

# EDUCATING BODIES THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL PEDAGOGY: PHYSICAL CULTURE CINEMA IN ARGENTINA, ITALY, AND SPAIN: 1934-1944

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The aim of this paper is to question the usefulness of informative cinema as a pedagogical device. A set of Argentinean, Spanish, and Italian newsreels filmed in the second quarter of the 20th century is analyzed to understand how a notion of symmetrical aesthetics was formed to narrate an ideal of physical culture. The short informative Argentine main newsreel, *Sucesos Argentinos*, which was broadcast between 1938 and 1972, shows familiarity with other European newsreels, such as *Giornale LUCE* and *No-Do*, filmed in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s in Italy and Spain. Argentina, Italy, and Spain had strong economic, political, and cultural connections because of historical immigration. As a result, these countries also exchanged ways of narrating state-organized physical activities. Through the analysis of newsreels, it is shown how sports and mass gymnastics exhibitions operated as a governmental technique to show the strength, virility, and healthiness of individual bodies in symmetry with collective bodies. Based on the nationalist rhetoric characteristic of the interwar period and of the Second World War, it can be said that there was a transnational aesthetic for narrating bodily and cultural techniques. Therefore, by analyzing the images shown in these three countries between 1934 and 1944, what one finds is a decade of political and aesthetic affinities in the construction of a national image of the “correct body.”

## A COMMON HISTORY

In most Western countries between 1930 and 1940, there was a popularization of in-

formative documentary films known as newsreels. The newsreels expanded the schooling processes outside school walls by combining an important educational task in transmitting ways of doing as ways of being. This occurred by combining the passivity of the viewers in the theater with the dynamism of the moving image, showing ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ ways of doing and being.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, the images of bodies educated through physical culture in the newsreels made ways of doing analogous to ways of being by linking images and movement to become one inseparable thing. This is what Gilles Deleuze called the “movement-image.”<sup>2</sup> According to Deleuze, cinema is not merely images and movement as two separate things, but rather they have an indivisible association—a “movement-image.” In this sense, it cannot be understood only as the linking of reel images. Rather, cinematography’s creative act is to have invented the fusion between “movement-image” and a new scientific-rational technology that operates on the transmission of motion pictures.<sup>3</sup>

The informative documentary film, particularly the newsreel genre, consisted as a vast media resource for communicating national and international cultural, social, and political activities. This is especially visible in the Inter-war and the Second World War periods.<sup>4</sup> The filmed media productions between 1934 and 1943 in Italy, Argentina, and Spain, present strong case studies for the influence of the newsreel, both because of their historical immigration connections and also because of their common methods of narrating physical activities organized by the States.<sup>5</sup> Newsreels were developed in the years that mass media func-

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tioned largely as a propaganda device for these three countries.

Before undertaking an analysis of physical culture newsreels, it is important to understand the shared starting point for cinematography and mass physical activities. There is a common history in the scientific advancements of the technologies that allowed the passage of the stationary image to the moving image—cinema—and the governmental uses of physical culture. As modern devices, cinema and physical culture emerged in parallel in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“Physical education,” known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier as “gymnastics,” was born from the hand of the state and the practice of science as two correlated processes. On the one hand, physical education was a state mechanism to educate its citizens about their bodies, mainly through military and scholarly establishments. The two most significant objectives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were training soldiers and forming citizens through an ‘integral’ pedagogy that involved intellectual, moral, and physical matters. The traditional, educational idea in most Western countries was to teach what it meant to develop simultaneity and symmetry as values. State educational systems, therefore, created a school subject aimed at using the hygienic senses as a scientific resource, teaching games mainly for moral improvement and gymnastics for character-building and as a source of useful knowledge at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, scientific positivist debates of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century took the body and its movement as their objective through a rhetoric focused on anatomy, physiology, and hygienic matters. Thus, a reform in traditional gymnastics was born in Europe, and it aimed at distinguishing which methods had to be followed to properly exercise the body. By establishing a close connection between strengthening the bodies and perfecting the homeland, an international dispute developed between the emerging nation-states to see whose bodies were the strongest and most resistant, and therefore whose nation was the fittest. Gymnastics reformers, therefore, began to discuss which scientific methods were the most effective and efficient for exercising healthy, vigorous, docile, strong, and controlled bodies.

