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Canine Performance Sports in Poland: Another Look at the Dog Training Revolution

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Watching performances of Poland's top competitive obedience teams at the 2015 qualifications for the *Fédération Cynologique Internationale* (FCI) World Championships, it is easy to observe the dogs' joy when performing the exercises.¹ Their tails are almost constantly wagging; their gaze is fixed on their handlers' faces; their responses to the commands are brisk and enthusiastically joyful. The dogs seem to be excited in anticipation of the tasks awaiting them; yet, it is an enthusiasm which is under control, curbed—at least as it appears—by the dogs' own internal motivation, not by leashes or collars. In contrast, the behavior of dogs in an instructional obedience video dated 1991, scripted and directed by communist Poland's most well-known dog trainer, Antoni Brzezicha, is strikingly different: As the dogs go through their paces, their heads and tails are invariably down, their movements cautious and slow (Brzezicha, 1991).² The dogs seem to be performing without much joy, grudgingly complying with the handlers' demands. They invariably lag behind their handlers in off-leash exercises and rarely maintain eye contact with their humans, often displaying other signs of discomfort and stress,

such as licking and sniffing the ground—signs evident to the eye of a spectator with even a rudimentary knowledge of canine ethology. The change is glaring and—from the contemporary point of view—it is difficult not to ask: Did the handlers and judges not see that the dogs were not enjoying themselves? Why did the judges not demand (and reward) a more joyful performance? Why were the trainers unable to elicit such a performance?

These are all questions asked from a 21st-century perspective and they are valid only within a contemporary mindset: one in which the goal of training is defined differently than it had been 25 years ago. Clearly, what must have happened in the meantime, between 1991 and 2015, is not simply a change of training methods but a change of training philosophy. In 1991 the judge saw nothing wrong with the performances he observed. On the contrary, the dogs were rewarded precisely because their behavior reflected the prevailing understanding of the human-canine relationship at the time: the dog was expected to submit to the human. There is little joy in forced submission; thus, joy would not have been an expected element of the dog's performance. The performances from the 2015 top-level obedience competitors suggest that value is now placed on the dog's enjoyment of the process of training and, simultaneously, also on the strength and beauty of the resulting human-canine bond.

The purpose of this chapter is to theorize the changes in dog training philosophy geared toward competitive canine events based on training materials (instructional articles, videos, rule books, and interviews published in popular media) available in Poland from the 1970s to the present. The goal is to show not only how training methods have changed but also how expectations related to the dog's performance have changed along with them. Such an interpretation reveals how changes in training are part of a broader redefinition of the human-canine bond and reflect changes in the dog's place in contemporary Polish society. In this chapter I argue that the emergence of a plethora of new canine performance events in the early 21st century is itself entangled in these changes. It is a sign that dog guardians are actively seeking new ways of interacting with their dogs: ways that reflect postmodern notions of identity, exhibit a changed understanding of what it means to care for a dog, and prioritize the nurturing of canine happiness over expectations of blind submission.

Background: Theorizing the Training Revolution

Even though throughout the period under analysis there coexisted a variety of training methods, a shift toward what is broadly dubbed as positive methods is clearly visible in Poland, as described by Agnieszka Orłowska in Chapter 2. The term *positive methods* is in itself a very imprecise umbrella term; yet, most trainers who use positive methods underscore their preference for what is defined in Skinnerian behaviorism as positive reinforcement. While Skinner's training protocols were designed with emphasis on greater effectiveness of the training process and his aversion to punishment was based on the empirical observation of the side effects of applying aversive stimuli (Skinner, 1938, 1971/1976), many companion animal trainers in the English-speaking world (the most popular names include Ian Dunbar, Karen Pryor, Jean Donaldson, Pamela Dennison, and Patricia McConnell) embraced these techniques from the 1980s onward, not solely because of their effectiveness but primarily because of their humane character (Pręgowski, 2015). In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway famously refers to the rush to embrace the new training methods using emotionally charged vocabulary as “near-religious conversion from the military-style Koehler dog training methods, not so fondly remembered for corrections like leash jerks and ear pinches to the joys of rapidly delivering liver cookies” (Haraway, 2003, p. 48). For Haraway, training is a process of “becoming with” (Haraway, 2007, pp. 95–132), a definition that emphasizes the role of intersubjective empathy. Empathy for the dog's experience and respect for the dog as a nonhuman other are key concepts in the narrative of the training revolution from the perspective of animal welfare. This shift toward “kinder, gentler” methods is commonly read as being embedded in the growing aversion to the use of physical force in interpersonal relationships, visible, also, for example, in childrearing and schooling (Koski & Bäcklund, 2015) and in the increased value of empathy in contemporary Western societies.

