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Artistic formalism in relation to sport and science: Towards the peaceful co-existence of differing “Forms of Life”

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Abstract

As a point of departure, this article asks the question in what way does artistic formalism relate to both sport and science. Sport in this regard is used to metaphorically allude to science. The underlying premise is that one can link sport and science via the inclusion of the aesthetic and in particular formalist art aesthetics. For example, the point is that science, to a greater or lesser degree, includes formal components whether as participant and/or viewer, just as sport does. It seems clear to me that we should experience

and describe a medical operation, for example, as formally attractive, that is, that it exemplifies grace, poise and delicacy. Or that a certain maneuver in a team engaged in scientific effort dazzles and weaves a wondrous pattern before one's eyes and as experienced as such through “playing” and many scientists go so far as to declare that a certain scientific formulation was simply sublime, that it was aesthetically pleasing or even akin to a sporting spectacle, if only metaphorically.

Keywords: Art, Science, Sport, Formalism, Beauty

Introduction

My task is somewhat of a clown and trickster, as I begin with the axiom that the independent variable is art and the dependent variables are sport and science, which I use at times interchangeably and at times simply describe in speculative fashion a reverie connecting art and sport via the aesthetics of formal beauty quo formalism. One cannot simplify the whole problem and its numerous variables (art, sport, science, aesthetics, formalism, form, “will to power”) under the general appellation “philosophy”, for “philosophy” itself is not a “pure” term – each variable is embedded with other such terms.

This coheres with the post-modern “language turn” and the idea that there is no presence (of the word) as such, only traces and absences and deception/illusion/play; an ecstasy of games, yet a struggle that may result peacefully insofar as a “holistic epistemology” may emerge. The promise that this may be possible is via the introduction of the aesthetic. Yet is not form, the aesthetic ideological and politicized; is not beauty deceptive? I do not answer such questions here, only lay the platform for at least a dialogue between the arts, the humanities; mass culture or everyday aesthetics (as is sport) and science. It is precisely the analysis of sport as aesthetic, and its further “application” to the domain of science, that offers a new way to account for the language of science, both been derived from artistic formalism. Yet in truth, all such terms – “art”; “aesthetic”; “science”; “sport”; “formalism” dissolve – there being no clear identity/particle, for the nature of language/a vessel, is to divide, limit and separate. This article, however hints at a kind of unity of these terms or in other terms, a dissolving of the terms in the first place. Curiously this is achieved, however by their apparent separation.

Part I: The Relationship between art, aesthetics, sport and science: Towards an inter-disciplinary paradigm

Although it is not my intention to argue that science is art, the question does come into view when we consider science (scientific work) as aesthetic. I am going to be rather daring and apply theoretical art aesthetic theories that can be applied to sport¹ and simply substitute in many instances science for sport. The reason I do this is that I assume the axiom that both sport and science are aesthetic modalities as hitherto mentioned.

¹ C,f, Shorkend, A New Interpretation of Sport derived from art aesthetics. UNISA: South Africa, 2016.

Arnold (1990)^[1] argues that to say that sport (read: science)² is aesthetic does not mean it is art, for the aesthetic is a broader category than art, even as art is the paradigm case of the aesthetic. To argue that sport (read: science) is art, because it is aesthetic, conflates the concept of the aesthetics with art, as hitherto mentioned.

But something need not be considered art in order to demonstrate that it can be beautiful and a source of aesthetic experience. Although science can be described, interpreted and evaluated, it does not and cannot be a necessary guarantee for providing an aesthetic experience. Conversely, an aesthetic object need not be art, but it obviously could be. Best (1978)^[2] distinguishes between non-aesthetic sports or purposive sports and aesthetic sports. The former are those sports that can be specified independently of the manner of achieving it, as long as it conforms to the rules (for example: football, rugby, hockey, track and field, baseball, tennis and so on). In such sports, the aesthetic is not intrinsic. It is simply the most points, goals or best times that are essential. Science, in this sense is just raw data. It can be aesthetic, but these moments are not necessarily or logically a part of their purpose – their purpose can be fulfilled without reference to the aesthetic. Then there are the partially aesthetic sports whereby: “...the aim of the sport cannot intelligibly be specified independently of the means of achieving it” (Best 1978:165)^[2], because the way and manner of performance is important, a necessary feature of the activity. Importance is given to “elegance”, “ease”, “precision”, “style” and “rhythm”, “faultless execution”, “right amount of force” ...“originality...virtuoso integration of parts”.

