Promostyl: emotions and eroticism influencing style



Image: Promostyl.

There is little doubt that our relationship with sport is changing. Most individuals would admit to a little hero worship of a favourite sportsman when growing up but today this perspective has fundamentally altered. As Benjamin and Sebastien de Diesbach of Promostyl explained in a presentation prepared for ispo, the uni-dimensional sportsman is no longer sufficient. Because sport has become such an important aspect of our lives, sportsmen and women become the images of who we would like to be and what we are prepared to accept as ourselves. The presentation made for interesting speculation.

Tears for the dead footballer

Apparently, we are looking for more in life than just work, money, or leisure. Emotion is an important thing to us, because it has the potential to lift us up from the mediocre to new heights.

And so sportsmen must be emotional, not uni-dimensional, not just performance oriented. During the semi-final of the Football Federation Cup last year, a Cameroon player, Marc Vivien Foé, died on the field. He was well known to the French public and players because he mainly played for a French club. The final was between Cameroon and France and was the occasion of an extraordinary expression of grief and sorrow. The players cried, in front of the cameras. One of the players was the French goalkeeper Gregory Coupet, a friend and colleague of Foé.

France won the final but, in paying homage to Foé, any hostile feeling between the teams had vanished. In the face of death, the teams were united, symbolising the union of all men, of all humanity. Modern or hypermodern man feels essentially the need for community, the need to be together. He does not want to be the same as others - but he wants to be with them.

Adventures open up their souls

Alpine, Himalayan, and climbers in general used to be of single dimension: they went up, reached the summit, planted the flag of their country and that was it!

Now we are into the psychological era of climbing.

Proof of this is the book by the well-known Himalayan climber, J.C. Lafaille: *Prisonnier de l' Annapurna*. Ten years ago, Lafaille lost one of his friends, an even more famous climber, Pierre Beghin, while descending Annapurna. Lafaille nearly lost his life, too. In his book, he explains his psychological suffering: only recently has he been able to climb again and return to Annapurna. For a decade, as the title of his book claims, he was a prisoner of the mountain.

Object of desire

Playing football used just to be playing football. Today, it is principally playing with the desires of the public and projecting an image of sexuality. Sportsmen such as David Beckham have become 'objects of desire'. He represents what in New York is called 'metro sexuality': heterosexual men behaving and dressing like homosexual men. His exhibitionism is part of his talent and appeal.

Eroticism comes to sports

How can sports open themselves to the public? How can they be even more democratic? How can rugby become more popular? One solution is to change the image of the player. Rugby players are seen as thick, heavy brutes but a calendar recently produced by professional rugby in France presents an entirely different image because all the players are shown naked.

Sports are becoming more erotic. Even sports clothing is now concerned with being sexy. Polos cling closer to the body. Shorts are briefer. The body is more accentuated.

Technical progress enables us to reduce the quantity of material one needs to dress a body and also to reduce the layers, and the thickness of these layers, between the skin and the exterior. In skiwear, it is forcast that big parkas disappear for a much more skin-tight fit.

The era of the body

Years ago it was improble that muscle could lead you to becoming the governor of California. Ronald Reagan was an actor and a governor of California. However Reagan had had a long career in politics even when he was an actor, before becoming governor of the richest state of the US and in the world. Now Arnie Schwarzenegger has burst into politics and his style is a 'muscled' one: by subjective implication he promises a firm hand. Again, the body is becoming the hero of today.

To say that Schwarzenegger's body is his political programme would be unfair. During his campaign, he expressed his ideas better than his opponents – even in TV debates.

But his body made him noticeable, remarkable. It also expressed the desire of many people: to be muscled, certainly to be slim at the waist, not to have a fat stomach and to maintain that look into his 40s and 50s and beyond.

Aesthetics favoured Schwarzenegger at the level at which modern man is most concerned: his body. Man can reshape his body through 'pumping iron', shedding fat, adding protein supplements, popping pills, and adopting fresh culture. Instead of 'I am' it is a case of 'am defined by myself.'

The last Utopia

Changing our body is our last step, our last Utopia before the big jump, claim the de Diesbachs. We have changed our society, our culture, our definitions of what is a man, a woman, or a child. Now we are changing our bodies through body building, chemical products and processes such as Botox, a product that one can inject under the skin to erase lines and furrows and through aesthetic/cosmetic surgery.

So what is the big jump? It will be to manipulate our genes themselves and to create a New Man.

Fukuyama, the American philosopher states: "Science and bio-technology will triumph where ideology has failed: to change man!" Why will this happen? Because man has always tried to correct negative trends. It is in his nature: technology gives him a new way, perhaps the final way, to do it!

Extending locomotion

Any way you can move seems to be open to exploration. There appears to be no limit to the ingenuity of man to find more ways of locomotion in one form or another. We now have air-boards, in effect a body board on snow, that you blow-up. It is solid enough not to tear itself into pieces. Because of the air that has been blown into it, you can negotiate bumps as much as you want without breaking your back!

Races are now organised in winter. It appears imperative that action must continue during the whole year, such as the Ukatak race in Quebec. Four hundred kilometres through the wilderness. Adventure races are replacing adventure tourism: competition is becoming a popular form of sports.

Protection becomes a style

Protection devices used to be reserved for certain sports: now you find them in traditional sports such as skiing. They become a style. Security equipment is becoming more sophisticated through digitising, easier to use: normal skiers, who rarely leave the piste, use it.

Backpacks are designed to carry spades and rods for digging a skier out of the snow or finding his body.

Children have shown the trend for a number of seasons and refuse to ski without helmets and big glasses - giving themselves an 'extremist' look.

(Incidentally: always look at children, they often show a trend before it strikes the adult market!) Well equipped for the cold, children never hesitate to lie on the snow. The same familiarity with danger is also spreading to adults.

The Robinson Crusoe reaction

Trends are always accompanied by counter-trends. The high level of equipment that one sees has its opposite, which can be described as the Do - It - Yourself attitude.

Last year, twin brothers, Maximilien and Emmanuel Berque, crossed the Atlantic in a boat they built themselves, a wooden pirogue. They had no modern navigation equipment, no electronics, no radio, no watch. Their clothing was totally amateurish. Apparently they wanted to travel in an archaic manner. Like the Maoris did when they crossed part of the Pacific Ocean in the 5th century, they navigated by the sun and the stars and when these could not be seen, by the wind and the direction of the waves.

Then there is the example of Nicolas Vanier, the Jack London of our time. A few years ago he crossed Siberia. Recently, he followed the Rockies into Alaska with his wife and little girl covering 3,000 kilometres without the aid of motorised equipment. He even built himself a log cabin, in the way settlers used to do in the 19th century when they crossed America from East to West. Building your own log cabin is now becoming another way of filling leisure time while the world continues to get more sophisticated. It appears to be a trend to reject modernism.

The anti-modernist attitude is motivated, among other reasons, by the desire to shoulder total responsibility for oneself. 'I can survive and live decently, with my own means.'

The DIY inspiration can be found in many crazy inventions nearer to home than the North Pole. After snowboard, we now see snowskating. No doubt, all of these attitudes will influence colour and design.

David Buirski



Image: Promostyl.