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## AESTHETICS APPLIES TO SPORTS AS WELL AS TO THE ARTS\*

by

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If I were to write an essay "Ethics Applies to Sport" there would be little doubt about what there is to discuss: the standards of fairness between contestants, the need of umpires to prevent cheating and foul play. Yet the title "Aesthetics Applies to Sport" produces shock. Since Aesthetics is generally conceived as applying to the arts, the title suggests that athletes are some new kind of artists, that there are performances in the arts and the sports that are comparable and even identical, that sporting events or athletic contests may be viewed as theater or dance and should be judged according to aesthetic standards. All these claims are indeed made in the literature of sport and it is a challenge to assess them fairly.<sup>1</sup>

These difficult conceptual problems arise not because philosophers seek to confuse categories but because there is a movement called "art in sport." In this essay I shall limit myself exclusively to what athletes say of themselves, to what persons in physical education and recreation write of their aims and to what critics of sports claim about the values of sporting activities. Because I am fascinated by this body of thought, to which I am so new, I shall spend much time quoting.<sup>2</sup> I shall not spend time defining "aesthetics" or defining "sports." There are philosophic essays that show that this can be done in such ways that it follows deductively that there is little to talk about except the confusion of categories or that there is an identity between sport and art.<sup>3</sup>

The area called generally "philosophy of sport" is so new an area that we need to examine the questions in the contexts in which they arise. This means much empirical study on the part of philosophers with the dangers of missing the specific meanings developed in the sports, and trenching upon psychology, sociology, history, education. The results of an early survey of a field are indeed likely to be in the stage of inquiry Whitehead called "assemblage." This cannot be helped if one is to avoid premature systematization.<sup>4</sup> I think it sufficient to consider proposed answers to the set of questions that seem to fall under "aesthetics of sport," however we find the categories of aesthetics and of sports used. Is it possible at this stage to know whether we should begin with the athlete who thinks he performs as an artist? We may anticipate difficulties with the intentions and attitudes said to characterize each, and then we have a compounded intentional fallacy! If we begin with the performance, say "the well played game" to ask about it in contrast to an artistic performance, how did we decide which game and which concert or drama or dance performance?<sup>5</sup> We have all seen fallacious generalizations produced not merely by selecting instances of maximum or minimum divergence in the spectrum of performances, but the descriptions of both events are never innocent of theory. If a soccer game is described by a sports critic in dramatic terms, does this then become an

artistic event? Politics can be described in the language of games without making politics sport. If we do not take the perspective of the performer or of the spectator, what of the coach or director who is an educator of the performer and the producer of the spectacle? He is deeply committed to the importance of his work and may well characterize it in whatever laudatory language the audience accepts. We all know that sports in a Victorian age were recommended to reduce, like cold showers, sexual desire. In a competitive age coaches stress roughness as preparation for dog eat dog business; in a more cooperative age roughness is a safety valve protecting gentle folks from attack. Are there any values in the activities or only in the attitudes of people towards them? My trust in the description of sporting events is subject to the caveat that the describer may merely project his attitudes and then pretend to have found these values there as though they were facts for every observer. Should we then finally consider how the performance in sport is to be judged? If "the beautiful" is the standard of sports as well as of arts, should we then give the aesthetic theory within which the norm acquires precision, so that we know the modes from "pretty" to "sublime" and their opposites? So great is the ambiguity of aesthetic norms that it is rash to begin without a prolegomenon of massive proportion.<sup>6</sup>

All these problems are involved in a concrete instance. An athlete answered them dogmatically in one way and his coaches were equally dogmatic on the other side. Because the consequences are grave, the case makes us consider our answer as more than a parlor game. Neal Shartar was one of the best Georgia athletes of recent years, who won the state high school championship in 1970. He won a scholarship on the University of Georgia's gymnastic team. The advocacy of the aesthetic value of sport led to difficulty. His coaches laid down the rule that sideburns should not be below the bottom of the ear, the hair shouldn't cover any part of the ear, and shouldn't touch the collar in the back. Two hundred and forty other athletes on scholarships followed the rules. Neal Shartar was out of step with them. His position was that performance is important and the length of hair, when it doesn't interfere with performance, is insignificant. Neal Shartar had become less an athlete obedient to the coaches and more an artist acting from his own conception of himself.

