

# Aesthetics, Art and Sport: Towards the “Argument from Intertwining”

Daniel Shorkend

WIZO School of Design, Haifa, Israel.  
*dannyshorkend@yahoo.co.uk*

**Abstract:** The significant, Enlightenment philosophers in aesthetics, such as Schopenhauer and Hegel form the bedrock of many of our ideas in aesthetics. After briefly unpacking their ideas in this regard, I argue for the inability of such philosophers to deal with non-mimetic art, such as abstract painting and in the process their views on aesthetics only apply to a limited domain of the visual arts. Insofar as this is the case I then put forward an alternative aesthetics that accommodates advances in the arts, namely a metaphoric conception of art. This conception of aesthetics also appears to argue for the pervasiveness of aesthetic experience, thus also undermining the said philosophers’ hierarchical elevation of the arts from common experience. This invites an alternative aesthetics, where sport may be regarded as a kind art. In this regard, the role of metaphor, in both positive and negative ways devolving from the post-modern “language turn” leads to a holistic conception of experience, whether parcelled off as art or sport and this is argued for as the so-named “argument from intertwining”.

**Keywords:** art; sport; aesthetics; metaphor

## INTRODUCTION

I shall begin by analysing the aesthetics of key Enlightenment philosophers which will set the stage for a discussion on metaphor in both positive and negative aspects. This then leads into a discussion of aesthetics as it relates to sport and toward the “argument from intertwining” in which I argue that there is indeed an overlap between art and sport – in fact that need not even be considered separate categories in the first place.

Schopenhauer gives high praise to art, particularly of music. He argues that art is a kind of refuge from the tumult of life, affording “disinterested” contemplation. Since will is the underlying drive, force or energy behind reality, it is art that is able to arrest this constant willing, seeking for consummation of desire and the resultant suffering as one is never satiated. In Buddhist speak, he develops the thesis that to rise above such incessant willing, as it were, leads to a sort of non-attachment when engaged in the aesthetic appreciation of art. He writes, for example that music is “so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain” (in Cooper 159). In other words, art is able to rise above the facticity of existence with all its strife and enter a cultural sphere; it is able to penetrate the variety of whim and experience and so to speak touch will in its essence. It thus enhances life, rather than simply reproducing it.

Even though music and the arts employ definite forms, it is akin to the perfection of geometric figures, that is to say, art draws from a sort of universal truth via the sensible according to Schopenhauer. As opposed to Kant, the sensible phenomena are penetrated, the In-Itself does become revealed – it expresses the emotions themselves, not simply the emotion in relation to this or that event or this or that effect. Although Schopenhauer draws from Plato’s Theory of Forms, he wants to argue that music above all is not dependent on the shadow world at all and exists in some realm disengaged from the world, which cannot be said of the other arts. He is, however saying that music stirs the passions and yet is an objectification of the Will nevertheless. He rejects Hegel’s

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idea that such forms are then in need of rational, philosophical objectification, but rather believes art, even if unconsciously arrived at, are truths in themselves and need not lead to verbal and rational articulation.

For Hegel, art is not the final and deep word. In fact, while art – the sensible objectification of ideas – is in need of rational articulation which is the work of philosophy. Once achieved, Hegel believes there is no need for art. This, what is often called the “death of art” thesis, a precursor to modern or post-modern theories, posits that we will no longer have need for art, that the days of the venerating of such cultural forms will have ceased, and the pure idea or spirit will be rationally determined, what in Hegel’s language is the Absolute. Art is in his philosophy considered higher than nature and its perfection, while art itself is amenable to intellectual investigation especially in relation to the historical unfolding of epochs and so Hegel is often considered the “father” of art history and yet as hitherto mentioned his end of art thesis even predates the advent of conceptual art. As Hegel says: “...but art, far removed...from being the highest form of spirit, acquires its real ratification only in philosophy” (in Cooper 149) and continues further on that “neither is fine art unworthy of philosophical treatment, nor is philosophical treatment incapable of decrying the essence of fine art” (Ibid.).

Now, the problem with Schopenhauer is even though he is correct that in music one finds something rather non-sensible, that is not mimetic, it is not true that painting for example is necessarily mimetic, for with the advent of abstract art there is no longer a dependence on the world of phenomena akin to music. Line, colour, composition, form, texture – the first principles in themselves – stir the emotions in the way music does. Kandinsky is rightly regarded as the father of abstract art. The Abstract Expressionists took this to another level. Thus, Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory does not apply beyond the twentieth century in many respects, but the idea that art is a recoil from the cacophony of material life is sound. In the case of Hegel, he errs with respect to the idea that art can be articulated in words and ideas, although his “death of art” thesis is actually in many respects quite post-modern. But again, this refers to a mimetic kind of art and abstract art needs to be understood on its own terms, without recourse to a literal, rational explanation.

So, incorporating the best of both philosophies and taking into account their shortcomings, in view of Abstract Art, what alternative theory can one develop? Perhaps all that is needed is to substitute art as mimesis for art as metaphorical. In this way one can associate particular ideas with art quo Hegel and at the same time, art penetrates to an essence that is beyond verbal articulation, a meaning that cannot quite be reached, but only alluded to through passions and reason quo Schopenhauer.

Metaphor implies that an object of sense alludes or suggests a meaning, but such a meaning is only implied and not fixed. It avoids the idea that art is a copy or representation. Accordingly, whatever the objects of art – installation, video, photography, painting, sculpture, performance and so on and so forth – can be subsumed under the metaphoric conception of art without the metaphysical problems of the dualism between sense and reason, phenomena and idea, In Itself/Absolute and plethora of things, specifically particular art works.

