

TOWARDS A (STILL) CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT IN THE AMERICAS: THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS AND SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATIONS

*POR UMA SOCIOLOGIA (AINDA) CRÍTICA DO ESPORTE NAS AMÉRICAS:
O PAPEL DOS INTELLECTUAIS E DAS ASSOCIAÇÕES CIENTÍFICAS*

*POR UNA SOCIOLOGÍA (AÚN) CRÍTICA DEL DEPORTE EN LAS AMÉRICAS: EL
PAPEL DE LOS INTELLECTUALES Y DE LAS ASOCIACIONES CIENTÍFICAS*

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Keywords

Sport.
Intellectuals.
Habermas.
Bauman.

Abstract: This paper is a reflection on the public role of intellectuals. It describes the stances of two renowned contemporary thinkers: Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman. It looks into the crisis of the legislator-type intellectual discourse and how it has affected the public role of Philosophy and Sociology – here represented by those two thinkers respectively. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of intellectuals studying sport and its institutions.

Palavras-chave

Esportes.
Intelectuais.
Habermas.
Bauman.

Resumo: Este artigo reflete sobre o papel público dos intelectuais. Descreve, para tanto, a posição de dois renomados pensadores da atualidade: Jürgen Habermas e Zygmunt Bauman. Investiga a crise do discurso intelectual de caráter legislador e suas repercussões no papel público da Filosofia e da Sociologia, disciplinas que, respectivamente, esses autores representam. Conclui com implicações para a função pública dos intelectuais que estudam o esporte e suas instituições.

Palabras clave

Deportes.
Intelectuales.
Habermas.
Bauman

Resumen: Este artículo reflexiona sobre el papel público de los intelectuales. Describe, para esto, la posición de dos reconocidos pensadores de la actualidad: Jürgen Habermas y Zygmunt Bauman. Investiga la crisis del discurso intelectual de carácter legislador y sus repercusiones en el papel público de la Filosofía y de la Sociología, disciplinas que esos autores, respectivamente, representan. Concluye con implicaciones para la función pública de los intelectuales que estudian el deporte y sus instituciones.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sociology of Sport is incipient in Brazil. Moreover, if we consider Sociology's lifetime, Sociology of Sport is new in the world. In its more systematic and intense form, it did not exist until the 1960s (RIGAUER, 1982; SOUZA; MARCHI, 2010). Alabarces (1998) says that Latin American Social Sciences only started to produce explanatory and interpretative discourses about sport that were endorsed by the scientific community in the last third of the past century, though modern sport had already gained social visibility in the late nineteenth century.

A peculiar aspect of its development in Brazil is that it was based not only on sociology itself, but also on the field of Physical Education. Souza and Marchi (2010) found three development pathways for Sociology of Sports in our country: a) sociology of football or, in other words, socio-anthropological studies of football;¹ **b) critical theory of sport, professed by Physical Education authors from 1980 on;**² c) the history of sports practices. We use this analysis/classification to make an initial delimitation of our essay, namely, to take the second pathway found by the authors as the references and focus of our reflection. This development of Sociology of Sport has its particularity: it was primarily a tool to criticize the sporting phenomenon for teaching purposes.

These observations are important when considering Michael Burawoy's manifesto, which inspired the call for this dossier for stressing the need to consider the context in which the concept of Public sociology was coined. According to Burawoy (2006, p. 36):

The term "public sociology" is an American invention. If, in other countries, it is the essence of sociology, for us it is but a part of our discipline, and a small one at that. Indeed, for some U.S. sociologists it does not belong in our discipline at all. When I travel to South Africa, however, to talk about public sociology—and this would be true of many countries in the world—my audiences look at me nonplussed. What else could sociology be, if not an engagement with diverse publics about public issues?

The development of Sociology of Sport in Brazil, which we have taken as a reference, has been influenced by the interests of a professional field – Physical Education – therefore, by a specific public. The discipline is established when sociological analyzes and interpretations of sport start to be made by intellectuals with specific training in Physical Education, who sought to equip themselves with sociological or social-philosophical concepts and theories.

Considering this development and Burawoy's (2006) warning mentioned above, it would not seem appropriate to transfer his classification (Professional Sociology, Political Sociology, Critical Sociology and Public Sociology) immediately to the case of Sociology in Brazil and much less to that pathway of the incipient Brazilian Sociology of Sport established in the field of Physical Education.