Although he performed beautifully, his old high school coach refused him use of the rings of the gymnasium. "Not in my gym. I'm not part of your protest because I don't agree with you." "Art in sports" cost Neal Shartar his scholarship and he withdrew from the University. There is the consequent cost of a philosophy of sport.

"Other things are more important than being an athlete," he said. "Or winning." "And what is that?" he was asked. "The beauty of it," he said. "Gymnastics is very beautiful. People don't see much of it and so they don't know how beautiful it is, but when they do see it they like it. One should do gymnastics for the beauty of it, not for winning."<sup>7</sup>

The case is regrettable intellectually as well as morally. Does the conception of "artist" require non-conformity and specifically is short hair necessarily the

mark of the athlete and long hair of the artist?<sup>8</sup> The general issue of authority in a peculiar application gets confused with the relevant issue of whether a gymnastic performance is to be judged by aesthetic standards and is therefore like an artistic performance. And if it is an artistic performance is it sufficient that it be enjoyed? In conversation some teachers of music, dance and drama have insisted that Shartar is right. Games are played to win. Athletes compete and it is scoring points for victory that is essential to the game.<sup>9</sup> But art events aim to satisfy standards of beauty, and cannot be judged in the competitive situation. If poets and musicians competed at Olympia, the ancient Greeks gave us an example of forcing the wrong categories upon the arts.

Maybe we could resolve the problem by saying that gymnastics conceived as an art belongs more to music, dance and drama and games, specifically contact sports, are altogether different kinds of bodily activities, even though some analysts bring them all under the one umbrella term "movement."

But this athlete has a much stronger theoretical case that unfortunately the journalist's story could not examine. The journalist reported his aesthetic experience.

Neal C. Shartar whirls around beautifully on the rings . . . He can do breathtaking things with such little apparent effort that he seems to have conquered gravity itself . . . Like ballet, for instance, the gymnast . . . seems to do the impossible. He does in thin air what most of us can't even do on the ground . . . He might be kin to the angels. . . . And if the gymnast can maintain the illusion, the crowd falls under a certain spell . . . <sup>10</sup>

The gymnast's aims are defined socially and the judge's standards are fixed institutionally. The "beauty" reported is made rather precise; one may hope, precise enough to be applied in a competitive situation where every decision must be as defensible as a judge's in court of law, subject to some kind of review.

Movements combining the elements of *balance, agility, strength, elasticity*, jumps and leaps (tumbling) presented in *rhythm* and *harmony*. The gymnast is required to move in different directions, *not using too many* running steps. (The run must be taken in the *right proportion* to the difficulty of the jump or tumbling routine that follows.)

A perfect exercise with a maximum rating is one that is presented with *elegance, ease, precision* and in a *style* and *rhythm* well adapted to the nature of the *aesthetic* performance with no faults in execution. The faults in execution or style are penalized by a deduction in points or fraction of points according to the following directions:

Defects in elegance in general. An exercise, although executed without fault, but presented in a rhythm *too quick* or *too slow*, or with an *ill-proportioned* display of force, counts less than a perfect exercise as described . . . <sup>11</sup>

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Is winning a gymnastic contest an intrusion upon the artistry of the gymnast if the standards are appropriately aesthetic? I have often heard tennis players allowing that one player did indeed win the points that added to victory, and that although within the rules, he played without grace and ease. It is then conceptually possible not that playing for victory is the non-aesthetic, even anti-aesthetic, element in games, but failure to award the garland of olive to performances judged appropriately to movements observed.

To establish that there are sufficient common characteristics shared by arts and sports, or some arts with some sports, is difficult. Some thinkers have been deeply impressed by the common feature of spontaneity. From the perspective of utility and work, performances in both families of activities belong to "leisure" and are often put to use as "recreation."<sup>12</sup> But the theory of play is itself a difficult concept and produces many paradoxes when artists practice seriously and when athletes train to the point of exhaustion and expose themselves to great pain.<sup>13</sup> I would not wish the argument to rest on a merely verbal similarity that there are "players" in both drama and games, for to "play" in the theater and to "play" on the tennis court may be as accidental as the common word "dog" applied to a hound and a star.

