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DOI
10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71
Publication date
2018
Document Version
Final published version
Published in
Historical Social Research

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Stauff, M. (2018). The Assertive Image: Referentiality and Reflexivity in Sports Photography. *Historical Social Research*, *43*(2), 53-71. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71

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Download date:08 Sep 2026

Historical Social Research
Historische Sozialforschung

Markus Stauff:

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doi: 10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71

Published in:

Historical Social Research 43 (2018) 2

Cite as:

Stauff, Markus. 2018. The Assertive Image: Referentiality and Reflexivity in Sports Photography. *Historical Social Research* 43 (2): 53-71. doi: 10.12759/hsr.43.2018.2.53-71.

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Historical Social Research
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The Assertive Image: Referentiality and Reflexivity in Sports Photography

Markus Stauff[*]

Abstract: *»Das nachdrückliche Bild: Referentialität und Reflexivität in der Sportfotografie«*. Contrary to other social practices, sports organize competitions on a publicly visible stage, where they are supposed to have an immediately recognizable and definite result. Embedded into this results-oriented and emphatically visual culture of sports, individual images often turn into what can be called assertive images, which are explicitly addressed as images and commented upon in order to admire performances and understand them. This article will use photographs from the time before television started to be the dominant medium – from the 1930s to 1960s – to outline four recurrent procedures which contribute to such assertiveness. The approach, which is more systematic than historical, aims at developing key questions, terms, and concepts for more detailed case studies. The more general claim is that media have not only been a means to represent sports, but sport has also functioned as a stage to display the qualities of media.

Keywords: Theory of the image, media sport, photography, visual culture, Bildtheorie, Fotografie, Mediensport, visuelle Kultur.

1. The Visual Culture of Sport[1]

Since the end of the 19th century, the world of sport has not stopped producing a tremendous quantity of visuals: action photographs, diagrams, star portraits, scientific visualizations, and much more. Whether one looks at newspapers and magazines, or at the websites of sports broadcasters, bloggers, or fan communities, all offer an avalanche of illustrations displaying athletes but also venues and sports gear. The now common embedding of moving images, which ensures that texts are punctuated with algorithmically chosen still frames from the videos, further adds to the seemingly arbitrariness of the available visual forms.

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[1] This research would not have started without a generous gift I received from Hilde Hoffmann: a huge box with invaluable historical material from football World Cups and Olympic Games. Additionally, the participants of the conference *Visualities: Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources* (Cologne 2016), an anonymous peer reviewer, and Florian Duijsens gave valuable feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

Considering this, any effort to identify particular characteristics of sport's visual culture might seem futile. Nevertheless, I here want to argue that the media representations of competitive spectator sports contribute a particular dynamic to contemporary visual culture. Focusing on photography, I will take up two questions: How do modern, competitive sports appropriate the potentials of visual media? What kind of images and what kind of visual practices are characteristic of sports?

My main claim will be that sport's use of photography to marvel at, and evaluate, athletic performances intensifies and complicates the perception of images in a particular manner. On the one hand, sport harnesses the potential of photography to record real events (photography's referentiality) – the image gets scrutinized for the details it renders visible. On the other hand, photography is never sufficient to fully understand the athletic performance, which means it is almost always paired with other media forms and thus directs attention to the specific qualities of each medium involved. This combination of referentiality and reflexivity produces what I would like to call "assertive images": images which highlight both photography's claim to give an account of a pre-photographic reality and photography's dependency on context, embellishment, and explanation.[2] The reader/spectator (text and image are inseparable in sport's visual culture) is often explicitly instructed to pay attention to certain details of the image, but also to the qualities and limitations of photography more generally. Not least because of the inevitable partisanship, sports images are arguably more (and more explicitly) commented upon than any other form of popular visual culture. As a consequence, sport provokes a constant reflection on the marvels and limitations of the still image. More broadly, it thereby familiarizes the audience with different visual forms of coping with these limitations.

After further introducing the concept of the "assertive image" with reference to a recent video clip (and comparing it to other types of images), I will use photographs from the 1930s to 1960s, decades in which television did not yet completely dominate sport's visual culture, to outline four recurrent procedures which contribute to these images' particular assertiveness. I picked this era because I want to avoid the impression that what I discuss here is mainly the result of sport's commercialization and spectacularization through the television industry. While I don't have the space here to discuss this in greater detail, I argue that similar procedures were already in existence from the later 19th

[2] For the sake of this analysis, I will have to bracket complicated discussions about reality and how photography relates to it. I only claim that most sports photography is part of a context in which it is mainly approached as a representation of a reality that exists outside of, and can be scrutinized through, different means of representation. The images invite a reflection on photography by insisting that photography (even if often imperfectly) refers to a reality beyond and before the photograph – a reality which is shaped through cross-media discourses.

century onwards, continuing to be relevant to sport's representation on television or online. Overall, my argument will be more systematic than historical, and aimed at developing key questions, terms, and concepts for more detailed case studies. Additionally, I want to show that throughout the history of sports, the media have not only been a means to represent sports, but sport has also functioned as a stage to display the qualities of media.

