



## Media Narratives on the relation between body and olympic games in the 1890s and 1900s

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**ABSTRACT – Media Narratives on the relation between body and olympic games in the 1890s and 1900s** – The olympic games featured themselves to the inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro of the 1890s and 1900s as something beyond sport. Circus, theater and cinema were cultural spaces where those events could be enjoyed, as the newspapers of the time announced. The Olympic Games of the International Olympic Committee were also reported, however shared the attention of the newspapers readers of Rio with the unofficial olympic games, such as those held in Montevideo in 1907. Understood this context, I present in this article some questions concerning the ideal body in that period and its dialogue with the *novelty* represented by the olympic games.

Keywords: **Olympic Games. Media. Body. City. Rio de Janeiro.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Narratifs Médiatiques sur la relation entre le corps et les jeux olympiques dans les années 1890 et 1900** – Les jeux olympiques se présentées devenus l’habitant de Rio de Janeiro des années 1890 et 1900 comme quelque chose au-delà du sport. Cirque, théâtre et cinéma étaient espaces culturels où ces événements pourraient être assistés, comme les journaux annonçaient. Les Jeux Olympiques du Comité International Olympique ont également été publiés, mais rivalisaient à l’attention du lecteur de Rio avec des jeux non officiels, tels que ceux qui sont détenus à Montevideo en l’année 1907. Compris ce contexte, je présente dans cet article quelques questions concernant le corps idéal dans cette période et son dialogue avec la *nouveauté* représenté par les jeux olympiques.

Mots-clés: **Jeux Olympiques. Médias. Corps. Ville. Rio de Janeiro.**

**RESUMO – Narrativas Midiáticas sobre a relação entre corpo e jogos olímpicos nas décadas de 1890 e 1900** – Os jogos olímpicos apresentavam-se ao habitante do Rio de Janeiro das décadas de 1890 e 1900 como algo além do esporte. Circo, teatro e cinema eram espaços culturais onde aqueles eventos podiam ser assistidos, como os jornais da época anunciavam. As Olimpíadas do Comitê Olímpico Internacional também eram noticiadas, porém disputavam a atenção dos leitores cariocas com jogos não-oficiais, como os que foram realizados em Montevideú no ano de 1907. Entendido esse contexto, neste artigo são apresentadas algumas questões relativas ao ideal de corpo no referido período e seu diálogo com a *novidade* representada pelos jogos olímpicos.

Palavras-chave: **Jogos Olímpicos. Mídia. Corpo. Cidade. Rio de Janeiro.**

**Introduction: olympic games in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the turn of the century**

When thinking about olympic games, which is the first image that comes to your mind? If you have basic information on the intricacies of sports, you may have thought of some fact related to the mega event organized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC): an event of centenary history that happens every four years in different cities, with increasing costs and dimensions. What we presently have as one of the great events of the world sportive calendar began in the 19th century. At that time, a favorable historical context called the attention of the Europeans to the accomplishments of the Hellenistic Greece and, as a consequence, to the sportive competitions carried through by that civilization. The model of Olympics that Rio de Janeiro will host in 2016 was established by Pierre de Coubertin in 1896, with a clear inspiration in the ancient Greeks. In the 19th century, Coubertin was not the only one to propose olympic games. They were not even restricted to the strictly sportive events; olympic games could be watched in the circus or during the celebrations of a festive date, like the centennial of the press in Brazil in 1908. If we agree when claiming that the definition of sport has been modified since the 19th century, it is not that hard to guess that the olympic games have passed through a similar process of re-signification to the current days. The domain of the expression *olympic games* and the symbolic universe circumscribed in it was not under the hegemonic control of the IOC at least until the 1910s<sup>1</sup>.

On the other side of the ocean, Rio de Janeiro, the capital of a nation that had just abolished the slavery and had established the Republic by means of a military coup, presented propitious conditions for the absorption of the civilizatory ideas associated with the olympic games. With a relatively consolidated press, an urban elite influenced by European ideology and a sportive field in solid growth, Rio had the means of dissemination, a potential public and an interest in sports that were necessary to spread out the olympic ideal. Considering a glance at this past, I currently develop a research focusing on the analysis of the resources, approaches and strategies used by the Carioca<sup>2</sup> [established in Rio de Janeiro] media in the construction of narratives on the olympic games, from the 1890s until the 1930s.

For this article, I have used part of my empirical data, selecting only the journalistic texts that addressed, in some extent, aspects related to the ideal of body sought to be constructed during the 1890s and the 1900s. The promotion of a controlled leisure and the cult of healthy bodies, beyond the olympic values (pacifism, amateurism, fair play/courtesy), fascinated the journalists, being structuring argumentative axes of some articles.

It becomes necessary, at this initial moment, to establish a basic model to understand the olympic games<sup>3</sup>. I understand that such events operate not only by means of their sportive links, but they have cultural, political and economic reverberations, both for the countries that organized or participated in the olympic games and those that only received the news on their accomplishment. In this way, approaching the olympic games demands a knowledge of the broader context in which they were inserted.