Using the language of ethology, the training revolution is interpreted as a move away from the so-called dominance model—that is, a crude, and incorrect, transference of the wolf pack theory onto human-canine relations (cf. Coppinger & Coppinger, 2001; Eaton, 2008; Miklósi, 2009).

The ethological analysis of changes in training methods stresses developments in scientific knowledge of canine behavior and human-canine interaction and their resulting incorporation into animal training protocols. The work of Norwegian trainer Turid Rugaas, discussed in Chapter 2, also falls into this category: It is because of her close observation of canine behavior that Rugaas develops new methods of training that do not result in the dog's discomfort.

While these two perspectives are most certainly important, they are not exhaustive. The shift in training methods can also be analyzed using a different vocabulary, that of critical cultural theory. For example, the switch from force to kindness can be most broadly defined using Foucault's modalities of power as a shift from sovereign power to disciplinary power, but even more specifically as a move—within the disciplinary mode—away from reliance on the panoptical model (where it is the possibility of being watched which guarantees compliance with the rules) to an active desire for performing correctly regardless of the presence of a supervisor. The resulting human-canine training relationship in positive training has also been described using Foucault's definition of pastoral power (Włodarczyk, 2014). In Cary Wolfe's *Zoontologies*, Paul Patton, writing about horses, recognizes the power dynamic inherent in the training relationship and uses a Foucauldian vocabulary to identify the various technologies of exercising power, arguing that even the most sympathetic training techniques are coercive in that they cause the animal to behave in ways in which it otherwise would not (Patton, 2003). Patton's interpretation of training can be read as leading to the conclusion that positive training is positive only from the perspective of Skinner's quadrant. However, this does not mean for Patton that training should be abandoned wholesale. Conscious of Foucault's complex understanding of power, Patton suggests that animal training makes us aware that ethical relations are possible not only between equals. Patton does, however, suggest that the aesthetico-moral defense of animal training is corrupt because training—no matter how positive—is still embedded in the human value system and the entire effort of training an animal is a process of making the animal share the human's values: what changes is the sophistication of the methods (Patton, 2003, p. 93).

Competitive Dog Training Events Before 1989

While this chapter focuses on the significance of the current explosion of activities on the canine sports scene, a few words are due on dog training events in Poland before 1989, with emphasis on the types of activities available and the definition of the human-canine bond in the rule books of these events. Dog training competitions in Poland between World War II and 1989, with the exception of conformation shows, were relatively few and far between. The events that did take place can be divided into three major groups: obedience competitions and exams, protection dog competitions and exams, and various types of hunting dog competitions and exams. With the exception of obedience competitions, the events were closely tied to dogs' presumed usefulness to humans, and even obedience exercises were presented as a more publicly available version of exercises for working dogs (meaning: police dogs and military dogs).

The first field trials in communist Poland, organized according to British rules, took place in 1959. Trials organized according to Polish rules and targeted at a larger group of hunting breeds were organized shortly afterward, in 1962 (Bukład, 2010, p. 3). The *Regulamin prób i konkursów pracy psów myśliwskich* (Regulations of Field Trials and Tests for Hunting Dogs) stated—and still state—the purpose of the events as “popularizing hunting with dogs through the testing and constant improvement of the usefulness of hunting dogs” (Związek Kynologiczny w Polsce, 2007, p. 2). According to Ewa Bukład, the first obedience event, a so-called obedience ring, took place at the National Dog Show in Kraków in 1959. The first official obedience trial—organized in a format differing from contemporary competitive obedience and called a companion dog examination—took place in 1960 and was attended by four dogs: three German Shepherds and one Boxer, handled by three men and one woman. Interestingly, the rules of the obedience examinations were based on the rules of the American Kennel Club. Just like in the United States, the dogs were able to obtain the titles of Companion Dog, Companion Dog Excellent, and Utility Dog. The first official, thorough, and comprehensive rule book for the *Regulamin szkolenia, egzaminów i zawodów*

psa towarzyszącego i psa obrończego (Companion Dog and Protection Dog Exams and Trials), prepared by Antoni Brzezicha, was published only in 1979 and was 115 pages long. The words *utility* and *usefulness* appear practically on every other page of the booklet, while the main goal of obedience training exams is listed as “verifying the degree to which the dog submits to the handler,” with the main goal of dog training defined as “establishing the utility and breeding quality of dogs” (Związek Kynologiczny w Polsce, 1979). There is no mention of improving the emotional bond between the human and the dog.

