

*Visualities – Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources.* Olaf Stieglitz, Historisches Institut, Universität zu Köln; Jörn Eiben, Neuere Sozial-, Wirtschafts- und Technikgeschichte, Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg, 24.06.2016–26.06.2016.

**Reviewed by** Sebastian Weinert

**Published on** H-Soz-u-Kult (August, 2016)

In modern sports visual sources are omnipresent, since in present days every major sports event like the UEFA Euro 2016 or the Olympic Games is accompanied by extensive media coverage. Moreover the concept of visibility itself is a crucial key for understanding sports as a phenomenon of modernity. To trace down this relationship between modern sports and visibility OLAF STIEGLITZ (Cologne) and JÖRN EIBEN (Hamburg) organised the international conference “Visualities. Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources”, which was funded by the Thyssen Stiftung für Wissenschaftsförderung and which took place from June 24 until June 26 2016 in Cologne. The main aim of the conference was to initiate an interdisciplinary discussion about visual sources in sport including contributions from scholars of history, sport sciences, art history or media studies. The conference was video-taped and will be published on the portal “L.I.S.A. - Das Wissenschaftsportal der Gerda-Henkel-Stiftung”. <http://www.lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de> (02.08.2016)

The first day of the conference was largely concerned with the methodical challenges historians have to face when dealing with visual sources. In his keynote JENS JÄGER (Cologne) gave at first a short introduction in theoretical discussions about visual sources – especially photographs – within the German historiography since

the 1970s. Following these helpful introductory remarks, Jäger exemplified his methodical approach by analyzing the medial context, the content, and the formation conditions of a cover showing the right fist of the boxer Willie Lewis, which was published 1908 in an issue of the journal *La Vie au Grand Air*. In his concluding remarks he especially highlighted that photographs are not just “objective” evidence of the past but have to be understood as a more complex source for the investigation of sports history. The information value of visual sources for sport history was the core of the presentation by MICHAEL KRÜGER (Münster) as well. He pointed out that even though visual remains of past sport events quite often provide the only access to the history of sports, they are still “second-hand sources” since sport is a performative physical activity. By dealing with the paintings “Schwimmer” by Willi Sitte (1971) and “Gustav Adolf Schur und die Jungen” by Bert Heller (1959) Krüger tried to reevaluate the heuristic potential of “Sporting Art” for sports history. In the second talk of the panel, BERNHARD HACHLEITNER (Vienna) turned to a totally different painting: Paul Meissner’s depiction of the Austrian “Wunderteam” of the early 1930s painted in 1948. The “Wunderteam” was the Austrian national soccer squad which had been well-known for its playful style and competed in a famous match on December 7th 1932

against England. The game at the Stamford Bridge Stadium was lost 4:3. But it confirmed Austrians reputation as the “Wunderteam”, since England was at that point still undefeated on home ground. Drawing on several fascinating visual sources, Hochleitner traced down how Meissner’s painting became part of the Austrian process of nation-building after World War II. The concluding speech of the first panel was a shared presentation of STEPHAN WASSONG and ANSGAR MOLZBERGER (both Cologne). Molzberger explained how the archives of the Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln use visual sources in their efforts to get a wider audience within the academic as well as broader public. Wassong presented the concept of an Online Encyclopaedia on the Olympic Movement that includes a wide range of visual sources.

The second day of the conference started with a keynote by MIKE O’MAHONY (Bristol). In his talk rich of material and content he – despite many other things – presented two pictures of Soviet Russian athletes at the Olympic Games. The first one by Mark Kauffman showing Irinia Press winning the 80m hurdles at the 1960 Rome Olympics was a striking example for the ambiguity of images. When it was first published in 1960 in the Life magazine, it became a symbol for the modern Russian women winning a competitive game. Six years later the Life magazine used a cropped part of the same picture to insinuate that Press could have been doped in Rome. The second image by Ralph Crane showed two US and two Soviet athletes sitting together on a bench during the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games. Through a careful close reading of the – at first sight tame looking – image O’Mahony indicated how it reflected on the situation of the Cold War at that time. The following second panel was composed of three case studies dealing with the bodies of athletes. MATTHIAS MARSCHIK (Vienna) reported about the images of athletes of Vienna’s famous Jewish sports club Hakoah (1909–1938) in the Austrian popular press. Even if these athletes were