The movements may be matched to music and a formalist description might be most applicable. Thus: “The aesthetic sport in one in which the purpose cannot be specified without reference to the aesthetic manner of achieving it” (Arnold 1990:167)^[1]. Then there are those sports (read: sciences) that are not just aesthetic, but may be considered art, for example biology and physics, wherein there is no separation between the nature of the activity and its mode of presentation (one elicits “facts about nature”). One might call it an embodied meaning, as Friessen (in Arnold 1990:167)^[1] states, “the dancer must remain one with the dance to preserve the unity and continuity of the aesthetic image. The technical competence of the dancer includes not only the physical skills required to perform the dance, but the ability to exist within the dynamic illusion of the dance”. I believe science might be similarly described. The difference between being simply an aesthetic sport (read: science) and being an artistic one, is that in the case of the

² These formulae – sport (read: science) expresses the relationship between sport and science. This relationship can be understood (or measured, as it were) through an appreciation that formalist aesthetic concepts that pervade sport can be transposed to that of science and scientific endeavor. Moreover, the abbreviation – sport (read: science) is an attempt to dissolve terms and yet allow them to appear, a game of hide and seek, wherein neither term “wins”, rather there is the invocation of the interdisciplinary. In addition, one can, with these points in mind concoct the following formulaic abbreviations: art (read: sport); sport (read: art); science (read: art); art (read: science).

former the gap between the purpose and the aesthetic is never entirely closed; the purpose could still be achieved in absence of the formal aesthetic coherence.

To give substance to the idea that sport (read: science) is certainly aesthetic, as it is concerned with formal coherence, we can look at the writing of Smith (2006)^[28], who argues that “significant form” – the relationship of structured, meaningful, cultural activities in a given time and place, and the mastery of these forms by a few, as well as the active interpretive role of the media in the event – is the crucial element in the game, rather than just success or winning. Again, science might be *described* in a similar vein.

Smith (2006:47)^[28] said the following about Wooley, the cricketer: “...he gave thousands and thousands of his countrymen a conception of the beautiful which artists struggle to capture in paint and on canvas...and they recognized in him something beyond the average scorer of runs, some elegance of line and harmony of movement which went beyond the figures on the scoreboard. That, indeed, will give him his place in the game, a place higher than many who won more matches for their side”. Smith (2006)^[28] treats cricket with the kind of interpretive parameters usually reserved for “higher” forms of culture; that it too should inspire a sonnet.

He wrote of the style of play, the attitude of the players, the discovery of new shots or styles of bowling ... these are the significant formal aspects of the game in the same way that modernism or tragic realism are formal literary developments which can be historically discussed. Expertise in science too is a game and therefore one may similarly describe it so – a beautiful stroke in cricket is *like* a beautiful formulation of a natural phenomenon in terms of relationships that can be described in the language of mathematics. Hence, we find a list of sports writers in Smith’s mold, as they describe signature strokes, posture, response to specific circumstances and the like. One may thus argue that there is a formal element to sport, both in terms of historical formal developments within the game and individual style. The history of science is precisely a systematic analysis of the formal development (read: knowledge) accrued by scientific formulations as the net of knowledge increases.

Lowe (1977:45) also relates sports-movement with aesthetics. He speaks almost mystically of the “total comprehensive capacity” and “imagery” of the sports moment. As I understand it, he refers to the ease and effortlessness of correct play, as well as the poignant instance of a good performance, the result of which is a picture of high definition. The notion of a scientific discovery and a paradigm shift is surely a parallel kind of phenomena to the way sports-movement is so described. Furthermore, this “high definition” may be described as beautiful, pleasurable and joyful for participant and viewer alike.

The price for beauty is effort. Another way of describing how this beauty is achieved is to say that sport as with science is a “relational pattern” (Smith 2006)^[28]. Smith perhaps takes his cue from Bell as this “relational pattern” consists of pure forms and unities and is thus comparable to what Bell appeals to when he talks of significant form. The beauty of movement and its formal ordering, if you like, is a result of the fine-tuning of the mind acting through the body. Scientific analysis is precisely the interpretations of patterns,

that is to say “relational pattern”. Suffice it to say at this juncture that the very competence of the athlete (read: scientist) is as a result of the training of the mind and body in a formal language, both beautiful and effective as it pertains in specific and distinct ways, depending on the sport (read: science).

Weiss (1969:68) ^[30] helps clarify the type of formal harmony of the body that I am arguing for in the following quote: “...he who makes golf his game finds that he never comes to the end of the work of perfecting his stroke. His is the perpetual problem of getting his wrists, fingers, arms, legs, shoulders, neck, head and hips to function in harmony. The mind makes the body be almost indistinguishable from himself. He must submerge himself in it, at the same time that he keeps it under his control. Only because he has become his body for a while is he able to bring about the results he seeks.” In this quote, one sees that one can only achieve and enjoy a specific sport if one makes out of one’s body a form that articulates a sense of constructive action and unity of parts; achieving this may be beautiful and invite aesthetic contemplation and the like. It is clearly articulated here that an athlete actually arrives at this point where he hardly notices his equipment. This would be an ideal description of the scientist working in a laboratory and even though one may discount the argument of describing science as a “muscular sport” on the grounds that scientific endeavor is more cerebral, requiring deep moments of contemplation, one might describe contemplation as the “muscular activity” of the brain, charging thought in a dynamic dance: He acts with and through the dance, as though it were just his body extended beyond the point at which it normally can function. The hunter hardly knows where his arm and fingers end and his rifle begins. It is barely a metaphor to say that a polo player is a centaur (adapted from Weiss, 1969) ^[30].

