Chapter 8
"Body Culture":
A Spiritual Echo of Olympia and the Fragmented Nature of Physical Education in the Modern-Day School in Greece

Konstantina Gongaki
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

"Body culture," a modern term in Western Europe, owes its philosophical content to ancient Greece and especially to Olympia. Altis turned out to be a creative place for presence and mixture of cultural elements of a set of people that through this exchange of ideas gradually conquered its first characteristics as a nation. Philosophically, the ideology that was cultivated formed the reflection of the deepest background position which the classical culture identified with coexistence of the opposites. The physical perfection of the Olympic model was reflected in art as the symmetry of Kouros, with a transcendent and spiritual dimension, idealizing the human body. The Olympic athlete reflects harmony and symmetry, the most complete form of the perfect citizen, the concept of moral beauty, as it is defined by Plato and Aristotle. But sport that is provided by the school in Greece today, instead of being an integral part of mainstream education, as it was in antiquity, represents a compressed and therefore inadequate education tool. Sport in Greek schools operates within an oppressive organization framework that is basically imposed because of competition. As a result, the final aim of sports "education" is to teach discipline and physical efficiency with the view to ultimately promoting an organized performance industry. But this obsession, about wanting to be first, in addition to being a source of personal stress, only achieves is to develop the student's personality with competition as the

prevailing principle. Moreover, this pursuit of personal affirmation through sports ranking depreciates personal value and the individual as a whole, whilst breeding insecurity and the need for personal recognition through unsafe means. What's more important, instead of being the best tool for bearing social life and reducing egocentric subjectivity, it inflates egocentrism and creates human beings susceptible to individualism. In this way, a type of "one-dimensional man" is cultivated, which Marcuse describes as the most dangerous of all because it destroys society's cohesion by deconstructing man's perception of coexistence.

INTRODUCTION

Body culture, a widely-used term in education and culture in modern Western Europe, owes its philosophical content to ancient Greece, and especially Olympia, as the Olympic athlete reflects *harmony* and *symmetry,* the most complete form of the perfect citizen, the concept of *moral beauty*, as defined by Plato and Aristotle.

Today, however, the state's fragmented treatment of physical education in school, especially in Greece, has isolated the physical aspect of the pupil, focusing on the intellectual aspect with rigid course curricula, and downgrading physical education to secondary or even tertiary importance. In doing so, the state deprives the pupil, and by extension the future athlete, from the harmony and symmetry that develops the wholeness of the psyche.

And when the state does put priority on physical education/sport, it does so with a view to competitive, or "championship" sport, with the objective of "producing" champions that will bring "glory" to the state that can be capitalized on, quite the opposite of the objective of the sporting competition in Ancient Greece, where the champion, or victor, brought a philosophical glory to the state.

"BODY CULTURE" AS A SPIRITUAL ECHO OF OLYMPIA

"Body culture", is a term of art in modern Western Europe. It owes its philosophical content, however, to ancient Greece and especially to Olympia. To appreciate its significance, one must appreciate the multidimensional role of the Olympic Games during the period of the establishment of the Games of Olympia as a social institution. Its development is strengthened mainly by two factors: the first factor is of an urban and political character as it coincides with the process of creation of the city-state; the second is of a religious and social character as it coincides with the completion of the Olympic pantheon (Finley & Pleket, 1976).

10 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/body-culture/209783

Related Content

Informing About CSR Initiatives on the Corporate Website or Staying Invisible?: SMEs in Controversial and Non-Controversial Industries
Andrea Mangani (2021). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 48-63).*
www.irma-international.org/article/informing-about-csr-initiatives-on-the-corporate-website-or-staying-invisible/270472

Profits or Employment: Priorities of Future Managers
Grzegorz Wojtkowiak (2018). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 18-31).*
www.irma-international.org/article/profits-or-employment/219266

Preparing Teachers in the Age of Equity and Inclusion
Kelly M. Anderson (2017). *Medical Education and Ethics: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1532-1554).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/preparing-teachers-in-the-age-of-equity-and-inclusion/167354

Intellectual Property Rights and the Protection of Africa's Traditional Knowledge
Benjamin Enahoro Assay (2017). *Media Law, Ethics, and Policy in the Digital Age (pp. 122-145).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/intellectual-property-rights-and-the-protection-of-africas-traditional-knowledge/175443

Green Innovation and Ethical Responsibility: Do They Improve Customer's Green Purchase Intentions?
Harsh Tullani, Raiswa Sahaand Richa Dahiya (2018). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility (pp. 35-52).*
www.irma-international.org/article/green-innovation-and-ethical-responsibility/211164