In its inception during the 1980s, the critical character (Critical or Public Sociology according to Burawoy's classification) of that pathway taken by Sociology of Sport in Brazil was theoretically oriented toward versions of Marxism, for instance, Jean Marie Brohm's (1978) Freudian-Marxism initially publicized in Brazil by Cavalcanti (1980, 1984) or Marxism circulating in the Educational debate, especially in the work of Saviani (1983). Well, the aspect of that the-

¹ In Brazil, more specifically regarding football, Social Sciences began to focus on the subject in the late 1970s. But it was not until the 1990s that a greater number of works began to be published, as shown by Lopes (1998).

² In this regard, we suggest Torri and Vaz (2006).

oretical stance that supports the version of Critical Sociology of Sport we elected as the focus of this paper is related to criteria of criticality, their relationships and their consequences for what Burawoy (2006) now calls Public Sociology, i. e., the relations of (Sociology's) intellectuals and their production to the different publics or to what is "public" in the broad sense of the term. One of the problem areas for intellectuals' interventions in social reality – whether they are sociologists or philosophers – has been the function and the type of authority they advocate (or that is assigned to them) during that intervention. Such "authority" would come from the "quality" of those intellectuals' analyzes and interpretations, since they would be based on "scientific" or "philosophical" doing. Ultimately, this is about the old question of the political role played by science, philosophy or, more broadly, intellectual production.

To discuss and take a stance about that relationship, we looked into considerations by two very influential contemporary intellectuals in the fields of Sociology/Philosophy: Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman. The election of the authors is justified by our reading of the need to question a view that is strongly present in this pathway of Brazilian critical sociology of sport. According to our interpretation, that view was roughly based on "strong realism" (HABERMAS, 2004) which gives sociological production and their intellectuals a "legislator" nature (BAUMAN, 2010a). Both authors point to the need for or the fact that the role of intellectuals in contemporary society (understood as late or liquid modernity) is established or is much more characterized by the notion of "interpretation".

Although Habermas is widely known for his philosophy, he is also a sociologist by "training". Therefore, he is a philosopher with strong sociological "sensitivity" – as indeed virtually all philosophical production of the "Frankfurt School", where Habermas began his career. Bauman, in turn, is a sociologist by "training" and "trade", but he blurred established disciplinary barriers in order to theorize about society. As a result, he often resorts to philosophers, including Habermas himself, to ground his sociological analyzes. In common, and despite their differences, both did not give up questioning the public role of their own specialties – Philosophy and Sociology, respectively – and their intellectuals. We sought to demonstrate it based on their criticism of the legislator nature of intellectual discourse and its impact on the public role played by Philosophy and Sociology. After presenting the views of our authors in this regard, the final section draws implications for the public role of intellectuals who study sport and its institutions.

2 BETWEEN LEGISLATION AND INTERPRETATION: THE PUBLIC TASK OF INTELLECTUALS ACCORDING TO HABERMAS AND BAUMAN

In "his" history of philosophy, Habermas (2002, 2004) characterizes the metaphysical thought prevailing until Hegel as a strong or substantial concept of (philosophical) theory. In this context, philosophers took the role of judges or supreme legislators not only in the face of science, but also regarding culture as a whole. Philosophy would allow, "[...] a gradual privileged access to truth, whereas the path to theoretical knowledge remains close to the majority" (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 42). With the advent of modern society, Habermas (2002, 2004) continues, this situation began to change because philosophy gradually loses its extraordinary status, finding itself constrained to abandon its claim to privileged access to truth. Since then, the role of "usher and judge" assigned to it becomes increasingly untenable (HABERMAS, 2003a). In his own words (2003a, p. 19):

To drop the notion of the philosopher as knowing something about knowing that nobody else knows would be to drop the notion that his voice always has an over-riding claim on the attention of the other participant in the conversation. It would also be to drop the notion that there is something called “philosophical method” or “philosophical technique” or “the philosophical point of view”, which enables the professional philosopher, *ex officio*, to have an interesting view about, say, the respectability of psychoanalysis, the legitimacy of certain dubious laws, the resolution of moral dilemmas, the soundness of schools of historiography or literary criticism and the like [...].