In the 1970s the significance of *Pies Obronny* (Protection Dog) exams grew, and training began to be associated with teaching dogs when and how to attack potential muggers and other assailants. This was due largely to the influence of retired police and military personnel (Władysław Chyrc, Antoni Brzezicha, Andrzej Woźniakowski), who practically monopolized training courses and also authored most of the training manuals. Protection Dog exams were divided into three components: obedience, protection, and tracking. This meant that Protection Dog exams and competitions had a much higher status than Companion Dog competitions because they contained within themselves obedience as a component. Many dogs trialed in both protection championships and obedience championships. The *Mistrzostwa Polski Psów Obrończych* (National Protection Dog Championships) were organized in 1972 and the *Mistrzostwa Polski Psów Towarzyszących* (National Companion Dog Championships) in 1980 (Brzezicha, 1980, p. 14). In 1979, 44 dogs took part in the National Protection Dogs Championships (Brzezicha, 1980, p. 14), while in 2013 the same championship event attracted only 32 participants. Interest in protection dog sports has significantly decreased since 1989.

Competitive Dog Training Events After 1989

Training events in communist Poland were explicitly geared toward proving dogs’ usefulness to humans. Meanwhile, contemporary canine performance events seem to reverse this logic and try to prove humans’

usefulness to dogs—that is, they are attempts at finding activities that function as substitute outlets for a bored urban dog’s energy. They function more as entertainment for the dog and a bonding activity for the canine and the human. The outburst of interest in different kinds of canine performance sports in the late 1990s and in the 2000s in Poland and other Eastern European countries poses a challenge to Paul Patton’s claim that

the aesthetico-moral defense of the activities for which animals are trained is corrupt in the same manner to the extent that it misrepresents what, anthropomorphically, we might call the “values” of the animals involved and it projects onto them as natural certain aptitudes and airs that are valued by their all too human trainers. (Patton, 2003, p. 93)

While Patton claims that top-level competitive training is about sophisticated techniques of making the animal share the goals of the trainer (the later work by Foucault on the ethics of self-care can come in handy here to describe how this is achieved and can offer an alternative framework to the master-slave metaphor), the explosion of canine-related competitive (and semi-competitive) events in the 2000s counters this claim, at least explicitly, because these new activities are designed as outlets for a dog’s “natural” needs, albeit in a new, modern, and urban context.

It seems that instead of instilling the values of the human in the dog, the existence of this trend suggests that the “values” of the dog now determine the activity the human and dog engage in. The human chooses from a plethora of activities available, basing her (less often: his) choice on the dog’s talents and aptitudes—on the dog’s desires. In other words, I pose that the very existence of the canine events scene is a reflection of the changes in the human-canine relationship. Dog training ceases to be what postmodern thinkers refer to as a “grand narrative”—that is, a universalizing explanation and legitimation of existing power relations (Lyotard, 1984). In other words, it ceases to be about naturalizing human domination over animals. This big narrative breaks up in little narratives (*petits recits*), in which the guardian follows the dog’s individual aptitudes and

talents even if they lead in unexpected directions. This is not to say that training relationships in the new performance sports are not power relationships. Of course they are, but they also take into account dog agency and, interestingly, their arrival corresponds in time with the outburst in positive training methods. Most of the new sports explicitly endorse positive training techniques in the rule books.

Concurrently, a survey of the motivation of Polish participants in canine-related sports activities carried out in the period 2010–2011 on a group of 150 participants proved that the humans' motivation for participating in such activities is their desire to deepen the emotional bond with their dogs, to find an outlet for the dog's energy, and to make new friends and be a part of a social group (Teodorowicz & Woźniewicz-Dobrzyńska, 2014). As an aside, the research also revealed that the respondents were predominantly female (65 percent), urban dwellers, and significantly younger than suggested by results of similar research carried out in other countries, for example Canada (Farrell, Hope, Hulstein, & Spaulding, 2015). In fact, when respondents were asked about whether any humans accompany them at dog training events, many pointed to their parents, and the age of the respondents ranged from 11 to 50 years (Teodorowicz & Woźniewicz-Dobrzyńska, 2014, p. 302). These findings are in stark contrast to those of Farrell et al. (2015) and Hultsman (2012) and reveal the Polish dog sports participants to be much younger than their counterparts in the United States and Canada. Research from Finland, carried out on a group of participants in competitive obedience, revealed the group to be 100 percent female and also younger than the North American dog sports enthusiasts (Koski & Bäcklund, 2015). Although some of the Polish respondents were even younger than the Finnish ones, it should be mentioned that the Polish survey was distributed via Internet channels, and some older respondents may have been reluctant to participate in this form of research. The respondents were also aware of their dog's aptitude (or lack thereof) for a particular sport and selected the activity on the basis of their dog's talents (Teodorowicz & Woźniewicz-Dobrzyńska, 2014, p. 301). It should be noted that by 2010 already many forms of recreation and sport were available for interested dog guardians.

