history. This "cosmic ordering" is significant to bring spectators and participants alike back to daily life with a sense of completion and fulfilment.

Van Gennep, who established the classical three stage sequence of separation, transition and incorporation as the basic proceeding of rituals, paid attention to the symbolism involved in the production of meaning. In this way, he heavily influenced the work of Victor Turner, who was disenchanted with a view of ritual as social control. The central writer of the symbolic anthropology rejected the understanding of ritual as a means to stabilise the social system, maintain its group ethos and restore a state of harmony after any disturbance. He developed the theory that life contained two styles of being in the world – structure and anti-structure. There are two major models for human inter-relatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system, the second is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated community of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders. Ritual could function to maintain structure or to subvert it.

The ritual-like dimensions of sports are most pervasive in the elements that frame the core activity of sport events. Both sport and ritual constitute important cultural devices that serve to instil certain orientations to the world in individuals, in the first instance through the symbolic manipulation of the body, in the second through the bodily manipulation of symbols. The contest element in sport is especially significant because it allows opposition, conflict and struggle to be experienced and represented in extremely dramatic and spectacular ways,

whereby sports can be made to map national struggles.⁴⁰ As one of the most important public displays of the body, sport is a natural tool for regimes and groups to provide the collective with meta-narratives on what this society is about, or what it should be about. Being a nation, and having a culture are basic requirements for a legitimate and autonomous position in the world system. But to be a nation recognised by others and realistic to themselves, nowadays a people must march in the Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies procession. States or political actors tend to be led into temptation by the powerful metaphoric meaning of membership to the great civil associations of global governance in sports. Political scientist Taki Kōji observed that most newly erected states of postcolonial Africa, as well as the relic states of the former Serbian Republic, were eager to join the IOC or FIFA as soon as possible. What nowadays is realised within a year or two, took more than four decades in the case of Japan or Austria.⁴¹

The official interest in sport as a political stage arose with the growing interest in spectator sports, on the one hand, and the success of some Japanese athletes at international meetings, on the other hand. Japan became a regular participant in the Olympic Games in 1912, and three times it hosted this mega sports event. A first opportunity to host the Summer and Winter Games in 1940 was lost due to the Pacific War. The next chance, 1964, gave Japan the opportunity to herald its return to the international community of nation states and to celebrate its rebirth as a peace-loving nation and democratic state. The Tokyo Olympics served as a showcase for made-in-Japan modern architecture and high technology. In line with signifiers of economic nationalism, traditional symbols of national representation were strategically used in Japan's display on the global stage. The presentation of the Emperor, who fulfilled the honorary task of opening the Games, and the use of the controversial symbols *kimigayo* and *hinomaru*, the national anthem and flag, pleased conservative nationalism and provided a sense of unity. National pride was also boosted by the sensational success of Japanese athletes at the Games. In particular, the women's volleyball, labelled the "Asian witches" by a Russian journalist, came to represent the Japanese spirit of endurance, team work, and unconditioned submission to the authority of the superior when, much to everyone's surprise, it clinched the gold medal.

40 John Hargreaves (2000), p. 13.

41 Taki Kōji, *Supōtsu o kangaeru. Shintai, shihon, nashonarizumu* [Thinking sports: body, capital, nationalism], Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1995.

The image of Japanese society had changed considerably by the time Japan got hold of its third and most recent chance to present itself to a global television audience. Yet the Nagano Winter Olympics of 1998 failed to repeat the mystical experience of national rebirth as in 1964. According to the producer in charge of the spectacle, the opening ceremony was designed to represent Japanese distinctiveness and its good-natured character. But the scripts turned out to be rather too complicated. Japaneseness was represented by *shintō*, the emperor's gaze and elements of historical communal memory, but symbolised by the display of universal discourses, the Olympic idea of peace through sports, and the final chorus of Beethoven's ninth symphony, also in its outbound orientation towards the world. If the outcome of this presentation towards itself and the world may be called ambiguous, the 2002 World Cup deserved this label even more.⁴²