Furthermore, a metaphoric conception of art lies in its pervasiveness. Close to the ideals of modernism and in fact related to other epochs – the middle ages and the guild system; Ancient Greek art and sport; art as defined as a mechanical art; art as an expression of political ideals and religious systems and so on and so forth – such infusion and penetration of the arts into other domains is an historical fact. Rather than a corresponding meaning to an artwork situated within a world-form or form of life, one might say post Duchamp that all things are potentially art and that therefore all things can mean something else, that is stand for or be a metaphor of any other possible meaning. The problem, of course with such a conception is that this “loose language” implies that anything could mean anything else, that the sign and symbol is not fixed, other than by its predetermined place within a certain context. There is no art gallery. Or rather, there is an art gallery as but one type of art gallery.

Let me unpack the concept of *Metaphor* at greater length.

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Metaphor (is) the likening of one thing to another in varying degrees of expansive connection between that one thing and that of the other. Metaphor is distinguished from literal language and thus a literal correlation between a thing and its description, that is, the thesis of correspondence thinking. Potgieter (2007:58) writes that “... whilst it is true that the metaphoric instability of language deconstructs the correspondence paradigm, it also inaugurates an understanding of art as a place for the creation of new meanings”, which he associates with the “metaphoric paradigm of art”. He draws from Heidegger’s (1971:62) idea that metaphors, in a sense, assist in establishing new, concrete worlds. That is, metaphors assist in imaginatively projecting, and thus creating new possibilities. If we concede that the “language turn” implies we do not have access to a “true reality”, only endless surfaces, then art is not so much a copy of the real or original, but a new aesthetic, one that embodies the fractured state of signifiers that abound and that could become part of a process of open-ended discourse on the work of art, both inscribed and yet not inscribed by a specific language system. That is, signifiers may have a definite meaning (content) in the context of a specific language as a kind of Wittgenstein-like “form of life”, but the possibility of a signifier coming to mean something else in relation to a different set of rules and language also exists. In this respect, the signifier becomes disembodied from its literal (precise) meaning and functions in another way. So that when Potgieter (2007:59-60) says that “metaphor is understood as a relation between literal and figurative meaning, transparent and vague meaning, essential and decorative meaning, concrete and abstract meaning, original and imaginative meaning...”, this may point to the instability of circumscribing the signifier within a definite language game. I refer the institutional theory of art (specifically Danto and Dickie’s work in this regard) where one may draw from the “rule-following paradox” in which words and also now images can function in many ways depending on context and use, that is, the language game.

Another way to perceive the metaphorical play of images and/or words is to recognize the difference that analytical philosophers draw between different senses of the word “is” or as in mimetic resemblance. On the one hand, “is” means identity as in X “is” Y, that X and Y are necessarily the same entity. On the other hand, “is” specifies that X and Y are not identical but contained within the same set, so that they share in Wittgenstein’s terms, a “family resemblance”. Metaphor belongs to that second category in as much as one is not equating two seemingly disparate concepts, but rather suggesting a confluence, a similarity, while they still remain distinct entities. For example, to draw a likeness between a painted tree and the notion of, for example, a life generating principle is not to say that the latter concept “is” the tree in terms of identity, but merely pointing to a shared aspect of both such concepts. This renders the metaphoric play of art akin to a type of “fuzzy logic”<sup>1</sup> and “paraconsistent logic”<sup>2</sup> and Godel’s “undecidability”<sup>3</sup> that coheres with my task of demonstrating that mimesis is an inadequate description of art. If metaphor does function in this way, we may say that art is an activity that can forge new meanings and connections. Thus, although one may not be able to say what the precise meaning of an artwork is, and an artwork is not just a discursive idea, it is emotive, imaginative, instinctive, aesthetic...one can offer another metaphor to engage with the art form. This kind of ineffability prompted Potgieter (2007:56) to remark: “All meaning is a metaphoric interpretation of a metaphoric interpretation”. In other words, though postmodernism has discredited the correspondence thesis as applied to the image and/or the word, this does not necessarily foreclose on meaning, and here I suggest this meaning is in that art may

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1 This term refers to a form of multivalued or probabilistic logic. It deals with reasoning that is approximate rather than fixed and exact. In contrast to traditional logic theory, where binary sets have two-valued logic, true or false, fuzzy logic variables may have a truth-value that ranges in degrees between 0 and 1. This also reflects the oscillation between complementary pairs.

2 This sort of logic attempts to deal with contradictions in a discriminating way so that one can reason with inconsistent information in a controlled and discriminating way. Some even maintain that some contradictions are true.

3 This refers to the idea that a statement can be neither provable nor refutable in a specified deductive system.

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evoke a kind of metaphorical “play”. Kearney (1988:358) states that postmodernism may “be the twilight of great art or the clearance of a space where alternative modes of communication may evolve”. In this sense, Lyotard’s paralogy (1984) comes to mind as metaphor may induce a constant changing of the rules of the game so as to inspire new games and ignite a metaphorical subtlety.

### Freedom and “Play”

Having acknowledged the role of the metaphor, one can be more precise and dub this notion of metaphor as a certain freedom and “play” within a postmodern context. For if fine art need no longer serve the ends of some correspondence programme, whether conceived as a mirroring of the biblical, the classic, an “aesthetic essence” and so on, then perhaps one may conjecture that such times emphasize a certain freedom and “play”. The “language turn” with its emphasis on “difference” implies that there are numerous fragments and any new evocation implies an “other”, so that the “play” is potentially without limit. Furthermore, the infinity of the sign expands and grows and adapts and evolves. One may take an example from language from Hegel’s “Aufhebung” where he makes the point that words transform from being bodily to being conceptually clear. For example: the simple phrase “I see” connotes both a sensory experience and means one understands something. Or “sensible”, which may refer both to that which is amenable to sense-impressions and that something makes sense. Thus, language is embedded in both our experiences and intellectual abstractions, and since one cannot separate the two, we cannot objectify a “reality” or separate aesthetic from extra-aesthetic considerations. The result: one can merely “play” with the surfaces, with the realisation that art is essentially ineffable, because words themselves function according to arbitrary designations and art is already embedded in another language. And each language is a metaphor. With “play” we forge links between languages, rather than perceive and conceive an absolute “reality” quo Hegel. Nevertheless, there can be a certain creative freedom in this.