2. The Assertive Image

Though photographs are occasionally still used to depict and scrutinize special moments of a sport competition, video is now the dominant visual form. In online articles summarizing an event or discussing an athlete's performance, video is regularly used to support the written arguments. During the 2017 NBA playoffs of the US basketball competition, player Kawhi Leonard sprained his ankle when landing on the feet of his competitor Zaza Pachulia after a jump shot. Reporters and fans immediately started discussing if this was an intentional foul by Pachulia or just an unfortunate situation. On its website, the LA Times collected different takes on the controversy and also provided a fragment from the live broadcast (Schilken 2017). This fragment provides a good starting point for discussing the way sport produces "assertive images." At the beginning of the clip, we see Leonard lying on the ground, the reporter commenting on him having been injured. When noise from the attending crowd can be heard, he explains that they are reacting to the replay images on the display in the arena. Immediately afterwards, the replay is also available for the TV audience (or the newspaper readers, for that matter): In slow motion, Leonard twists his ankle while landing on the stretched leg of Pachulia. The reporter explains that the rules prohibit defenders from placing their feet in the landing zone of a shooter.

Visibility gets highlighted in two different ways here: First, the reporter comments on a technical aspect of the media constellation (the big screen in the venue) to indicate that something is not (yet) visible to the TV audience. Then, he scrutinizes the images and refers to the rules of the competition to direct the spectators' attention and their understanding. The visual culture of sports thus entangles pictures in a context that both highlights the power of vision and triggers reflection on its conditions and limitations.

With slow-motion replay and live commentary, television and online video add further layers to this assertiveness, yet a similar dynamic was already in place in an era when sports photography still was the dominant means of visualizing sports. While the majority of sport photographs might not necessarily be assertive in the way I have described above, the assertive image nevertheless can be considered a type that is very particular to modern competitive sport – and sport, throughout its history and across different media technologies, has

consistently contributed this type of image to visual culture. Contrary to other social practices, sport organizes performances on a publicly visible stage, where they are supposed to have an immediately recognizable and definite result. Embedded into this results-oriented and emphatically visual culture of sport, individual images often turn into what can be called assertive images, which are explicitly addressed as images and commented upon in order to admire performances and understand them.

The contexts of sports photographs – but also their formal features themselves, as I will show below – invite spectators to pay heightened attention to both the "content" of the image and the specific materiality of its medium. Before discussing a number of different ways in which photographs achieve this, I want to provide a theoretical framework to conceptualize this assertiveness of the sports photograph.

There have been any number of efforts to delineate the epistemological and aesthetic features of images (or photography) more generally (e.g. Aumont 1997; Lechte 2012; Mitchell 1980). Here, I am rather interested in distinguishing different types of images (e.g. portraits, diagrams, spectacles). The respective qualities of such different types do not directly result from the material or formal features of one medium, but from the combination of a number of features with a particular visual practice. A certain type of image can thus exist in different media (e.g. in photography and video, as my examples above have shown). Additionally, one and the same image might develop into different types in specific situations. If the short video clip described above is used in a training course for referees, it approaches what Dominic Lopes calls directive pictures – pictures that show us enough "affordances" of an object (or a situation) so that we can use this object (or decide on a situation) in a particular way (Lopes 2004, 191). The sound of the TV reporter surely would be muted, and the referees would be presented with a number of similar situations, together with the precise text of the relevant rule. Thus, the image would depict reality "in a way that keys into the skills of the agent" (ibid., 193). Visual referentiality can thus be tweaked in a way to guarantee that the image supports efforts to handle a reality that is 'outside' of the photograph.

In art, but also in photojournalism, the direct link between seeing and acting is often adjourned, if not completely interrupted. Additionally, an image often defers any specific meaning and thus "induces us, vaguely, to think" (Barthes 1981, 38). The pensive image directs attention to the form and materiality of the image and thereby provokes a state between activity (thinking) and passivity (being lost in thought) (Grootenboer 2011, 17-8). Jacques Rancière, for whom the modern aesthetic regime is characterized by such "pensive images," uses photographs to analyse how images (be they art or documentation) create an indeterminate relationship between reference and artifice (2009, 107-32). Two of his examples are Rineke Dijkstra's photograph of a teenage girl on a beach ("Kolobrzeg, Poland, July 26, 1992") and Walker Evans's photograph of

a wooden kitchen wall ("Kitchen Wall, Alabama Farmstead, 1936"). Both images seem to aim at "documenting" something particular, yet with their conspicuous formal composition they also seem to result from the artist's intention, and simultaneously – with the waves of the sea or the scratches in the wood as background – give space to the passivity of automatic photographic registration. Thus, the images resist clear identification, for instance of who the girl is; whether the pose was chosen by her or by the photographer; if the wooden kitchen wall documents poverty or represents a modernist sensibility for abstraction. Through this ambivalence, such images undermine or at least adjourn traditional operations of images like representation, expression, description, or narration.