A brief look at the history of canine performance events in Poland reveals that in the mid-2000s these quickly began multiplying in numbers. At the time of writing in 2015, the canine events scene in Poland consists of multiple sports that appeared only after the systemic transformation of 1989:

- Obedience (FCI rules)
- Rally obedience
- Agility
- Canine disc (also known as dogfrisbee)
- Mantrailing
- Flyball (two teams of dogs race across a set of hurdles to retrieve a tennis ball)
- Dummy trials (a derivative of field trials but the dog retrieves a plastic dummy, not a real bird)
- Search and rescue (while not a competitive event, this activity only opened up to amateurs after 1989 and involves a multiple-level certification program)
- Weight-pulling
- Water rescue (similarly to search and rescue, the certification program is open to all dogs)
- Dogtrekking
- Herding trials
- Various kinds of mushing events (including canicross)
- Bikejoring (dog runs alongside a bicycle)
- Dock diving (dogs jumping into a pool off a dock, longest jump wins)
- Speedway (basically a timed recall to handler contest)
- Canine freestyle (also known as doggy dancing)
- Treibball (the “herding” of inflatable plastic balls)

The classic trio of canine sports practiced in communist Poland—obedience (by local Polish rules), protection trials, and hunting trials—have been pushed to the margins of the canine sports scene, although they are still present. Men still dominate protection and field trials (Włodarczyk, 2014).



One of the new performance sports is dock diving. Dogs are asked to leap into a special pool, and the longest jump wins. This competition has significant spectator appeal. (Copyright by K9Action [Tomasz Mońko], www.k9action.eu. Courtesy of Tomasz Mońko.)

Agility is the oldest among the new arrivals: the first sanctioned agility trials were organized in the early 1990s. However, the number of trials increased only in the mid-2000s, with the largest events gathering up to 400 participants from several neighboring countries (Włodarczyk, 2014). The Polish team regularly participates in FCI Agility World Championships, and in recent years the members have been quite successful on the international arena. The first Polish competitor to win a medal at the World Championships was Olga Kwiecień with her Pyrenean Shepherd Brava, in 2012. While the agility regulations do not explicitly encourage the use of positive methods, they do emphasize that agility “is an educational and sporting activity intended to improve the dog’s integration into society. The sport requires a good rapport between dog and handler, which will result in perfect understanding” (Fédération Cynologique Internationale, 2012a). “Integration into society” is, of course, something of a blanket term, but it does underscore that which I have been emphasizing as the general impulse of modern canine

performance events: the inclusion of the dog as “a significant other” (using Haraway’s term from *The Companion Species Manifesto*) in the human’s everyday life practices. In Poland, and not only there (Farell et al., 2015; Hultsman, 2012), agility is a sport dominated by women and practiced largely by city dwellers.

Agility is usually taught through increasingly sophisticated techniques that build on the dog’s prey drive. While not all training may be “purely positive” (from the perspective of Skinner’s quadrant, and from other perspectives as well), all handbooks emphasize the “fun” aspect of the sport and its role as a remedy for canine boredom. It is not coincidental that the title of the first agility handbook published in Polish is *Agility. Sport i zabawa* (Agility: Sport and fun).³ Similarly, it is not coincidental that the book’s reviews emphasize that one of its advantages is in displaying that agility is something new on the dog training scene because “the entire process is fun; it serves the purpose of alleviating boredom and strengthening the bond one has with one’s pet. This is not strict obedience training, where a scared dog submits to the owner” (Café Animal, 2010).

Canine disc is one of the activities in which Polish competitors shine on the international arena, a result of the determination of one individual who almost single-handedly devoted his life to promoting the sport among Polish dog guardians. Dariusz Radomski organized the first canine disc event in Poland in 2005, and already in 2012 Poland hosted the European Championships, where over 300 players from all over the world (including Japan) participated in the three-day event in a beautiful urban park. As of 2015, local Polish trials bring together approximately 200 human-canine teams and are quite impressive in scope, often generating the interest of local and national media and attracting crowds of spectators. Similarly to agility, though in an even more obvious way, canine disc is also based on a redirection of the dog’s prey drive (the desire to chase and intercept fleeing prey) transferred onto an inanimate object: a plastic disc. Radomski advertises the sport as a possible life-saver for the unruly and disobedient dog—the dog whose owner cannot keep him from chasing cars and bicycles or destroying furniture. In an interview with *Dog&Sport*, a quarterly magazine published in Polish and devoted solely to canine performance sports (and with a circulation of

17,000!), Radomski writes that “a serious advantage of dogfrisbee is its availability.... All you need is discs and a field in a park or your backyard” (Radomski, 2010, p. 5). While it remains to be examined whether the top dogs in the sport are truly obedience school dropouts who have found a sense of purpose in catching plastic, the sport does attract a crowd of participants who see it as a fun outlet for a dog’s excessive energy and for whom the competitive aspect of the activity is secondary. Paula Gumińska, one of Poland’s top players, claims that her dog, Wena, “takes part in trials but for her it is all fun, it’s like catching prey.... There are no commands, no coercion. For her, it’s just the pleasure of catching a disc” (Stenzel, 2012).