The athlete, as an exemplar of human perfection in the art of running, jumping, wrestling and so on, offers the viewer and the less serious and talented sportsperson, no less than the athlete himself or herself, a vision of beauty and grace, of the body-beautiful as the athlete’s coordination, responsiveness, attention, efficiency, devotion and accomplishments; his or her splendid unity with the equipment, are all geared to produce a result at the limits of bodily possibility which set the athlete apart from the rest of men. When we watch a sublime play or somehow perfect a movement, it is the form that we are admiring and/or that we have created and developed. Scientific excellence also can be *described* with these words.

The theoretical basis for the cross-disciplinary synergy is that a formalist description that has been used to understand artistic production and, in my research, sport as well, may also be applied to science. I think Weiss (1969:247) ^[30] sums this up best in the following line: “Something similar to what the mathematician attains when he thinks (and/or does mathematics), the athlete attains when he acts...”. It is precisely the mastering of language (of symbolic logic or precise movements) that engenders a formalist conception of say, sport (read: science), which is articulated in a mind acting in a well-structured manner through the vehicle that is the body and the equipment of a particular sport (read: science). In the following section the beauty of such an “act” will be looked at more closely.

Part II: Gumbrecht’s contention that sport is aesthetically beautiful

In this section, I outline Gumbrecht’s (2006) ^[14] project, namely to lend scholarly weight to the idea that sport (read: science) is aesthetically beautiful. I contrast that with Edgar’s (2013) and Young’s (2008) ^[31] critique of some aspects of this assertion. My position is to maintain an aesthetics of sport (read: science), but also to extend that or derive that by applying traditional art aesthetic concepts. This allows me to determine a more thorough understanding or language with which to speak about sport (read: science) within the humanities generally. This is precisely the paradigm shift – at once a shift to the humanities and yet “containing” science – a win-win scenario.

Sport is described as aesthetic and, in particular as beautiful. This is then problematized as lacking semantics or the extra-aesthetic. But the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic obtain simultaneously, only they can be analyzed only one at a time. This is akin to the wave-particle duality and the *uncertainty principle*. I conjecture, then that the analysis of sport which follows may be applied to say as a) an instance of beauty; b) an activity; c) an institution, and d) a game, including participant and viewer where the viewer (the masses) lauds the activity of science (read: sport), a kind of philosophical stance of materialism – a “muscular sports”, a certain “form of life”.

The front cover of Gumbrecht’s book encapsulates much. It shows what is probably a male diver in a diving pose colored in black against an off-white background. My interpretation of this image (and in the context of the book) is that on the one hand it draws attention to the beautiful form of the athlete, while on the other hand it conveys that which is beyond this particular form. I say so as in the case of the aesthetic description there is an emphasis on the outline and beautiful agility, yet on the other hand the infinity implied by the deep black form (that is, endless space or the surface of text) suggests something that escapes that particular form.

Black is indicative of letters and text and since it eschews the details of the divers’ form, the “text” hints at multiple levels of interpretations. Such interpretation is, I believe the social, extra-aesthetic dimensions of meaning that inform the form or sports act. This interpretation may not be sound, for the void in the shape of figure possibly reveals and highlights formal, aesthetic matters as they pertain to sport, concealing that which is not form. In this respect, perhaps the “infinite form” is merely an invocation that the aesthetic dimension of sport can be written about, explicated and discursively analyzed or more aptly: praised. The shared aesthetic trait in art and sport is what Gumbrecht (2006) ^[14] presents to the reader. This image of sport as formal beauty may be applied to science in respect of the sheer order that it pursues both in its process of mining nature for answers and the creative act of discovery, application and generation of knowledge.

Gumbrecht (2006) ^[14], a leading figure in the philosophy of aesthetics, offers in his book, in praise of athletic beauty (2006) a new aesthetics of sport in order to retrieve sport from the margins of intellectual enquiry within the global academia. He begins by challenging the tendency within the Western academy to deny athleticism intellectual praise, though the classical Greeks were an exception. This has

occurred because human physicality and related sportive activity have often been pushed to the margins of Western cultural life, where it joins other forms of popular culture outside the realm of “high culture”. This situation can only be redressed when sport performance is reclaimed as potentially beautiful, and by extension, establishing a case for an aesthetic “essence” in sport which is tantamount to a formalist project, in that an aesthetic dimension can be reduced to – and analyzed as – a set of formal properties and an abstract configuration of sorts.

