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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

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# 10. Lift Up Your Arms!

## Elite Athletes and Cold-War Childhoods

*Susanne Gannon and Stefanie Weiss*

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This chapter turns to configurations of athleticism, child bodies, and the instrumental uses of sport as a form of soft power. We work with memory stories of children selected to become elite athletes within the diverse geopolitical timespaces of the Cold War in East Germany, Romania, and Hungary. We follow trajectories of selection, training, and injury as we trace formations of sporting subjectivities as discursive, affective, relational, and material. In close readings of each of the stories, we consider desire and longing for sporting success, the investments of state institutions and individuals in producing elite sporting bodies, and how we might think the body through ever-present risk and intimations of freedom. In our analysis, we introduce theoretical resources on risk, memory, and the carnal body to help us to think differently about the memories and processes of collective biography as a methodology.

Sporting excellence in the global arena was a central plank of Cold-War cultural politics, and significant state resources were invested in identifying and cultivating sporting talent. This chapter turns to memory stories of children who were part of this strategy in particular geohistorical junctures. Recognition of elite potential opens children to new opportunities, and their bodies are subjected to new instructional regimes and disciplinary procedures. They take up new desires and aspirations, join with others who are similarly selected,

and become members of new communities. Children in elite sporting programs are trained to anticipate success, but they also experience numerous risks and disappointments. Their bodies, minds, desires, dreams, imaginings of possible futures are all shaped and profoundly impacted by the experiences and the procedures of sports training and competition.

Representing collective identity and embodying the desire of a nation, elite athletic programmes provide new perspectives on the Cold War from those who remember themselves through their sporting capacities and potential. Each memory story describes a specific moment in the elite sporting journey of the narrator as a child. Although the body (flesh, tendons, strength, dexterity, agility) may be the obvious focus of training, the memory stories reinforce the inseparability of bodies, affects and emotions, imaginings, and the material and sociopolitical contexts of children's lives. We begin by briefly outlining how the body is understood in collective biography and the theoretical resources we draw on to think through bodies, stories, and memories. We summarise current research on Cold-War sport and youth. We then present close readings of three memory stories of elite sporting childhoods. We conclude with our thoughts on contributions to research on Cold-War sporting childhoods and collective biography.

## Bodies, Stories, Memories

The body has always been central to collective-biography and memory work, from Haug et al.'s instruction to 'choose a theme connected with the body' (1987, p. 13) through to Davies and Gannon's focus on 'writing *from* the body', since the memory is 'lodged in the body' (2006, p. 10). Bodies are not understood as discrete or intact entities but as discursive, affective, relational accomplishments that settle, momentarily, in particular configurations (Gannon et al. 2014). Memory stories evoked through and about the body, therefore, cannot be assumed to be reliable or truthful representations of any particular experience. Fragmentation, misremembering, artful reconstruction, and imagination are all at work in the processes of collective biography. The narrator is inevitably captured by multiple discontinuous

temporalities. Hints and flickerings of the child subject that they feel themselves to be, that they come to recognise and reconstruct as their 'self', are pinned to a specific event or moment that is imbued with retrospective significance, layered with subsequent historicity, adult insights, habits of thought, and culturally available tropes and motifs. Collective-biography processes move memories from individuals into social spaces where these elements are opened up for critical consideration.

Memories of sporting prowess suggest themes of strength, power, submission, routine, pain, and disappointment. We are interested in tracing the specificities and detail of how these materialise in the memory stories, rather than generalising from them. Embodied or corporeal memories are organised into stories whose coherence relies as much on gaps, omissions, and exclusions, as it does on inclusions of particular details. We are interested not in the facticity of history but in how history works discursively and materially to produce certain embodied subjects in the memory stories. We are interested, too, in dissonances and inconsistencies that disrupt the seamlessness of any story.