Both agility and canine disc are sports that function as substitute outlets for a dog’s prey drive. Consequently, it is the dogs whose prey drive is the most developed who have a competitive advantage over others in these sports (although other factors cannot be discounted), but a number of competitive events not explicitly based on prey drive have appeared. One of them is dogtrekking: a cross between orienteering and taking the dog out for a walk. Here, human-canine teams, with map and compass in hand, tackle a course designed specifically to highlight the beauty of the landscape. This is a timed event, and the team with the shortest time (and that hits all checkpoints along the route) wins. Canicross is a faster paced version of this endeavor: there are no check points and the route is well marked, with the stroll turning into a long-distance race.

Since 2003, when the first event was organized in Poland, dogtrekking has exploded in popularity, becoming one of the favorite events for parents with children (Bonk, 2010, p. 4). The “Family” category is developing the most rapidly, while entries in all categories average approximately 200 teams per event. Dogtrekking does not require sophisticated training techniques, though it certainly helps if the dog is willing to pull the handler and is not easily distracted by the presence other dogs. It does not even require a recall, as the dogs are always on leash (as stipulated by the regulations). The team’s success depends mostly on the handler’s stamina and orienteering skills, but for most participants the competitive aspect is absolutely secondary. The sport is a way of including the dog in an individual human’s (sometimes family’s) passion for hiking in the outdoors, while providing the

dog with much-needed exercise. The discipline's selling point is, in fact, its laid-back and noncompetitive character (Bonk, 2010, pp. 5–6).

Mantrailing, which is basically tracking the scent of a human being, is also a semi-competitive event whose popularity is growing among canine guardians. While the obedience and protection dog exams in communist Poland often included a tracking component, the dog's performance on the track was judged according to very strict criteria: the dog's head had to be down, he had to be moving at a steady pace, and he had to indicate each turn of the track in a precise way, as specified in the *Regulamin szkolenia, egzaminów i zawodów psa towarzyszącego i psa obrończego* (Regulations of Training, Exams and Competitions for Companion Dogs and Protection Dogs; Związek Kynologiczny w Polsce, 1979). Points were lost each time the dog went off track or raised his head. In contrast, mantrailing tracks are evaluated on a pass or fail basis: the dog has to find the person hidden at the end of the track. It is telling that the rules of Mantrailing Competency Tests (known in Polish as SKOP, or *Sprawdzian Kompetencji Zespołów Tropienia Użytkowego*) describe the activity not as proving the dog's usefulness to humans (as had been the case with tracking tests under communism) but as “a form of activity that naturally creates a strong human-canine bond and leads to mutual respect and trust” (SKOP, 2014).

This outburst of variety in canine-related activities can be interpreted with regard to the notion of individualization, which has been employed by various theorists (cf. Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991, 1994) to explain how postmodern individuals are faced with an increased number of choices they must make to shape their life in a way that best reflects their perceived individuality. Ulrich Beck also argues that individualization is connected to changes in social and family structure: the individual has replaced social class or the nuclear family as the fundamental unit of social reproduction (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, the dog is no mere accessory to the human individual; bearing in mind how concerned the guardians are with choosing the “right” activity for their dog, one can rather speak of extending the notion of individualization onto the canine partner. Of course it is the human who makes the choice, but this choice is then evaluated through establishing the dog's level of enjoyment of the activity. It is not uncommon on the Polish dog sports scene to switch

between sports should a dog not exhibit enjoyment, or to try several activities with a young dog and continue with the one which the dog finds the most “fun.” Farrell et al.’s (2015) research performed in Canada suggests this is also the case there, and while the research conducted in Poland did not focus on motivations for changing the activities the human-canine team is involved in, I (with knowledge of the dog sports scene resulting from long years of personal involvement) know of numerous such cases. These include an individual who acquired a dog with the specific purpose of participating in flyball and finally ended up participating (quite intensively and with great success) in mantrailing because the dog did not “enjoy” the sport of flyball. In other words, the humans are often willing to significantly alter their life plans, switch between different social groups, and adopt different value systems, all because they see it as being in the best interest of their dog.

The emergence of the canine sports scene is also a reflection of Poland’s transition into a free market economy: the human consumers choose—from a variety of options—the product that they see as the best suited to the needs of the human-canine team they represent. While the talents and aptitude of the dog are listed as primary decisive factors, the human’s preferences are certainly also taken into account. Nature lovers can choose dogtrekking; those who enjoy being in the spotlight will love the applause of awed crowds at canine disc events; while flyball fans claim that nothing can beat the sense of teamwork and human camaraderie generated in that sport. In turn, each sport entices would-be aficionados with promises of a uniquely crafted “fun” experience. In fact, the sports seem to be vying for the title of the “most positive” sport: the one which promises to deliver the most enjoyable experience. The strategy assumed by many of the sports consists of breaking the association between that particular sport and the traditional understanding of dog obedience.