At roughly the same time, an argument about how to measure the performance of the body and its movements evolved.<sup>7</sup> This situation generated an exponential growth of scientific equipment surrounding measure-

ment. Physiologists such as Fernand Lagrange, Philippe Tissié, Georges Demenÿ, and Étienne Jules Marey created scientific apparatus to reform anatomical and physical gymnastics while adhering to the common concepts of simultaneity and symmetry. Two topics of Étienne Jules Marey’s (1830-1904) research are especially important for the present paper. First, there is Marey’s *l’appareil chronophotographie*, or chronophotography, a photographic process he created in the 1880s that captured several photographs at regular intervals. It was initially used for the scientific study of locomotion, especially in humans and animals. This invention allowed the passage of stationary images to moving images, the first step toward motion pictures, by a regular sequence of camera shooting. The chronophotographer developed an important characteristic of modern science: order and method, with symmetry as its result.<sup>8</sup> In addition to being the inventor of the *l’appareil chronophotographie*, Marey was one of the fathers of what is known in France as “scientific physical education.” Several of the classic images of Marey’s chronophotographer were made with Georges Demenÿ, recognized as the founder of scientific physical education. Marey and Demenÿ developed what is known as *La Station Physiologique de Paris* in 1882; it was supported by the French State to study the human and animal locomotion. Many of their images were taken at the *École Normale Militaire de Gymnastique de Joinville-le-Pont*, a military-based gymnastics and fencing school established in 1852; it was known as the first French Physical Education school to create teachers and served as a model for other institutions outside France.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the chronophotographer, when used in conjunction with the “scientific physical education” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, created a relationship between cinema and modern rational gymnastics. Both the movement-image and systematized corporal practices were influenced by the same scientific perceptions to attach movements to techniques that interpreted the body as its objective.<sup>10</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, bodies, movements, and images were used for scientific purposes, developing different physiological apparatus for the analysis of locomotion, allowing for the creation of cinematography and motion pictures. The concept of ‘movement-images’ was established to point out the indivisible nexus between image and movement in films. This analogy between the movement of images and the movement of bodies is the primary reason why the birth of documentary cinema and

the field of physical education have a common history in scientific rationality.

### A (TRANS) NATIONAL IMAGE

A half-century later, the relationship between physical culture and motion pictures continued, but on different levels. During the 1930s and 1940s, audio-visual mass media was developed, which resulted in the exponential growth of filming records and cinema theaters. As a result of the Interwar period's cultural and economic globalization, the cinematography industry emerged as one of the most important social influences.

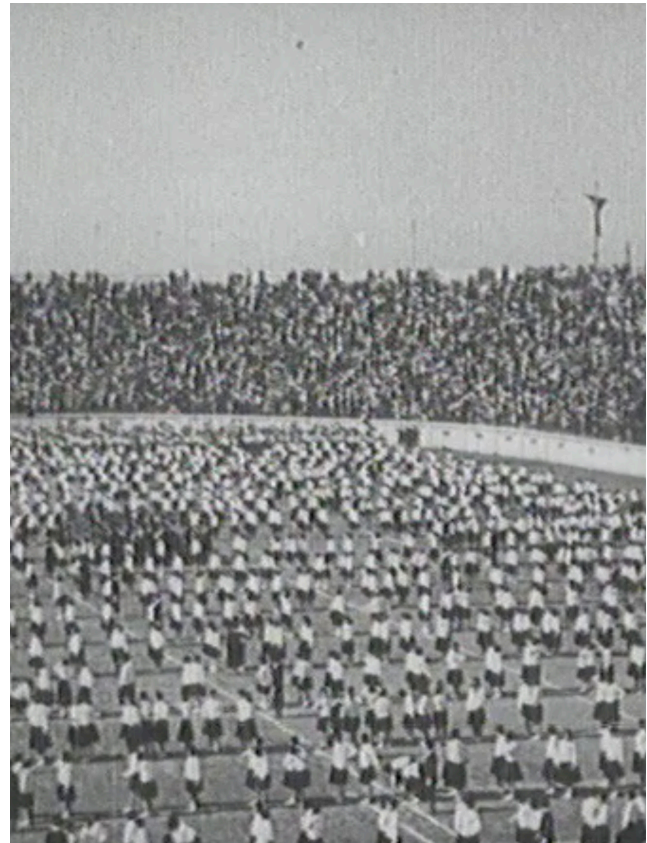
A technical and technological revolution took place during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This revolution reconfigured the film industry with regard both to film production and the spectators of those films. Aside from private film companies, various governments with varying political ideologies used fictional and non-fictional cinematography to disseminate news and specific points of view. It is for this reason that the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini claimed cinema as a weapon: "*la cinematografia è l'arma più forte dello Stato*" (Cinematography is the most powerful weapon of the state.)<sup>11</sup> Such weaponization of film happened primarily through the dissemination of newsreels.<sup>12</sup> This technology existed in almost all Western countries, often with state support, allowing cultural events to be shown in cinemas prior to the start of the commercial films.