Contrary to what happens in the pensive image, intentionality and referentiality are highlighted in sport's visual culture. Images of competitive sports refer to (and are published in relation to) particular events that are organized to be watched and to produce spectacular moments. In sports, the media apparatus is positioned (and trained) in a way to enable specific photographs of certain predetermined situations shaped by the rules of the respective discipline (goals, finish lines, etc.). The event's time and place are specific and well known, and the athletes not only have a name, but they also embody their own (and/or their team's) well-defined, quantified performance. Even if images achieve more symbolic status over the years (e.g. one photograph standing in for an entire event or possibly for one particular sport), their referentiality still sticks to them – not least, because the picture includes identifying elements like the colours of, and the numbers on, the athlete's jerseys, or the names and results on scoreboards in the background. However, the more specific the scene depicted in the image is (e.g. an athlete crossing the finishing line with a world-record time), the more the image gets commented upon and scrutinized in various media, intensifying yet often also complicating its referentiality. Hundreds of photos display Usain Bolt winning one of his Olympic 100m races; most of them come with commentary which directs our attention to his distance to his competitors (which the image can display or distort), his emotions, his running style, but also the blurriness of the background, the winning time on the display in the picture, and so on.

Contrary to the directive image, seeing and acting are not in direct connection in the assertive image, and the affordances of the depicted situation are opened to further embellishment and meaning production. As any one situation is represented in different media forms and from different perspectives, referentiality is multiplied and spread across different media commenting on each other. Remarkably, it is exactly the heightened relevance of representation (and not its adjournment) that redirects the attention towards the formal and material properties of the image, thus provoking reflection on perception and referentiality. Sport's dual imperative to understand the details of the competition and to appreciate (and judge) the aesthetic experience ensures that the attention that

is paid to the image is intensified but also ambiguous. Sports produces assertive images not only because it invites to scrutinize how something was achieved, but also because this specific potential of the image is explicitly reflected upon in the cross-media context. In this sense, the visual culture of sports shows some features which are well-known from the visual culture of science, where "re-presentation becomes a matter of presenting an initial something again and again; transforming, transposing, and translating the material/semiotic forms of that something; and serially disclosing and detailing what that initial, inchoate something was all along" (Lynch 2014, 324). In scientific practice too, the image is scrutinized, framed, and reflected upon to make something visible; it gets equipped with a strong, but complicated and contextual referentiality (e.g. Lynch 2006; Galison 2002). Being an immensely popular culture, sport's procedures of image scrutiny and reflection are less rigid and more spontaneous, combining technical and operational knowledge with explicit partisanship and matters of taste. This spawns a more heterogeneous formal repertoire of assertive images.

3. Appreciating and Scrutinizing Sports Photography

Sport's characteristic urge to evaluate performances and to assess events in aesthetic and moral terms intensifies the attention for the individual image and solidly connects it to a cross-media context. As a result, the assertive image, resulting from the particular entanglement of intentionality, referentiality, and reflexivity, has characterized the visual culture of sports since the end of the 19th century, even if, quantitatively, it might not be the most frequently used type of image.

The remainder of this article will use sport photographs from different historical moments and different events to analyse a number of distinct procedures that contribute to creating assertive images by highlighting the referentiality of the image while reflecting on its material and formal features. The examples are mainly taken from "paratexts" (Genette 1997) of special events – brochures, leaflets, chronicles, and coffee-table books announcing, accompanying, and memorializing individual instalments of the Olympic Games or the men's football World Cup. While newspapers and specialist magazines evince similar procedures, I chose to focus on these publications because they offer a conspicuously multi-modal representation of sports for a general audience, including diagrams, tables, drawings, aerial and fish-eye shots of stadiums, portraits of players, action photographs, re-narrations of the competitions, and often advertisements which make inventive use of sport's recurrent topics and images.

While the assertiveness of the image is mainly an effect of such heterogeneity itself and of the broader cross-media entanglement of each individual sports image, I here continue to focus on photography to show in detail how sport

impacts the mode of its presentation and even the particular formal properties of photography. These examples also show how the urge to understand performances generates a particular attention to the images as images, thereby familiarizing a mass audience with visual technologies and visual forms which are otherwise reserved for more specialized practices, like science, economics, or institutional education.

3.1 Pre-Mediation and the Visibility of Media Technology

Sport's heightened attention for the image and its visual qualities firstly results from the ubiquity of heterogeneous media technologies at work in sports. Most sports publications are conspicuously multi-modal, combining texts, images, diagrams, and so on. Additionally, a broad range of media technologies (cameras, displays, announcers, etc.) are highly visible elements of any organized sports event. In sport's visual culture, images become assertive images because they are part of a context in which media technologies (and the differences between them) are displayed, explained, used, and commented upon.