This “extraordinary” view of philosophy was challenged, still according to Habermas (2002), by historical developments such as: a) the advent, from the seventeenth century on, of a new kind of methodical rationality, with the emergence of the experimental method of natural science, with formalism in moral theory, law and institutions of the State of Law; b) the emergence of historical sciences, and with them, de-transcendentalization of fundamental traditional concepts; c) criticism of the foundations of a philosophy of consciousness, leading to the transition to philosophy of language. These movements brought down, so to speak, classical precedence of Philosophy in the face of what had always opposed it – praxis – since the classic primacy of one over the other can “[...] no longer hold up against the mutual dependencies that were emerging ever more clearly. The embedding of theoretical accomplishments in practical contexts in their genesis and employment gave rise to an awareness of the relevance of everyday contexts of action and communication” (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 43).

While recognizing that Philosophy could never take on the role of judge or supreme legislator again, Habermas still ascribes to his discipline (and its intellectuals) a public task that is essential for democracy, since for him, “philosophy and democracy not only emerge from the same historical context of origin; they are also structurally dependent on each other” (HABERMAS, 2004, p. 324). For Habermas, philosophers should not be angry, after Hegel, when they are judged by the political implications of their ideas (HABERMAS, 2002). The public and/or political effect of philosophical thought, in turn, depends on freedom of thought and communication in democratic societies, while democratic discourse is also dependent on Philosophy’s surveillance and intervention, conceived as a “[...] public guardian of rationality” (HABERMAS, 2000, 2003a, 2004), even if that role brings more and more distress and has no privileges. For him, democratic discourse, always threatened, “[...] depends on the vigilance and intervention of this public guardian of rationality” (HABERMAS, 2004, p. 324). This conclusion, found in later texts, was already present in the 1980s, in Habermas’s (2003a) response to what he himself called “impressive critique of Philosophy”:

[...] Richard Rorty’s impressive critique of philosophy assembles compelling metaphilosophical arguments in support of the view that the roles Kant the master thinker had envisaged for philosophy, namely those of usher and judge, are too big for it. While I find myself in agreement with much of what Rorty says, I have trouble accepting his conclusion, which is that if philosophy forswears (*avsvenger*) these two roles, it must also surrender the function of being the “guardian of rationality”. If I understand Rorty, he is saying that the new modesty of philosophy involves the abandonment of any claim to reason – the very claim that has marked philosophical thought since its inception. Rorty not only argues for the demise of philosophy; he also unflinchingly accepts the end of the belief that ideas like truth or the unconditional with their transcending power are a necessary condition of human forms of collective life (Habermas, 2003a, p. 19).

Unlike his colleague Rorty, Habermas believes that “philosophy which merely clarified through hermeneutics what already exists anyway would lose its critical force” (HABERMAS 2007b, p. 119). Even after its crisis, philosophy still has a special status as mediator not only in the culture of other experts, but also in the key role it can play for those who inhabit the life-world. For Habermas (2002, 2003a), a philosophy made pragmatic can function as rearguard/critical instance that acts to clarify concepts and mediate meaning, in short, as an interpreter-mediator toward the life-world, responsible for mediating between the knowledge of experts and everyday practice, thus contributing for people to be aware of deformation in everyday life. Even today, it struggles to clarify the rational foundations of knowledge, language and action (HABERMAS, 2004). In his own words (2002, p. 48)

[...] philosophy moves within the vicinity of the life-world; its relation to the totality of this receding horizon of everyday knowledge is similar to that of common sense. And yet, through the subversive power of reflection and of illuminating, critical, and dissecting analysis, philosophy is completely opposed to common sense.³ By virtue of this intimate yet fractured relation to the life-world, philosophy is also well suited for a role on this side of the scientific system – for the role of an interpreter mediating between the expert cultures of science, technology, law, and morality on the one hand, and everyday communicative practices [...].⁴

However, Philosophy takes on this task by assuming a fallibilist and anti-foundationalist consciousness. It is aware that, apart from the questionings about the universal scope of its claims, it has nothing special regarding sciences, much less the certainty of a special access to truth. Nevertheless, it does not want to do without performing “[...] an illuminating furtherance of life-world processes of achieving self- understanding, processes that are related to totality. For the life-world must be defended against extreme alienation at the hands of the objectivating, the moralizing, and the aestheticizing interventions of expert cultures” (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 27). In this role, which enables mediation between experts’ knowledge and daily life in need of guidance, the philosopher can contribute to bring lifeworld deformations to the surface. This, however, “[...] as a critical agency, for it is no longer in possession of an affirmative theory of good life” (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 60).