Memory is always an ambivalent process, with the body both elusive and pivotal to what we can remember, how we remember, which details are arranged for narrative form and coherence, and which are suppressed. In collective biography, remembering is intensely social. Participants tell their memories to the group, write and rewrite them, guided by questions such as: 'How did it feel? How did it look? What were the embodied details of this remembered event?' (Davies and Gannon 2006, p. 10). Philosopher-psychoanalyst Anne Dufourmantelle (2019) says that the body is a puzzle, profoundly ambiguous. Our 'carnal being' exceeds the 'perceptible body', to include 'the thought body, the imagined body, the dreamed body, the body of the voice, the body of taste, the affected body, or the body overtaken by fever, jouissance, drunkenness, the body that migrates beyond the body in order not to suffer' (p. 75). The body is multiple, excessive, generative, and relational. In this project, sporting memories arise in dreams, visions, sensations: smells and sweat on the skin, gut-wrenching pain, the metallic taste of soup at a training camp, the sound of a coach shouting in your ear, or the ecstatic joy of victory all exceed reason and are impossible to contain in one small story. In Dufourmantelle's

practice, participants tell stories about and from the body to a particular listener. The difference in the methodology of collective biography is that the audience and interlocutor for stories is the group rather than the individual analyst. For Dufourmantelle, memories lodged in the body, stories we tell ourselves and others, habituated narrative stances and perspectives, are always open to variation. The key tool of analysis lies in creating conditions for the subject to tell her story differently, reflecting back its dimensions, querying a detail or an angle, opening it up to variations. Collective-biography workshops provide this space, one where stories are interrogated to explore new angles and lines of variation, details come in and out of sight, and sensations echo and resonate. Working with the memory archive as we do in this chapter—writing around and through the memories, trying out different readings and interpretations—continues these processes. Despite differences of intent and process, including the intimacy of analysis compared to the collectivity of memory work, Dufourmantelle offers fresh conceptual tools to think through bodies, memories, and practices of collective biography. The relationality of collective biography, with interrogation by others as part of the workshop process, deepens our awareness that processes of remembering (such as in Cold-War contexts) are always embedded in social formations (Arnold-de Simine and Radstone 2013).

Dufourmantelle's theorising of 'risk' also offers us new ways to think through stories of children and sport as well as of the processes of collective biography. She asks readers to think of risk as a 'territory' to be 'traced' rather than as a discrete heroic act, as a 'certain manner of being in the world... a horizon line' (p. 2). Moments of risk can push us ahead of ourselves, opening us to chance and freedoms, determining future possibilities but also looping back to reanimate the past. In telling stories, we take the risk to surrender our memories and rehabilitate the collective experiences with a sense of freedom and strength. Collective-biography processes entail inherent risks, but these are productive and generative risks. We return to this reflection in our conclusion.

## Children's Sport and State Socialism

We juxtapose three memory stories of child athletes at a time when the sporting body embodied the desire of the nation in the body of the child. The body is both a fleshy corporeal or carnal entity, as evoked in the memory stories, and a symbolic system implicated in geopolitics, part of the identity construction of nations. Bodies are points on which power operates, and from which power pushes back. We investigate processes of subjectification through which children are enrolled in state structures that cultivate athleticism and confer recognition, as each of the memory stories describes how a child takes up, negotiates and disavows desire for that subject position.

Configurations of athleticism and child bodies suggest the instrumental uses of sport. Sport was a 'major cultural phenomenon' in the Cold War, such that the 'liminality of sport made it both the hardest form of soft power and the softest form of hard power' (Edelman and Young 2019, p. 1). Although children's recruitment and participation were key strategies of state sporting apparatus, crucial for cultivating elite performances, their experiences as children rarely feature in historical analysis, except for those few who achieved global fame (for example, Nadia Comăneci). Yet, their accounts offer nuanced insights into how sport was experienced, felt, and remembered by child athletes beyond stereotypes of regimentation and disciplinary power. In Czech state socialism, Oates-Indruchova (2018) reexamines moments from her own childhood as 'epiphanies', arguing that children's physical cultures were egalitarian spaces where sporting participation was assumed, inclusive, and gender-neutral. Collective synchronised exercise (*spartakiad*) was a public ritual in which all Czech schools participated (Kaščák and Pupala 2018), and sport was integral to children's organisations such as Pioneers. Organised performances symbolised the literal building of communist ideals of strength and optimism through the bodies of children. In contrast to this egalitarianism, where all bodies had a place on the field of display, and where inclusion and mass performance were the point of the exercise, elite athletics had a different purpose and relied on differentiation and separation from the masses. They required different sorts of disciplines and temporalities, with training in the present pivoting on imagined futures.