Warhol, the pop artist recognized this freedom, one grounded in a decentred, unstable and changing language field and “plays” with this. This freedom has nothing to do with the right style or manifesto. As Warhol once said, you can be an abstract expressionist one day and a pop artist the next week ... or a realist (Hughes 1991). This coheres with Danto’s “posthistorical” thesis (1995). Danto (1995) maintains that postmodernism is less a period than what happens after there are no periods in some master narrative of art. It necessarily lacks stylistic unity and is a period “of information disorder, a condition of perfect aesthetic entropy. But it is equally a period of quite perfect freedom” (Danto 1995:12). This freedom is not born out of “innate thought”, but through the “play” of what already exists and is mediated through different languages.

In terms of “playing with what already exists”, one cannot draw meanings of past art in its original “form of life”, though one can imitate the style of an earlier period, which is to say “play” with style and narrative itself. Thus Danto (1995) believes that painting and art history had reached an end point and that all that could be done was to revel in the freedom, that now the story of art exhibits no particular pattern. In this seeming chaotic freedom one is reminded of Nietzsche’s (1995:88) poetic line: “there must be chaos within to give birth to a dancing star”. Or to put it in other terms, Margolis (1999:30) makes the point that the final free “play” of all possible styles of painting is “discovering of once and for all the historical possibility of ever fixing a rational essence of painting”.

Part of this freedom and “play” is in the elision between art and “everyday” life. Danto does not seem to distinguish between art from a “mere real thing”. Thus, the ideal forms of “Plato’s beds” for example, wherein the artistic version is a second or third-order copy of the ideal concept was ruptured when Rauschenberg, Oldenburg and Segal included real beds, for example, within the artistic framework. With Warhol’s *Brillo Box* (1960) this goes further to the extent that the meaning of art could not be given via examples or via perception. Danto believes his idea, namely that you cannot easily distinguish between art and the “everyday”, brings art-making and art

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history to an end<sup>4</sup>. The result: art can take any conceivable trajectory and this allows a certain freedom and “play”, or at least an “imitation of dead styles” (Danto 1995:65), where art no longer has transcendental value but “historical as opposed to eternal significance” (Reez&Borzello 1986:70). It is precisely in the elision of art and “everyday” life that this historicization comes to the fore, as works of art are treated as special sorts of signifiers, neither more nor less than any other tightly defined and highly institutionalized form of image, such as the advertising poster, the product label or the technical book illustration. In this sense, art’s freedom consists in the “play” of the endless possibilities of “surfaces” with no distinction apportioned to the a priori status of the work of art drawn from fine art as opposed to “kitsch” and the “everyday”.

### **Inclusivity and Diversity**

Having acknowledged “play” as the consequence of a certain chaos and instability or lack of definition as far as art is concerned and because language is open ended, one can deduce that it is the very inclusivity implied by the “language turn” and the constant hankering over an “other” that is not to be forgotten. One may posit that the notion of difference in language at the same time allows for the inclusion of otherwise oppressed and silent voices. In this respect, art theory and practice are well appointed to address these imbalances.

Ironically, these imbalances can be found to occur precisely when theorists attempt to write a humanistic account of people’s “sameness” and that art (or at least Western art) has a special role in that regard. Panofsky and Gombrich appear to give art “special status”. In a tradition dating back to Kant and Hegel they see art as bridging the gap between the sensual and the rational, as retrieving “lost” and “alien” cultures and subsuming them as one’s own which is said, in terms of modernist discourse, as enhancing the unity and composure of self. This allows for a critical procedure that traces historical continuity like the genealogy of motifs, and the meaning of a work of art as the reconciliation of conflicting elements. The “new” postmodern approach, however, is to construct a narrative or halt the existing narrative wherein art is not part of the solution, but part of the problem, a kind of “ideological baggage”, be it bourgeois, racist or patriarchal. This task is one of deconstructing, a critique of visual images, from paintings to pop videos wherein the “contradictions and prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful” (Reez&Borzello 1986:84) are unearthed. The postmodern task is thus to deconstruct the polarities, that is, thwart the valorisation of a dominant pole, “rather than police their boundaries” (Reez&Borzello 1986:87). In this regard, the artist does not necessarily have privileged access to ultimate “truth”. The pertinent question about the meaning of art is thus aptly put by Reez and Borzello (1986:168): “It’s not what does it express but what does it do?” Thus, there has been a shift from the assumption that one’s own point of view is the “truth”, that the “other” simply needed to be “edified” to see that “truth”, to one of a critical critique of one’s own position and so the question as to how art functions in culture becomes “central”. In this sense one’s own knowledge claims become contingent.

Once one recognizes the contingent nature of the “story of art” as a consequence of the theoretical “decentering” of language, the art theorist can be more inclusive as to what counts as art (and as aesthetic), so that there is a postmodern reaction to the assumed teleology in art towards a revisionist art history. In this respect, silenced voices and styles of art, for example film can become part of the artistic “mainstream” and this incorporation can aid in human understanding and communication.

Furthermore, the “decentering” of the word and/or the image means that many a sign may be linked to another and even in that relationship other linkages can be made so that an “other” is forever generated as the text expands. In this way, art is a powerful tool to create intersubjective, interdisciplinary cross-overs and hybrids. It would be misguided to call this intertextual “space” a unity of differences, for one cannot perceive the totality

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Hegel (1993) argued that having achieved “absolute knowledge”, art was no longer necessary or divine and had reached some kind of end (at least in those terms). Or in other words, the sensuality of art had performed the historically inevitable task of bringing forth rational, absolute knowledge; the latter now superseding the need for art.