The emergence of competitive spectator sports was closely entangled with the development of media technology in the second half of the 19th century: The mass press, telegraphy, and photography were constitutive for the translocal development of competitions and rules (e.g. Betts 1953; Werron 2010), and scoreboards, leaflets, and megaphones were important to communicate the event to the local audience. Depictions of sports events often quite simply include media as an unavoidable, non-intentional element: a photograph from the first modern Olympics in 1896 in which the Greek king awards the winners, for instance, also depicts a number of photographers (Kluge 1996, 184-5). Additionally, media technologies increasingly became a topic of their own. They are highlighted and explained so that the audience better understands and appreciates the representation of sports.

Such visibility of technology is especially intensified through the forms of pre-mediation characteristic of big sports events, which harness the most variegated media forms to prepare the (media) audience to understand and appreciate a competition. The audience is thus familiarized with both the rules and players of the coming event and with media forms which it otherwise would only rarely encounter. In 1908, for instance, the Olympic marathon was premediated in newspapers through maps of the course, lists of participants, narratives of possible outcomes, and so on (see also Stauff 2018, in this HSR Special Issue.) In the stadium, the audience received a printed programme that listed the record times in marathon running so far (incorrect times, but one hopes not intentionally so) and listed the number of each starter so that the attendees could follow the announcements of the race standings which were telephoned to the stadium every five minutes – a set-up that was detailed for a broader audience in the Daily Mail (Jenkins 2008, 157, 191, 199).

This pre-mediation grew even more explicit in the case of a Coca-Cola-sponsored programme booklet for the 1954 men's football World Cup in Switzerland, which – aside from photographs of athletes and stadium – also includes diagrams explaining game tactics and the offside rule. The accompanying text warns readers that they should have a good knowledge of the rules of the game before assuming to judge the referees (Klages 1954, 30).

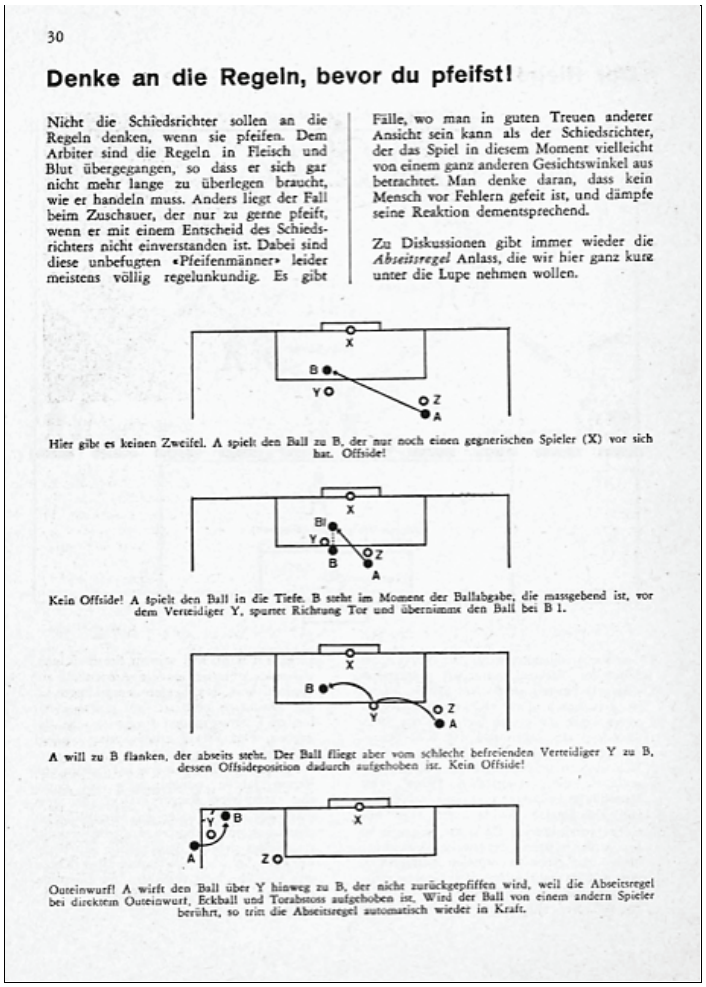
Pre-mediation involves a variety of media forms that prepare and modulate the actual perception of the event. Already before the event, its actual outcomes and their prospective media representations are imagined "as remediations of current ones" (Grusin 2004, 18). Actual images of an offside situation will be conceived of as variations on this more abstract scheme.