Young (2008:6) ^[31] makes the point that to stress the aesthetic appeal of sport is to see it as not simply subordinate to other powerful systems, however, at the same time it does not express anything as such.

This contrasts the Enlightenment paradigm and the metaphysical tradition that is characterized by an urge to interpret and look “beyond” and “upwards”. Gumbrecht concern is to avoid this and instead argue for what might be termed “presence” (praesenzeffekte) by which, as Young (2008:8) ^[31] defines as “dimensions of culture that emerge from the relations of bodies to the things by which they are surrounded”. In order to argue for this, Gumbrecht emphasizes spatial elements over temporal, time-based factors. He is concerned with the epiphany, the instant or moment in time rather than continuity and narrative. The appearance of things, gestures and drama rather than meaning as it develops over time, is stressed.

However, Gumbrecht does seem to recognize the significance of the oscillation between presence and meaning, the former being most applicable to understanding sport. Yet according to Young (2008) ^[31], the idea of presence is highly suspect, for that which is made present, and the mediation devices that create such presence, is complicit with ideological factors and in that respect is precisely part of a constructed narrative in and of time. In this sense, the appeal to aesthetic beauty cannot be easily isolated from other non-exhibited factors. One can isolate the aesthetic, but that requires the ignoring, not the negating of extra-aesthetic factors.

A further critique is taken up by Edgar (2013). Edgar (2013) writes that the aesthetics of sport is a largely unchallenged presupposition of much aesthetics about sport (Lowe 1977, Gumbrecht 2006 ^[14], Moller 2003) and a theme in de Courbertin’s conception of Olympism. There is an assumed centrality of beauty in aesthetics generally and, in particular in its application to sport. But the aesthetics of beauty in sport is ambiguous and vague. It’s a hangover of eighteenth-century aesthetics that affirms the illusion of “givenness” and modernist self-critique that disrupts the “given”. In agreement with Edgar (2013) this leads to “disenfranchisement” of sport (and art for that matter), that is as seeing it only fit for sensory pleasure and the like and an appeal to a vague intuition of beauty. This is so, as to argue that sport has intrinsic aesthetic properties, is to see it as lacking relevance to everyday life. It is reduced to a kind of sports-for-sports-sake mantra, which like art-for-art’s sake, is problematic.

One may take this idea of “disenfranchisement” further by noting that the divorce of experience and the aesthetic object from any non-aesthetic concerns (historical, political, psychological), for example in Gumbrecht on sport or Bell on art, is simply to look at syntax, not semantics. It is to see sport as a kind of Sabbath from everyday life that expresses nothing. Sport becomes an embodied presence obdurate to

any intellectual interpretation in this respect. Aesthetic judgements of beauty, according to Edgar (2013:103) only expresses a personal and idiosyncratic satisfaction, then it is not available for discussion and cannot be contested discursively and intersubjectively.

Having said that, Gumbrecht’s appeal is the rather nostalgic even romantic writing about sport as sport and he does this by looking at Kant’s notion of disinterest, those moments of aesthetic transcendence resulting in the observer or listener moving into a state of pure appreciation, detached from other dimensions of worldly existence. It is this that creates the beauty of art in the first place. Gumbrecht uses the term “focused intensity” – borrowed from the swimmer Pablo Morales (2006:49) – to describe the disconnectedness both athletes and spectators experience at heightened moments of sport appreciation. The wondrous surprise occurring in the moment of appreciation “can be thought of as a kind of epiphany” (Gumbrecht 2006:54) ^[14]. Therefore, the aesthetics of sport recalls a kind of artistic inspiration, not least of all a scientific insight or breakthrough.

In this respect, young’s critique of presence and Edgar’s idea of “disenfranchisement” need not apply as sport’s meaning is both its powerful and often violent aggression, as well as how that in turn may be applied as a kind of metaphor for everyday living as well as the meaning found in other practices (scientific, political, psychological...). In the final section he makes a case for “gratitude” (Gumbrecht 2006:202) ^[14] being given to the athlete for his or her creation of beauty, via the terms “watching” and “waste”. He writes about two aspects of watching sport, namely analysis and communion. Analysis is a more personalized viewing experience, whereby sport is watched on television with a critical eye. The communal watching experience occurs at the sport stadium. Here followers are collectively gathered usually in support of a team. Gumbrecht (2006) ^[14] believes that there are moments when the energy of the crowd connects with that of the team and suggests that in this ultimate moment of communion, the prospect of collective aesthetic experience is heightened. “Waste” refers to athletes whose lives fell away since their retirement from sport, but this would not indicate that they wasted their time; their subsequent demise is not indicative of waste, but sacrifice. Thus, those of us who have seen beauty in the performance of the sportsperson must be grateful because the potential sacrifice gives to us an awareness and appreciation of joy in our own mortal existence. So Gumbrecht appears to make the case that sport certainly is aesthetic. That the “wow” one might feel for a painting correlate as “aesthetic entities” to that of the “wow” one might feel for sport. Therefore, an analysis and understanding of sport requires a formalist theoretical perspective as, in the making of beauty, sport is composed of a language of sensory artistry.