Culture, society and the individual, as well as private and public spheres of the lifeworld, are references to which philosophy must report regarding the roles the discipline can play in contemporary societies. Such concern with Philosophy’s and philosophers’ public and/or political tasks is a hallmark of Habermas’s work and can be found in books written at different times in his career. For example, it is present in “Excursus on Leveling the genre distinction between philosophy and literature”, contained in “The philosophical discourse of modernity” (2000), but also “Moral consciousness and communicative action” (2003a), “Texts and contexts” (1996) and “Truth and justification” (2004) – a book where, in the last chapter, Habermas summarizes some desirable tasks for philosophy in what he calls post-metaphysical (but not post-philosophical!) times. According to this view, it becomes easier to understand why Habermas believes that philosophy could have an eminently political effect, even if that role does not assume the existence of an ultimate foundation for democracy. Habermas expects philosophers first to perform the intellectual function of taking part in public processes

3 Habermas (2002, p. 89) understands that the lifeworld does not reach the level of questioning, thus escaping “[...] criticism and pressure developed by the surprise of critical experiences, since it lives out of a postponement of validity provided by previously agreed certainties, that is, by certainties of the lifeworld”. What matters to him is the pragmatic role of a two-faced truth, which serves as an mediator between the certainty of action and discursively guaranteed assertiveness (HABERMAS, 2004).

4 For Habermas (2003a), interpreters, as they entered communication, admit in principle the same status of those whose utterances they want to understand, thus engaging in a process of reciprocal critique that cannot a priori decide who learns from whom.

[...] in terms of which modern societies come to understand themselves. Ever since the late eighteenth century, the discourse of modernity has been conducted primarily in the philosophical form of an auto-critique of reason. Second, philosophy can fruitfully tap into its ability to think in terms of the whole and its polyglossia to develop certain sorts of interpretations. Given that it maintains an intimate relation to both the sciences and to common sense, and that it understands the specialized idioms of expert cultures as well as it does the ordinary language of everyday life, philosophy can, for example, criticize the colonization of a lifeworld that has been gutted by trends toward commercialization, bureaucratization, and legalization, as well as scientization. Third, philosophy has an inherent capacity to address basic normative issues of the “just” or well-ordered society. (Habermas, 2004, p. 324)

Taking a very different direction, Bauman reaches a diagnosis with respect to the “extraordinary” status of intellectual discourse (which includes the philosophical one) that is very similar to Habermas’s. This is a story that Bauman starts telling in the 1980s, in his work “Legislators and interpreters: on modernity, postmodernity and intellectuals”. As we learn in that book, the concept of modern intellectual drew its meaning from the collective memory of European “Enlightenment”. The project of the “Republic of Letters”, dictated by the supreme and unquestioned authority of reason, provided the criteria for assessing society, indicating “what” and “how” to do to lead a “straight” life without deviations. Bauman argues that philosophical reason could only be a prescriptive power, and philosophers were the people endowed with more direct access to genuine reason, free from narrow interests. Their task would be to discover what kind of behavior reason would dictate to the common person, without which people’s happiness would never be achieved. That philosophical reason, according to his description, was anything but contemplative. Interpreting the world was not enough; it had to be changed. And philosophers – the only ones truly endowed with Reason – had the answer to that (ALMEIDA; GOMES; BRACHT, 2009).

This reading of intellectuals’ role is inseparable from Bauman’s diagnosis about modernity. The metaphors of “order” and “solidity” are customarily used by him to refer to it (BAUMAN, 1998a, 1999, 2001, 2010a). Modernity made “order as a task” the paradigm of its operation, melting the “solids” (traditions, common sense, etc.) it found on its way in order to build others that were more “durable” and in accordance to a model of society based on the unquestionable authority of modern legislators, including philosophers themselves, and of course, the State.⁵ According to Bauman, the rational and universal world of order and solidity was consistent with contingency and ambivalence. Paradoxically, however, the impetus toward universalizing or consensual syntheses (which were at the basis of the project of order as the task of modernity) always resulted in more endless bifurcations, new separations and multiple divisions. In other words, the impetus toward order with a purpose drew all its energy from the horror to ambivalence, but the final product of modern impetuses had a more ambivalent effect on order.