A second, no less common practice more directly highlights and explains the media technologies that will be used to cover the competition. Just like all the major media events since the end of the 19th century, the 1908 Olympics did not only construct venues for the competitions, but also special facilities for the media: "Underneath the grandstands were thirty-six dressing rooms and a press room with telephones and a direct cable to the United States" (Davis 2012, 123). As already mentioned, such technical and organizational aspects of media coverage are also regularly discussed in detail before and during the event. In a special issue on the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung [sic!] contains a double page on "Olympic Technology" ("Olympia-Technik"). Next to a wind gauge, the electrical scoring apparatus for fencing, and a simple measuring tape, the TV camera is also depicted, with the telling caption: "It watches for those who can't be present."[3]

Sport thus gets presented as a densely mediated field in which the technologies to organize and rule the sport are placed on the same level as the technologies to represent it. The booklet for the 1954 football World Cup which includes the diagram on the offside rule also includes a short feature on one of the photographers of the event (Klages 1954, 6). From the start, the competition is considered to be a necessarily and multifariously mediated event: As the presence of technology is outlined, the audience is not only prepared for the possible events of the competition but also for its forms of mediation. Notoriously, each sports mega-event is harnessed to propagate the qualities of new consumer technology (Stauff 2006).

[3] "Sie sieht für die, die nicht dabei sein können" (*Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung. 2. Olympia-Sonderheft* 1936, 30-1).

Figure 1: Pre-Mediating Fans' Judgment of the Referee



30

Denke an die Regeln, bevor du pfeifst!

Nicht die Schiedsrichter sollen an die Regeln denken, wenn sie pfeifen. Dem Arbiter sind die Regeln in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen, so dass er sich gar nicht mehr lange zu überlegen braucht, wie er handeln muss. Anders liegt der Fall beim Zuschauer, der nur zu gerne pfeift, wenn er mit einem Entscheid des Schiedsrichters nicht einverstanden ist. Dabei sind diese unbefugten «Pfeifenmänner» leider meistens völlig regelunkundig. Es gibt Fälle, wo man in guten Treuen anderer Ansicht sein kann als der Schiedsrichter, der das Spiel in diesem Moment vielleicht von einem ganz anderen Gesichtswinkel aus betrachtet. Man denke daran, dass kein Mensch vor Fehlern gefeit ist, und dämpfe seine Reaktion dementsprechend.

Zu Diskussionen gibt immer wieder die *Abseitsregel* Anlass, die wir hier ganz kurz unter die Lupe nehmen wollen.

Hier gibe es keinen Zweifel. A spielt den Ball zu B, der nur noch einen gegnerischen Spieler (X) vor sich hat. Offside!

Kein Offside! A spielt den Ball in die Tiefe. B steht im Moment der Ballabgabe, die massgebend ist, vor dem Verteidiger Y, spurtet Richtung Tor und übernimmt den Ball bei B 1.

A will zu B flanken, der abseits steht. Der Ball fliegt aber vom schlecht befreienden Verteidiger Y zu B, dessen Offsideposition dadurch aufgehoben ist. Kein Offside!

Outeinwurf! A wirft den Ball über Y hinweg zu B, der nicht zurückgepfiffen wird, weil die Abseitsregel bei direktem Outeinwurf, Eckball und Torabstoss aufgehoben ist. Wird der Ball von einem andern Spieler berührt, so tritt die Abseitsregel automatisch wieder in Kraft.

Source: Klages 1954, 30.

Premediation, here, "insists that the future itself is also already mediated" (Grusin 2004, 19). Individual sports photographs thus are framed in a double way: (A) Their content is entangled in a dominantly visual discourse (or "viscourse" [Knorr-Cetina 2001; see also Hentschel 2014, 262]) specifying and contextualizing the visible action, thus combining referentiality with reflexivity. (B) Their existence as a material image is highlighted in an additional "viscourse" on the particular technologies and institutions of the media, bolstering the significance of the event by highlighting the innovative means of its repre-

sentation. Any understanding of the athletic performances is connected to arguing with, and understanding, (visual) media.

3.2 Instructions for Reading Messages

Following sports, it is impossible to not be confronted with different media technologies and their specific capabilities. In the above examples, the image becomes assertive through the sheer ubiquity of its conspicuously heterogeneous forms and through the explicit exploration of image production. A second procedure, no less straightforward, consists of explicit instructions on how to look at an image and how to use it to understand (or marvel at) sports.

Though it is often taken for granted that media representations transform sports into a spectacle (e.g. Oriard 1993; Real 1977, 1990), this spectacle does not just emerge from exciting pictures, it rather needs to be highlighted for the spectator through explicit comments. Except for art museums and art catalogues, I wouldn't know of any other field of visual culture in which the images are praised as often for their pictorial qualities and their aesthetic pleasures as in sports. In coffee-table books summarizing and memorializing two consecutive Olympic Games from the 1960s we find the following accolades for the photographs: "The brightly illuminated luge track presents a magical image." "Downhill skiing resulted in beautiful and eerie images alike."[4] Prompting the spectator to marvel at the image is still common practice in today's TV coverage of sports, where it often is not entirely clear whether agitated exclamations to "just look at these images" are more directed at a remarkable performance or at the aesthetic forms resulting from the movements, the venue, the weather, or the audience.