As this paper aims to show, the newsreels of Italy, Argentina, and Spain during the 1930s and 1940s, had an especially strong influence on the political, aesthetic, and ethical discourses on physical culture in the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through analysis of newsreels from these three countries, one can identify a transnational dialogue, which presents movement-images as state propaganda productions in three different totalitarian governments during weak, but peaceful times.<sup>13</sup>

Images of mass gymnastics exhibitions are especially influenced by the *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa* (Luce), a state Italian propaganda official organ founded in 1924. As a part of the fascist Italian educational ministry, the Luce institute was explicitly established to educate through moving images. Three years later, in 1927, it began its newsreel production with the *Giornale Luce*, the official mass media outlet for informative documentary cinema. This audio-visual experience was followed between 1940 and 1943 by the newsreel of the

*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*—the Cine G. I. L.—the Italian fascist youth movement, which gave enormous space to physical culture on cinema screens. The archives show 26 films produced in 35mm format made by the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, a youth organization with strong state support from Benito Mussolini, that developed massive physical activity events favoring militaristic training for young people using chauvinist discourses.<sup>14</sup>

A good example of the use of physical culture as public policy in Italy can be seen in the newsreel, *Roma. Stadio del P.N.F. Il Duce Assiste all'Annuale Saggio Ginnico dell'Opera Nazionale Balilla* (Giornale Luce n° B1010, 1932). This newsreel shows hundreds of young people forming lines and marching in symmetrical geometrical shapes with a military soundtrack in the background. The music stops when Benito Mussolini enters the stadium and salutes. Then students begin to do calisthenic physical exercises, all simultaneously, separated first by boys and then by girls, all dressed the same ac-



This screenshot from the 1932 Italian newsreel titled: "Roma. P.N.F. Stadium, The Duke Attends the Annual Gymnastics Performance of the Opera Nazionale Balilla" shows a mass gymnastics display and a small part of the full stands in the stadium. Mussolini, referred to as Il Duce or the Duke, favored these mass displays of nationalistic patriotism as did Hitler, in Germany.

ording to gender. The twelve-minute film closes with military marching, the applause of the public, the image of Mussolini, and an artillery demonstration by the Italian army. This is just one example of the consistency between both Italian newsreels, the *Giornale Luce* (1931-1940) and the *Cine G.I.L.* (1940-1943): the presence of organized youth, separated according to gender, obeying the orders of a teacher/commander, performing choreographed drills with military music in the background, and the image of *Il Duce* in a long-angle shot to give a final grandiloquent image.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main objectives of the documentary films was to develop an Italian image abroad, especially in countries with strong heritage influences. One can see this influence in Argentinian newsreels beginning in 1938, when the newsreel became part of state policy because of two factors. First, National Deputy Matías Sánchez Sorondo proposed to create the *Instituto Cinematográfico del Estado*, the State Cinematographic Institute. As Clara Kriger pointed out, when Sánchez Sorondo travelled to Italy in 1937, he met with Mussolini himself to discuss the idea of copying the *cinogiornale* in Argentina.<sup>16</sup> According to Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, Sanchez Sorondo preferred the Italian experience to the German one due to the excessive centralization and propaganda of the Reich, in addition to criticizing the loss of talent caused by Nazi racial legislation.<sup>17</sup> Paranaguá continued his analysis, arguing that the proposal for the *Instituto Cinematográfico del Estado* had a virtual and ephemeral existence because the Argentinean military of the 1943 *coup d'état* preferred to ensure strict control of news and fiction production in private hands, instead of assuming an educational mission at the state level with no short-term results. In general, authoritarian regimes privileged propaganda over information and the media over education. These same ideas were continued by the following Argentinean President, General Juan Domingo Perón, although with a different strategy about educational cinema, through the organization of the *Departamento de Radioenseñanza y Cinematografía Escolar* in 1948, the Department of Radio Teaching and School Cinematography.<sup>18</sup> This political position was reflected in 1944 in the promulgation of a national decree that established the official character of the cinematographic media.<sup>19</sup> Although the ten newsreels released in Argentina during those years were produced by private companies (except for the *Noticiero Bonaerense*, which was

