GRAMSCI’S CONCEPTION OF SPORT

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Abstract

Bourdieu’s language has Foucaultian accents with reference to physical discipline. He claims that sport is the area where teaching someone the body discipline is more obvious than in other areas of cultural practice. He recognizes that the fight for common sense in contemporary politics is more Gramscian than Foucaultian. Bourdieu’s analysis has more imagination and utility than Foucault’s. Bourdieu recognizes that meanings assigned to sports practices are influenced by some social contexts where sports is consumed. In Bourdieu’s view body practices and beliefs are less sensitive to the centrality of the contradictions of the contemporary cultural life. The dominant meanings in sports are not consistently interpreted and they change historically. It is helpful that sports and body to associate with a theory of social power, structure and development that operates following the Gramscian model.

Key words: cultural tradition, power, Gramscian model, total institutions, sports

Introduction

The critical literature of Western sports and a part of critics of the sports counterculture of the 70’s-80’s have sought to free themselves from radical pessimism and romantic anti-modernism to introduce the idea of contradiction and struggle, typical to Marxist tradition. Another part of critics have tried to recover the Marxist faith and human reason in order to take the analysis beyond despair, because this part of Marxism always promised "to put hope into practice rather than use desperation to convince" according to English Raymond Williams in his Towards 2000.

To achieve this idea it was neccessary an adequate understanding of human capacity and rejection of the concept of power as an element of coercion and personified false ideology. Partially we understand the acceptance of the limitations of the German "critical theory", but not the return to classical Marxism. Here, it was necessary the refusal of the logocentric Marxist vision of the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and the representation of the proletariat' "interest" as "automatic" equivalent to the entire human emancipation. At this time, a new theory about power, social practice and cultural struggle was needed. During the 70’s, the English critic tried to develop an analysis of this type of theory and he was inspired by the theory of "structuring" praised by British sociologist Anthony Giddens, then he was influenced by Bourdieu’s views about "practices" and "rules" written in Outline of a theory of practice in 1977, as well as by the analysis issued by sociologist Paul Willis in Learning to labour published in the same year. Also during this period, and like many others, British Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith attempted to correlate abstract theorizing about mediation, social structure and reproduction with the vast theory of social development. In this respect, the two headed for the possible solution of the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci.