My main interest here, however, lies in how sport's focus on competitive performances and their results provokes the augmentation of images with reading instructions. Most importantly, photographs are supplemented with instructing commentary to fill in details missing in the image. In contrast to "directive images" which aim to highlight the necessary steps to do something, sport photographs cannot capture all relevant aspects of an event's unfolding – actually not even of one particular situation. The reader/spectator thus gets instructions to fill in the parts which are considered to be relevant to the performance but are either structurally invisible or missed by the camera.

A typical football photograph from the Official Programme for the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland shows the goal and in front of it a ball in the air and a number of players leaping up, their limbs twisted. The caption states that the defence of the goalkeeper and his two teammates (all are visible) "stood out"

[4] "Ein zauberhaftes Bild bietet die hell erleuchtete Rodelbahn" (Deutsche Olympische Gesellschaft 1960, 353-5). "Zu ebenso schönen wie gespenstischen Bildern [...] kam es beim Abfahrtslauf" (Lechenperg 1964, 54).

("fiel auf") throughout the game, adding that the header of the opposing striker "went past the goal post."[5] But sometimes, to clarify the visible action, the visual culture of sport also has to elaborate on the limitations of the image: In a Swiss *Chronicle of the 1966 World Cup*, a photograph of two players jumping high in the air is paired with the text: "Air fight for the invisible ball."[6] For another photograph of players without a visible ball, the caption additionally comments on the intrinsically invisible strategic intentions: "Flying in the air, English defender Wilson powerfully heads away a pass intended to reach the winger."[7]

Nowadays, in the context of internationally shared broadcasting streams, references to events outside the visual frame can become an explicit critique of media, as when the commentator of a game criticizes the decisions of the organizing host broadcaster to focus on one aspect of an event instead of another. This for instance happened during the 2016 men's European football championship, when German broadcasters complained that the organizer, UEFA, refused to show images of crowd violence inside the stadium.[8] It also often happens around more mundane issues, like the missing image of a coach's reaction or of the replay of a contested situation. Such comments on the invisible allow the audience a glimpse into processes of media organization which are pretty rare outside of sport. Sport, aside from being a spectacle, can thus be considered a forerunner to what Jan Teurlings (2013) called the "society of machinery" – a society in which the pretension that everybody is granted access to the otherwise hidden operations of production becomes part of the dominant ideology.

While these references to things outside of the image frame invite the audience to think about the limitations of images, these texts just as frequently reference images' visible details, instruct readers to pay close attention to the image and determine the relevant details. In the case of a non-descript photograph of one striker and two defenders fighting for the ball from 1966, the *World Cup Chronicle* urges the audience to read the faces of the players: "Representative for the elevated concentration of both teams are the faces [of the players]."[9] In the 1936 Olympic magazine, two images of different high jumpers, both with their backs to the camera, are positioned next to each other and the

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[5] "Antenens Kopfball ging neben den Pfosten" (*Fußball-Weltmeisterschaft 1954, 16. Juni – 4. Juli. Offizielles Programm / Programme Officiel* 1954, 21).

[6] "Luftkampf um das unsichtbare Leder" (Weber 1966, 37).

[7] "Fliegend köpfelt Englands Verteidiger Wilson eine dem Flügel zugedachte hohe Vorlage wuchtig fort" (Weber 1966, 13).

[8] E.g. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/ard-und-zdf-klagen-ueber-uefa-bildregie-bei-fussball-em-2016-14285402.html>; <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2012/jul/05/german-tv-uefa-crying-fan>.

[9] "Bezeichnend für die äusserste Konzentration auf beiden Seiten sind die Gesichter von Emmerich und der abwehrbereiten Cohen und Peters" (Weber 1966, 75).

audience is invited to compare "how the jumpers, each in their way, summon their power and will, before they start their approach."[10] Sport's assertive images thus can be easily harnessed to direct attention to fairly different aspects of the visual field, connecting sports to broader psychological or political issues.

Granted, most of the photographs in the sources used here are not scrutinized in such detail. Images of a high jumper in the air or a football player on the field mainly serve as general illustrations of an event or of a situation which gets clarified in the caption. Yet the recurrent appearance of such instructions to scrutinize photographs in popular publications nevertheless seems significant to me. All the more so since the instruction to pay attention to the image goes beyond the caption and impacts the visual forms themselves; the guiding function of captions gets integrated into the visual field through overlaid graphics, arrows, and so on. In the Official Report of the British Olympic Association on the 1956 Olympics, an arrow guides the reader/spectator to detect the unusual arrangement of the rudders in the Italian boat, the captions transforming the perception into a riddle: "Can you spot at a glance what is novel about this winning Italian crew? The answer is that bow and stroke are rowing on the same side" (Bear 1956, 54).

Figure 2: Scrutinising the Image

Source: Bear 1956, 54.