The surest beginning of a positive answer to the problem of exactly how aesthetics applies to sport is to conceive of the performances, some of which are called "arts," such as dance, and others called "sports," such as figure skating. Now the accidental and superficial aspect is that one takes place in a concert hall, a shrine of the muses, and the other in the arena of a palace of sport. The fundamental positive likenesses have been made forcefully and in great enough detail that they cannot be brushed aside.<sup>14</sup> Apart from the "special buildings" in which there are created "special worlds," there are the rules to which both kinds of performers must conform, along with the unities of time and space and special ways of using time and space. Does this analysis maintain a difference? Yes, there is no score of choreography or text in the sports as in music, dance and drama, but only game plans that might be thought approximations. But we will consider the point of whether sports can symbolize reality later.

On the level of physical action there is a kind of aesthetic analysis that applies. This is kinesthesia and empathy (*Einfühlung*). Something happens physiologically and psychologically between performer and spectator.<sup>15</sup>

When it is said that physical education is being reconceived aesthetically, now we can see precisely what is meant.<sup>16</sup> As far as it goes I find Maureen Kovich's "Sport as an Art Form" convincing. She is a teacher of physical education in Regina High School, Cincinnati. A merely scientific analysis of movement does not get to the "artistic qualities." These we must state because many people get their art outside of theaters and galleries.

"Art is also being performed in our natatoriums, gymnasiums, and playing fields through the medium of sport. The definition of art needs to be expanded to include the skilled athletic performance." Miss Kovich could footnote her claim with some of the most sophisticated aesthetic analyses: "art" is an open not a closed concept. There is, accordingly, no way to establish that the con-

cept cannot meaningfully be expanded beyond any static definition.<sup>17</sup>

It is not only sports such as figure skating and synchronized swimming that are comparable to dance, but pole vaulting, tennis, gymnastics, and not only stellar performances, but "any skill in movement expressing beauty."

Is there aesthetic value for both the performer and the spectator? The experience of joy, excitement, satisfaction in performing and witnessing can be analyzed and it is instructive to follow her analysis closely.

From the perspective of the performer, any given performance can have qualities of the aesthetic—something of excellence that goes beyond the theoretical perfect. Rebound tumbling, for example, becomes more than mere novelty. The tumbler senses something of brief snatches of freedom, something of precarious balance in unsupported space, of underlying rhythm, and of forces initiated by himself acting upon himself. He becomes sensitive to the elements of space, force, and time in his world of movement. From this viewpoint, we see that it is not just the man's body performing; it is the whole man. The total performer then becomes both artist and material. Man and his movements become the art.

The beauty of any movement depends upon the aesthetic response of the performer or spectator. The performer perceives his movements as art through the working of his kinesthetic perception, his own sense of personal feel. He cannot go outside himself and see his movements simultaneously with their execution, but he does "know" in an intuitive way when the movement "feels right." The evaluation of the performance by a spectator or judge serves only as additional testimony to the trueness of the movement for the performer himself.

The spectator cannot divorce man from his movements. Sport is a truly human form of art, for it is not just the product of man's abilities which is on display; it is man. Research in electromyography has shown that observers mimic in a minute way the movement patterns of the performer, thus inducing a form of restrained participation. As the performer feels the art he is creating, so can a perceptive spectator feel this same quality, although not to the same extent. Whether intended or not, there is silent communication between the performer and the spectator. Empathy with the elements of force, space, and time in the world of the performer and his movements can account, in part at least, for the spectator interpreting the movement as meaningful and beautiful.<sup>18</sup>

An opponent of my thesis that aesthetics applies to sport might at this point grant all that I have argued for: that there are some activities called "sport" that are judged by standards of grace, etc., which we shall call "formal aesthetic norms," that there are indeed many aspects, possibly nearly all, of performance shared in common, and that there is a psychology of aesthetics, the kinesthetic-empathetic, that explains the delight provided by athletic performances. Yet

this opponent might say that sports are physical activities with relatively crude animal passions, but arts are refined with subtle emotions and intellectual content.