In fact, in this comprehension exercise, I consider it interesting to think of the olympic games as one of the *webs of meaning* woven by man (Geertz, 2008). In order to interpret it, I search for the singularities that make the olympic games a succeeded cultural text, which, in its turn, leads us to reflect upon the space occupied by them in the daily life of the Carioca society of the investigated period. In order to examine this text and the social dialogue established, one of the possible ways is in the mediation process involved. The relation established between the media and the olympic games from its early moments is intrinsic - Coubertin himself called for the alliance with the press in his notorious speech in the Sorbonne<sup>4</sup>, in 1894, and the Olympic Charter<sup>5</sup> of 1930 already regulated the media coverage. In the analysis of the media discourses on the body in the olympic games, I not only consider the journalistic texts in themselves, but the conditions of production and reception of this content<sup>6</sup> as well.

The central role of the media in the course of the olympic history finds a distinguished example in the Brazilian case. The introduction of sports in the Carioca daily life happens in the 19th century already. In the turn of the century, different products coming from Europe, mainly France and England, were disembarked in Rio's harbor. They were items that supplied a city which was still deprived of its own industrial production and eager for habits (literature, fashion) said *civilized*. From Rio, the modern habits of consumption and leisure coming from Europe were spread through Brazil (Melo, 2001, p. 14).

In this context, it is not by chance that sports have arrived through this same harbor, either with students returning from Europe or immigrants from this same continent (Melo, 2001, p. 23). And, following the same way, we are able to understand the entrance of the Olympic Games, a cultural product that was European as well.

The documentary sources supporting this research are found, thus, in the Carioca newspapers from the mentioned period, chosen for their relevance for the Carioca society of that time and for the attention paid to the olympic games<sup>7</sup>. The daily newspapers of Rio de Janeiro were essential for the introduction and dissemination of modern sports and leisure in the city (Melo, 2012). As prominent actors in the social environment<sup>8</sup>, it can be said that the newspapers formed a certain olympic imagery, when formulating representations on the events narrated by them. In the analysis of the sources, I have been using a transdisciplinary approach, as I articulate media studies to the theoretical references of cultural history, thinking with authors like Peter Burke (2008; 2011), Roger Chartier (1991; 2010), Carlo Ginsburg (1989) and Richard Sennett (2010) on the place of the olympic games in the Brazilian culture<sup>9</sup>.

This paper is organized in two sections, trying to account for the body representations conveyed in the newspapers when addressing the olympic games, as well as to introduce the complex universe that surrounded such event in the turn of the century. In the first section, I explore the offers of leisure and entertainment for the Cariocas of the time. Next, I present the research data themselves, analyzing the ideas conveyed in the journalistic texts in the confluence of body, sports and olympic games. I make it clear that, since I am not an expert in studies of the body (its concepts and different approaches), the present text acquires a certain tone of essay in the discussion of the data on the relation between the ideals of body present in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century and the narratives on the olympic games, understood in a broad sense.

### **A Favorable Background: leisure options and sportive field in formation**

“By Rua do Ouvidor, its fierce rival in the preference of the public, the Avenida Central has intensified the pleasure of the *flânerie* or the *footing*, depending on the ideal of the pedestrian who could be influenced by the French or English model of the time” (Araújo,

1993, p. 327). This quotation, extracted from the book *Vocação do Prazer* [Pleasure Calling], establishes an opportune linking between the urbanistic history of Rio and the changes of leisure habits and entertainment in course in the city in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. Carioca people, of all social classes, started to occupy the city streets with their bodies; previously, it was over all the black people who inhabited this public space, for instance the *negros de ganho* [wage-earning slave]<sup>10</sup>. In order to understand the place that would be occupied by the olympic games, in parallel to the changes in the use of the body, we have to understand the field of amusement and entertainment<sup>11</sup> available to the Cariocas of the wealthier strata and the popular social classes.

The social scientist Georg Simmel (1987), in his classic text *A metrópole e a vida mental* [The Metropolis and Mental Life], wrote about the multiple sensorial stimulation that the modern European cities offered to their inhabitants. We are able to understand that part of this stimulation was proceeding from the increasing offer of amusement possibilities. They appear in a context in which free time starts to be as valued as the time dedicated to work. Simmel referred to the urban-industrial societies, where the accelerated rhythm of factory work was combined to the intensification of the emotions and the emergence of a period of time that would should be dedicated to the leisure options, offered by a rising industry of entertainment. Such leisure, which was the result of the working conquests and was associated with the time of non-work (Gomes, 2004), may be, in a critical perspective, associated with the interests of the ruling classes, and not to the mere benefit of the popular classes. This seeming paradox is more evident when we observe the etymologic origin of the words *ócio* [idleness] and work/business: “*otium* (*ócio*) and *nec-otium* (*non-ócio, that is, business*)” (Marcassa, 2004, p. 166, author emphasis).

The background described by Simmel for Europe can be applied, considering the cultural peculiarities, to the changes experienced by the inhabitant of the city of Rio de Janeiro in the beginning of the 20th century. From Portuguese Court seat in a monarchic, slave-owning and, in a certain sense, conservative regimen, Rio started to experience, from 1890, the population densification, the frenzy of the ruling capitalism, the contact with more liberal ideas and the arrival of the European cultural novelties. In short, the Carioca experienced

what would be a modern standard of life marked, amongst other things, by the use of the public space for non-utilitarian *stricto sensu* ends. According to Araújo (1993, p. 341): “The new opportunities of amusement are marked by modernity traces that attract spectacularly the population to consume entertainment in the street, as it occurred with the success of the cinema”.