dependent on Buenos Aires' province), they had to pass through government censorship eyes, becoming a vehicle for national propaganda.<sup>20</sup>

The second relevant fact of 1938 for the influence of newsreels in Argentina was the birth of the most important Argentine newsreel: *Sucesos Argentinos*. "Argentinean Events" was a private mass media company run by Antonio Ángel Díaz that created radio, film, and magazines. Their newsreel was released on 26 August 1938 and remained in production until 1972, when it stopped because it could not compete with other technologies, like television. Although it called itself the "First Latin American Film Weekly," the truth is that it was not the first in Latin America, and not even in Argentina. Experiences such as the *Argentina Actualités* developed by Max Glücksmann in the 1910s or the *Film Revista Valle* produced by the Italian immigrant Federico Valle in the 1920s prove that *Sucesos Argentinos* was not the first one.<sup>21</sup> However, it can be assured that it was the most representative of all Argentine newsreels, due to its more than three decades on cinema theater screens and due to a cultural significance that transcended generations.

As María Florencia Luchetti explains, just five years after the 1938 decree and the birth of Antonio Ángel Díaz's film company, *Sucesos Argentinos* won 70% of the movie theater screens.<sup>22</sup> According to Argentinean law, this priority was based on the idea that this newsreel better reflected the national image, leaving the remaining 30% for the *Sucesos Panamericanos* (Pan American News.) In a more political reading of this situation, the preference for *Sucesos Argentinos* can be explained by the fact that Raúl Apold was one of the greatest beneficiaries, a public server linked to this company until 1946, who had strong connections to important Argentinean politicians. For example, he was the director of the first Peronist government documentary, entitled *The First Five-Year Plan* (Rodríguez, 2002), and in 1949, Apold worked as director of the *Sub-Secretaría de Informaciones*, the powerful Undersecretariat for Information, from which he became a strong political figure in entertainment and journalism. Years later, Apold earned a suggestive nickname—the Argentinean Goebbels—because he became the mass-media hand of the Juan Domingo Perón government's propaganda. This is why, despite Antonio Ángel Díaz's company being a private media company, *Sucesos Argentinos* was often considered an official state voice used by informative documentary cinema.

### BODIES AND IMAGES OF MOVEMENT

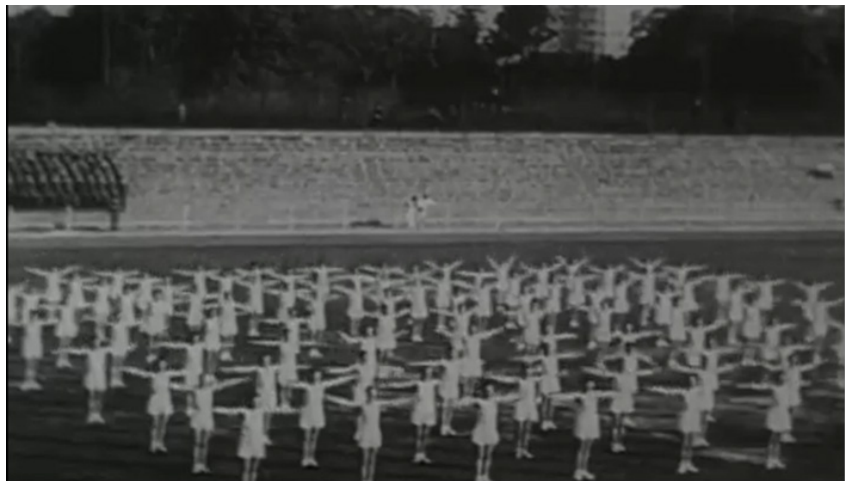
The 1930s is one of the most important decades in cinematography history because cinema theaters and the filming industry grew exponentially as an instrument for media massification as a political nationalist device. Furthermore, as Clara Kriger explained, cinema had become a form of cultural entertainment for the popular masses who could afford cinema tickets in many countries.<sup>23</sup>