## Memory Stories

We selected memories from the archive that focused on children's bodies in training, shaping and being shaped by the desire of the state as well as of the individual. While the stories are written from a child's perspective, they are made sense of by the adult narrator who tends to compress the political and historical knowledge that makes each story tellable and interesting within this project. Although there are many stories about sport in the archive, the three we selected are of child athletes in East Germany, Romania, and Hungary: a rower, a gymnast, and a track-and-field athlete. Importantly, each child was selected for these sports because their bodies had certain dispositions. Being selected opened opportunities for specialist programs, schools, trips, and tours. The children moved into a new category of young person—one with potential, worthy of specific focused attention. Rather than foregrounding individualised or inherent talent, these stories suggest the labour that goes into making the elite sporting body. While they invite us to imagine bodily trajectories that are lived as limit, vigilance, and submission, there are also intimations of amazement, desire, and freedom. There is also, always, a shadow of precarity or risk—the body might fail, the child might lose their status and therefore part of their identity, they might be rejected as readily as they are selected. The three stories that we explore follow a sequence through from selection and training to competition and injury.

### Selected for Rowing (East Germany)

*She is sitting in class. It is a quiet morning. The class is organised into three rows of desks with six desks in each row. She sits at the third desk in the row next to the wall. Notebooks and pencils are uniformly laid out in the top-right corner of the desk in front of each child. The teacher, Mrs Lindner, is speaking and all the children have turned to face her.*

*When the door opens, everyone shifts their gaze to the door. Three adults come in. Mrs. Lindner interrupts her lesson and takes two steps towards them. They talk quietly to each other. They look serious. Mrs. Lindner turns back to the class and explains. These visitors are here to see if any of the children would like to join a rowing club in the south of Berlin. She asks all to stand up, next to the chair. The noise of moving chairs scraping the floor fills the*



classroom, breaking the silence in the room. The kids are standing and waiting for the next thing to happen. The strangers start to move along the rows of desks. They do not stop at the first bench, but they pause briefly at the second bench in her row. They are looking at Ivo now, her friend. 'You. Go over to the window' the woman tells him, pointing towards the teacher's desk. Then she takes a step back to make space for Ivo. He steps away from his desk, fills the gap the woman just made for him with his body and, without looking at the girl, hesitantly starts going to the teacher's desk next to the window. The strangers come to the girl and Holger. Holger is three months older than her, but visibly shorter. They don't look at Holger but they turn to her. The woman who was speaking to Ivo points at her: 'You. Go over to the window.' The girl tries to read the tone of her voice. Is this good or bad news? She does not have a clue. She does not know what will happen to her once she reaches the window, but she finds some solace in Ivo being there. So she starts walking towards him.

The three adults are walking from one desk to the next, and the little group of them at the teacher's desk grows to six people. When the three adults finish their round through the classroom, the classmates are allowed to sit down. The woman who told them to go to the window now tells them to stand in a line. Sensing the looks of the others, with no hint of what will happen next, they position themselves next to each other. The two men walk behind them, in the space between them and the wall where the blackboard is. 'Lift up your arms,' one of them says to Ivo, and she sees Ivo lifting up his arms. 'You too. Lift up your arms,' says the second man to the girl. She cannot look at Ivo to her right anymore. She lifts up her arms. Mrs. Lindner and the classmates are watching them standing there in silence with their arms lifted. She feels the fingers of the man on her shoulder, moving up the arms, the elbow and the wrist.

'Bend forwards,' he says, and a moment later, she hears the man behind Ivo saying the same. She bends forwards, assuming that Ivo would be doing the same by now. Again, she feels the fingers on her spine, pressing her vertebrae one after the other, starting at the neck and ending at the hip.

'Alright,' the man behind her says. 'Go and wait outside the classroom.' Together with Ivo, she leaves the room. Once the door closes, she asks him 'What are they doing?' Ivo explains to her that it has something to do with rowing. She knows what rowing is—she learnt how to do it during the last holiday. She can already row the boat with her whole family sitting in it. But what these three

*adults did has nothing to do with rowing, she thinks. The door opens and Stefan and Antje, two of her classmates, come to join them.*

*When the door opens again, not only do the last two children join them, but also the three adults. In the dark hallway, they tell stories about the rowing club, about the boats there, and the water, and that they will teach them how to row very quickly. They chose them because they were tall, the woman says. They can become really good rowers as their bodies fit well to the sport. She did not have any sense that her body would fit any sport. It had never occurred to her that in order to do a sport, one body is better suited than another.*

This memory story opens with a meticulously ordered classroom—the children, the furniture, the notebooks are all lined up and in their proper places. Authority in the classroom is completely with the teacher, Mrs Lindner. It is a safe and familiar place. Abruptly, the power relations are disturbed when the door opens and unknown adults enter the room. Although the teacher introduces them as ‘visitors’, the children clearly see them as ‘strangers’ with absolute authority. Almost all the dialogue in the story comes in the form of imperatives/commands: ‘You. Go over to the window... Lift up your arms... Bend forwards.... Go and wait outside the classroom.’ Although the unnamed narrator observes everything that happens in great detail, this attention does not help her understand what is happening: ‘She does not have a clue. She does not know what will happen’. When she does speak, much further into the story, it is only to ask ‘What are they doing?’.