Applying Gumbrecht’s “findings”, Regier (2008:31) ^[25] analyses Zidane’s winning goal for Real Madrid in the 2002 Champions League final as beautiful. Such a judgment satisfies the following criteria: 1) The goal can be said to be “purposive without purpose”, because it is a goal as of its kind with no further function. 2) It represents disinterested beauty – regardless of whom one is supporting one can appreciate the goal. 3) One ought to claim subjective validity universally, no necessary prior cognitive stock is required, that is, contextual knowledge. Though one cannot prove its beauty, the Kantian model is maintained. I cannot

help but feel a sense of communal kingship is established at the theatre as if the audience goes through the drama together. To a lesser extent, the art gallery offers a space of communion, certainly where performance art is concerned, though here, in general perhaps the experience of the gallery is rather more isolated.

Following Gumbrecht, Regier maintains that sport tends to the condition of beauty. In appealing to beauty, one is led to a formalist-type description of the performance and viewing thereof. This may explain the attraction of sport on both a conscious and subconscious level. In other words: while sport seems to be the counteraction to contemplation, Gumbrecht now contemplates it (sport) which in a sense breaks the circle, namely that between “action” and “contemplation”. And what unites them is the invocation of formal aesthetics. On the other hand, sport may be read as a social text so that an appeal to aesthetics is merely an instance of other extra-aesthetic factors or its prelude.

Now while “science” was “silent” in the foregoing, the I, the author-trickster conjecture that a mathematical-like substitution of terms can take place (see note 2 herein) so that where beauty was ascribed to sport and praised us such, one can similarly argue that the scientific project in method and result, in the form of the production and application of knowledge, is both motivated by and inherently demands, a formal awareness that can be termed beautiful. In this respect, it may be further linked to the aesthetic and thence to art as well, if not literally than metaphorically.

In fact, definitions themselves fall apart and as the field of everyday aesthetics is well-aware, an aesthetic modality may even apply to the more mundane and monotonous aspects of life if only one were attuned to the mystery inherent in living itself. Science, however, is closer to a self-enclosed world, an order that uses symbolism and higher order thinking and awareness akin to the fine arts and so it is not a far-reaching step to maintain its association with the beautiful, and certainly scientific claims of truth is itself an act of wondrous beauty is it not? (Art is less propositional in this sense, but nevertheless may also express/show a truth. A good sporting performance is also not propositional, but its formal coherence might also be termed an expression of truth, for example a truthful rendition of the apex of human speed).

Part III: An observation: The will to form.

Having made the last point, I wish to propose an observation that devolves from such a position and coheres at the same time with a formalist approach to art. Fundamentally, if one subscribes to the view that art and sport (read: science) appeal owing to their formal structure and their beauty, then could one not claim that inherent in the desire to make art and/or to move (read: think) in specific ways, is what I term “a will to form”.

Secondly, but no less important, this “will to form” is a kind of freezing of time, a capturing of the moment and the creation of an eternal present (this applies to documentary photography of sport and the like, as well as key concepts, like the four known forces of nature described by the science of physics and applicable as a universal truth so far as we know). It is to this observation that I now turn.

I refer the reader to for example Brancusi’s “Bird in Space” (1928) - figure 2 - and figure 3 of Yamashita’s judo throw. What could these two images have in common? There is a certain tension, weight, physical aliveness, a sense of

grandness, even transcendence in both images. I attribute such perceptions to the fact that such imagery appears to me to exemplify formal mastery. In figure 2, Brancusi makes the viewer feel a sense of upward joyous surge, a sensitive linear mobility that is all the more sacred given the gold bronze colour. His sculpture is soft and sharp simultaneously, strongly vertical, and yet curved and organic. Brancusi was quoted as saying: “art must penetrate into the spirit of nature and, like nature, create beings whose forms and lives are independent” (in Walther [ed.] 2005:427). In this quote, the artist reveals the desire to create new, original forms, to create forms that exist independently, that speak the silent language of art. Form is thus the vessel of meaning and formalism, a theory that emphasizes the unique visual language in contradistinction to other languages and the aesthetic disposition that certain artworks may induce in the viewer, helps clarify why we may attend so favorably to a work such as this. And what of the connection to science, wherein factors this variable? It is the technology that science affords, namely photography that reveal each of these “acts” i.e. mediated by the camera. Scientific invention and tools are the mechanism, the medium and the very vessel that allows the art and sport to emerge³ in the first place.