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and thus grasp it as a unity. At best one may say that art is inclusivity compounded of differences. One might then regard this call to mistrust unities and totalizing as democratizing and detotalizing culture. This requires the undoing of hierarchical systems. In this sense rather than a “grand narrative”, one emphasizes seeming minor narratives. As Sim (1992:402) puts it there is a “Multiplicity of little narratives, all of which have their own particular integrity and sense of importance, but none of which can be considered to take precedence over any of the others. Grand narrative is held to dominate and suppress little narratives, and is therefore to be resisted”. Another more direct way of saying this is the observation that the valorisation through art of the Western, first-world, male, Euro-American “fine” art is a myth and that it cannot claim to have universal validity, but is itself a Western construction. In this sense, the postmodern “language turn”, with its emphasis of endless differences becomes a self-reflexive activity of not only maintaining a sense of identity, but realizing that one’s identity and art is a) part of “others” and vice versa and b) has no moral high ground. If a) and b) are maintained within artistic circles and beyond, this would lead to an inclusive and diverse life-praxis and aesthetic sensibility.

### **Meaninglessness**

Thus far I have been arguing that the detotalizing project of postmodernism derived from the “language turn” is a positive and creative paradigm shift to be celebrated. However, Potgieter (2008:53), in this rather lengthy quote, points to the fact that this may not be the case. While there may be distinctions of value, Potgieter, writing tongue in cheek, presents a possible implication of the “language turn” for art and culture:

If knowledge and experience are language-bound, and language itself is an unreliable creation, does this not mean meaninglessness? Are we entering a world in which all hierarchical distinctions are literally exhausted and lacking in authority, and in which no form of experience can be regarded as less, or more, valuable than another? A world in which we can identify no qualitative distinction between rap and Beethoven, Tretchikoff and Manet, Wilbur Smith and James Joyce? If there are no external points, no positive terms, to serve as final authorities in the hierarchical evaluation of knowledge, experiences and values, does this mean that all things are equal and that nothing then has particular value?

The above quote reflects the concern that an “anything goes” rampant inclusiveness attitude may mean the lack of discernment and value, for the deconstructive mode is precisely a debunking of “discernment” and “value”. Does this mean that art and the imagination within the context of the postmodern have “reached” a terminal point? As Kearney (1988:252) observes in his reflecting on the “crisis of the imagination” at this time that the “...Postmodern experience is of the demise of the creative humanist imagination and its replacement by a depersonalized consumer system of pseudo-images ...”

Conceived thus, I will analyse the down-side of what the “language turn” means for art according to the same categories in which the up-side was evaluated.

### **Metaphor means we cannot Really Know**

The idea that an image is no longer authentic expression (Kearney 1988:3), as the individual, and the image, is already part of a language structure that denies the self as present, notwithstanding the power of the image, implies that the veneer of “metaphor” is just another way of saying that the artwork does not mean anything, for meaning is forever deferred. Potgieter (2007), though not necessarily in agreement with the following possible implication of the “language turn” on art, observes that: “Representations of representations, works of art which lose authenticity as a consequence of being mass produced, photographs of photographs, reflections of reflections, parody upon parody, the end of originality and the end of modernity’s search for the “real” inner structure of art ... .” In other words if the nature of metaphor is to say X is like Y, and Y like X or Z and so on, one is caught in the “non presence” of the poststructural web of language. That is, if an artwork functions

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metaphorically, it means one cannot actually pin down a definite meaning and that while these “kindred associations” (Kant’s phrase [1952 {1790}]) may be creative, at no point can one claim final knowledge about the work of art<sup>5</sup>. This may be liberating as argued above, but it may also be debilitating for if “anything goes” then boundaries are eroded. Consequently, there may be no logical distinction between a casino and an art museum as an institution of art!

Furthermore, the notion of metaphor does not allow one to escape to a non-conditioned unknown, because metaphors by definition refer to the web of known signs. Thus, the postmodern “language turn” and the invocation of the metaphor amount to the same thing, namely the critique of the “original”, “the given”. Connor (1992:77) claims, in reflecting on the postmodern reality that it “reflects a pluralistic, rootless society, where consumerism, proliferation of media images and a multi-national capitalist economy make it unique in history. There is no privileged position, not even that of the artist, there is no new style or world, since individual interpretations are derivative”. That “individual interpretations are derivative” means that the individual subject is not in full control of language so that self-knowledge is impossible. Kearney (1988:253) concurs with this reading when he states: “the humanist conception of ‘man’ gives way to the anti-humanist concept of intertextual play. The autonomous subject disappears into the anonymous operations of language”. In this respect, appeal to metaphor in art amounts to relinquishing control over pinning down a discursive understanding and knowledge, for understanding is “of something” and knowledge is “of something”, but that “something” cannot be defined, for it is just part of the structural web of language itself, a “body” without contours. The fact that we do not have access to a “true reality” that is not already mediated by language, one cannot analyse the relationship between literal and figurative meaning and consequently it is unclear whether art or any language simply functions pragmatically as some sort of social convention at a given time, or whether it carries actual knowledge about the world rather than a provisional and contingent meaning. Or if it is simply an aesthetic, sensual surface. However, if one tends to regard art or any language as but a self-enclosed system, then meaning itself is highly suspect. Appeals to the “other” of language alluded to by Derrida above does not act as an escape from language for that “other” is circumscribed by yet another in an ongoing “sequence”, so that as it tends towards infinity, it also tends towards an indefinite meaning or an ongoing replication process that is in itself meaningless.

### **Freedom and “Play” May Mean there is No “Inner” Substance**

This “ongoing sequence” of language and its “other” implies that while in traditional art (and language) there is scope for endless “play” and interpretation, it may also mean that there is nothing beneath the “play” of the surface signifiers.