Having thus described the history of modernity, Bauman says that the modern strategy of intellectual work is best characterized by the metaphor of the role played by “legislators”. Intellectuals had the task of making authority claims that arbitrate in controversies of opinions and choices that, after selected, become correct. Since they are endowed with a “superior” and more “objective” knowledge, postulates intended to “others” (the people, ordinary citizens) come in the heteronomous form of law or moral standard. These circumstances, impose a perspective

5 In Bauman’s (2010a) view, the modern State is the gardener type: it cleans the “place” on behalf of the new, of carefully grown and previously selected plants. Its function is to eliminate the “wild cultures”, full of weeds and replace them with a “garden culture”.

that considers itself in better conditions to access the procedural rules ensuring achievement of truth, valid moral judgment and selection of a more appropriate taste.

This description of modernity as the march from error to truth, from chaos to order and from injudiciousness to the empire of reason is “discredited” in the postmodern habitat,⁶ which acquired the ability to “[...] be comfortable with a variety of sorts of people’ and move towards a togetherness in which nobody thinks of dreaming that God, or the Truth, or the Nature of Things, is on their side” (BAUMAN, 1998b, p. 149). Because plurality of truths is no longer a temporary irritant and given the possibility that different views are not only simultaneously judged as true, but are in fact simultaneously true, Bauman (1998b) continues, the task of philosophical reason has shifted from legislating about the correct way to separate truth from untruth to interpreting the correct way to translate between different languages, each generating and sustaining its own truths. This strategy, according to Bauman (2010a), openly abandons the assumption of universality of truth, moral judgment and taste, and with it, the prolonged adherence to legitimizing and foundational discourses of all kinds. According to the words of Bauman himself (2010a, p. 20-21),

the typically postmodern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterized by the metaphor of the “interpreter” role. It consists of translating statements made within one communally based tradition so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition. Instead of being oriented towards selecting the best social order, this strategy is aimed at facilitating communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants. It is concerned with preventing the distortion of meaning in the process of communication. For this purpose, it promotes the need to penetrate deeply the alien system of knowledge from which the translation is to be made.

The good interpreter is the one who, when mediating communication between “finite provinces” or “communities of meaning”, can read the message properly, with no need for someone or a legislator or legitimizing instance that separates good interpretations from bad ones. In this context, in turn, “[...] sociology is needed today more than ever before [...]” (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 241). Its practical problem to be solved “[...] is enlightenment aimed at human understanding” (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 241). This does not mean that Sociology has a monopoly on wisdom about human experiences; after all, it no longer makes sense after the “fall of the legislator” (BAUMAN, 2010a), but the relational and interpretative understanding produced by that sociology has the power to enlighten the means in which we conducted the life-world by shedding light on what could otherwise be overlooked in the course of daily events. The sociologist, therefore, has the task of offering an interpretation for everyday experiences through the process of understanding and explaining. Now, according to the words of Bauman himself (2010b, p. 265),

let us characterize sociology as a commentary on social life. By providing a series of explanatory notes on our experiences, it also shows implications for the way we conduct our lives. Therefore, it also works as a means to refine the knowledge we have and employ in our daily lives, thus bringing to light – in addition to our relations – the constraints and possibilities faced, and relating our actions to the positions and circumstances in which we find ourselves. Sociology is a disciplined look that examines “how” we act in our everyday life and allocates the details resulting from this analysis to a “map” that extends beyond our immediate experiences.

⁶ In Bauman, post-modern is not synonymous with the end of modernity. In this regard, see Bauman himself (2010a) or Almeida, Gomes and Bracht (2009).

Bauman (2010b) argues that sociological knowledge has something to offer that cannot be provided by common sense alone, however rich it may be. It challenges what is considered unchallengeable, shaking the certainties of life and asking the questions we do not ask and, when exposed, cause resentment among those who have vested interests. However, it is a mistake to believe that the type of intellectual service that sociology can provide is summed up as offering “advice” to the inhabitants of today’s society. In fact, our society is saturated with experts who offer their knowledge so people can deal with the pressures of a deregulated, privatizing and uncertain society by themselves. These pieces of “advice” are usually directed at the private sphere, to the scope of what Bauman (2001), paraphrasing Giddens, calls “life politics”.

Under that view about the task of sociology, the criticism it can perform is rendered “toothless” in that it does not explain the gulf opened between the right to individual self-assertion and the ability to control the social situations that can make this self-assertion something feasible or unrealistic. This gap – the main contradiction of today’s modernity (which Bauman likes to call liquid) – cannot be surpassed only by individual efforts, but it is the

[...] task of Politics with a capital P. It can be assumed that the gap in question emerged and grew precisely because of the emptying of public space, and particularly the agora, that intermediate public/private site where life politics is Politics with a capital P, where private problems are translated into the language of public issues and public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 49).