Returning to a formalist appraisal: In its abstract quality or its abstraction, Brancusi desires to reveal “deep” reality. Now, although this position has been criticized, this modernism certainly holds a kernel of truth and “he (Brancusi) unerringly and painstakingly seeks an increasingly pure and perfect body of form that is transcendental in its immaculate finish” (in Walther [ed.] 2005:425, brackets my inclusion). Formalism therefore may be “spiritual”, as it speaks of the “essential form” containing “metaphysical reality” (according to Bell) or as is the case with Greenberg, materialistic, in that we simply assert the fact of a form without attending to meanings. In either case, it appears that there is an inner need for form; a desire to be graceful, harmonious, rhythmic, effortless, in control, to flow, to hold power and if one cannot be these things or some of them, to realize them through visual perception of form; in an artwork! We are empathic to other.

We may then describe dance and performance arts as poetry in motion, as a revelation of symmetry, unity, as not been discordant. We may perceive qualities of balance and timing, pattern and design ... all this through creating form and/or simply viewing eloquent forms, such as in Brancusi’s sculpture.

In a self-same manner, the documentary photograph (Figure 2) recorded in Kodokan Judo (1986:59) ^[19] inspires a sense

³ Having said that, each of our primary variables – “art”, “sport”, “science”, “aesthetic” and “formalism” -can be described as before or after, as a beginning point of one variable giving birth to another within time is some sequence. Time itself has the quality of space, so at an instant, all the variables co-exist and assume form (even if only space) or the receptacle for an object. Such objects are all the known details within each variable. However, the point of this article is in the unity or inter-disciplinarity of these variables, so that the stars do not so much fill space as warp it. The result is form. And forms come in infinite variation. The form or structure indicates properties of that body/’form. This in turn indicates more abstract relationships.

of balance and power. The two fighters create a vertical line, offset by the strong horizontals of the background. The sense that the physics of stasis is about to change as the uchi-mate throw will inevitably lead to the demise of the one fighter – that moment before chaos is captured and we momentarily witness the intense, forceful action just before the plunge. Through this image, we can learn what is required to execute a good throw or photograph and choose to identify with the judo player. In so doing, we project ourselves into the form as we empathize with other, as one may do so with figure 1, and in this alignment of self with image, our empathic projection “into”, we transform ourselves; we intuit that the form poses a question.

Perhaps the question is not only as a result of its aesthetic quality; perhaps it enters the domain of our will – do we wish to feel like a “bird in space”; can we also perform a judo throw with such gusto and verve or fall victim to it? My contention is that images enter the mind on this level, because we need to see who and what we are and can be in order to think on it: it is the will to form that makes us; it requires an empathic emotion for other. Or in other words, we may say of art that it allows us to see the world from another perspective, as with Hegel’s notion that art is the midway between sensual embodiment and the abstractness of pure thought, or at least the play between these “things”. That which makes meaning is sensibly exemplified, rather than understood in logical terms alone. Sport too may also reveal an action, encoded with a picture of the sublime.

Brancusi’s “Bird” is finite but its eloquent form hints at the infinite and that which is of the mind, the “realm” of ideas. The sporting documentary photograph captures the singular moment of a series of movements that was the alive, vigorous activity of that sporting event, and in that stillness creates the potential for that which has no limit – the idea of the sublime and the “realm” of ideas. On the other hand, Brancusi’s abstract configuration may be arguably locked into a modernist aesthetic of “pure form” and “disinterested contemplation” and then subsuming the interpretation of the photograph of the judo throw under the same aesthetic, but clearly labels the former as “art” and the latter as “sport”.

Klein’s performance piece (figure 3) operates differently. It is art and it is sport. It exists aesthetically as an embodied art form that is at once a sport-like dive and an artistic intervention breaking the code of the “white cube”. It therefore offers an aesthetic that is neither disembodied contemplation, nor embodied contest against other bodies. It therefore offers, at least in theory, a life-praxis where aesthetic expression is mediated by the body.

Of course, the fame of the photograph means that it does suffer the fate of being “merely” an art object with a certain value, a photographic relic of what promised so much in terms of transcendence through action. By transcendence I here mean the going beyond binary categories such as that between thought and action or art and science and indeed between art and sport. As such one could see a work such as this as one of many significant precursors of performance art, subversive counterculture and the recently so-called somaesthetics initiated by Richard Shusterman where it is the expression of the living body as a “site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-stylization” (blurb of somaesthetic online journal). Such is the nature of many contemporary artistic interventions in performance, installations and digital art, and in particular the way the body in movement, space and time dimensions determines

one’s experience of reality, disrupting the old Cartesian mind/body polarity. In this sense neither concepts nor a singular aesthetic defines art or rather defines how one may understand sport as artistic. It is precisely in the realm of the body or nature that science unearths the inner workings and logic therein, which gives rise to consciousness. Art and science are drawn from and are an analysis of nature in their own unique ways and sport is also nature expressing itself.