Although the children do not actively choose, there is a sort of mute agency operating through their bodies. The right body shape will get you chosen. The strangers map the children’s bodies—with their eyes, looking for height, and then with their fingers, getting more specific and intimate. Initially, the woman steps back so Ivo can pass without their bodies touching but, as the story develops, there is no space between them as the adults begin to touch the bodies of the children. They start with arms, feeling perhaps for muscles, sinew, potential to be strengthened. We know no more than the child about what the man’s fingers are feeling for. The fingers move down shoulder, elbow, wrist, down to all the vertebrae, one after another from neck to hip. It feels very invasive and there is no point when this child has the opportunity to say yes or no to any of it. The children are compliant and confused. Ivo has

some idea of what this is about, and an image flashes into the narrator's mind of the pleasures of rowing on the last summer holiday. Outside in the corridor, there is more effort from the adults to explain what they have been selected for and imply how it might be enjoyable because they will be good at it. The child seems clear about two things by the end of the story—that what the strangers did to them in the classroom 'has nothing to do with rowing' and that sport is more about hierarchies of bodies and their fit to a particular sport than any other factor.

Being selected produces a double effect. The child did not know that she was good at a sport, nor if she wanted to be, but becoming an athlete (or being made into one by those prying adult fingers) is to become an object of desire of the state (as represented by these adults). The child will need to learn how to properly embody the desire that is invested in her. It might be confusing but also makes the child want something that she didn't already know she desired. This memory is told from the point of view of one who was selected, without knowing what is expected of her. The teacher offers an invitation, implying there is a choice ('if any of the children *would like* to join a rowing club...'), but the movements of the strangers around the room, pausing, looking, pointing, giving orders, clearly indicate that there is no choice. The invitation is contradictory because, in reality, it is about which body is suitable. The reconstruction of that moment allows us to experience the anguish of those who are being reviewed and finally selected, but it also leaves us open to the question of what happened to all those 'classmates that are allowed to sit down', those who were not selected, who are 'visibly shorter'. Where does risk lie—in being selected or not? We cannot tell, but we align with the narrator in the corridor in imagining the promise of the future. Dufourmantelle suggests that childhood can feel like 'hanging in wait for something to happen' where each event is infused with both disappointment and promise 'as if neither exists without the other' (2019, p. 67). The story of selection for training swirls with these feelings.

This story finishes before training begins, but we can imagine how this promised future might detract from other pleasures. Rowing the family on the lake in the summer holidays is likely to be in this child's past. From this pivotal moment onwards, rowing will take the child away

from her family. It will be organised by the club, and will take place on their boats, and in their water. Rather than enjoyment and leisure, the goal now is speed, strength and the re-formation—through training—of this particular body into the generic rowing body. Our second story takes us into the thick of sport-training regimes, on a summer training camp for young gymnasts.

### Gymnastics Training Camp (Romania)

*She was awakened suddenly by a beam of light piercing through the windows. There were no curtains. Another 20 or 30 girls were sleeping in the same dormitory, on beds made of metal bars. It was a scorching summer day in a gymnastics training camp by the Black Sea.*

*For three weeks, the girls had done the same routine: waking up very early, eating breakfast, training, going to the beach, having lunch, more training, having dinner, sleeping. Those three weeks seemed like three years to her. She hated that routine and being away from her family. During 1974–1979, she trained as a gymnast at the primary school next to the block of flats where her family lived. With Nadia Comăneci's success at the Olympics in Montreal and her perfect 10 score, the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu seized the opportunity to raise Romania's profile internationally through sports. A lot of talented girls were enrolled in free training programs throughout the country. She was one of them. She wanted to be like Nadia, all Romanian girls in the '70s wanted to be like Nadia. It was very hard work, with calloused palms, scratches, bumps to the head and blisters. And during summer camps, she missed her home dearly, her familiar surroundings, the food, familiar smells and faces.*