The use of informative cinematography as a government propaganda device potentially made the newsreel a pedagogical tool, not only as a way of educating beyond the schooling processes, but also informing and forming the “national interests,” as the Argentinean 1943 national decree explicitly states.<sup>24</sup> This chauvinistic intention to transmit patriotism through newsreels is a good example of Italy’s historically enormous influence on Argentina, which can be explained by the significant immigration between the two countries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also by the legacy of Latin-American lifestyles. The impact was also strong on political ideologies.<sup>25</sup> This is especially clear in physical culture and Argentinean history since the first gymnastics and fencing teachers of the *Escuela Militar de Gimnasia y Esgrima*, the first higher education institution of physical culture in Argentina, were mostly Italians.<sup>26</sup> Like mass immigration, there was a colonization process from Europe to South America about the movements of bodies and images.

At the same time that images flowed from Europe to South America, one can also observe a “reverse colonization” process when it comes to newsreels in Spain, which I was able to discover thanks to an academic stay in 2015 at the Filmoteca Española in Madrid Spain.<sup>27</sup> The most important Spanish newsreel appeared in 1943 as a public state cinematographic media production—the *No-Do*—as it is popularly known, an acronym for *Noticiario y Documentales* (Cinematographic News and Documentaries). The *No-Do* were part of the *Dirección de Cinematografía y Teatro* (Cinematography and Theater Directorate), which reported to the *Vicesecretaría de Educación Popular* (Vice-secretary of Popular Education) and depended on

the *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (National Ministry of Education). As an official state voice, *No-Do* functioned as a propaganda cultural artifact of Francisco Franco’s government.<sup>28</sup> It began on 22 December 1942 as a result of a decree regulating the projection of filmed news as a mandatory and state responsibility, but its first edition was released on 4 January 1943.<sup>29</sup> Although every informative-documentary film is, at some point, a pedagogical tool, it is understood that the *No-Do* was born as an official device of the schooling process as part of the popular educational system.<sup>30</sup>

Like the Italian newsreels of *L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa* and similar to the *Sucesos Argentinos*, a huge number of phys-



In Spain, dictator Francisco Franco, also supported the concept of mass sport displays as a way to show his country’s superiority. He backed the making of what we now regard as propaganda documentaries such as this 1943 film called simply *Sports. Deportes – No-Do nº 16 (Spain), 1943*.

ical culture images can be found on *No-Do*, principally sporting events, mass gymnastics demonstrations, dance lessons for women, military training for men, and physical education school classes, among others. Many such images appeared in the early editions of *No-Do* in January 1943, but, surprisingly, on 19 April 1943 in *No-Do* edition number 16, a few Argentinean physical culture shots entitled “School Gymnastic Championship” appeared. These images exhibit the story of a schoolchildren’s tournament in the province of Buenos Aires, organized by the *Departamento de Educación Física* (State Department of Physical Education), in which student delegations are shown. Marches and choreographed gymnastic exhibitions by male students from the “Mariano Acosta” school are portrayed for almost the entire length of that particular news event.

Despite its brief duration, it is intriguing to consider why those images would be shown in Spanish cinemas. The important thing to remember is that this footage was shown on 22 September 1942 on the *Sucesos Argentinos* newsreel, following the subtitle “La Juventud Argentina Perfecciona su Educación Física” (Argentine Youth Perfect their Physical Education). Seven months later in Europe the same Argentine school championship was shown as news, but with a different storyline. In Argentina, it was shown as a recent news story because the images illustrated the past week’s events about a new policy, such as the inter-school championships. In Spain, however, it was presented in order to highlight the possibilities of physical culture as a political tool, as an important part of the totalitarian government machine. But why does a Spanish newsreel about an Argentine physical culture event represent “news”?