The proximity between art and sport is intuitive, sensed and somewhat conceptually analogous. Klein’s “jump” expresses the freedom in bodily action like an accomplished diver and at the same time it is an impossibility as he (the body) must plummet to the ground. This reflects our dual desire to both overcome gravity and work with gravity, of being inscribed in and as a world. This could be seen as a precursor to some contemporary art, especially that linked to somesthetics, where art and science interlink, where the visceral quality of the senses, movement and actual bodies also suggest a blurring of the distinction between art and sport. And in the process, one may surmise that Brancusi’s abstract configuration dissolves into a forceful – gravity-intensive – sport act such as the judo throw. This then resolves itself in a new art performance such as Klein’s, which yet begets another comparison to a sporting moment (though this is not explicitly shown as another illustration as such, one may imagine it so). The only difference then between calling one thing sport and another art and one thing science and another art, is 1) intention of the “actor” and 2) context. It has nothing to do with what is merely visible or aural.

Should we however expand our horizons and choose to see the “world as sculpture” (following James Hall, 1999) ^[16]; should the sportsperson see himself or herself as expressing an artistic act, or for that matter, as a scientist, and should the artist (read: scientist) acknowledge the sport of his craft and its institutional, highly competitive reality, then there cannot be a rigid distinction between art and sport (read: science). Or, at the very least, this argument should buffer the thesis that we can talk about sport (read: science) as art-like. Perhaps, allowing some speculative license, we can say that this discursive assessment points to an art of living beyond both stadium and “white cube” and scientific laboratory. Art and sport (read: science) are only a taste of what could be beyond the limitations of a fixed space-and-time constraint.

Returning to the reverie: When we see an image or picture the flow of time is arrested. When we watch a sports event, the world of make-believe usurps the rather more serious flow of time that is life. In this way, art and sport transports us to a kind of eternal present. Halt (2008) ^[17], reflecting on Gumbrecht, believes that in the evocation of athletic beauty, the “everyfan” as he calls it, suggests a choreography of beautiful play in which “... the sudden, surprising convergence of serial athletic bodies in time and space” (Gumbrecht in Halt 2008:52) ^[17] create a larger-than-life theatricality. Depictions of early cricket matches, for example, are almost as potent as hunting prints in constructing a pastoral idyll in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. Or in tennis we have young men and woman in white set against the soft grass of summer. Other than spatial considerations, there are technical aspects as in the notion of “classic” shots, and an aesthetic orthodoxy, where cricketers, for example tended to be captured in portraits with one hand on the hip and the other on the handle of the

bat in a heroic manner.

In the athletic ideal there is an aesthetic, formal quality. This is also due to the kind of sculptured body of the athlete. The sports arena is an ideal space in which that moment is elevated. Halt argues (following Gumbrecht) that there is a sense of “oneness” in such “moments of intensity”, a feeling of communion, even a “momentary loss of self”, or transcendence of individuality, that actually begins with beauty. He continues by saying that “the unexpected appearance of a body in space, taking a beautiful form that just as quickly dissolves, can be thought of as a kind of epiphany” (Gumbrecht in Halt 2008:56) ^[17]. I would claim the same effect may be inspired through the images presented in this section. Figure 1 and 2 imagine the relationship between inner and outer dimensions in making an art object or performing in sports and the reception thereof in visual terms which may or may not lead to the appraisal of the beauty of the art or sports’ “object”. Figure 3 resolves the tension by allowing art and sport to “touch”, and in so doing cannot easily be named. In this sense it is ineffable but mutable in the same way the figure of the artist apparently “flying” will descend to the earth unless gravity should cease. Yet we are the figure, the body that will meet its end.

Yet it is a construction, a game – obviously the artist will be fine after the staged event. But then art and sport are a form of trickery and illusion – or rather “play”. Gumbrecht makes the point that “Beauty is not the goal of competitive sports, but high-level beauty, the human beauty we’re talking about here is beauty of a particular type. It might be called kinetic beauty. Its power and appeal are universal. It has nothing to do with sex or cultural norms. What it seems to have to do with, really, is human beings reconciliation with the fact of having a body” (Gumbrecht in Young 2008:10) ^[31]. A point that just occurred to me is that what surrounds us in the hi-tech digital world we now inhabit, the brain-child of scientific knowledge and invention in which our idea of the body has changed with the emergence of the machine, automation, the potential of cloning and the very enigmatic city-scape.