quite successful Marschik pointed out that their positive self-perception was not entirely reflected in the popular press. In his conclusion he emphasised that by interpreting visual sources one should not only pay attention towards what is depicted within an image but also to what is not shown. In the second speech of the panel EMANUEL HÜBNER (Münster) turned to the 1936 Berlin Olympics. By presenting his findings of amateur photographs of this event, he shed light on a yet quite unknown visual source of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. He ended by stressing three major observations: Amateur photographers depicted different topics than professional ones, staged architecture in a different way and produced series rather than one iconographic picture. The third presentation was held by MELANIE WOITAS (Erfurt), who gave the audience some insights into her recent PhD-project about aerobics in 1980s USA. In her insightful talk she focused on the rise of aerobic videos at the beginning of the 1980s, which was deeply connected with the American actress Jane Fonda, and asked what they contributed to the contemporary body discourse. In her concluding remarks Woitas especially pointed out that the promise of aerobic videos to empower the female followers can be interpreted as part of the disciplinary discourse about self optimization. Instead of challenging traditional body ideals, aerobics rather helped to stabilize them.

The third section focusing more on three specific media of body representation was introduced by MARKUS STAUFF (Amsterdam). As a media scholar he added to the conference another promising perspective. Concentrating on a photograph showing Dorando Petri finishing the 1908 London Olympics marathon, who was later on disqualified due to having received assistance before the finish line, as well as the whole media coverage before and after the marathon, he introduced the audience with the concept media literacy. Following up, he elaborated on the specific use of statistics within the visual culture of sports concluding that sport creates a certain form of pro-

ducing, creating, and consuming knowledge which is tightly bound to the visual culture of sports. The second speech on the one hand matched very well Stauffs remarks, but presented on the other hand again a very different approach. JÖRN EIBEN (Hamburg) presented a paper drawn from his PhD-thesis that was published in December last year. Jörn Eiben, *Das Subjekt des Fußballs. Eine Geschichte bewegter Körper im Kaiserreich*, Bielefeld 2016. He turned to tactical depictions of football players from a bird's eye perspective printed in football manuals he had evaluated for his thesis. By analyzing these manuals Eiben demonstrated that they were "practical pictures" and part of a certain school of seeing. Every visual representation of the footballer's spatial position on the field was thus also a hypothesis about the anonymous athlete's body. The third panel and at the same time the second day of the conference was concluded by AMANDA SHUMANN (Santa Cruz / Leiden). Also drawing from her PhD-thesis about athletes in the People's Republic of China 1949–1966, she presented the rich material she had collected during the research for her thesis. By highlighting the two major education programs to increase the healthy behaviour of the Chinese population Shuman made obvious how the old narrative of China as the sick man of Asia shaped the visuality of the Chinese athlete.

KASIA BODDY (Cambridge) started the third day of the conference with her keynote. She focused on the famous female tennis athlete Helen Wills, who became an American sports star in the interwar period. In contrast to her older opponent, the French athlete Suzanne Lenglen, Wills was at the end of her career seen as the typical American girl: A 100 percent clean athlete who perfectly fit into the role as heroine. Although Boddy highlighted the important role that Wills' face played in this process, her discussions about the function of women's clothing in shaping an ideal of the female body were of particular interest. The fourth and last panel of the conference

was almost entirely dedicated to the depiction of sports in the cinema and the television. BARBARA ENGLERT (Frankfurt am Main) presented insights of her recently published PhD-thesis about the Hollywood sports film. Barbara Englert, *Mainstream and beyond. Wie der US-amerikanische Sportfilm der Siebzigerjahre die Gesellschaft reflektiert*, Frankfurt am Main u. a. 2011. Concentrating on the 1970s sports film she argued that these reflected the American struggle for their – at that time hardly contested – identity and self-confidence. She ended by stating that there is a relationship between sports, politics, and Hollywood (sports) movies which offers a key to the understanding of American society in general. In the subsequent discussion the question was raised if there are specific characteristics of the sports film that distinguishes it from other genres at that time. Second OLAF STIEGLITZ (Cologne) gave a short, but insightful glance at his ongoing research project. Using the example of hurdling he demonstrated the role of sport for the formation of 20th century modernity in North America. Unlike other track and field disciplines hurdling indeed had been a quite modern sport which had no antique tradition. Given this and given the complexity of movement compared to other running disciplines, hurdlers were perceived as avant-garde athletes. Since hurdles was being depicted especially by modern media and since male, white US-athletes dominated the scene at the turn of the 20th century there was a growing interrelation between hurdles, America as well as modernity. Modernity, so to say, became once again a male white phenomenon. Due to illness the last participant EVA MARIA GAJEK (Gießen) could not attend the conference. Instead her paper was read by Jörn Eiben in place of her. In her talk, which also drew on her PhD-thesis *Eva Maria Gajek, Imagepolitik im olympischen Wettstreit. Die Spiele von Rom 1960 und München 1972*, Göttingen 2013, she analyzed the interweaving between television broadcasting, the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and the body of the athletes. In

