

Essay Question: In the 20th century sport undergoes three major developments: it becomes a global activity; it is increasingly oriented towards spectatorship and entertainment; and it moves away from the ideals of Greek athletics, and is integrated into the contemporary, media-driven culture of the spectacle. Using the following clip as the basis of your analysis and argument, explain and show how these developments have influenced and changed contemporary sport.

In the late nineteenth century, sport was a communal exercise. People, on a local scale, would participate in sporting activities where spectators were frowned upon and there was little involvement from the fields of media or business (Schirato 97). However, the twentieth century saw sport make a transition away from these ideals. This essay will examine a video advertisement - "NIKE FOOTBALL WRITE THE FUTURE - FULL LENGTH VERSION" (Nike's Write the Future) - to argue that it is a perfect embodiment of how sport, in particular football, has significantly moved away from its amateur days. This argument will be reinforced through an analysis of the video, where sport is portrayed as a global enterprise that has been inserted into the logics of the media and professionalism. The video also contains numerous examples of fans' reactions and fast-paced montages that reflect the attention-seeking qualities of the spectacle.

Globalization is essentially the "growing interconnectedness" of the world where the physical boundaries of nation-states are becoming increasingly insignificant (Held and McGrew 1). In Write the Future, Nike is able to connect the world and attract a global audience because the video features footballers from various countries and continents such as Africa, South America and Europe. All the featured players have competed in previous FIFA World Cups and Europe's top football leagues. Because these competitions are televised around the world, this video successfully appeals to a wide demographic of potential consumers.

The process of globalization has been aided by technological advances that have led to the compression of time and space (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1). This has resulted in what Marshall McLuhan defines as a "global village" where everyone can experience the same events simultaneously (Kellner 118). In the sequence of shots involving Brazilian footballer Ronaldinho, he tricks his opponents with some fancy footwork. This event continues in the very next shot, but Ronaldinho is now being mediated through the video sharing website

YouTube and millions of viewers “Like” the video. Relating to this is Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” where geographical boundaries are overcome as people “act as members of a community” through cultural representations (Schirato 88). Following Ronaldinho’s performance is a montage of user-generated videos where different people in different locations all copy Ronaldinho. Put simply, the internet allows us to overcome physical distance, share our own imitations of an event, and interact over a common occurrence. Ronaldinho is shown to have a global fan base that, although they have never met before, is bounded together by the same attachment to a player, or consumption of the same product.

Globalization can be thought of as a process of “Westernization” where Western countries impose their ideologies on the rest of the world (Houlihan 347; Giddens 19). Guy Debord, in “Society of the Spectacle,” argues that the spectacle “epitomizes the prevailing model of social life” (75). In other words, the spectacle exemplifies the dominant ideas and beliefs that circulate in society. Nike is an American based multi-national corporation that operates under a capitalist model, and Kellner argues that corporations are willing to pay “top dollars” to get their products associated with sports “heroes” who function as “embodiments ... of the good life,” (6). Nike’s choice of footballers is also due to the fact that the players in question have all had success at the highest level, either for their club or country, and at the time of production were among the world’s highest paid footballers. By selecting multi-million dollar earners, Nike reinforces what Kellner refers to as the “capitalist ethic” (65). That is, success and money go hand in hand.

A globalization of culture also takes place as all players adhere to the same style of football. The recognitions explained above depend on cultural literacy, that is, the ability to understand the so called “meaning systems” within cultural fields (Schirato et al. 190). Viewers who are unaware that the sponsored players featured in this video are global football icons will not be swayed by Nike to consume their products. Right from the beginning Nike, in order to get the attention of these viewers, presents a fast-paced and attack-orientated style of football. Côte d’Ivoire’s Didier Drogba is the first footballer featured in this video and he demonstrates this energetic style of football in the process of outwitting his opponents.