It is the pre-discursive body through which the self-acts; it is the body that becomes the very materials out of which form is composed. And in that presence of self through the body, there can be a dramatic moment, a sensual, though aesthetic, perception. One is not referring elsewhere and treating the sports moment or the execution of an artwork as symbolic. That is, like Kant’s ideas, we attend to beauty for its own sake without a definite concept, via the free play of imagination and understanding. It is disconnected from “everyday” life, and not grounded in concepts, since nothing in the “everyday” world is at stake, that is, it’s really a game, fantasy, a picture, a formulae...though here it serves to elucidate the question of form in and of itself.

In an interview (02/08/13) with Sherrylle Calder (UCT, Sports science – vision expert) it became clear that considering sport as an art and the sports person as an artist were both agreeable notions and she added that “sight is clarity of vision”. To me this means that both art and/or sport require the combination of mental (vision) and physical (sight) aspects working together. I would further conjecture that this “will to form” is predicated on the need humans have for order, pattern and harmony, sensory stimulus that calms or exhilarates us. In that sense, art and sport and certainly – science - might offer us a vision of

clarity and precision. Form is therefore necessary for intellectual, sensuous, intuitive and emotive dimensions of being, the four-pronged compass of human agency as expounded by Jung (1875-1961).

Allowing some speculative license, one might claim that Kant, for example sensed this integration of the “the four-pronged compass of human agency” in not being able to define the aesthetic experience in literal, discursive language. Furthermore, the very fact that Kant (1952 [1790]) ^[20] even deals with humour and its health benefits, implies that he recognized the “other” of universal reason and the gamut of human cognition and affect or that any one term, begets another, so that one could say science is born of art. And perhaps art of philosophy, but that is altogether an “other” discussion (see note 3).

Conclusions

One might think that art (read: science) is purely theoretical and cerebral and thus not in need of a tangible formal expression. If so, art and science are ostensibly the opposite of sporting bodily activity, and even a formalist appraisal. This question contains the implicit assumption of dualism, that of the disjunction between idea and form. However, because there is, it would seem, always some tangibility to art (and science is heavily dependent on the empirical and very costly methods in a very tangible experimental set-up), and because sport certainly also has a mental component, such as willpower, focus, intent, tactics and aesthetic intuitions, it would appear, a purely aesthetic-formalist or a purely extra-aesthetic and hermeneutic approach is one-sided.

To the extent that art and sport are amenable to the senses, the seeming refutation in late modern and postmodern work, conceptual art, for example, of formalism, is limited to that aspect of art that is concerned with intentions. However, intentions and actions are not so clearly separate (Powell 1998) ^[24]; thus, mind and matter form a continuum just as art, science and sport does. Or in other words, we may say of art that it allows us to see the world from another perspective, that its form offers us symbols for something that is inarticulate, a visual analogue of struggle depicted or ceased, and that the form of a sports-play offers us a metaphor for our desire to overcome obstacles, of the goodness of teamwork, of fair play and an arena in which to “shine”, to exude confidence, to inspire and to be inspired. That which makes meaning is sensibly exemplified, rather than understood in logical terms alone. Art as with sport may reveal an action encoded with a picture of the sublime, the ineffable. Such an inspiring “act” is also a description of good science.

That said, what is argued here is not the invocation of idea or form or “act” as referring to “reality”. Rather what is expressed here is simply the beauty of aesthetic and formal “play” in the oscillation between differing harmonies and forms. This does not preclude (extra-aesthetic) content, a kind of representation, though not one grounded in metaphysical and epistemological certainty. The upshot is that aesthetic “play” is ubiquitous. A theory of formal beauty applied to disparate objects of culture aims to include a refreshing perception and conception of “everyday” life, and Gumbrecht’s appraisal of sport is thus a positive mechanism whereby this goal can be realized. This article takes that project further in (re-)evaluating art aesthetics, such as formalism, in order to understand sport better,

specifically in developing the thesis that analysis of the significance of the beauty of form may yet be one important aspect of aesthetic experience generally in art (read: science) and thence in the everyday itself, sport been one instance.

I have argued that there is an innate “will to form” and that this itself is subsumed further by a “will to power”. While aligning art and sport in these terms was one aspect of the project, I have introduced a further variable, namely science and applied the same reading of artistic formalism to sport to that of science. The result is the potential for a peaceful co-existence of both co-extensive and differing terms, so that no one term is valorized and an over-arching philosophical paradigm forged.

This is a *paradigm shift* that might be termed

“epistemological holism” and it is marked by the trans and inter-disciplinary, which is in effect to say there is no such “epistemological unity” either, only a dance, an aesthetic delight, a game, a process, and act of being becoming. This “wow” that confronts one in nature or the inner dimension may take a number of forms depending on the language-game, or “form of life”, each incommensurate and none ultimate, so that the light that activates this “wow” is contained in different vessels or became encapsulated in different vessels – now art, now science, now sport – but it is the same “light” all the same. And the vessels themselves – the constraints of a particular language/form – are also not as different as what they may at first glance appear to be.



Fig 1, 2 and 3

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