The task on the agenda of intellectual discourse, therefore, is to cause the agora to take the political sphere back.⁷ That is one of the most urgent tasks, because on the one hand, today’s society experiences growing separation between capital’s extraterritorial power and politics, whose institutions remain local. As a consequence, market pressures are replacing political legislation. On the other hand, the public sphere is being colonized by the private one, while public space has become the place where secrets and private feelings are confessed (the more intimate, the better) – rather than the space for meeting and dialogue about private problems and public issues (BAUMAN, 2000, 2001). Therefore, the clarifying function of sociology is to discuss the separation between power and politics, privatization and de-politicization of the public sphere, “[...] though, paradoxically, in order to enhance, no to cut down, individual freedom” (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 62).

3 FINAL REMARKS

An important part of Sociology of Sport in Brazil, especially in its critical version, is anchored in the field of Physical Education, guiding questions directed to sport when their relationship with school Physical Education is at stake. Its birthplace was characterized by a critical perspective, tending or at least closer to what Bauman calls a legislator or Habermas names an “usher and judge,” largely due to its theoretical linkages and its relation to normative pedagogy. Part of the intellectuals of Physical Education who made the critique of sport (in the 1980s) invested of “reason”, “historical truth” and a new “project of order” for the field are com-

7 For Bauman (2000, p. 92-93), “The distinction between public and private spheres is of ancient origin; it goes back to the Greek *oikos*, the household and *ecclesia*, the site of politics where matters affecting all members of the *polis* were tackled and settled. But between *oikos* and *ecclesia* the Greeks situated one more sphere, that of communication between the two; the sphere whose major role was not keeping the private and the public apart or guarding the territorial integrity of each, but assuring a smooth and constant traffic between them. That third and intermediate sphere, the *agora* (the public/private sphere, as Castoriadis put it), bound the two extremes and held them together. Its role was crucial for the maintenance of a truly autonomous *polis* resting on the true autonomy of its members. Without it, neither the *polis* nor its members could gain, let alone retain, their freedom to decide the meaning of their common good and what was to be done to attain it.

mitted to unveil the pathway that would lead teachers to the “true Physical Education”, which involved a new way of situating sport inside it. The authority of those intellectuals to arbitrate between “right” and “wrong”, “true” and “false”, “ideological” and “non-ideological” was based on their access to a higher (objective) knowledge, to which the non-intellectual part – school teachers – had no access (better yet, they had access only to its ideological, already partial dimension). This stance also seems to assume that there is a true form of sports practice, one that would not be ideological, alienated or thingified, but which, in essence, would be formative, emancipatory or liberating, and the function of the critical intellectual would be to remove the veil of appearance.

According to our authors, contemporary developments have challenged the assumptions underpinning this stance in favor of a “fallibility and anti-foundationalist consciousness”. This perspective is more accustomed to the notion, shared by Habermas and Bauman, of the intellectual as an interpreter whose purpose is to facilitate communication between autonomous participants, hoping to prevent distortions of meaning in conversation. In this process, intellectuals, as interpreters-translators, may contribute to modern societies’ self-understanding, bringing up the deformations that the sports system produces in the life-world while mediating what happens in specialized cultures (among them, that of sport scholars) for the non-professional public that is present in everyday communicative practice.

So, does this mean giving up the “critical” task? We do not think so because intellectuals would continue with their function to clarify or enlighten everyday life, discussing sport’s ordinary certainties within common sense. They do so, however, with no claim to an “extraordinary” or “legislator discourse”; they rather indicate a necessary reorientation of criticism to enhance the importance of building public spaces that critical intellectuals must attend to present and debate their unconventional and unordinary interpretations of the sporting phenomenon and thus participate in and enrich the “democratic game”.

From a process-based understanding of truth, it is essential that these spaces for different publics are generated and occupied in the perspective of broad debate, where “who learns from whom” (HABERMAS, 2003a) cannot be defined a priori. Hence, for example, the importance of public (non-state) media and other public institutions to prevent market interests from defining the agenda, the result and the conditions of public debate also in the field of sports. The task of a critical sociology of sport includes avoiding such colonization.