[10] "Wie sich die Springer C. Johnson-USA (links) und Kottas-Finnland, jeder in seiner Art, Kraft und Willen sammeln, bevor sie zum Anlauf ansetzen" (*Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung. 2. Olympia-Sonderheft* 1936, 6).

Images of sports are visuals that give an account of a very specific thing. And yet, to grasp what the image is actually about (what its intention and referentiality are) the audience needs to know sports' rules and conventions, pay attention to facial expressions or the aesthetic marvels of the image, and think about the limits of photography – the invisible.

3.3 The Visual Mapping of Events and Movements

While captions and visual forms such as diagrams and arrows instruct the reader/spectator to connect details of the image to relevant aspects of sports, other visual forms establish a field for a less directed and more open-ended form of scrutiny. This type of image becomes assertive because instead of being a seemingly transparent representation, it underlines the usability and instrumentality of the image. Through multiplication and serialization it invites us to look back and forth between different (parts of) images.

Above, I mentioned the example of two photographs placed next to each other for comparison. This form of visualization has become a staple in sports photography. Most often it is applied in a form of "narrative mapping": the visual representation of a complex temporal event that offers the "opportunity to see both grand contours and areas of specific interest" (Mamber 2003, 146). The general knowledge of sports competitions and their rules and dramaturgy allow a broad audience to enjoy such a quasi-scientific use of visualizations.

For its "narrative mapping" of the 800m race of the 1936 Olympics, a magazine used four photographs on a double-page spread, respectively identifying these images in the captions as intermediate accounts from the race situation after 200, 400, 600, and 800 meters. At the top of the page, in big letters, it says: "The camera tells the story of the race."[11] Once more, the understanding of the race is closely connected to the media technology. The dramatic course of the race and the participating nations are noted in smaller print. The captions fill in any missing information and support the reader/spectator in creating a narrative from the four individual still images, yet the reader/spectator is also able to observe and compare a lot of details (e.g. the changing positions of individual athletes during the race) which are not commented upon. The limitations of photographic images are transformed into an analytic advantage; by isolating moments of special interest, they offer the reader/spectator an approximation of the "grand contours" of the entire race. Series of images only make sense if their referentiality is taken for granted (they represent distinct but connected aspects of a more comprehensive reality), and yet the referentiality has to be produced by scrutinizing and comparing the collocated images.

[11] "Die Kamera erzählt die Geschichte eines Rennens" (Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung. 2. Olympia-Sonderheft 1936, 28-9).

Sports publications also flaunt more analytical and less narrative image series, though. It is common for sport's visual culture to combine spectacular images – images of one decisive moment – with image series which aim to give a full account of the physical details of a performance. A coffee-table book from the 1960 Olympics, for instance, presents a colour photograph of a diver on a double-page spread. On the left margin of the image her jump is broken down into 16 small black-and-white photographs, allowing for close scrutiny of her turns and postures (Deutsche Olympische Gesellschaft 1960, 90-1). This switch from colour to black and white already highlights the images as images, connoting a more graphic, quasi-scientific approach. It also confronts the reader/spectator with two complementary forms of perception: marvelling at the one perfect shot (which, again, partly is perfect because its reference – the performance – is perfect) on the one hand and scrutinizing the series of images to better understand how this actually happened on the other.

Visual forms first developed in the late 19th century for physiological movement analysis have now even entered commercials for sports gear.[12] Sport is one of the areas in popular culture in which proto-scientific visual forms are very common. Sometimes they are merely illustrations connoting dynamics, technicity, innovation; often though, they actually invite the reader/spectator to scrutinize the image to learn more about a reality beyond the image. On social media, fans discuss particular situations with the help of such visual forms, and in sports video games analytical visualization does both, mimicking television's slow motion and digital graphics, but also supporting the improvement of a player's tactics. Here, the transition from an assertive image, which highlights the image as image, to a directive image, which mainly aims at improving capabilities, is a narrow one: Sometimes visual mapping provokes scrutiny and therefore attention for the qualities and the limitations of images, sometimes it focuses on displaying the "affordances" of a movement that can be directly applied to action.

3.4 Comparing Forms of Perception

While I don't have the space here to elaborate fully on it, I at least want to mention yet another procedure for creating assertive images which seems to be pretty characteristic for sports: Images become assertive through the way sports constantly provoke comparisons of different forms of perception. In the most basic sense, modern spectator sports strictly divide athletes from spectators, and as sports obviously confront athletes with tasks and challenges which impact their perception, the question of how the audience's perception differs from that of the athletes is a recurrent one in sports discourse. This motif was

[12] The Adidas commercial "The New Speed of Light" from 2013 is just one of many examples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP8Yi78oJoQ> (Accessed April 21, 2018).

already present when *The Times* outlined the race course of the 1908 Olympic Marathon in preparation for the event.