Sakaue Yasuhiro (1988) convincingly demonstrated how sports started to spark national sentiments and how sports were consequently exploited for political purposes by the state and its agents in the 1920s. Since then, the state stepped up its direct involvement in the administration of sports. It also made wide use of material and abstract devices symbolising the sovereignty of the state. In 1924, the Ministry of Home Affairs organised the first National Sport Meeting (*Meiji Jingū Taiiku Taikai*) at the precincts of the Meiji Shrine. At the last day of the tournament, which marked the birthday of the former emperor Meiji, the Ministry of Education invited all students to participate in the first national sport day. 11,760 schools and 860 youth organisations followed the invitation. Membership in the national youth association, founded by Tanaka Giichi in 1915, was compulsory for every male inhabitant of an administrative unit who had completed elementary school and who was still under conscription age. These social groups constituted a dense web throughout the country and were junctions where the relation between the emperor and the region were maintained.⁴³ Because the national sport meeting also served as national championships, the Japan Amateur Sport Association took over in 1926 to coordinate the events. Mass media that had spearheaded the spread of modern sports in Japan by sponsoring and organizing attractive sport events, also

42 John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter, "Accounting for mega-events: real and imagined impacts of the 2002 Football World Cup finals on the host countries Japan/Korea," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 39/2, 2004, pp. 187–203.

43 Sakaue Yasuhiro, *Kenryoku sōchi to shite no supōtsu. Teikoku Nippon no kokka senryaku* [Sport as power device. The state strategy of Imperial Japan], Tōkyō: Kōdansha (= Kōdansha sensho mechie; 136), 1998, p. 109.

constituted a vital resource to relate the national body in sport practice with the many thousands who were not there in the precincts of the Meiji Shrine.

During the 1940s, the national athlete meeting changed into an open display of embodied chauvinism and militaristic attitudes. Sport tournaments increasingly changed into competitive warfare and play-like preparation for actual combat. After the war, sports turned into a vehicle of democratisation. While the occupation forces banned all sports it deemed “feudal,” team sports or track and field were considered to serve the sound and healthy development of the young students. Starting in 1946, the National Athletics Meeting, the Kokutai, was revived and since then staged annually in a different prefecture. In recent years, the event has lost much of its popularity. As the host prefecture happened to win almost every year – in fact they seemingly were forced to do so in order to legitimise the huge investments into the sports infrastructure – the final result became insanely predictable. Although many sports came to hold their national championships independently from the Kokutai, the biggest event of Japan’s amateur sport continues its tradition.

The effects of the National Athletics Meeting continue to exert influence through time and space. Via the media, the meetings are watched and followed by many thousands Japanese spectators. Numerous competitions of much smaller scale imitate the National Meetings in their symbols, form and content. Local festivals are ideal entry points into a community’s symbolic, economic, social, and political life, particularly if they are organised by members of the local community for the community. But they also provide an avenue for outsiders to read the messages being performed by the community involved in the celebration. Participants as well as audiences that take part in the spatial temporality of the event play an important role as co-creators of social meaning. Opening ceremonies, including parades of the athletes, welcome speeches by local dignitaries, performance by marching bands, decorative devices of flags and the display of slogans and logos as well as signs symbolising the host locality, are essential parts of regional sport contests, school sport competitions and local sport days. Sport festivals, which are nowadays staged in early October to commemorate the successful opening of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, developed in Japan as early as 1874. While the state was a primary agent of establishing *undōkai*, or school sport days, throughout the country, it was the local population that integrated the new cultural event into the annual cycle of festivals. Researchers of the cultural studies school argue that sport became an item of Japanese culture once it had successfully found a place within the territory of *matsuri bunka*. In particular Yoshimi Shunya poignantly demon-