This is most difficult because we must recognize psychological differences between some who claim to speak for the arts, fine arts and liberal arts, or "culture," and when sports are called "mechanical," "crude," even "brutal," or at best "pop arts," one realizes that he may sound like a "prole," or plebian who strayed into the sacred grove of the cultural aristocracy.

Aren't artists and athletes very different sorts? Isn't it painfully obvious that there are artistic boys whose reluctance to fight subjects them to bullying? A contemporary author writes of being forced to play on a team and to ride a horse. He feels a gap between himself and the hearty games-loving boys. "Moreover, when I observed their boisterous play I could not help but feel that I was missing something. Though part of me now rejoiced in music and literature, there was another part of me which longed to be tough and callous."<sup>19</sup> It would seem altogether axiomatic to such a person, become an intellectual, to place the arts at the pinnacle of culture and to regard sports as mere amusement of relatively crude people. He would incline to nod approval when he reads Matthew Arnold, son of Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby School: ". . . Bodily health and vigour are things which are nowhere treated in such an unintelligent, misleading, exaggerated way as in England. *Both are really machinery.*" He meant clearly that "games and sports" are *physical activities* only, to which boys and young men are, in his term "sacrificed."<sup>20</sup> This lowly estimate of sport may be based not merely upon dualism of body and mind, now grown increasingly outmoded, but the view of the body as low and the mind exalted in dignity.<sup>21</sup>

Another writer on culture, T. S. Eliot, seems to grant that sporting activities have aesthetic character. But notice his judgment: "Culture includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dartboard, Wenleydale cheeses, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century gothic churches and the music of Elgar." The first items are sporting events and are aesthetically trivial or aesthetically bad?<sup>22</sup>

Is a sport such as yachting in a class with cheese, boiled cabbage and beetroot? I should rather say that yachting is in the aesthetic category of caviar and champagne. T. S. Eliot mentioned Cowes, didn't he? Had he been to Cowes as a spectator or participant? Had he merely passed over the yachting news in the *Times* as the amusement of empty headed monarchs and millionaires? We should not allow this judgment to pass without confronting the author or reader with the presentation of yachts in the pages of Frank and Keith Beken, *The Beauty of Sail*, or Beken of Cowes, *The Glory of Sail*.<sup>23</sup>

If one turns to the arts for the rich life of emotion, he can be satisfied also in the world of sport. This is the satisfaction particularly in our Olympic games:

The history of the Olympic games is rich . . . with drama and pageantry,

goodwill and controversy, humor and pathos. The Olympics are sports at the summit, and because the stakes are so high and the tension so great, the games seem to bring out and intensify the most basic emotions. Men cry in defeat and sing in victory. Spectators cry too. For the observers and the observed, the Olympic games are the most compelling spectacle in sports.

Yet the Olympics *go beyond sports. They approach art.* They offer ritual in the symbolic freeing of pigeons, the solemn lighting of the Olympic flame, the quiet dignity of the Olympic oath. They offer competition, with the animal excitement of physical combat, strength matched against strength, style against style, stamina against stamina, courage against courage. And, above all, they offer a singular spirit of camaraderie born of shared victories, and an understanding born of shared defeats.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most enlightening sporting autobiographies is Roger Bannister's *The Four Minute Mile*. It was not with him first discipline, then skill, then beauty as a by-product of efficient motor behavior. That is the implicit mechanism of much analysis rejecting an aesthetic of sport. Bannister is in the Platonic not the Democritean tradition. He writes in tones reminiscent of Wordsworth's nature mysticism. The athletic eros is a response to beauty. He stood, as a child,

barefoot on firm dry sand by the sea. The air had a special quality as if it had a life of its own. The sound of breakers on the shore shut out all others. I looked up at the clouds, like great white-sailed galleons, chasing proudly inland. I looked down at the regular ripples on the sand, and *could not absorb so much beauty*. I was taken aback—each of the myriad particles of sand was perfect in its way . . .

In this supreme moment I leapt in sheer joy . . . A few more steps . . . The earth seemed almost to move with me. I was running now, and a fresh rhythm entered my body. No longer conscious of my movement I discovered a new unity with nature. I had found a new source of power and beauty, a source I never dreamed existed.