Competitive Obedience: Redefining Fun

Competitive obedience is a particularly interesting case among competitive dog sports because it is one of the few activities that predate the current outburst of canine performance sports. Obedience trials did take

place before 1989, but their purpose was defined differently than it is now. Until the first years of the 21st century the scoring of competitive obedience events, organized according to local rules of the Polish Kennel Club, reflected the dominant take on the human-canine relationship. As the voice-over in Antoni Brzezicha's video explained, the purpose of obedience competitions was to demonstrate the dog's usefulness to humans and the human's skill at subduing the animal (Brzezicha, 1991). In the judging of the exercises emphasis was placed on precision of the dog's performance, not on speed or the dog's apparent enjoyment of the exercises.

Many of the competitive events that have appeared in the 21st century define themselves in stark opposition to the old understanding of dog obedience, as evident from the excerpts from various rule books quoted earlier. In post-communist Poland, in light of the outburst of canine-related sports and recreational activities and the concurrent redefinition of the human-canine bond, the sport of obedience found itself with something of a public relations problem. Modern dog guardians no longer wished to participate in an activity that defined itself as testing the human's skills at forcing the dog to submit. What has helped the sport is a much-needed makeover, initiated by the adoption of new, international rules.

While competitive exams and trials testing a dog's knowledge of training exercises did exist in communist Poland, the FCI-sanctioned sport of dog obedience entered Poland only in the 21st century (first official trial: April 2004 in Błażejewko). To break the connection with the military drill associated with traditional training, even the name of the sport was changed from the Polish *posłuszeństwo* to the English "obedience" (never translated into Polish in the new FCI rules). This move speaks to Poles' fascination with "everything Western" and is in line with the naming of all of the new events, which are also referred to using English. While the actual exercises of the old-style Polish obedience did not differ significantly from the new FCI obedience exercises, the new sport was marketed as requiring the use of positive training methods. Maria Kuncewicz, sometimes referred to as the godmother of obedience in Poland because she was the *spiritus movens* behind the effort to translate the regulations and organize the first trials (at which she served as a steward), advertised the new sport this way in 2004:

Obedience is gaining new fans because it emphasizes the contact and communication between handler and dog. There is no place here for “breaking” a dog, showing him who the boss is. Teamwork has to be pleasant both for the dog and for the handler. As such, this sport comes to us at a timely moment when we are beginning to treat dogs not as blindly submissive animals carrying out our orders, but are starting to focus on developing their willingness to COOPERATE with us.⁴

Competitive obedience is a sport in which handler and dog perform a series of exercises, such as heeling, retrieving, send-aways, and are judged according to how closely their execution conforms to the written description of the exercise in the rule book. In the FCI version of the sport—that is, according to the rules which govern how the exercises are judged in the majority of European countries—additional points are given for a team’s “general impression.” Additionally, per the current FCI regulations, during the performance of each exercise a dog must exhibit willingness and brisk speed. To quote the regulations: “When judging the general impression, the dog’s willingness to work and obey the commands is essential.... To get a high score both handler and dog must ... show mutual enjoyment” (Fédération Cynologique Internationale, 2012b). In other words, a dog’s overall demeanor, the appearance of canine happiness, is rewarded with a better score. Dogs which seem to be bursting with enthusiasm and yet are able to curb that enthusiasm score higher than dogs who either lack enthusiasm or are visibly unable to control their emotions (for example, constant barking or jumping are cause for disqualification).

While it is difficult to establish whether the new rules encouraged new methods of training or whether they actually reflected changes that had already been ongoing, it is a fact that most of the top competitors declare, in both printed materials and online training courses, which have become very popular in the past several years, the use of positive methods and their focus on the dog’s enjoyment of the training process. In the “Methodology” section of her online obedience courses, Joanna Hewelt, the competitor whose performance was referenced in the opening paragraph of this chapter and who is also a very popular obedience instructor, writes: “Our priority

in training is joy, passion and commitment, which consequently leads to a cooperating team: a smiling human and a smiling dog” (Hewelt, 2013). The trainer’s emphasis is not only on the use of treats and other rewards to classically condition training as a pleasant experience but on opening up channels of communication, on creating a stronger bond between the human and the dog. In another article Hewelt writes: “For me, preparing a dog for obedience [competition] is something of a philosophy. I don’t want my dogs to see me as a vending machine that might just distribute a hotdog or a ball. I want them to ‘talk’ to me; to ask me ‘what signal will be next?’” (Hewelt, 2014, p. 22). The word *submission* is not in Hewelt’s vocabulary, and her attitude is representative of the change that took place between the 1980s and the early 21st century: training should now be fun and its explicit goal to improve human-canine communication.