Postmodernism undermines the modernist project of the independent, individual artist-genius and the “aura” and presence of the art object through which the artist is said to express his “deep, inner self”. Furthermore, language, whether visual or verbal, was considered a transparent vehicle for expressing this self. As a result of the “language turn”, however, the artist’s “inner” being is expunged and the work of art is no longer an authentic presence from which meaning is said to emanate; rather the latter becomes part of a construct of power relations, that is, contingent human knowledge. This is far from the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Hegel. At best one can critique and “play” with images in order to reveal this contingency, and just reflect that art itself is indeed another “surface”; at worst, one laments the fact that there appears to be no deep structure, just endless particles zooming around in space so to speak.

Potgieter (2008) writes that the postmodern condition may lead to a kind of panicky schizophrenia (recalling Deleuze and Guattari) for as signifiers and signified no longer match there is nothing absolute. The “play of surfaces” is the order of the day and change is but cosmetic. And cosmetic indeed! For in a world of cloning, cyber disembodiment, mass media images, the digital world and so on, experience, perception and identity are constructed without recourse to “truth”. This state of affairs can be construed as the “free play of the net work

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of signs” (Hans 1980:307) rather than human agency, a cause ascribed to the “inner self”. Baudrillard echoes this idea of the subject being trapped in a network of decentred signs in the sense that within the postmodern condition one cannot make the distinction between “reality” and simulations thereof. These simulacra or simulations (Baudrillard 1988) are not simply false as opposed to the real; a distinction that one cannot make for the simulation absorbs the real itself (Poster 1988:6); “reality” is hyperreality. Thus “play” of signification becomes another word for hyperreality, a kind of chaos drawing from the “language turn”, in which there is no centre. Without a centre, there is an infinity of “surfaces”, and that which appears “deep” is but another sign that constitutes the language system. Therefore, considered thus, art no longer has claims to ontological truth. The seeming freedom of the hyperreal and the resorting to “play” in art may thus amount to very little.

### Inclusivity May Mean the Lack of Discernment

Although to say there are “no positive terms” in language has led to the inclusion of previously silenced voices in art, for there is no positive term to dominate as it were. There is also the sense that with the end of the avant-garde comes the loss of a clear direction in art (and perhaps elsewhere in life). The fact that the “real” and the “imagined” (or represented) are no longer clearly distinguished means that although this makes everything equal, there is no Archimedean point outside this inclusive differentiation from which to determine meaning and thus forge some sort of direction. Therefore, inclusivity without direction can be thought of as aimless, without trust in any particular system. In Foucault’s (1976) writing we find the proclamation of the “death of man”, the death-knell of transcendental consciousness. This, he argues is made cogent by “exploring scientific discourse not from the point of view of individuals who are speaking ... but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse” (Foucault 1976:88). Kearney (1988:266) writes that such a project is the “substitution of the postmodern paradigm of the structural unconscious for the modern paradigm of the creative consciousness ... which gives priority to the observing subject”. Barthes and Derrida too attempt to critique the subject who prides himself or herself to be the source of universal meaning. As such, postmodern inclusivity does not entail a conglomerate of individuals that together give one a semblance of “truth”, but a kind of non-presence, an impersonal “play” of linguistic signs. The result is that “creating” and interpreting becomes a struggle/play of multiple fragmentation and dissipation. Therefore, inclusivity of multiple interpretations simply means that there is no “truth” to be unearthed in the text or art object. Or put another way, the extension of the notion of the text to include everything means that the distinction between imagination and reality evaporate and discerning what is true becomes difficult.

This kind of chaos means that ethically one is not enjoined to act in a specific way. While this may mean a certain liberation, it also equates to a lack of discernment in ethical matters, which Kearney (1988:361) is well aware of, as he states: “if the deconstructionist of imagination admits of no epistemological limits (insofar as each one of us is obliged to establish a decidable relationship between image and reality), it must recognize ethical limits”. He continues: “...in the face of postmodern logic of interminable deferment and infinite regress, of floating signifiers and vanishing signifieds, here and now I face an *other* who demands of me an ethical response” (Kearney 1988:361). Here, Kearney argues for a “depth”, but logically, inclusivity, equalizing and horizontal surface “play” does not necessarily accommodate this response. For moral directives, for example, are based on a premise of differentiation to that it so opposes, but if the “other” has as much a claim to be, then inclusivity might mean the lack of a discerning principle. It’s a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the wish to detotalize<sup>6</sup>, but on the other hand, a foreclosing of a system of meaning, even while the latter can be endlessly deconstructed ad infinitum. Or one may opt out of this labyrinth and claim in rather esoteric terms that the foundation is the non-foundation.

It is obviously beyond the scope of this article to interrogate how contemporary art may instantiate the

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6 Another consequence of detotalising is that process and context, rather than finality and transcendence come to the fore, regarding knowledge claims as contingent, historicized and institutional.



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theories above – how current art is ineffable, resisting theory; diverse, resisting categorization and subversive, precluding definite ways to experience it. What I would, however, like to mention that much art today that makes direct use of the body (as opposed to indirect figure painting, for example, that is *representing* bodies) makes a case for arts (worldwide) proximity to activities such as sport. So we find skin pierced and live bodies hanging from hooks (for example Stelarc’s work), sub-cultural body piercing and tattoos; naked-bodies around an art performance; odd water-falls (as for example Olafur Eliasson’s work) interspersed at key venues in New York; cloud simulation machines that give off peculiar aromas such as Cai Zhisong’s “sculptures” (and other multi-sensory installations); digital bodily extensions and robotics (again Stelarc is an example of this trend) and improvisational dance performances (or the choreographed world-wide flash mob art happenings at designated social arenas). These interventions suggest a counter movement away from conceptual art, from art as idea towards a sensory-perceptual awareness (aesthesis), meliorative strategies such that knowledge is sought through the body, rather than alienated from the very tools that provide for knowledge in the first place. In this sense one might describe much contemporary art and “sub-cultural” practices as well as new age “art for living” (such as yoga, alternative medicine and tai chi) as well as sport practiced without hierarchy, in much the same way that art of the past may have included the mechanical arts and in Ancient Greece the gymnasium and the arts worked in tandem. But beyond suggesting a certain way of life or rather a practical, tangible kind of knowing and the subverting or blurring of hierarchical distinctions, one can discern that much current art on offer is extreme, such as bodies inserted with hooks and hanging in the gallery or other venues and this can easily be linked to the death-defying current trend commonly known as extreme sports.