With the Republic, an industry of attractions that was more organized, diversified and with aimed to the social niches industry of entertainment started to consolidate in Rio de Janeiro. The historian Roberto Moura (1995, p. 16) associates the industrialization in course and the constitution of a potential consumers public: “The urban middle classes grow and become sophisticated, favored by the state re-equipment and the industrial progress, for whom an entertainment industry would be assembled with priority.” At the end of the 19th century, Rio de Janeiro already had an amusement market providing a wide range of leisure options both for the elites and the popular classes.

The historian Rosa Maria Barboza de Araújo (1993, p. 328-371) lists some of these entertaining activities: family strolls downtown, mainly along Avenida Central, Rua do Ouvidor and Rua do Passeio; visits to the Vila Isabel Zoo, to Quinta da Boa Vista [a municipal park], to the Governador island, to Paquetá island; outdoor parties; family parties; attendance to national civic rites, as the Day of the Nation; participation in clubs, associations, charity balls, beneficent parties and dancing meetings; outdoors entertainment - beach and sea baths, carnival, June parties, neighborhood samba group, cinema and cafeterias; theatre and circus, to attend to circus and theatre companies, to *vaudeville*, lyrical singing and opera.

The urban reform promoted by Pereira Passos in the beginning of the 20th century stimulated the use of the public space, mainly with the recently inaugurated Avenida Central. “The transformed city invited the people to have fun” (Araújo, 1993, p. 384). At the same time, the relationship of the Carioca with the body and the physical activity was modified: “To educate the body and to discipline habits meant to integrate the country to the modern and civilized world profile” (Araújo, 1993, p. 312). It was a major transformation, mainly if we consider that the main previous reference was the aversion for any use of the body that would be close to the one of the work (Lessa, 2000, p. 90; Melo, 2001, p.

206). The formation of a new imagery referring to the corporal-sportive practices counted with the precious support of the Carioca families:

The image of the value of sports and physical strength established an evolution in the family habits, modifying the mentality in relation to the body culture. For man, showing the thorax and the legs when not bathing in the ocean did not seem vulgar and indecent anymore. The ideal of light skin and frail muscles was exchanged by the envy of the dockworkers' body, with thick biceps and suntanned skin (Araújo, 1993, p. 313).

The sport was no less important in this list of new entertainment. It is possible to conclude, from Melo (2005) considerations, that, in the end of the 19th century, there was a sportive field in advanced expansion process in Rio de Janeiro. The historian lists the available varieties of sports at the time: bullfights, cockfighting, skating, boxing, running/athletic running, sea bath, bicycle racing, swimming, dog and pigeon racing, *jogo do bicho* (illegal betting mode), cricket, horse racing and rowing. Besides these activities, Araújo (1993, p. 314-317) lists a few others, present also in the beginning of the 20th century: Greco-Roman wrestling (including the women's one), nautical races, kayaking, aviation, krockey, pin game, ping pong, biking, car racing, soccer, horse riding, fencing, bicycle racing. It is in this favorable background, despite suffering a strong competition that the olympic games should penetrate and search for their space.

If there are doubts regarding the agents responsible for the arrival of the sport in Rio de Janeiro, it seems clear to me that the media was the great responsible for its dissemination. As the historian Victor Andrade de Melo claims (2001, p. 189), “[...] in the final decade of the 19th century, sports already occupied a considerable, gradually increasing space in the Rio de Janeiro press”. Sports expanded through several social fields, serving as the theme for advertisements published in the newspapers (Melo, 2001, p. 190) and of subject for writers as Machado de Assis and João do Rio. This way, when inquiring whether the media would be cause or consequence of the sports dissemination in Rio de Janeiro, Melo (2012) claims that, in fact, a movement of mutual interweaving occurs, that is, the media is cause and consequence!

The strong habit of betting was coupled with the fondness for entertainment and sports, reaching its peak in the turn of the century.

At that moment, the “[...] we had the impression that everybody bet, starting with the fathers, who were entertained with betting inside and outside of the house” (Araújo, 1993, p. 318). One of the possible explanations from Melo (2001, p. 163) for this intensification of the interest for gambling games is found in the Brazilian insertion in the context of the international capitalism: “The final trimester of the 19th century is marked by a great entrance of capital of international origin (mainly French and English), for the valuation of luxury ostentation, for the unjustified fondness of spending money”. The penetration of gambling and betting in all social classes was such that the fact bothered the mayor Pereira Passos and his civilizatory ideology for the city of Rio: “I have tried to put an end to the plague of lottery tickets street vendors who, everywhere, pursued the population, bothering it with terrible shouting and giving to the city the aspect of a casino” (Passos *apud* Benchimol, 1992, p. 278). Notwithstanding, betting associated with sports would be less fought and even consented (Araújo, 1993, p. 318). The relation between gambling games and olympic games was compared by the journalists of the analyzed newspapers, sometimes with arguments favoring to the former, other times to the latter.

Presented the concept of (modern) leisure and the entertainment to the Carioca in the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s, I hope I have cleared the conditions of possibility for the support to the consumption and the exercise of olympic games in the city of Rio de Janeiro. One possible way for us to interpret the practice and the attendance to the olympic games seems to me to be their modern and European status which, added to the qualities of healthy activity for the citizens in general, beneficial to the private initiative and to the State social control, made it useful to the recently established Brazilian Republic. The journalistic narratives on the olympic games also expressed, underground, a debate in course on the uses of the body, as we will see next.