> [T]he runners will have little leisure to respond to the great reception which they are sure to receive from the Eton boys. […] Sixteen miles still to go, and – for those who have time to think of such things – far-reaching views of fields and woods and low-lying hills on either side. (*The Times*, July 24, 1908, 9)

Such speculations on the athletes' own perception easily feed into the praise and explication of the visual quality of the images mentioned above, underlining that what we see in the photograph is not the full truth of the event. An image of a ski jumper, for example, gets the caption: "It is unlikely that Jozef Przibyla from Poland pays attention to the marvellous view and the 60,000 spectators attending the concluding ski jump."[13]

The visual culture of sport very explicitly reflects on the difference between watching and participating, but also on differently mediated ways of watching sports. The debate on whether armchair supporters actually enjoy games more or less than the ones in the stadium is at least as old as radio. This is another reason why sports can so easily be used to promote new consumer technologies. An advertisement in an English report on the Olympic Games 1956 promises that new television technology will bring the audience closer to the field: "Big picture Cossor TV captures all the action and excitement of Sport in close-up. Pinshar details, steady, rock-like picture, realism at its best" (Bear 1956, 1).

Theatre, film, or music are mainly defined by a dual relationship between a presentation and its audience. While the concert film, for instance, is still considered to be the exception for music consumption, nearly all spectators of modern sports watch it on television, which presents the sports *and* the audience at the stadium. Additionally, media representation of theatre, film, or music do much less effort to replicate (and comment on) the subjective experience of the performers. For sports it is very explicit that different forms of perception are available, and that different media offer specific perspectives and experiences; this contributes to the assertiveness of image.

4. Conclusion

Social and cultural historians rightfully distinguish their own approach from the focus on number, results, and records that often dominates newspapers' and fans' accounts of sport history (e.g. Eisenberg 2002; Stearns 2010; Osmond and Phillips 2010). I want to argue, though, that in discussing the visual culture

[13] "Jozef Przibyla aus Polen achtet bei seinem Sprung wohl kaum auf die herrliche Aussicht und die 60.000 Zuschauer, die zum abschließenden Spezialspringen erschienen sind" (Lechenperg 1964, 110).

of sports the relevance of facts and results is actually often somewhat neglected (Osmond 2008, 2010). Sport's focus on performance, competition, and quantifiable results has consequences for the way images are taken, how they circulate, and how they get entangled with other media. Since, in sports, media are appropriated to evaluate performances, the media themselves become a recurrent topic, as do their technical features and visual qualities.

More or less since its take-off in the late 19th century, sports continue to be economically viable content for all media – mass press, film, television, and social media. Additionally, sport harnesses and combines the most variegated forms within these media – photographs, drawings, diagrams, narrative texts, statistics, and more. This cross-media assemblage also shapes the status and the mode of perception of individual photographs, producing what I suggest to call "assertive images." While the majority of sport photographs might be relatively nondescript images of athletes or strongly symbolic images of beautiful bodies and remarkable venues, the "assertive image" remains the most original contribution of sport to modern visual culture.

As organized competitions of physical performance, sports continuously produce surprising and visually remarkable spectacles. Moreover, they produce performances and results that demand to be scrutinized with respect to their reasons and their consequences, their quality and their conformity to the rules. This not only results in heightened attention for (and close readings of) images, but also in an enormous pluralization of the deployed visual forms and a heightened sensibility for the specific potentials of these forms. The assertiveness of the visual forms results from the tension between a strong focus on the referentiality of the images on the one hand and a reflexivity which complicates this referentiality on the other.

This tension is mostly articulated in the cross-media context that surrounds the individual photograph with rules and statistics, with turning points and alternative forms of perception. Thus a viscourse gets established on sports and on each individual event, framing the reading of the image. The captions especially invite both the scrutiny of the image at hand and connecting it to a broader field of facts, stories, and events. Yet it is also the visual form itself – e.g., an image series – that familiarizes the reader/spectator with an analytical perspective and the respective media technologies. The assertive image thus makes us familiar with the newest and most variegated forms of media while asking us to 'read' the images carefully, selectively, and in relation to other media forms – or to marvel at the picture's impressive formal qualities and its ground-breaking technology.

The institutional and technological transformation of media changes and re-articulates visual forms and the way they are highlighted and scrutinized – think about digital graphics or sport highlights which get circulated, annotated, and commented upon on social media. Thus, it could be of interest to analyse how the dynamics of sport's visual culture were activated and re-articulated

with each new technology. Here, however, I was less aiming to reveal such historical variations and more hoping to show the systematic aspects of sport's visual culture, which, I would argue, evince a certain continuity from the late 19th century on. This, hopefully, also shows that the visual history of sports, aside from providing insights into the normalization of bodies, the shaping of identities, and so on, can also teach us a lot about the adaptation and popularization of media technologies, and about the ways people are coached to use and understand visual forms. Images are not only a source for the visual history of sport, but also one of its central topics. And lastly, sport's ways of using media technologies to gauge performances might also significantly influence other cultural practices.

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