I would like to establish how much current art makes use of the body, which shall be described as the “extreme body” which immediately links it with the “sporting body”. Xian (2015) in the *Journal of Somaesthetics* (2015: 144-159) makes a distinction between traditional art – by which he means premodern art – and modernist art. The former is concerned with beauty and the ideal body according to rules and ratios of proportion, whereas the latter he dubs the “extreme body” characterised by a refutation of beauty (or at least the accepted norms thereof), an exploration of the strange, distorted and shocking. In my estimation postmodernism has taken this to new heights and Richard Shusterman’s innovation of a sub-category in aesthetics, namely somaesthetics provides a conceptual framework in which to consider the body in visual arts as determining how the body as a cultural issue has changed along with society. I agree with Xian (2015) who associates the modernist exploration and postmodernist continuation of the “extreme body” as dehumanised (strange, distorted, shocking...), especially as it initially formed in surrealist and abstract art and later in performances and digital art. Yet at the same time this transgressive, one might say uncomfortable, aesthetic is such that “modernist (and postmodernist) artists view the body as an object (and subject) that needs reconstruction and deformation to push the limits” (Xian 2015:158, brackets my inclusion). So that while traditional, pre-modern art holds the body in art in sacred reverence where the viewer is evoked to admire (even in the case of crucifixions), in modernist and postmodern aesthetics the “body is meant to help people reflect, explore and question” (Xian 2015:158).

Many sociologists feel that there is a rise in body culture (Ryynanen 2015) and I conjecture that soma – the living body – captures this sentiment. I would argue it is precisely sport as an aesthetic, cultural phenomenon that exemplifies this. Moreover, it is precisely the agitated, extreme shock value invoked which counter much art of the past that determines an “extreme body” – again reflected in sport in various degrees. Consider body building, the elite swimmer’s physique, the athlete, the wrestler – these “body types” are a certain reconfiguration of the body to actualise what the mind wills, and is integral to a society where adaption, replication, subjectivity, enhancements and extending beyond to achieve records or maintain a body with a specific function. Thus one may say that arts’ representation of the body and in more recent artistic practice, the direct use of the body is such that some art forms parallel the enormous popularity and the pushing beyond the limits evident in competitive sport. Even at a level where art and sport are more about play rather than fierce competition, for

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the viewer, one can make the argument that with the sophistication of digital technology, the body has become stretched (stretched skin...) navigating in uncharted realms, giving us “eyes” and “ears” and “touch” beyond our immediate surroundings (as sport, for example is broadcast via satellite world-wide) and art is said to be pervasive so that play, aesthetics and “body-consciousness” appears to be the order of the day. Whether this is wholly positive is debatable.<sup>7</sup> One point, however, is that taken to extreme levels of distortion, intensely abstract (digitisation) and aesthetic play without a coherent system, may be damaging. It is in this light that even as I argue that sport is art-like, this does not entail a necessary good. It is in this respect that somaesthetics with its emphasis on “healthy living” and a possible return to beauty without notions of autonomy in art and unchanging truths – at least in the fixation on imagery – may redeem the situation. The moving body in sport, the body in flux and motion, the body reaching for a certain goal, the ephemerality of our games suggest, on a philosophical level, that it is the living body, not the static image that may lead towards healthy living. In these respects sport in turn offers art an image of beauty without an image! This is similar to the non-presence of the sign postulated by the “language turn”.

In art, this was sensed with the modernist repudiation of the traditional exemplified initially in Dadaism and later conceptual art; pop art’s inclusion of mass culture, later still the transience of performance and installation art and the digital revolution whereupon perhaps no image is sacred and rare (though this perhaps contradicts the immense price tags for actual esteemed artworks and in sport, the almost idolising of sports stars). I would endorse the reassessment of the “traditional” and it is in such a climate that art and sport can reasonably be understood as merging – the global village or the global construction is a contour that we cannot trace. The non-presence of the sign – the fading image – and inclusiveness of all signs including the “extreme body” – could be seen as a practical consequence of the “language turn” and its consequences for culture.

### THE ARGUMENT FROM “INTERTWINING”

Philosophical discussions about whether or not sport is art already existed in the 1970s and 1980s. They were triggered by L.A. Reid (1970), D. Best (1979, 1980, 1985), S.K. Wertz (1984) and Cordner (1988). Rather than try to argue that sport is art (Welsch, Platchias...) or sport is not art (Best, Cordner...) or that *some* sport is art (Reid, Wertz, Kupfer), I shall argue that an “intertwining” of concepts aids one in meaningfully relating sport to art in a coherent manner. The “argument from intertwining” extends art theory into the realm of sport theory, while maintaining an open classification as to what counts as aesthetic. Moreover, that this argument is made when the language to describe art and sport together is metaphorical and treats instinct, sensuality and abstraction as forming a continuum, a composite whole, without either conflating art with aesthetics, art with some or all sport or that art and sport are diametrically opposed categories. To demonstrate the soundness of this argument, I draw key “moments” from several significant theorists who have either argued that sport is art or the reverse; in each case it appears that they all at least agree, in my estimation on a what I call “intertwining” wherein we need not come to a conclusive resolution as to whether sport is art. A subtler “sharing” of concepts at least allows one to speak of art and sport in such a way that they are not simply separate practices, without necessarily equating them either. What we can say is that aesthetic experience may be applied to different contexts if we so desire, which is not a question of equating these contexts. Instead, we can metaphorically talk about these manifestations of aesthetics, or in other words talk of sport as being *like* art, for example. This metaphorical “sharing” can be visualised in a Venn diagram, repeated so as to convey the numerous possible contexts in which this takes place, rather than an ultimate statement about art and sport, both of which evolve. Furthermore, the “argument from intertwining” sets up an ongoing oscillation between aesthetic experience and extra-aesthetic interpretation that pertains not only to art, but sport as well should one accept sport as art-like. Should we confer aesthetic valuation to sport it would be reasonable to “intertwine” art and sport somewhat.