### **The Body in the Journalistic Narratives on Olympic Games**

Now I present some articles on the olympic games that are related to the physical exercise and to the body. I reaffirm that the notion of olympic games and the Olympics between the decades of 1890 and 1900 was quite broad. With this, we could witness olympic games being accomplished in the circus<sup>12</sup>, as a theme for theatre



plays<sup>13</sup>, being broadcasted in cinematographic films (scenes filmed in IOC Olympics)<sup>14</sup>, besides diverse uses in the daily vocabulary<sup>15</sup>.

The first article that I selected is from *O Paiz* from June 10, 1892. Entitled *A educação physica* [Physical education], the text, signed by Ignotus, associated the practice of regular physical activities with the progress of the nation. Having the Ancient Greece as a model of civilization, the text reiterated that the ruled physical exercise was a path for the entrance in modernity: “In order a race is marked in history as a powerful factor of civilization and progress [...] it is necessary that the physical education of man is the object of serious concerns and intense care”<sup>16</sup> (*O Paiz*, Jun. 10, 1892, p. 1). It is evident that the encouragement to physical practice aimed to modify the standard of body valued until then, associating this change with the improvement of our race and the alignment with the Western nations (in contrast with the East). Such transformation, however, faced resistance, according to the playful reaction aimed towards those who dedicated to the practice of gymnastics, as it can be read in the excerpt below.

In case they [the people] do not provide physical education to their children, *if they do not prepare strong, healthy, brave young men*, they will gradually fall into the abjection of the Eastern peoples, buried in slavery and misery [...]. What, however, cannot go on, without dangerous consequences for the future fate of this people, is our complete indifference for the physical education of the race. *Here this major subject is not only disregarded, but also those who those who practice the gymnastic hygienic exercises are mocked, subjected to the laughter from the public [...]* The young men of Rio de Janeiro, with the exception of a few, do not have muscular force (*O Paiz*, Jun. 10, 1892, my emphasis).

Another aspect to be problematized with this article is the relation between progress and civilization, above used in a complementary way, but that were under tension in the beginning of the Republican regimen (Azevedo, 2003). While, during the Monarchy, the ideal of civilization was the main engine of the public policies, in the Republic the progress and the material development surpass it and start to guide the urban improvements. Modernity brought in its core an “imagery based on reason and progress” (Tacussel, 2006, p. 7). It is in this sense, for instance, that Pereira Passos and Rodrigues Alves initiated Rio’s urban reform process between 1902 and 1906. Both sought to give to Rio a cosmopolitan image and, to Brazil, a progressive aura, in opposi-

tion to the outdated and traditional Monarchic period. Understanding how the scale hangs between civilization and progress in the history of Rio de Janeiro city is also reflected in the perception of the different ways of body use.

Thus, an example of habit that should be overcome were gambling games and betting, considered as symbols of the archaism still ruling in the daily life of the city. The opinion article *O Jogo* [Betting], published in the cover of *Gazeta de Notícias* (Apr. 07, 1898), developed a severe criticism to the *jogo do bicho*, seen as the “source of so many evil for the people”<sup>17</sup>. The habit was described as follows: “Presently, in our days, in the docks, the parks, the streets, at home, in the repair shop and even in the church, people bet on the snake, the cat, the peacock, the chicken etc., at the expenses of sweat from hard work and the savings of the week”. In contrast to a habit considered negative, the journalist wrote an extensive compliment to the olympic games of the Antiquity: “They were not mere pastime games, but *games that strengthened the body*, formed the spirit and made valiant soldiers, good citizens and literate men” (my emphasis). The utilitarian character of this entertainment differentiated it from the other one, which was only vice. Furthermore, the practice of olympic games would forge an individual with a more muscular physic, what was in line with the new representations of corporal health<sup>18</sup>. It is also evident that, in his spare time, this individual would still be at the service of the work and the State, as the olympic games would come “[...] to entertain the people and, at the same time, train them in the good arts, which served to the ends of the civil society” (*Gazeta de Notícias*, Apr. 07, 1898, p. 1).

As I have already mentioned elsewhere, the “[...] ideal of light skin and fragile muscles was changed for the envy for the physic of the dockworkers, with thick biceps and suntanned skin” (Araújo, 1993, p. 313). This change in the paradigm of perfect body was, in general, supported by the journalistic texts. In this sense, two articles published in *Gazeta de Notícias* deserve a detailed analysis.

The first one, entitled *Absurdo verosimil*, pointed to the healthy body of the (at the time) president of Minas Gerais state: “It is not perfect, but in his look it can be felt that he is calling attention to the shape of his clothes and, above all, to his body, marked in the cassimere, because Mr. Silviano Brandão believes that he has olympic muscles” (Apr. 25, 1901, p. 3). This way, it can be noticed how, even in a politician, the contours of a body not only healthy, but

sturdy, were highlighted. The adjective “olympic” clarifies the source of Silviano Brandão’s good shape to the readers of the newspaper.