this perspective Munich 1972 was a turning point in history since it was the first Olympic Games which were completely covered by television. By showing pieces of the coverage of the Munich marathon won by Frank Shorter Gajek explained that due to the medial coverage the audience sitting at home in front of their television gathered a yet unknown experience of the athlete's body.

Putting together a huge variety of scholars from different disciplines, with different approaches, and different topics this conference provided a valuable contribution to the recent research about visual sources in sports history that would have deserved a greater audience. The participants in Cologne raised several important questions. Three more comprehensive ones of them concerning the relation between sports and visibility should be pointed out explicitly in the following: First, there seems to be a tension between sport as a performative act and its visualisation during or after the event whose methodical and theoretical potential is not yet fully incorporated into the research about visual sport sources. Second, many contributors highlighted the importance of the circulation of sports images e.g. in the form of a transnational circulation of body ideals, a circulation between different media, and of course the circulation in the course of time. Third and last, it became obvious that the process of digitalization is of growing importance for this research field. On the one hand digital media will most certainly change our ways of producing and consuming professional sport events. On the other hand digitalized resources are increasingly becoming the core material for research and the presentation of our results. How this development is changing and perhaps challenging our theoretical and methodical approach to visual sports resources is still an open question. Hopefully this conference provoked further attempts to answer these, similar, or completely new questions in the future.

#### Conference Overview:

Introduction: Jörn Eiben (Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg), Olaf Stieglitz (Universität zu Köln)

#### *Keynote I:*

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz

Jens Jäger (Universität zu Köln): Some Remarks on Visual Sources. Recent Debates and Concepts

#### *Section I: Visual Sources in the Realm of Sports Studies*

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz

Michael Krüger (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster): Visual Sources in the History of Sports – Potentials, Problems, and Perspectives with selected Examples

Bernhard Hachleitner (Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien): The „Wunderteam“, painted in Oil: Insights of Images / Insights through Images in Sport Studies

Stephan Wassong / Ansgar Molzberger (Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln): The Archive Project of the German Sport University Cologne. Visual Sport Sources in Teaching and Research

#### *Keynote II:*

Chair: Jörn Eiben

Mike O'Mahony (University of Bristol): Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Photography and the Visual Representation of Sport

#### *Section II: Depicting Sports' Bodies I*

Chair: Jörn Eiben

Matthias Marschik (Universität Wien): Depicting Hakoah, 1909-1938

Emanuel Hübner (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster): The 1936 Olympics in the Perspective of Amateur Photographers

Melanie Woitas (Universität Erfurt): „Exercise teaches you the pleasure of discipline“ – The Female Body in Jane Fonda's Aerobics Videos

#### *Section III: Depicting Sports' Bodies II*

Chair: Jürgen Martschukat (Universität Erfurt)

Amanda Shuman (Universiteit Leiden / University of California, Santa Cruz): No longer “sick”: Visualizing victorious athletic Bodies under Mao

Markus Stauff (Universiteit van Amsterdam): Understanding Performance. Media Literacy and the Visual Culture of Sports

Jörn Eiben: Bird’s-Eye: Positions, Spaces, and the hypothetical Body. The Case of Football in the German Empire

*Keynote III:*

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz

Kasia Boddy (University of Cambridge): American Girl. The Iconographies of Helen Wills

*Section IV: Moving Bodies in Living Pictures*

Chair: Jörn Eiben

Barbara Englert (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main): The Hollywood Sport Film — Visualizing Hidden and Familiar Aspects of American Culture

Olaf Stieglitz: Hurdling from Frame to Frame: A Modern Motion in Photography and Film

Eva Maria Gajek (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen): More than Munich ‘72: Sport and TV in 1960s/1970s West-Germany

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

**Citation:** Sebastian Weinert. Review of *Visualities – Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. August, 2016.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=47605>



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