*A part of the routine was going to the beach as a group. She loved water, but she didn't have fond memories of going to the beach with the group of gymnasts. She didn't like the way children were exposed to water and sun at all. They were lined up on the beach like sardines, one next to each other, very close together, in three or four rows, and they were told when to turn: 10 minutes on their backs, 10 on their stomachs. A trainer would shout: 'Back now!', 'Front now!'. Her favourite position was on the stomach, as she could better protect herself from the sun that way. Then they were sent into the water, but in a very orderly and organised manner: a line of older girls would line up in front of the younger ones. The water was just up to their knees, but*

*nobody could go beyond the line of older children. Ten minutes or so in water and then back to our towels. She used to cry a lot in that camp, at night, in bed, quietly. She would write letters to her parents that she hated it and she wanted them to come and pick her up. But of course, by the time her letter would arrive home, it was time to leave the camp. That was the longest camp in her life.*

This story takes us to a moment when Nadia Comăneci became a concrete object of desire and possibility for young people. The story opens and closes at the summer training camp, but the paragraph in the middle anchors it in a particular historical and geopolitical moment. The narrator says ‘She wanted to be like Nadia, all Romanian girls in the 70s wanted to be like Nadia.’ She anchors this desire precisely to the span of years when she trained as a gymnast, from 1974–1979. This girl was already well into gymnastics training by the time Comăneci achieved global prominence in Montreal in 1976, and became a socialist icon for the nation. Here the evocation of ‘the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu’ and his inclination to ‘seize’ opportunities conveys a post-socialist sensibility and critical political awareness of what followed. Here wanting to ‘be like Nadia’ is only intelligible when geopolitics is part of the story. Whether explicit or implicit, all memories are infused with the sorts of tensions that come from writing from the perspective of a child, with the knowledge of an adult. Being ‘like’ Nadia in this memory, is a crucial qualifier because none of these girls can be Nadia. There is only, and can only ever be, one Nadia. Yet, the scale of desire is absolute, because it is shared by ‘all Romanian girls’.

In contrast to the first story, this narrator has already taken up a sporting identity. Gymnast is the main identity she ascribes to herself during her six years of primary schooling. Woven through the story are glimpses of a homesick daughter, with the last lines telling us that she wants her parents to rescue her from the training camp. This is another impossible desire. Even though the letters do not serve their intended purpose, writing them means that she can express her anguish and therefore liberate herself to some extent from oppressive circumstances. Doufoumantelle speaks of running the risk of disobeying, which presupposes the ability to obey. Disobedience has nothing to do with whims and tantrums but, rather, supposes in

the first instance being able to speak, to discover that it is possible to be loyal to oneself. The narrator takes the risk of accessing that inalienable place: 'that other space inside [...] the impregnable and universal space of her freedom' (Doufourmantelle 2019, p. 12). Here the girl is able to say that she no longer wants to be there. Even when the letter arrives days after she is already home, there is something liberating in the words and memory.

The framing story is the experience of the three-week gymnastics summer training camp by the Black Sea. If the figure of Nadia is remarkable for her uniqueness, and the child missing her family is also a particular individual subject, then the rest of the story is about the collapse of the individual into the group. From dawn when '20 or 30 girls' are all asleep in the same dormitory in the same sorts of beds, the story is about regimentation and the operations of power on children's bodies. The daily routine is the same with the repetition making three weeks seem 'like three years' or 'the longest camp in her life'. The marks of training are written on the body as 'calloused palms, scratches, bumps to the head and blisters' and we can assume that all the girls doing this 'hard work' carry similar physical marks. Perhaps all the girls are quietly crying in their beds at night but the perspective of the narrator does not allow any insight beyond her own unhappiness.

Regimentation carries through into the apparent daily leisure activity of 'going to the beach' which sits between scheduled training sessions. The girls are positioned on the sand like sardines packed tightly in a can. Their movements are controlled by instructors who tell them to turn at regular intervals to even out how their bodies are exposed to the hot sun. This is the opposite of relaxation, or of choice. Access, entry and exit from the water are regulated, within a hierarchy of older/young girls. Although water can be a medium for building strength, agility, and grace, here it does not have that purpose. This is just knee-high paddling amidst bodies restrained by other bodies.