Despite its makeover, the popularity of obedience still lags behind some of the other canine events, with the biggest trials generating entries usually not exceeding 100 human-canine teams. For example, there were 87 teams entered the first competition in 2013, which took place in the city of Kalisz, and 87 percent of the human competitors were women. Entries in Polish agility and canine disc competitions can exceed these numbers severalfold. Somewhat curiously—though in accordance with the logic governing the proliferation of dog sports—a new obedience-like sport has appeared and promises to be “more fun” than obedience. Rally obedience made its debut on the Polish canine sports scene in 2011. The sport is sanctioned by the Rally-O Association, which explicitly bases its rules on those of the American Association of Professional Dog Trainers. The Polish regulations state the goal of the sport as “developing a positive relationship between the handler and the dog, based on trust and mutual respect” (Rally-O Association, 2015). As an article published in the most popular dog-related magazine in Poland, *Mój Pies* (My dog) claims, rally obedience is even more conducive to the use of positive training methods than classic obedience because “the rigorous rules of obedience restrict communication between the dog and the handler and make cooperation more difficult” (Urban, 2012, p. 22). Rally promises to make the experience of deepening the human-canine bond even easier and vows to deliver on that promise through positive methods only. This is a strange case, to

say the least—a situation in which two similar sports (a dog trained for competitive obedience will not have problems with rally exercises) enter into a rivalry and, looking at the numbers of participants in trials in the year 2014, the sport that self-describes as less competitive and “more fun” is winning. It is not that obedience cannot be trained using positive methods only—the example of Joanna Hewelt, who is not only a multiple national champion of Poland but also dedicated to noncoercive methods, proves this false. While multiplication of fun (“rally offers more fun!”) is rally’s promise, a look at the definition of the term *lifestyle sport* (Wheaton, 2004) can offer a different explanation for why people believe there is more fun in rally than in obedience.

The use of the word *sport* itself to talk about these human-canine activities is significant. In Poland, *sport* was rarely used in close proximity to the term *dog training* prior to the 21st century. Training was rather seen as something of a duty: the painstaking, laborious, and sometimes unpleasant process of making the dog a useful member of human society. The word *sport* creates associations of shaping healthy bodies and healthy minds; of socially useful yet enjoyable activity; of building character through self-imposed discipline. *Sport* (applied to dog training) has appeared alongside the changes in types of training endeavors, methods applied, and stated goals of the activity. It seems that canine performance events could be classified as “lifestyle sports” because they are not all highly competitive in nature and are based on a definition of *sport* that differs from the one which emphasizes individual achievement. In the case of canine performance sports (although there is still insufficient empirical research), it seems that the dog’s well-being and enjoyment are usually placed over and above the desire to win at all costs, at least on the level of declaration. Furthermore, it is the noncompetitive sports (or at least the ones that downplay the competitive aspect) that are most dynamically gaining in popularity.

Lifestyle sports offer an alternative to more competitive sports, and, as stated earlier, most of these new sports are heavily dominated by women. As Wheaton notes after Bourdieu (1984), many of these alternative sports (e.g., skateboarding, surfing, Frisbee) originated in 1960s North American counterculture and were later brought to Europe by American entrepreneurs

(Wheaton, 2004, p. 3). There is a certain similarity in the case of canine performance events in Poland: In addition to the fact that many of them originated in the United States and the United Kingdom, many individuals have devoted their lives to popularizing a particular sport—and the activity has turned into their livelihood—with hopes of offering “something different” from classic canine activities.

At the same time, the organization overtly dedicated to the development of canine training and well-being, the Polish Kennel Club has not become involved in promoting these new activities, possibly because they run counter to the very culture associated with the Club. Of the new sports, only three (agility, obedience, and dummy trials) are sanctioned by the Polish Kennel Club, but in all three cases there exist significant tensions between the authorities of the Club and the participants. While many of these result from the Club’s management style (last-minute rule changes being just one example), the conflict between obedience competitors and Polish Kennel Club officials in 2014 reveals a misunderstanding on a much more fundamental level: It is based on different definitions of the goals of training.

After the 2014 World Championship qualifications, Polish Kennel Club authorities decided to organize an additional trial, which they called a “verification of the results.” After the trial, the judge gathered all the competitors and delivered a long soliloquy that included strong criticism of the dogs’ apparent joy and enthusiasm. The speech was secretly recorded by one of the participants and uploaded as a public YouTube video. According to the judge, an “old timer” with judging experience dating back to the 1980s, “a new manner of [the dog exhibiting] joy has become all too common.”⁵ The judge criticized the dogs precisely for being too happy and not submissive enough. The quotation above was found so outrageous among the dog sports community that it was quickly turned into a graphic meme, circulating on Facebook and gathering hundreds of likes. The competitors filed a petition to the governing body of the FCI, complaining of how they and their dogs have been mistreated by local Polish authorities.