The Italian's intervention and the proposal of a solution of "hegemony" in the Prison notebooks written in 1947, as well as William's opinion on language and ideology in the analysis of "cultural production" assured a proper framework for their unification. The American sociologist Richard Grune’s reasoning presented in Class, Sports and Social Development intended structuring sports and establishing an organization based on a regulation and a legitimate practices, which represented a defined exercise of power and based on different abilities, skills and values in society. In this formulation Grune adopted Giddens's argument claiming that power can be seen as a capacity to differentiate used into different types of resources to ensure certain results. In unequal societies an obvious situation appeared when sporting structures constituted as social opportunities weren’t negotiated fair, and the organization of these structures sought to offer further social, political and psychological possibilities for various groups or individuals, but also restricted other possibilities. Establishment of "modern" sport as coherent and distinct field of cultural activity, modeled on Victorian athletics line is an example of restricting certain possibilities. The effort for defining sport also included the support of civilizing and healthy cultural practices of some gentlemen amateurs who promoted standardized sports competitions inland and between nations and created a strong current towards health, body expression, relaxation, personal fulfillment and pleasure of the spectator. The evolution of sport was favored by the development of material resources, cultural skills, beliefs and preferences of European and North American men belonging to a certain class. In these circumstances there are some intentions without much influence on sports organization and philosophy of amateur sport with civilizing value on its disciplines and ceremonies, artificial modernization consensus. Or it was gained through complex negotiations, through struggles and compromises.
This episode of the last century was dominated first by the institutional structure of sports and by the dominant social definition of sport, which became more confused in the confrontations with the expansion of the universal market of capitalism and with the challenges of the various social movements. The romantic images of "amateurism" remained in our memory retains and they were to a large extent the present criticism of marketing of sports, clichés that no longer belong to structures or values of old sports practice and are no longer embodied to the same extent in sports ceremonies, in body practices and in sport disciplines. Currently, the dominant sporting structures and values, as well as the body practices they animate, have their sources in the financial capital, advertising, commercial media, show business and in development strategies of modern nations. We meet the dominant trends of today's sports simultaneously next to many structures, activities, body practices and confused aesthetic elements, incipient or alternative. Some of them have old and new sports structures, others include female teams organized independently, community leagues, Master competitions, beer leagues etc. Modern sporting practices range from "bungee jumping" to snowboarding. The new body aesthetic elements found in men and women are related to profession, performance or simply to marketing. Prohibitions and body ideals based on popularity of classic sports images are still dominant, but more fragmented and diverse than in the past. The idealized aesthetics of male sports proportions was borrowed from the classical models of Greece and it contrasts with the new standards of male and female body, as we see the functional height of basketball players, the "swollen up to the neck" bodies of American football players, the exaggeratedly lean bodies of marathon runners, the muscular massiveness of women bodybuilders, and the sexualization of the weakest athletes' physique. To this end, we analyze the way each structure, practice, representation and aesthetic element described find their place within the contemporary systems of power, the way each of them fits perfectly in what Bourdieu called "the dominant logic of social distinction", and the way each opposes to or accommodates differently with the dominant interests. Nowadays, we see more clearly the difference in sport practice as a powerful affirmation of cultural pluralism or as a manifestation of a wide range of identities and the alternative conception of the body supplied by the contemporary consumerism capitalism. This difference alone doesn't represent equality or opposition. Some of these differences are taken or publicized in the media, and then are taken by the state or the private sector in ways dangerous to financial capital and the managerial role or eurocentrism. Sports practices, competitions and sporting events have or should have an open political character. American professor John J. MacAlloon believes that all genres of cultural performances have an open-ended metaphorical character. The political plan brings us to understand the ways of constitution, reproduction and transformation of certain areas of social and cultural practice. Lately there were modes analyzed as dominant structures and practices have become ubiquitous sports representative in negotiations on cultural and ideological hegemony of capitalist consumerism culture. Supremacy works much better when partially accepted by opposition in order to preserve the core principles on which the various forms of domination are supported. In the contemporary diversity, dominant structures and practices in current sports continue to represent certain classes, genders, Western cultures and body practices as if they were universal categories and as if they would marginalize certain alternative conceptions about sports and body. In redefining the principles of the dominant structure our field there are a lot of controversies, but in their fight for common sense and public approval, dominant interests often succeed in missing the alternatives and present them as unnatural or archaic attitudes. On the other hand, other differentiation factors step in, based on compromise, in order to avoid threats. Today's sport compared to the sport the past is more adaptable and contradictory, thus forces and interests for eternal hegemony rarely intervene. Between the overview of "modern" life and the forces of cultural and social differentiation characteristic of modern or postmodern consumer societies there is a pronounced voltage. We shall consider whether these divisions are new emphasis and recognition for cultural, stylistic and aesthetic differences or they are an expression of the market segmentation and transition to what the neo-Gramscian economists called the "new post-Fordist regimes of capital accumulation". As we do not have a clear situation we can expect that a series of structures, beliefs, styles and practices body emerging from modern sports to be included in marketing and trade in order to present the slightest possible threat in the system of interests that define the nature of the global capitalism of the third millennium. In the future we believe that the sports practice will evolve and we are confident that the transformation of sport in consumer good will continue in the current global capitalism. We're pretty sure that within international culture, the sphere of "popular", which includes sport at its heart, will be very important in shaping social and political identity for the common sense itself. The emphasis on "popular" as center of the struggle for hegemony is the core of the neo-Gramscian concept of social development. In Gramsci's emphasis on the struggle for common sense, the negotiation of hegemony excludes the body as an objective field. In an effort to form active political subjects, the philosopher was particularly interested in consciousness and language, then he noticed that the unconscious and usual traits of the common sense were marked by a cognitive tendency. Neo-Gramscian perspectives did not follow the counter-cultural critique of controlled manipulation of the body in high performance sport as a system considered a form of domination and of
Consequently, it results the association between interaction, without a privileged source of power. In a more abstract analysis we see the operation of the power at all levels of social bodies to be fully understood as independent areas. Carefully detach the power factor will allow the unconscious nature of power. If we analyze and historical agents and focused on the abstract and possibilities for solving these problems would be the complete reorientation of the concept of power, separate from the easily identifiable modes of the power. In his book "Sport, power and culture" John Hargreaves is closest to the ideas above, although it's not quite a Foucaultian analysis, but rather an argument derived from Foucault and Gramsci's ideas about hegemony and social development. We see Foucault's ideas in the definition that Hargreaves attributes to power, but also in the focus on the body and in the analysis on normalization of the specialists in physical education. In addition to criticism arising from this book to the sport in the 80's, we have some reservations about the compatibility of the Foucaultian theory with Gramsci's theory about power. We noticed the difficulty to synthesize Gramsci's modernist concept with the possibility of the emancipatory social transformation in Foucault's Nietzschean vision of pervasiveness and inevitability of power. The quality of the Foucaultian analysis on sports arises from the focus on the system of practices and discourses of "administrative power" imposed on the human body as well as from the takeover or not of the power reported to class, race, ethnicity or gender. In modern era, Foucault's theory forces us in an imaginary way to consider the body as the primary place of enactment of the various technologies of power. Hence it results that the theorist promises no global human or social emancipation, but he supports the concepts based on his own normalization technology. His own limited emphasis on the discipline and the analysis of the prison reflected in all modern institutions has had implications in the comparisons between sport and the total institutions. He also believed that normalization technologies produce submitted bodies and some forms of sport and physical education pedagogy, of relationships of discipline or supervision that seem to function similar to total institutions. It would be quite difficult to study all the causes when some sports practices and the structures do not function in the manner of the total institutions. Equally difficult would be to observe both the limits and possibilities as well as forms of freedom and investment with power, of oppression and dispossession of power associated with different modes of political and social organization today.
Conclusion

We find that power is inevitably involved in all social processes. Giddens believes that if we admit this it means to admit that power and freedom are not enemies and that power is more than constraint, coercion. This recognition has been the cornerstone of the limits and possibilities of modern sport. While raising power to a privileged rank for action and discourse means something else. We have no facts and no meanings outside technologies of power, we have no values outside of power, but we have a few who feel that some meanings and values are more or less oppressive than others.

References

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Sažetak

Ključne riječi: kulturalna tradicija, vlast, Gramscianov model, totalne institucije, sport

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