The scene is vivid and detailed, easy to envisage, almost at times a parody. It does not make sense to ask whether these details were actually true but, rather, what versions of truth are suggested and what practices pertaining to bodies and sports do they gesture towards. The

controlled exposure to sun and to seawater could be read in multiple ways. Perhaps gymnastics requires attention to the look as much as the strength of the body, with healthy suntanned skin desirable for high-cut barelegged gymnastics outfits. Perhaps it has nothing to do with appearance but is more about children who live in blocks of flats in cities and a general orientation to the health-giving properties of sun and sea. Would these city children have been able to visit the beach if they had not been invited to the training camp? There is no playing, no freedom, no choice and even though this is the seaside in summer, this is nothing like a summer holiday.

In our first and second stories, the children are developing skills, strength, and aspirations so that they might belong to the elite class of high-performance athletes. In our third story, the body fails and these dreams come crashing down. The communities of children that featured in the earlier stories are gone, and the immobilised child suffers an intensely private agony and grief.

### Backpain (Hungary)

*She was lying paralysed in bed. The toilet was 15 steps away so she only went when it was impossible to hold anymore. The pain was unbearable even with the strongest painkiller they prescribed her. Every step was agonising even if she moved very slowly trying to tense her muscles so they kept her lower back tightly in place. She felt despondent. Now she understood that she must stop competitive athletics. In the spring, they went to the doctor and then she had an appointment in the sports hospital in Budapest. They confirmed that the only way she could continue with competitions was if she had an operation strengthening her spine with screws in her lower back. The operation was very risky, and they only performed it if they deemed the person talented. She was 14 and her mother did not agree to the operation. She argued for a while, and her mother asked for a second opinion. Her decision stayed. The regional competition took place the day before. She did her usual combination: javelin, discus, shotput and long jump. She already felt the pain as she pushed off during the long jump and then on the way home sitting on the bus she could hardly bear the pain. By morning she could not move. Even the tiniest of movements came with shooting pain. As she was lying in bed there motionless, she slowly buried her dream of becoming an Olympic champion.*

'No pain, no gain' is a familiar training slogan and mantra for elite sports stars. Pain is a necessary virtue, something to push through towards greater sporting achievements. Pain is linked to the idea of crossing thresholds as a body strengthens itself, becomes more agile, resists more. However, there is a difference between the pain of a body that is transforming itself in order to fit a particular sport that is different from the pain of injury. Here the carnal body manifests as 'unquantifiable pain' (Dufourmantelle 2019, p. 74). The injury rips, tears, paralyses her. The pain of injury alerts, prevents, stops her. The body is in a kind of suspension. For Dufourmantelle, suspension offers the chance 'to look with as much attention as possible at what is simply there, at what offers itself to you in the presence of things' (ibid., p. 13). Motionless, made still in her bed in the overwhelming presence of pain, the girl has no alternative than to confront her body's inadequacy to meet her desire to pursue elite sport. The story opens and closes with images of immobility and constraint: she is 'paralysed', every step is 'agonising', even the 'tiniest of movements'. There is a sort of separation of self from the recalcitrant wounded body, an interiority that transcends the exteriority of the body. Yet, Dufourmantelle says: 'There is no demarcation and no sign that allows you to say: here is the dead centre of interiority' (ibid., p. 76). From where does the narrator speak when there is no separation of self, will, body? This cleaving of body and self is even stronger here than in the previous memories. For Dufourmantelle, in the space of vulnerability 'your name gives way to this skin that bodies forth, that becomes a loving body, a tearful body, or a combatant body' (ibid.). Here, the triumphant body, the strong and agile body, becomes the broken body, and the narrator seeks to speak beyond that still place of pain that is all she is in the moment. The contrast between the ability of a body to move, even to break through regional and national borders and venture out into the world is confronting in this moment of immobility. It is worth wondering, then, what happens to this girl, how she confronts her own desire with the imminent obstacle. If the body is much more than the flesh, perhaps also there, in the pain and frustration of that interrupted dream, the foundations of inner strength are building that will enable her to go further and inhabit as yet unknown other worlds.



Memory, within the story, as it zigzags across time and place, is also an escape from the moment. This story's temporality is very different from the earlier chronological stories. It begins with the girl in bed unable to move, then jumps forward in time to the Spring visit to the sports hospital in Budapest, then backwards to the day before this one on the regional athletics field, then to the present frame of the story where she is again in bed, and at the same time far from there, in a possible future where she might have been an 'Olympic champion'. A dream that is now dead and buried. Everything is compressed to the immobilised body in the bed where the story starts and ends, with past and future suspended in the present.