The second article, a chronicle, was published in the section *O Momento Litterario* [The Literary Moment] in April 24, 1905. Signed by the illustrious chronicler João do Rio, it included remarks concerning the poet Alberto Ramos, whose name, by the way, was the title of article. After a brief introduction to the poet and his Nietzschean influence, a reply from Ramos himself followed, cited between quotations marks by João do Rio in his text. Ramos ideas were related to the selection of the most apt individuals and to a sort of national complex of *underdogs*; underlying his criticism to the present time, there is a nostalgic look towards the distant past and some hope in a more prosperous future. The nostalgia and the idealization are directed towards the ancient Greeks, remaining to modernity the physical decadence and the degeneration. I highlight the straight relation established by the poet between the culture of a physically healthy body and the social prosperity, which would produce “a robust and healthy generation, much different from ours, better than ours”. The concept of civilization<sup>19</sup>, as well as the progress one, is also mentioned again.

The great times of civilization of the peoples are characterized by the integral and harmonious rise of the physical culture. Before the Christian dogma had perverted the notion of life, [...] body health was equal to the spirit health. The olympics were the basis of the Greek chronology, that is, the glorification of force and intelligence. The purest monuments of the human gender are the apotheosis of force and health. The periods of decadence, on the opposite, are characterized by the physical depression of the individual [...] The *decadent, physically atrophied societies*, like ours, are unable to produce the higher kind of the species, the *creator*, the artist [...] It is necessary that we restore, as an irreducible formula, the *'mens sana in corpore sana'*; yet: it is necessary that we assign a practical application by the creation of highly rigorous sanitary measures. [...] But isn't there anybody anywhere who will invent the artificial fecundation? A great subject for your next questionnaire, dear Mr. João do Rio; more useful, more current and definitely more productive... (*Gazeta de Notícias*, Apr. 24, 1905, p. 1, my emphasis).

João do Rio, in the end of his chronicle, provides a conclusive reply to Alberto Ramos, concerning the state of the sportive field at that moment: “Perhaps Mr. Alberto Ramos is quite right. We already are already happily climbing the mountain. The regatta clubs begin

the transformation...” Both, Ramos and João do Rio, strengthen the place of the physical activity in the quotidian of the Carioca metropolis; the first one, highlighting the need to form individuals following the model of the ancient Greeks, while the second one reminds that such enterprise was already ongoing, with the introduction of rowing by means of the Carioca clubs.

After successive mentions to the Ancient Greece, a question is interposed to the presentation of data: to which imaginary the newspapers referred? Several games honoring the most varied gods occurred in Greece in the Hellenic period, the social and political epicenter of the Antiquity. Pitic, Nemei, Isthmus, Panatheneans, Heran and Funeral games were some of them. It is assumed that the olympic games have originated from the Funeral games, the oldest among them all. Accomplished in honor of Zeus, these games first started, according to the records, in 776 B.C. (Godoy, 2001; Yalouris, 2004). Richard Sennett (2010, p. 91) points to the important place assumed by the body in the Greek Antiquity when claiming that the exhibited body was the “greatest work of art of the city”<sup>20</sup>. More than that, the “Greek” body was disrobed in the olympic competitions and this bareness was associated with civility<sup>21</sup>, not to primitivism, as it was in the Middle and the Modern Age. “The Athenian democracy gave to the freedom of thinking the same emphasis assigned to the bareness.” (Sennett, 2010, p. 30). While the academies were places where the Greeks exercised the intellect, they developed their bodies in the gyms (Sennett, 2010, p. 45). With the advance of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the olympic games came to be seen as pagan and were interrupted in 393 A.D., after 1,200 years of uninterrupted accomplishment. Christianity, due to its more spiritual than body values, breaks with the ideals of perfect body, which were marking both in the Greek and in the Roman society (Sennett, 2010). The inexistence of organized sports in Middle Age results from this too, as Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong (2012) mention. The modern olympic movement, to which the newspapers make reference, is taken, thus, as ideology, to the Antiquity, not to the Middle Age.

Back to the repercussions of the olympism in the Carioca press, I reiterate that the acceptance in new ways of use of the body was not unanimous among the journalists of the 1890s and 1900s<sup>22</sup>. When presenting critically a new habit of the Carioca - the domain of firearms and sportive shooting<sup>23</sup> - an article of opinion, published

in the section *Três Tiras* of *O Paiz*, also condemned the introduction of another sport. The text refers to a change that would be in course, marked by the abandonment of poetry in favor of the Greco-Roman wrestling. The derogatory tone when referring to the use of the body in physical combats demonstrates how strong resistance is interposed to the acceptance of a new cultural code:

And this phenomenal man, instead of writing rondels and sonnets, instead of singing the eyes and other uniquenesses of the girl of his dreams, decides to exercise this more valued and more fashionable thing: jumping in the upholstered arena of a music hall; fighting, like a mastodon against a megatherium, grabbing the opponent by the waist and knocking over a famous champion of the such Greco-Roman wrestling (*O Paiz*, Oct. 13, 1909, p. 2, text emphasis).