strated that urban residents in Taishō Japan did not subjugate themselves to the national ideology behind the local *undōkai* but creatively interpreted the sport festival as just one more of the regularly occurring annual events.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Drawing on various aspects of the Japanese sport experience, I have tried to show that sport serves in at least two different ways as a stage for performing the nation. On the one hand, the practice of structured body movements according to intersubjective rules is always a kind of cultural work that is in this context grounded within the territorial boundary of a national culture. Clearly the practice of sports is more than just mimetic action. If, as in the words of Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Da Matta, societies are made out of individual wills and interests that compete in a market and articulate themselves by means of laws that these free and sovereign individuals “choose,” sports reproduce this same experience in a closed domain.⁴⁵ The discussion has shown that ritual expressions function as a means of self-reflexivity, as they are bound to a time and space in which past and future merge in a flowing present activity. Performative cultural events, such as rituals, festivals, or its more mundane variants, such as parades or sport contests, thus vividly express a society’s ideas and conceptions of itself.

On the other hand, the performance of sports as a staged event has emerged in the service of dominant elites and representatives of the nation state. Since the global spread of modern sports started in the nineteenth century, sport often played a useful role in aiding and abetting state sponsored nationalism. Yet the relationship of sport and nationalism – as well as of state and nation – are seldom straightforward and its nuances are only revealed when looking at

44 Yoshimi Shunya, “Undōkai to iu kindai. Shukusai no seijigaku” [A modernity called sports days. The politics of festival], *Gendai Shisō* 21/7, 1993, pp. 55–73; Yoshimi Shunya “Nēshon no girei to shite no undōkai” [The sport day as ceremony of the nation], Yoshimi Shunya et al., *Undōkai to Nihon kindai*, Tōkyō: Seikyūsha, 1999, pp. 7–53; Yoshimi Shunya (2001) ‘Undōkai to gakkō kūkan’ [Sports days and school space], Sugimoto Atsuo (ed.) *Taiiku kyōiku o manabu hito no tame ni*, Kyōto: Sekai Shisō Sha, 2001, pp. 42–60.

45 Roberto Da Matta, “Hierarchy and equality in anthropology and word sport: a perspective from Brazil,” Kang Shin-Pyo, John J. MacAloon and Roberto da Matta (eds.) *The Olympics and Cultural Exchange*, Seoul: Hanyang University, Institute for Ethnological Studies, 1987, pp. 43–66, p. 61.

sportive nationalism as “a complicated sociopolitical response to challenges and events, both sportive and non-sportive, that must be understood in terms of the varying national contexts in which it appears.”⁴⁶ As modern states attempt to minimize and overcome internal divisions by fostering a sense of national identity, they attempt to cover the discrepancies between state and nation and make all citizens understand the terms of state and nation to be synonymous. As we have seen, these attempts did not always go undisputed, particularly because of the fluid nature of the relations between sport, culture and the nation. The changes of sport echo the changes of its wider environment, while its rituals reflect the changes of society, and anticipate or show alternatives to the established practices and meanings.

Pursuing interests of their own, the media, sport business, and consumers themselves nowadays are actively involved in creating their own vision of sport and of the nation. Cultural productions have become the generative basis of myths, lifestyles and even worldviews. Instead of social formations giving rise to symbolic expressions, it is now symbols that are creating social groups. As Robert Manning noted quite early, social entities arise, and often develop an amazing, if ephemeral, solidarity because they share interests deriving from television programs, movies, or sport.⁴⁷ A century ago it was baseball and the Kōshien national high school tournament in which a non-domestic sport was integrated into the symbolic construction of the national and of youth. Nowadays it is another imported sport in which local or national communities overcome their internal divisions and, at least during the games, see themselves as an integrated whole, as one people united under the same flag and the same wish. “The [Football] World Cup articulates the national with the universal but it permits anchoring the dramatic on the local level without losing sight of universal rules.”⁴⁸

46 John Hoberman, “Sport and ideology in the post-communist age,” in: Luther Allison (ed.) *The Changing Politics of Sport*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 15–36, p. 18.

47 Frank Manning, “Cosmos and chaos: celebration in the modern world,” Frank Manning (ed.) *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983, pp. 3–30.

48 Roberto Da Matta (1987): p. 59.