The narrator suggests some possibilities of agency in this story, of desires that are blocked by others, by chance, by the body itself. She wanted the operation so she could continue with athletics, but this depends on her mother's approval. She clearly has talent—this operation is only offered to those who warrant its risk. It is a privilege that she feels she deserves, rather than a right that might be available to any child with an injured back. Yet, she has no agency over her body, its treatment, and her future, despite her Olympic aspirations. In this moment of suspense, it seems that 'in reality, the decision has already been made but no one knows it yet' (Dufourmantelle 2019, p. 13). If the body of the rowing child recruits her into elite sport, then the body of this child opts her out of elite sport.

## Cold-War Sporting Bodies, Childhoods, and Collective Biography

The cultures of the Cold War cannot be understood without recognising the role of sport as a soft-power hinge between East and West and between high and popular cultures, or without acknowledging its global impacts and locally specific and national contours (Edelman and Young 2019). A 'false binary', or 'bipolar struggle' in the realm of sport between the Soviet bloc and the west is often assumed, but this view is simplistic and obscures subtleties and local variations (Edelman and Young 2020, pp. 28–29). Long before any sporting events attract attention in the public arena, there have been years of resource investment, training, and cultivation of athletes. For every

sports person who reaches a public stage, hundreds more fall by the wayside. The children in these memory stories could be seen as casualties of this process. If they had not been selected and singled out as having talent and potential that separated them from their peers, they would not be disappointed. They would not have been undone by the risk of failure. The child in the final story will never be an Olympic athlete, her dreams are dashed, her body is literally broken. The child at the training camp will never be Nadia Comăneci, and, in the mundane present of the memory, she is homesick and lonely. The child selected for rowing has been removed from the routine of the classroom but also from the pleasure of rowing her family on the lake in summer. But on the other hand, it is important to recognise that the children are also beneficiaries of their selection. They had opportunities to leave home, to travel to other places, to be seen and appreciated, to become capable of cultivating aptitudes that they would not otherwise have found in themselves and of daring to dream of futures replete with potential. Through their participation in elite sports training, they experienced cultural, sports, and social programs that promoted collective life and an ethos that, in these individualised times, would be great to rethink.

Each memory story is also steeped in loss. They evoke the 'carnal body' of Dufourmantelle, encompassing thoughts, imaginings, dreams, tastes, affects, emotions, senses, and more (2019, p. 75). This expansive understanding of bodies forces us to think beyond any simple equivalence of bodies, experiences, and selves. The method of collective biography entails inherent risks that are simultaneously productive, generative, and disruptive. Risks arise in writing and rewriting memories, using the third-person pronoun, opening memory stories to collective analysis in workshops, and including them in an archive to be selected and reinterpreted by others. All of these strategies are risky because they distance or separate the memory from the narrator who experienced the event (Haug et al. 1987). The author may have become accustomed to telling and thinking their story in ways that are disrupted by the processes of collective biography. Alternative interpretations are produced, and potential meanings expand in ways that challenge habits of thought about one's own biography. Analyses diverge from the ways that the narrating

subjects understood their stories. Collective-biography processes rupture habituated practices as memories are evoked and shared in critical social spaces and relations so that they each become more than a singular story. When working with collective-biography approaches to memories, something amazing happens that perhaps has to do with the fact that, in this way, we can cross the borders and erase the edges of what is mine or yours and run the risk of liberating the space of our reality and desire.

Approaching a different understanding of the Cold War from the perspective of childhood means taking the risk of putting our own memories at stake. It means playing at the limits of what we remember or think we remember. Memories written during the workshops become keys that, by letting emerge what is unique and particular to each participant's childhood, leads us to what has been lived in common and allows us to go deeper in understanding that moment in history that is materialised and embodied. The formation of elite athletes in the memories of children open those moments of history that are disregarded by conventional Cold-War histories. We wonder to what extent the so-called 'Cold War' (in all its multiplicities and variations) lives on in the body of these adults who revisit their childhood in such detail, evoking the child they imagined themselves to be, retrieving, arranging and organising their memories. Those thought, imagined, dreamed, remembered bodies of that time suggest a unique intimacy with history, as those girls and boys remember, decades later, from the territory of their own body, the moments of childhood that left traces of a remarkable time in history and humanity.

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