Great sportive events called olympic games were accomplished in the 1900s in Athens (1906) and Montevideo (1907). In relation to the first one, carried through in 1906, there are doubts about its official character and there is an extensive debate between the IOC and the olympism researchers on the status of the event. Concerning to Montevideo, 1907, I did not find sources in the academic literature addressing this event. In spite of this relative lack of information, both games reverberated in the Carioca press of the time<sup>24</sup>. Amongst these journalistic narratives, I highlight an interesting article of opinion published in *Gazeta de Notícias* in February 24, 1907. Trying to refresh the memory of the readers on the ancient Greeks and to strengthen some nostalgia related to this idealized past, the games of the Antiquity were compared with the two referred modern events. What this comparison implicitly makes clear is the level of relevance assigned to the two competitions, not organized by the International Olympic Committee<sup>25</sup>. The chronicler referred to the decadence of the modern man and the impossibility of recreating the greatness of Ancient Greece in our time, when “life is an infernal complication” and there is no time to “dedicate ten hours a day for physical exercise”. The pessimistic and hyperbolic prognoses of the author, partially reproduced next, pointed to the only possible way out: the sportive practice. Only the sports could restrain the evolution, in the Lamarckian sense, foreseen by the author. This leads us to the change in the perfect body ideal that was developing in the Carioca imaginary in the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century, when muscular and suntanned bodies came to be valued as necessary items for the inhabitants this new modern city:

The men of the year 3000 will be grumpy and very ugly midgets, having short legs, thin like toothpicks, and brains as huge as watermelons... But sports always will delay the irremediable catastrophe a little. And the duty of those who live is to try preserving life by all means. Let's clap our hands, therefore, to the craze of sports, - refraining only from the perverse sports, which can only be exerted with sacrifice of life of the other animals, our lower brothers. If, with the exercise of sports we want to preserve our individual life and the life of our species, - let us not forget that the other animals and the other species also must have the right to live! (*Gazeta de Notícias*, Feb. 24, 1907, p. 3).

In face of the closing of the London Olympics, in 1908, *Jornal do Brasil* published in September 7 of that year an extensive article of two columns on the conclusion of the event and providing a list with the name of the winning athletes in all the sports and the time achieved by them. In the text, the picture of the sportsman<sup>26</sup> collaborated for the formation of an image favorable to the Games, as they inspired more individuals to adopt a healthy life behavior, also serving as a model for the exercise of the good citizenship. These arguments, as already seen, circulated in other journalistic texts as well. Thus, the mutually beneficial relation between the games and the press in the period studied here can be inferred, since the former seemed to meet the intentions of the latter, interested in stimulating the practice of sports and, as a consequence, to extend the consumer public of sportive contents. On the other hand, the mentioned text differentiated a use of the body with profit attainment (professionalism) of the one that was practiced by the olympic athletes, for whom sports were not a profession (amateurs):

[...] Two thousand athletes and 20 nations attended to fight without weapons and in peace and, even more, there were no winners, nor losers, because there are none of them in the sports. Certainly somebody will have criticized these fights, because it does not represent any benefits to the world that the 100 meters are run in 10  $\frac{4}{5}$ "[...] but the same criticism is baseless, when considering these 2,000 athletes as the best of thousands and thousands of other ones who practice athletics, for the improvement of their organs and for the aesthetic beauty of their bodies [...] In the stadium, 2,000 young people represented the affection of the human gender for physical exercises. The ultimate, the most irrefutable proof is that among all these youngsters, there was any one who made of his skill or dexterity a profession. [...] Sports not only exercise the muscles, they also educate the intelligence and improve the character [...]

The sportsman is, in general, a man endowed with character, always judicious and respectful. Do we want to awake the youth of the urban centers? Let's inspire in them the taste for the outdoor games and they necessarily will practice them with much good will. This way we will have a strong youth, able to face life with courage and resignation. And this is what we saw in London (*Jornal do Brasil*, Sept. 07, 1908, p. 12, newspaper emphasis).

From the journalistic excerpts above presented, the presence of a wider debate in the Carioca society on the uses of the body and its culturally accepted representations in the 1890s and 1900s<sup>27</sup> can be inferred. The olympic games, a still incipient idea in Brazil, had a part in this dispute, exemplifying arguments often in favor of the physical practice.

### Final Remarks

In this paper, it was questioned that the formation of a pro-olympism mentality (education of the body and contact with the ideas) was already in progress in the 1890s and 1900s, thanks in a great extent to the dissemination by the press. The arrival of the initial news on the games probably awakened the curiosity of the Cariocas, producing conflicting opinions on the introduction of these new practices of entertainment and leisure, since we already possessed a repertoire of our own for the use of free time.

The information present in the journalistic texts provides us evidence of socially valued ways of use of the body. The practice of the so-called olympic games was related to the arrival of the sports and the novelty represented by their practice. Until then, the Carioca leisure was not that related to the physical effort, what increases with the several sportive modalities arriving to Rio de Janeiro coming from Europe.

A city intended to be modern, like Rio, also seemed to need bodies that would fit to a certain standard typical of modernity. A model like this imported from Europe tended to exhort to the constitution of an athletic body, possibly with muscles. This is evident in the majority of the articles that establish a relation between the olympic games, the physical practice and the representations of the body.

The fact that the olympic games came from Europe was an additional element that was favorable to them: an European product,

similar to so many other tangible objects of consumption that arrived to the Rio harbor at that time. The other habits already enrooted in the Carioca culture came to be archaic, primitive and degrading. Let's take betting as an example, which could become a vice, degenerating the character, as claimed by its detractors. Not exercising, on its turn, would weaken the body, what was not acceptable in this new corporal order.