From intense moments like this, love of running can grow.<sup>25</sup>

Bannister then rejects a scientific "objective" explanation in terms of electrical impulse.

The electric rhythm produced there is a source of pleasure. Like that caused by music, it has some interplay with rhythms inherent in our nervous systems. But no explanation is satisfying that does not take account of feelings of beauty or power.

Is there an essential will-to-win that differentiates sport from art? Bannister

denies it. There is an agonistic element.

We enjoy struggling to get the best out of ourselves, whether we play games of skill requiring quickness of eye and deftness of touch, or games of effort and endurance like athletics. There is the need to feel that our bodies have a skill and energy of their own, apart from the man-made machines they may drive . . . . The sportsman enjoys his sport even if he has absolutely no prospect of becoming a champion.

Of "running—win or lose" Bannister writes as a source of deep satisfaction. Even running in the mud adds variety and negates boredom. "However strenuous our work, sport brings more pleasure than some easier relaxation. It brings joy, freedom and challenge which cannot be found elsewhere."<sup>26</sup>

I wonder if Bannister's response to beauty could not have led him to become a great ballet artist. He writes that he feels his story applies not only to sports but "beyond."<sup>27</sup> I feel he is a great mystical poetic philosopher of sport.

Of what importance for sports is Bannister's aesthetic analysis? It gives him a reasoned basis of criticism of recent tendencies in athletics. The development of professional skills to break records for national prestige may be the mainspring of Olympic activity, but by Bannister's conception of sport, this athleticism is degenerate sport.

Much as the Greek philosophers who rebuked professionalism and striving for victory, Bannister deplores the present situation. What is wrong with professionalism is

not . . . unlimited financial reward, but . . . devoting unlimited time and energy to sport. Every country is seeking to enhance national prestige through physical achievements. It may be in establishing new jet-plane speed or altitude records, penetrating the depths of the sea, or scaling the world's highest mountain. Too few questions are asked about the means, provided the end of national glory is achieved. I have tried to show that running refuses to fit into a pattern of this kind.

In this aesthetic view of sport, running is a satisfying expression of human intimacy with nature, and a way to realize the best within us. To break a record is accidental, for mere training to perform more successfully has no intrinsic satisfaction. "Where would it all end? Running would have lost its purpose."<sup>28</sup> "We run, not because we think it is doing us good, but because we enjoy it and cannot help ourselves. It also does us good because it helps us to do other things better."<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, it is the high emotional quality, like that of music, that makes sports worthwhile. When one applies aesthetics in this sense one must condemn much of what goes under the name of sport as quite poor. Should we reject Bannister's evaluation as merely the characteristic quaint protests of a university bred Englishman? Is this not more of the same old outmoded protest of the amateur against the professional?<sup>30</sup> An American sports writer shifted

his justification from moral to aesthetic grounds. John R. Tunis once stressed sport as educationally valuable: sport inculcates "democratic ethics."<sup>31</sup> In the next decade Tunis saw precious little high morality in sport because of American zeal to compete and be successful, to win and break records. Professionalism breeds sport that is "a first-class training ground for a jungle society."<sup>32</sup> Genuine sport, by contrast, is what is taught by a multitude of nameless, faceless coaches and recreation directors: "*poise, coordination, a sense of beauty, and a feeling for their bodies, as well as skills beyond measure.*"

In what sense of "aesthetic" other than good form and psychological empathy, can aesthetics be said to apply to sport? There can be great emotional value in the sporting events, such satisfactions of the high points of the Olympic games, and the intense moments of emotional climax and unification described by Roger Bannister. It is valuable to notice that those who defend sports as ends-in-themselves, not appealing to any usefulness, usually talk of the "joy" in the "enjoyment" of participator and spectator.