In the early twentieth century, the “sport-media nexus” was established where individuals could get closer to sporting events, for example, through accounts in the news media (Schirato 84; Guttman 85). In other words, contemporary sport differs from earlier sport because it has become immersed into the logics of the media. The Drogba sequence illustrates this connection. Nowadays, sport stadiums are designed to support the demands of advertisers, cameras and spectators, with the purpose of encouraging consumption (Schirato 122). Nike’s fictional football event takes place inside a multi-million dollar stadium and as Drogba controls the ball, Nike advertising billboards surround a crowd of thousands of fans. Photographers and cameramen track Drogba’s movements and, in their purpose-built environments, commentators scream into their microphones and journalists wait at their laptops, getting ready to write their reports on the action that unfolds.

Contemporary sport also has a strong emphasis on spectators. Schirato observes that the media treats fans as commodities, in that their “passionate” attachment can help encourage consumption (90). Some of the fans within the stadium display banners in order to signal their attachment to Drogba. In a swift montage of shots, Côte d'Ivoire fans line the streets and while a fireworks display takes place they respond emotionally by cheering, dancing, playing drums and waving flags. Essentially, Nike associates its brand with a passionate fan base by creating a party-like atmosphere in the hope of selling its products. This rapid sequence of images also gives us very little time to contemplate what we are seeing.

Attention management is “all-important” in the spectacle and this is achieved by making each successive event “more dramatic and intense” than previous ones (Schirato et al. 150). After Drogba chips the ball over the goalkeeper, we start to assume that a goal will be scored. In other words, the spectacle is coming to an end and our attention begins to wander. However, Italy’s Fabio Cannavaro performs a bicycle kick in slow motion to successfully defend Drogba’s shot. The viewer is then taken away from the football pitch to a theatrical celebration in honour of Cannavaro. Ladies dance in sparkling blue outfits and countless, multi-coloured stage lights accompany upbeat music. Write the Future is sustaining its dramatic element in order to hold our attention. Furthermore, sport has undergone a transition over time. It is not necessarily valued by the action that takes place on the field but is more judged by the entertainment factor that it brings to spectators.

The significance of spectators in contemporary sport is further portrayed through England’s Wayne Rooney. A close-up camera shot reveals a fearful look in Rooney’s eyes after his pass

is intercepted. It would go against the logic of the spectacle if he was shown chasing after the ball. This would not be very exciting compared to the earlier examples of Cannavaro and Drogba. Instead, a hysterical collection of premonitions is given from Rooney's perspective. Hysteria is another quality of the spectacle, and can be defined as an "uncontrollable state of mind brought about by panic and/or an overreaction to events" (Schirato et al. 151). Within Rooney's mind, street riots take place and newspapers are published with headlines implying his demise. In essence, Rooney is deeply concerned about how his life will eventuate. Although Rooney wants to perform for himself and his team, at the forefront of his mind is how the English news media and football fans will react unless he gets the ball back.

When Rooney does regain control of the football, a fast-paced montage exemplifies Debord's notion that, in the world of the spectacle, "truth is a moment of falsehood" (76). In other words, the spectacle involves constant hyperbole in creating extraordinary scenarios. Rooney has just performed a standardized action on the football field, but he constructs a world where numerous newborn babies are named after him, the financial markets climb, and he is knighted by the British Queen. Put simply, Rooney creates a more positive outlook and exaggerates how English society will react. This example embodies the idea that the spectacle involves a saturation of exaggerated images with the hope of encouraging consumption.

In conclusion, Nike's Write the Future is a great example of how sport has become immersed into the logics of the media and the spectacle. Technological advances have led to a process of globalization where culture is being homogenized, multinational corporations impose capitalist ideologies, and people from disparate locations experience the same events at the same time. Actual action on the football pitch makes up less than half of this video's running time, therefore emphasizing the spectator and entertainment orientated nature of present-day sports events. Nike has also given its footballers exaggerated examples of success and, fittingly, the video concludes with another fast-paced montage featuring another global football icon, Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, who has just taken a penalty kick. However we are left uncertain as to if Ronaldo scores. Instead, the video ends with the phrase "Write the Future," implying that if we consume Nike's commodities - whether it is their sponsored footballers, the fans' passion, or physical sports gear and equipment - we can control our own destiny.

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