This particular conflict stands out because canine performance sports are presented—maybe the word *marketed* could be used here—as primarily

fun and only secondarily competitive. The emphasis on fun is so ubiquitous that a line like “the dogs are having too much fun” stands out glaringly. At the same time it seems there is something more to this fun than pure hedonism. The way *fun* is invoked in rule books, in advertisements, and in participants’ descriptions of their experiences makes it sound almost wholesome. While this is the way fun is defined in many non-canine sports as well (where it is the challenge and the effort that account for fun), what makes canine sports a particularly interesting case study is the opposition between the old style of training (no fun for the dog) and the new style of training (all fun for the dog). The invocation of fun is thus itself a way of signaling the activity’s place within the broader framework of the evolution of dog training. It should be added that contemporary social theorists and philosophers often note the ubiquity of fun in postmodern culture, speaking even of the imperative to enjoy or of “happiness as the supreme duty” (Žižek, 2008). Slavoj Žižek interprets this imperative as resulting from the superego’s order to enjoy that which one has to do anyway, but it is not necessary to immerse oneself in Lacanian psychoanalysis to see that the postmodern subject is bombarded from all directions with imperatives to enjoy him- or herself. This emphasis on enjoyment in dog sports is yet another instance of how, in the new understanding of human-animal relations, the notions associated with human postmodern subjects are extended to nonhuman subjects. It becomes a guardian’s duty to find activities that the dog will enjoy.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to show the links between the emergence of the contemporary canine sports scene in Poland and the positive training revolution. I also set out to prove that the turn to newer and more positive methods among participants in canine events, analyzed in relation to the explicit goals of these activities (as expressed in rule books and as understood by participants), is not just an attempt to come up with less physically intrusive and more sophisticated methods of creating docile

bodies serving human needs: There is a genuine desire among the trainers associated with these sports to identify and meet a dog's real psychological and physical needs. As a result, this analysis does enter into something of an "aesthetico-moral defense" of animal training, to use the category criticized by Paul Patton.

As an aside, I am aware that it is impossible to disentangle the identification of preexisting needs from the formation of new ones—from the emergence of a value system that is shared by both the animal and the human. However, it is the decision to enter into a relationship with a nonhuman other and the desire to shape that relationship as an ethical relationship that seem to be the structuring elements here; all the other decisions follow from the desire to develop this relationship with the nonhuman's best interests in mind, and this is what accounts for the qualitative change of the human-animal bond in the newer sporting events. This new relationship is primarily an affective relationship, while the old one was based (at least overtly) on different categories, usually those of utility. Adrian Franklin sees the turn to affective relations with animals as a response to the insecurities of the postmodern world (Franklin, 1999, p. 3) and from this perspective the very emergence of canine performance events is an element of what Franklin describes as the "extraordinary further growth in the range of activities associated with animals" (Franklin, 1999, p. 46).

I have also identified the canine sports scene as a symptomatically (post)modern phenomenon: related to notions of risk, individualization, and reflexivity and reflecting the postmodern plurality of ready-made templates of lifestyle choices that seem to be infinitely proliferating. The emphasis in lifestyle sports, which I have identified as a broader category into which canine sports fit, is not on individual achievement but on enjoyment of the activity. Finally, I see the proliferation of sporting events as tied to the postmodern imperative to enjoy oneself: one that caring guardians see as referring to their dogs as well, not just to themselves. In the context of Poland, it comes as no surprise that the canine performance sports scene emerged only after the transition from socialism to capitalism, which underscores the uneasy connection between consumerism and qualitative changes in the contemporary human-canine bond.

Notes

1. The performance of the team that won this particular event held on March 15, 2015, in Wałbrzych, Joanna Hewelt and her dog Tough, is available as a YouTube video on Joanna Hewelt's public profile: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un3QKQajYhg> [Accessed 1 May 2015].
2. The voiceover in 1991 VHS video is the exact text of Brzezicha, A. (1997). *Amatorskie szkolenie psów* [Amateur dog training]. Warsaw Poland: PWRiL. (Original work published 1973)
3. Theby, V., & Hares, M. (2010). *Agility. Sport i zabawa* [Agility: Sport and fun] (M. Jatowska, Trans.). Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo RM.
4. Posted by Maria Kuncewicz on the "Kliker" Yahoo! Internet discussion group on February 4, 2004; from the author's personal collection of e-mails.
5. The YouTube video of the so-called verification trial that took place in April 2014 is uploaded to the YouTube profile of KlubObedience.pl and is publicly available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2SBdrIqI20> [Accessed 10 May 2015].

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