The Carioca reader was aware of the transformations in the ideal of perfect body ruling in Europe. The journalistic narratives activated all the time the unequivocal relation between the practice of olympic sports and the formation of a more robust, militarily stronger and apt to achieve sportive performances race that enhance the national image. A renaissance of the physical culture, previously placed in second plan in face of the culture of the intellect, was often mentioned.

Thus, a change in the paradigm of perfect body was in course. At that moment, to civilize and to improve the *Brazilian race* were two arguments that were highly valued by the Carioca press. To forge a body appropriate to these purposes started to be the new priority raised by the journalistic script. In the following decade, in face of the imminent Brazilian participation in the Olympic Games, the sportive performance also entered into the scene as a result of the individual physical formation.

Certainly, due to the reduced number of articles, I cannot develop in depth and claim with precision how the media representations of the bodies impacted on the Carioca society, nor even which was the role of the olympic games in this change of imaginary. The emergence of mentions to the body in journalistic texts linked with the olympic games legitimizes, however, the thematic aspects considered here.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the chosen journalistic texts, deriving from my PhD research in course, help to compose a bigger picture concerning to physical practice and the representations/regulations of the body conveyed in the media. These themes are quite topical, I must say. They are aspects that we discuss daily today and that, it seems reasonable to suggest, also were in the agenda in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.



## Notes

1 On the circulation of the olympic games in the circus, the theatre and the cinema during the 1890s and the 1900s, see Amaro and Helal (2015). On the coverage of the IOC Olympics in the same period, see Amaro (2015).

2 N. T.: Carioca is a term used to designate an individual, an institution, an entity or a custom that is native of or established in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

3 In order to deal with the presence of sources that referred both to the Games that we can define as *official*, as they are organized by the IOC, and the *non-official* ones, as they were not organized by IOC not were not acknowledged by the utmost institution of the world olympic sports, I decided to adopt a small distinction in the spelling of both. Thus, whenever I use Olympic Games with capital letters I am referring to the *official* events, while, for the *non-official* ones, I adopt the spelling in lowercase letters (olympic games), which also is applied to the moments when I deal with both, *official* and *non-official* games.

4 He said that: “The advocates of the old school were enraged when they saw us accomplishing our meetings in the heart of the Sorbonne: they sensed that we were rebellious and that we would end up knocking down the building of their decayed philosophy. It is true, gentlemen; we are rebellious and this is why the press, that always supported the beneficent revolutions, understood and helped us - for what, by the way, I am thankful with all of my heart” (Olympic Review, 1969, p. 394, author translation).

5 In general, it can be said that the Charter addresses the principles of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Movement. Since its first edition, in 1908, the document has been continuously updated.

6 For the understanding of this perspective, I am me based on Iser (2013), Chartier (2010, p. 36) and Charaudeau (2007, p. 28).

7 Based on this criterion, the research *corpus* comprises five newspapers and one magazine (name of newspaper/period available for consultation): *Gazetta de Notícias* (1875 to 1956); *O Paiz* (1884 to 1934); *Jornal do Brasil* (1891 to 2012); *Correio da Manhã* (1901 to 1974); *Gazeta da Tarde* (1880 to 1901); *Revista da Semana* (1900 to 1950). The consultation to these sources was carried through the on line site of the National Library Digital Newspapers and Journals Library, by searching for five terms: “jogos olympicos”/“jogos olímpicos” [olympic games], “olympiadas”/“olimpíadas” [olympics], olympíada”/“olimpíada” [olympiad], “Coubertin” and “jogos gregos” [Greek games].

8 Between 1890 and 1909, newspapers and magazines had the primacy in the coverage of the first Olympic Games. The printed media was followed by the introduction of other communication means in the first half of the 20th century: in 1900, cinema is born; in 1928, radio (experimentally); and, in 1936, television. Concerning this, see Slater (1998) and Peña and Hernández (2014).

9 The newspapers accomplished effectively the association of their narratives with the facts and ideas they convey. For the cultural history, images and texts are “ways of representation of the world that constitute the imagery” (Pesavento, 2012, p. 86). It can be concluded

from this that the formation of an imagery enrooted in the olympic games is related to the narratives produced by the press from texts and images.

10 In this sense, see Karasch (2000) and Silva (1988).

11 My understanding of “field” finds its inspiration in the theoretical development proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (see, for instance, 2004a and 2004b) for such concept.

12 Several company presented their spectacles of olympic games in different theatres of the city. I mention a few: *Grande Companhia Equestre e de Novidade* (*Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 18, 1907), *Família Jacopi* (*Gazeta de Notícias*, Oct. 13, 1896, p. 6) and *Companhia Silbon* (*O Paiz*, Apr. 24, 1890, p. 6), in Theatro S. Pedro de Alcantara; *Os 4 Fortys*, in the Theatro Maison Moderne (*Correio da Manhã*, Jun. 22, 1903, p. 6; *Gazeta de Notícias*, Jul. 17, 1906, p. 8; Jul. 18, 1906, p. 8; Jul. 19, 1906, p. 8); *Troupe Baltus*, in the Casino (*Correio da Manhã*, Jan. 28, 1903, p. 6; *O Paiz*, 26 Jan., 1903, p. 4).

13 In the decade of 1900-1910, *O Paiz* published in its column *O Theatro na Grécia* [Theatre in Greece] a play with an olympic theme, on which we read that: “The ‘Corrida de Marathon’, also represented by the Nova Scena company, is a *bella revista*, of Moraitini, inspired by the most recent olympic games: it is skillfully written and contains several scenes that are quite funny” (Jun. 11, 1907, p. 3).