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<sup>7</sup> The core of my project is the realization that beauty has the dual nature of being both ideologically coercive and innocent – inducing healthy living and a better state of mind.

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Art and sport share certain characteristics. They are both more or less aesthetic. They both present some body, something external to be evaluated and experienced. Many languages can be used to describe and understand art and sport, aesthetic language being one. I argue for what I have termed the “intertwining argument” whereby there is a co-existence of art talk, sport talk and aesthetic meanings. An example of this conception can be seen in the writings of Kupfer (2001:19) who writes (on sport):

...perfection in negation lies at one pole of aesthetic experience and human life – the pole of austerity. It is minimal, clean and simple with counterparts in sport, in both nature and art. In nature, we delight in the austerity of stark vistas of desert or ocean. The perceptually boundless expanse of sand or water provides an aesthetic intensity that is captivating in its bare repetition. In art, we appreciate the clean lines of Brancusi’s ‘Bird in flight’ or the minimalist painting of Rothko. At the other pole of experience is plenitude and proliferation. We also enjoy the seemingly endless profusion of flowers in a meadow or the starry galaxy that appears to spill forever into inky space. So, too, in sports. The counterpoint to perfection as negation is the aesthetic exuberance of abundance: the quarterback who throws for over 400 yards or completes a handful of touchdown passes; soccer and hockey players who score three, four, even five goals in a game...

We can enjoy abundance and proliferation as well as negation and austerity in nature, art and sport. The aesthetics of abundance and negation are “intertwined” in sport as art-like.

If we can thus metaphorically fuse art, sport and the aesthetic, then it seems that they can fulfil similar goals, that their task is somewhat akin. In fact, as Elcombe (2012:71) asserts: “... due to sport’s span of passionate appeal – from the local to the global – as well as its irreducibly embodied, kinaesthetic nature, sport is well positioned to perform art’s cultural task better than traditional forms of art”. Here art and sport are “intertwined” not in the sense that sport is simply dubbed “low” art, but in that sport as an aesthetic, cultural phenomenon may continue the work of art, namely as a meaningful human practice with the intent that as Alexander (1993:205-6) puts it - “a sensed texture of order, possibility, meaning and anticipation” - is potentially experienced. In other words, this “texture” of meaning is presented in sport as it is with art, a “texture” that one can grasp experientially and aesthetically that gives rise to pleasure which, at the same time, gives one a sense of conceptual meaning should we choose to perceive it so. That is, in art we *look* for meaning, in the sense that should we be presented with X in the context of art, it is the assumed practice of art that X as an aesthetic object at the same time ought to be interpreted. If we take that same practice and say that sport too is aesthetic then we are enjoined to interpret what we perceive. Thus, the “texture” of perceptual experience may resonate with meaning. Or more accurately: cultural practices such as art and sport are “intertwined” should we choose to apply a similar practice of “right perception”, that is, aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic attention (which may or may not lead to its symbolic, non-visible extra-aesthetic meanings.)

Without conflating art with the aesthetic and eroding clear boundaries between art and sport, I still hold it makes more sense to allow the free play of “art”, “sport” and “aesthetics” and so develop a language that can apply to both art and sport. Here is an example from Platchias (2010:14) who writes (on sport):

...What ‘dictates’ that the athlete discern and instantiate a ‘winning pattern’ is the free play of the powers of cognition, which enables him to envisage the

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perfectly harmonised arrangement of means and ends (the whole) and then to employ the ‘special patterns’, each instantiation of which is the perfect arrangement of means and ends (the particular) and is what arouses the aesthetic contemplation or what gives aesthetic pleasure and, further what enhances the aesthetic pleasure is when the particular is harmonised with the whole ...

What we have here is a description (in the context of his essay) of the athlete clearly in the language of art. While Platchias holds that sport can be equated with art as is clear from the language he uses, my contention is rather that similarity of language simply reveals not a literal equivalence, but a metaphorical allusion from different domains of experience one to the other so that there is an “intertwining” of various cultural expressions and indeed in the very language of trying to understand them.

Even in Reid’s early 1970 article where he clearly separates art from sport, he does end off with the observation that some sports, like figure skating, are art as it is almost inseparable from dance. My problem with Reid’s analysis is that he writes as if art and sport or games are neatly parcelled into definite categories but subsequent art post-1970 – not only in theory – has shown this not to be the case. For example, Velez’s *The fight* (2008), a performance piece wherein boxing clubs were invited to train inside of the iconic walls of the Tate Modern where elements of boxing were orchestrated with music and dance. The assumption is that art and sport are often in “a Manichaeian struggle in cities like London: corporate built structures and mass mediation versus art’s utopian abolition of different spheres of life” (Velez 2008:5). By bringing them together, perhaps something that is neither art nor sport is created, subverting assumed structures in the process. This example shows the “intertwining” nature of sport, the aesthetic and art, their relational value, perhaps sensed by Reid but not taken to its logical conclusion – that is, a kind of indivisibility between seemingly different and incommensurate games.