Unfortunately, tracing the path of these images is nearly impossible, but three things can be hypothesized. First, the nationalist ideas of the Spanish government were articulated into an ideal of international propaganda. For Francisco Franco’s administration, the transnational image of Juan Domingo Perón as Argentinean President was held as a paradigm for a peaceful totalitarian leader after World War II. Second, *No-Do* used those clips quite possibly because the producers didn’t have any other images at the time. The Spanish newsreel was released on 4 January 1943 just 13 days after it was announced on 22 December 1942. Therefore, it was probable that for its sixteenth edition the *No-Do* producers could not prepare the most interesting local news. The printed program that was distributed in Spanish cinemas and that announced the upcoming news proves that half of the news was imported from abroad. In the particular case of *No-Do* No. 16, there was footage from Germany, Italy, Greece, France, Hungary, and Argentina. Third, those images were part of the cinematographic traffic between Argentina and Spain.<sup>31</sup> Borders are erased, however, in this traffic from South America to Europe and from a private company supported by state resources (symbolic and financial) to an entirely public entity. Thus, the

“official” character of the narrative about physical culture, prescribing the correct ways of doing and being, whether in Argentina or Spain, presents a similar transnational political agenda.

#### FINAL REMARKS

How do the movement-images constitute a trans-nationalization in newsreels? Was there a specific cinematographic technique for showing physical culture techniques? Those images display similar ways of narrating mass gymnastics exhibitions because they depended on totalitarian military governments. Or was there simply a universal method of showing physical culture footage? Moreover, in a more particular sense, is it possible to think of the colonization of cinematographic and corporal techniques from Italy to Argentina, and from there to Spain? There is no specific answer to all these questions, but I would like to close with three final considerations.

First, I would like to conclude by pointing out that movement-images and body technique images show that there were transnational ways of how to narrate what it is to *do* and to *be* “correct.” Even if it is paradoxical, it became a government policy to develop “a strong and healthy people” by using a relatively universal mode of nationalistic speech, whose rhetoric crossed many borders. That is to say, while arguments and images of the health of the people were particular to the *Italian, Spanish, or Argentinean* nations, what was promoted was relatively universal. In addition, whether



The making of nationalistic documentaries also spread to South America as can be seen in this screenshot from “Argentine Youth Perfect Their Physical Education,” released in 1942.

these three examples of cinematography news were produced by government offices (such as *LUCE* or *No-Do*) or by a private company (such as *Sucesos Argentinos*), the truth is that in all cases, they reproduced what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “rhetoric of the official.”<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu refers to those speeches whose performative announcement makes them official by practical use, even if they are not enunciated by a government entity.

Second, the analyzed images make explicit a conceptual link between cinema and physical culture’s common history; sequence and symmetry are presented through the exhibited body and cinematographic techniques. On the one hand, sequences of images are used

as a narrative method, produced by the montage technique in the different newsreels, with parades of schoolchildren’s delegations marching combined with shots of the expectant passive audience. A similar effect is produced when the newsreel displays collective bodies doing the same thing at the same time, albeit men separated from women and boys from girls. These images of bodies also are associated to cinematographic techniques which combine high-angle shots of mass activity, alternated by short-angle shots to prioritize the individual facial expressions—a technique commonly used to prioritize the masses over individuality.

On the other hand, physical culture newsreel movement-image exhibits symmetry as a method of sensibility education. That is, the massively developed technical gestures are almost the same in Italy, Spain, and Argentina, with small local particularities. It is possible that the differences aren’t between the newsreels of those three countries, but rather within each country’s physical culture policies, as evidenced by the distinction between men’s and women’s exercises. In those images, men are carrying out activities in which strength is prioritized as the motor capacity, distinct from the women’s footage, which exhibits plasticity, grace, and dexterity as the most salient features of their movement. The male/female distinction could function in those years as a way to shape appropriate images of masculinity and femininity, and define gendered sensibilities associated with physical culture techniques.