14 The screens of the Cinematógrafo Parisiense showed images of the Paris Games, according to the column *Diversões* of *Jornal do Brasil* (Aug. 28, 1908, p. 16; Aug. 31, 1908, p. 1; Oct. 10, 1908, p. 1; Oct. 12, 1908, p. 1) and in *Echos & Factos* of *O Paiz* (Aug. 28, 1908, p. 1).

15 “Olympic games” and “olympics” were also present in journalistic notes and articles with varied uses, normally associated to the Greek games of the antiquity, but also as the name of animals and synonymous for greatness, sportive competitions and tricks, amongst others.

16 This and the other quotations extracted from the journalistic material investigated here reproduce with precision the spelling of the words used at the time [in Portuguese]. I chose to preserve these peculiarities in the use of the Portuguese language in respect to the original texts and their authors, as well as to convey to the reader the ambience from where (time and space) these narratives were extracted.

17 The same newspaper, however, published in the column *A Semana*, in March 17, 1895, an article whose content demonstrated fondness for the *jogo do bicho* [an illegal betting mode in which each number is represented by an animal], in detriment to the olympic games. The text considered the *jogo do bicho* as a typically national custom and addressed the recreation of the Ancient Games with a mockery tone, criticizing the physical effort and the impossibility of betting. I quote: “The spectacle is scheduled for April of 1896. There are neither donkeys nor horses there; there are only men and men. Running, wrestling, gymnastics, nautical races, swimming, athletic games, *everything that can tire a man* without any advantage for the spectators, because there is no betting. [...] It seems that there is an idea of repeating such games in Paris, in the end of the century, and in the United States in 1904. If it happens, good bye, America! It would not have been worthy discovering it four centuries ago to make it go backwards twenty centuries. *We hope they*

*don't remember us. Let's stay with the donkeys and their gifts* (*Gazeta de Notícias*, Mar. 17, 1895, p. 1, author emphasis).

18 It must not be forgotten that Pereira Passos' urban reform also had amongst its objectives the sanitation of the city, which suffered frequent epidemics. The valuation of the care with the body, in this context, was in accordance with the public policies for the population health.

19 According to the historian Andres Nunes de Azevedo (2003, p. 30), a possible meaning for the term civilization is the following one: "The term 'civilization' expresses the conscience that the West has of itself. Its way to self-perceive itself, to understand itself as a privileged agent of a historical development that would lead to a world always better, governed by the reason and its expansion movement. The idea of movement is characteristic to the idea of civilization".

20 Among the Greeks, the belief in the beautiful kindness was valid (Spivey, 2012, p. 67), that is, the physical beauty as a mirror of an individual's moral virtues. The appearance acted as a form of social distinction of the character, which, in some extent, still operates today, in the contemporary society.

21 This "social rule" did not apply to the women, who did not circulate naked in the public space (Sennett, 2010, p. 32).

22 The tensions and debates around an ideal of body establish the possibility of existence of the different and, therefore, act, in my opinion, positively on the imaginary under construction. The unanimous and uncritical agreement would result in a dangerous background described by Sennett (2010, p. 22): "Ideal images of the human body lead to the mutual repression and to the insensitiveness, especially among those whose bodies are different and away from the standard".

23 The criticism was made against the supposed Greek inspiration of the practice: "The Greek and Roman games are mentioned, thus, to prove that this is distinct and admirable, that this is healthy and helpful [...] And it is claimed, thus, that knowing how to shoot with precision and to use a firearm with expertise is pretty and magnificent" (*O Paiz*, Oct. 13, 1909, p. 2). The curious aspect in this dispute is the fact that our first gold medal in Olympic Games came from shooting with Guilherme Paraense in 1920.

24 Montevideo-1907 generated greater repercussion in the Carioca newspapers than the event in Athens-1906. Due to geographic reasons, which made the arrival of news easier, or to the presence of Brazilian athletes, the olympic games of Montevideo called more the attention of the media than the Olympic International Committee Games accomplished in the 1890's and the 1900's.

25 Even though the Athens-1906 games have the presence of IOC representatives in the audience of the competitions, they are not present in the Olympics time line available in the site of the institution. In the Montevideo games, as far as we know, no IOC member was present.

26 It is important to observe the distinction that was established at the time between *athlete* and *sportsman*. Melo clarifies that: "It was only in the 20th century that the term

'athlete' started to currently designate those involved with sportive modalities [...] For many years, those involved with such practices (either as managers of clubs, assiduous public or practitioner) were known as *sportsman*" (Melo, 2001, p. 206-207, author emphasis). In the 19th century, the meanings assigned to the word "athlete" were different: "Dictionaries of that time record the meaning of fighter and warrior, but normally the term was used to assign the individual who was an implacable questioner [...] They had no link with the sportive practice and/or physical activities" (Melo, 2001, p. 206).

27 It is important to highlight also that the use of the body in sports has a place of prominence in the social studies of soccer. Gilberto Freyre, in his article *Football Mulato* (1938), inaugurated a line of research dedicated to investigating the supposed relation between uses of the body that are peculiar to the Brazilians (in dance, in music) and the formation of exceptionally good soccer players.

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