As an example of a possible public institution, we would like to mention the case of the Brazilian Association of Sports Sciences (*Colégio Brasileiro de Ciências do Esporte*, CBCE) – a space that is, given objective conditions, as impossible as necessary.

In developing the critical movement of Physical Education cited in the introduction, under which an incipient Sociology of Sport develops, that academic (private, non-profit) entity was a key political actor, since it played the role of organizer and builder of discussion forums and dissemination (publicizing) outlets for (self-declared “critical”) interpretations of the sporting phenomenon. Its public has always been basically the Physical Education community: higher education professors (academics), elementary and high school teachers, professionals working in other instances where sports practices were present as well as Physical Education students. Although it was criticized by some sectors as an unduly “politicized” organization (at least after 1985, when important segments of the “renewal movement” of Physical Education started to

lead it),⁸ the association sought to provide a public space for the expression of different interpretations of the sporting phenomenon.

We can mention the example of an absolutely current issue, namely, the so-called mega sporting events in Brazil (World Cup in 2014 and Summer Olympics in 2016). The distinct instances of CBCE, particularly its congresses,⁹ have turned mega-events into a constant topic with a view to further discuss their possible repercussions in Physical Education, sport and society in general. It was largely as a result of this public sphere (implemented in numerous congresses and publications) that interpretations contrary to economic and political interests could reach their target public. This is because mega sporting events in Brazil are examples of how such (sports) market pressures replace or weaken political legislation, the way public sphere is colonized by private sphere, all in favor of the much vaunted “FIFA standard”. The CBCE and intellectuals who attended it have played the role of clarifying the powerful economic interests of FIFA and its sponsors and how they are opposed to the interests of the Brazilian people that, in principle, should be defended by the state. Historically, moreover, the CBCE has taken on the task of questioning the salvationist nature of sport (sport is health, sport is education and a panacea for all problems of society) and, recently, of the legacy of mega-events for the host country. It has thus worked as a kind of “public guardian” by denouncing the “rationality” that supports the realization of mega-events and that has inexorably led to privatization and de-politicization of their agenda.

These concerns were present in the organization even before¹⁰ the emergence of more widespread desire and demand in Brazilian society for a more radical discussion of how mega-events will reflect in the lives of Brazilians, not to mention, of course, the numerous charges of misappropriation of public money related to them. We could not find an emphasis equivalent to this issue in specific Social Science forums (for example, on the 38th Annual Meeting of the National Association of Graduate Studies in Social Sciences, in 2014, none of the 22 roundtables discussed or even touched the topic); no specific Working Group put the issue on the agenda either. There are obviously exceptions such as the case of the dossier of UFRGS’s journal “*Horizontes Antropológicos*” (year 19, no. 40), published in 2013 and dedicated to mega sporting events.

A brief dialogue with two aspects highlighted by Burawoy (2006) seems pertinent: the first one is related to the necessary care regarding political engagement of scientific associations (in the case of the author, the American Sociological Association – ASA) and, in our case, CBCE. Speaking on behalf of all members is always difficult and dangerous. That would require building internal mechanisms for debate so that the diversity inherent in these associations is not leveled based on the position of one group and its leaders. The second aspect concerns the risk of scientism, that is, of scientists turning their backs to social reality in favor of their own curriculum vitae or, in Brazil, their “Lattes” curriculum. The CBCE and its members must always keep the search for rigorous interpretations that are not limited to commercial appeals and to providing advice to life-politics, and it should not serve as a partisan arm that interprets sport based on political conveniences of the moment either. The public space produced by the CBCE can constitute a space where dissenting voices that resist these processes can express themselves and find resonance.

8 These disputes within the CBCE are well recorded and analyzed in Paiva (1994) and Damasceno (2013).

9 The last Brazilian Congress of Sports Science/International Congress of Sports Sciences, held in Brasília in 2013, elected “Identity of Physical Education and Sports Science in times of mega-events” as its central theme.

10 Of course the more “independent” media already worked to denounce and discuss the legacy of mega-events for the country.

Returning to a more properly epistemological level, we understand that the challenge of public and critical sociology in this context is to support (or renew) the critical perspective in post-metaphysical, anti-foundationalist and deconstructionist times. Where can we anchor critical theory? How can we sustain its normativeness? Habermas's and Bauman's answers, in their differences, lead us to the need to preserve and build new and expanded public spaces, which amounts to "empowerment" of politics in face of the market and reemergence of democratic debate free from any embarrassment but the power of the best argument.

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