If the argument from “intertwining” has some validity, then one can take many examples from the canonised history of Western art, and apply this reading. So, for example, *Laocoon*<sup>8</sup> is a powerful image in which we can see struggling, fighting, writhing, *moving athleticism*, so that it is perhaps an image of profound aesthetic power. It is art cloaked with the veneer of sporting aesthetics or athleticism in the context of art. *Laocoon* is as much an image of art as it is of sport: it is aggressive and violent, yet one of beauty; the combination of Eros and Thanatos, of erotic pleasure and traumatic self-annihilation. The sporting image is not simply one of serenity and stasis, of rationality and purity, but knows itself through confronting the world, at once heroic, his musculature vivid – and disturbing - where self is potentially annihilated, analogous to a knock-out punch in boxing, for example. My argument is that sport’s attractiveness and prevalence draws from its artistic source such as in this example. Just as we apply aesthetic and extra-aesthetic readings to art, so we should do so for sport considering the sport in art.

Another widely different example is the abstract configuration of Newman’s zip paintings where there is a strong vertical line matched by equally strong colour fields and geometries. This can be likened to an emphatic move in a sport, its precision and aesthetic coordination or composition. The argument can work the other way around: The referee in soccer makes a line to indicate where the players must stand when a free-kick is about to be taken. He is probably not conscious that he has made a kind of artistic Pollock-like mark. The footballer assesses the angles and skilfully spins the ball into the vacant net. He or she is not necessarily conscious that he or she was motivated by the aesthetics of “accuracy”, “formal coherence” and “balance” over and above the functional aim to score, to win and to simply play a game in accordance with rules. So there is art in sport.

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8 Hagesandros, Polydoros and Athenodoros, *Laocoon and His Two Sons*, circa 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Marble, height 96 inches. Vatican Museums, Rome.

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Art is the paradigm root of aesthetic experience, but it filters through – with our awareness, our choice to perceive in this way – into other domains such as cooking, cleaning, friendship, sport and so on ... Aesthetic motivations, that is, what we value and praise, proceed logical determination. They are like axioms without which there is no system, no sense of the direction as well as integration of logical and affective dimensions. We need first to value and praise something before we set to systemise its conditions and parameters. If we reinterpret art (history) in such a way that we celebrate its connection to the everyday, we do not thereby topple it from its “pedestal”. Rather, we may in fact invigorate the mundane, not in order simply to thus minimise the value of art. On the contrary to assess, nay experience and judge activities usually not associated with art, as being aesthetic, may enhance those activities. It is simply a matter of choosing this direction. Nevertheless, there is simultaneously an extra-aesthetic component, a politicisation of form and thus our value judgements and aesthetic predilection continuously needs to transform, be critiqued or else we run the risk of declaring “beauty!” when all around, there is the desolation of ethical norms in a given society, including the one we may be a part of. So, I believe that we need to recognise the pervasiveness of the aesthetic, drawing from the example of art (and nature) with the intent that aesthetic sensitivity in art and in fact all cultural manifestations, does the job of bettering society, rather than simply being the tool that institutions, including artistic ones, wield to usurp power to the detriment of society at large.

True power lies in *Laocoon’s* struggle as an immediate, perceptual fact, rather than as a political, historical and mythical “fact”, but that power is tempered and often manipulated by these other latter associations. That power means the snakes and the struggling figure mean something, have a history and the pain of the “protagonist” is *real*, not simply a perceptual delight as art, as athletic, as aesthetic. As argued in the introduction, it appears that both realities co-exist, that is immediate perceptual fact (presence) and mediated conceptual meaning. Perhaps Duchamp recognised the necessary “impurity” of form (meaning over and above reaction to the present “image”) as he declared a found-object as art, in a sense trying to eradicate the aesthetic/extra-aesthetic narrative of (Western) history, in the elision between art (something supposedly created) and life. In the process, this declaration seemingly destroying art so that life itself could become beautiful (art), not simply forms to be venerated as art while life need not be beautiful. The binary shifts in his act, though history (of art) is such that his “act” became canonised, its effect therefore repelled. By reclaiming everyday life (sport) as being aesthetic, one is attempting to present sport as a kind of “found-object”. This is perhaps not in a Duchampian sense as he rejected the aesthetic valuation of the object, while I am arguing that aesthetics enhances the appreciation and integration/”intertwining” of life-praxis.

Of course one could retort and say there is an aesthetic dimension to even violence. My response is simply that just as there are rules to sport and certain tacit rules in art (we would be outraged by certain things in the context of art<sup>9</sup>), so life and the aesthetics of everyday life would be circumscribed by some rules (hence I could envisage an aesthetic of law...).

### CONCLUSION

It may be more appropriate to speak of an “intertwining” of concepts that resists specification other than metaphorical integration of seemingly separate categories. In this way, I have avoided the “is sport art” question and argued instead for an insoluble unity of experience, an experience that one can potentially find in the everyday. I was not able to fully resolve whether that kind of aesthetic experience is simply an aesthetic one or if it may have a singular or numerous other extra-aesthetic meaning/s to what is “present” refers. The philosophies of Schopenhauer and Hegel, insofar as they do not accommodate non-mimetic, abstract art and the place of the body in contemporary art (sport) are useful in a limited respect, where today perhaps an aesthetic theory ought

<sup>9</sup> The proof of this is that one does not bat an eyelid or consult a mental health practitioner if a person were to stand staring at an artwork – it is an assumed normal practice. Similarly, the way fans may act in the context of a sporting event – screaming, dressing up and the like – all this is considered normal practice. Of course, what renders such things normal is acculturated social practice and arbitrary conventions. Taken out of context, such behavior may be considered “abnormal”.

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to demonstrate the integration of various levels of experience without a hierarchical elevation of the fine arts. In this respect, I applied a metaphoric conception of art to such domains as sport.

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