The frames exhibiting explosive and fast physical exercises on the one hand and the passive, soft, and slow ones on the other are examples of the formation of gendered meanings. Although there is no clear definition through the images of physical exercises of what *is* masculine and what *is* feminine, the truth is that in the decade of 1934 to 1944 a clear differentiation of two distinctive gendered methods was developed. Characteristic of the time, more than a sex-gendered reaffirmation, the distinction was based on the intention of configuring a corporal homogenization.<sup>33</sup> After all, if it is possible to do the same, it is possible to be the same, even if that means a differentiation between the masculine and the feminine.

Once again, newsreels displayed a way of *doing* as a method to delineate ways



As can be seen in this advertisement, the Spanish documentary titled *Sports*, appeared as part of a larger cinema project created by the Franco-led government. Known as the *No-Do* an abbreviation of *Noticiero y Documentales Cinematograficos* (*Cinematographic News and Documentaries*), these news “documentaries” were also a form of propaganda and began to be shown in Italian theaters and some schools in 1943. *Deportes – No-Do nº 16* (Spain), 1943.

of *being*. It is interesting to observe the clothing they used, not only because all men and all women used the same between them, but also because they wear very similar clothes among Italian, Argentine, and Spanish men, and among Italian, Argentine, and Spanish women. However, beyond this difference, there seems to be a common idea—to use calisthenics as the appropriate movement technique. Everyone in lines and rows is doing the same action at the same time in front of a commander/teacher who demonstrates the *correct* exercise to do while students repeat it. Attractive to the cinematographic camera because of its symmetry, the calisthenic technique displays the image of everyone doing the same thing at the same time—individual bodies functioning as a collective national body.

The images then reproduce an idealized body, an iconic construction about something transcendental that is the effect of belonging to the collective body. In other words, the Argentine, Spanish, and Italian newsreels did not present a specific type of “correct” body with a defined ideology, but they did exhibit and masify the importance of the national, subsuming the individual will to the destiny of the collective. In any case, the “correct” thing for the body was to do what the rest did, although a specific gymnastic method was not defined as was common at the beginning of the 20th century.

The idea of a “correct” body is based on the work of Georges Vigarello, who explained that the passage from the Renaissance to modernity brought with it a series of characteristics that physical activities reproduce, as can be observed in these historical films.<sup>34</sup> There is a “showdown,” a “frontality,” and a “dramatization” of bodily practices when dozens of people synchronously move together. The “correct” body functioned as a fiction, as staging a “geometrization of gestures;” conceiving symmetry as a modern value, the gymnastic harmonic movements were a synonym of being equal.

Finally, it is worth considering the paradox of passivity of the spectators sitting in movie theaters observing bodies move while listening to narratives about physical culture’s scientific importance, augmented by patriotic rhetoric. Passivity and dynamism in equalized balance presents the cinema as an extension of the schooling process, reinforcing the discourses otherwise held by the State through the school, but through mass-scale audio-visuals. As Walter Benjamin has noted, cinematography is a powerful *weapon* because it can replace free

imagination with a pre-configured image.<sup>35</sup> The movement-images in newsreels thus operate as a didactical tool not only for school students but also for the adult population. Newsreel work is therefore a key factor in the context of the cultural expansion of cinematography as a mass-media industry.

As a part of this cinematic mass-media process, Benjamin identifies in the 1930s the rise of the intimate relationship between propaganda and the mechanical arts of photography and film. In a historical framework characterized by totalitarian political governments, as happened in Italy, Argentina, and Spain, Benjamin points out the risk of art politicization, which ultimately impoverishes the aesthetic experience. The politicization of art produced a gradual but sustained replacement of the imagination by mechanical images, and that, in turn, reduced political speeches to form with little substance. As an effect of the characteristic technical reproducibility of the mechanical arts, its propagandistic use produces a political reproduction perpetuated by images.

Benjamin’s critique of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century does not lose historical relevance in times like the present, when one can observe patriotic nationalist extremism returning, once again with movement-images as its *weapon*, using technologies to standardize sensibilities. As a constant reminder of its potential consequences, images like those in Italian, Argentinean, and Spanish newsreels show the danger of totalitarian ideologies, body homogenization, and aesthetic universalization.

## NOTES

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