Whereas all sporting activities may be equally described as kinaesthesia and empathy, only some events have this great consumatory joy. Hence some sporting activities are of lower value than others. The theory must be normative. By employing the standard Bannister condemns professional specialization and making the competitive zeal supreme, and judging achievement solely by quantitative standards.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the aspects of aesthetic value we have already recognized, is there any further claim? What is beyond form and beyond feeling, is there "significance" or "meaning" or "revelation" or "symbolic import?" This is the most difficult question (or questions) to put precisely, but it is frequently the issue on which some critics of sporting spectacles claim the decisive difference from the arts, and on this issue others affirm that some sporting events are comparable to some artistic events.

Put the question another way: if we have recognized the kinesthetic-empathetic response between spectator and performer and given an account of the emotions that are sometimes rich and intense, what other kind of aesthetic value is there in sport? It is sometimes said that the drama of theater has something that the drama of sport lacks. This is perhaps the best way to handle the question of the difference between sporting and artistic performances. Earlier it was pointed out that a stage play has a text and the players are assigned roles to represent the characters and to perform actions. But the players in a game play the places of the team and, governed by the rules, strive to win. The game may have a structure of beginning, middle and end, it may have turning points and a climax, but the structure is not symbolic. What is the game about? Schechner can write that Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is about "going to Moscow (or, having a meaningful love relationship) and 'lives wasted by time.'" But games have no script and do not represent reality. There is indeed, he argues, a continuity of the modes of performance, but there are differences of degree that amount to differences of kind.<sup>35</sup>

If I understand the recent position of Paul Weiss it is that the purpose of a contest is the striving to win, as victory is recorded in points. If there is an

element of "style," it is reduced to numbers to be added to the score. He does not question the "accepted way of quantifying style." The position developed here is that the custom is mistaken, that the aesthetic elements of form and feeling are irreducible and that, according to Bannister's *The Four Minute Mile*, the agonistic success of breaking a hitherto unbroken barrier does not exhaust the meaning of his running. Now the issue is whether there is some dramatic excellence other than striving for success in the contest and winning.<sup>36</sup>

There are dramatic aspects of a game, he admits, but a game is only "episodically" dramatic: "the highs occur unexpectedly in the midst of a multitude of flat moments."<sup>37</sup> There are opportunities and there are obstacles but "they are usually not noted in the records, despite the great role they sometimes play in the determination of an important result."<sup>38</sup> Weiss then belittles all but winning. "He who does not try to make maximal use of his body is playing at, not in a sport."<sup>39</sup> To "perform at his best" an athlete must strive to maximize his score. But what follows? "The end to which an athlete is dedicated is narrower than that appropriate to man at his best." The "dedicated" athlete becomes a fanatic, a man of misplaced zeal. So this policy produces a Mark Spitz, with all his excellence in record but lacking the wholeness of a Bannister. For the latter, not for the former, there are also scientific, artistic, religious and ethical goals not alien to the life of sport. One would think that Weiss's whole philosophy would lead him to side with Bannister against fanaticism.

"How do we know what best performance is?" asks Dean Fraleigh.<sup>40</sup> If there are many dimensions of sport, and there is "mimesis" or representation as well as "agon" or contest, then an emphasis on sport as drama is one way to preserve a richer significance.<sup>41</sup> The striving for excellence is not exhausted by the dimensions of *citius, altius, fortius*, stated as goals of the modern Olympics. Even if we do not picture the perfected athlete as a god of Olympus, or even sing his praise as a hero, as did Pindar, we still recognize excellence other than the record. Says Erich Segal of Bannister: "the most eloquent poetry ever composed to praise or describe the spirit of sport."<sup>42</sup> Dean Fraleigh sees "higher" as a symbol of transcendence. "In dance, humans move their bodies to use space, time, and force to produce images of infinity, eternity and omnipotence as the symbolic means of overcoming their 'earthiness.'"<sup>43</sup> Is the meaning then of sport that man strives for and attains divinity?

It is easier to grasp exactly how sporting events are significant in the social context as "a celebration," also in religious terminology. Sporting events surely as ritual festivals strengthen the traditions of a society. "Like the drama, . . . sport instructs people by commemorating the glories of the past and by strengthening communal pride."<sup>44</sup>

The view of the sporting contest as a tragic drama has much attraction.<sup>45</sup> It locates the significance not in the product, the score, but in the performance. "The stress on the numerical result, especially a solitary, fixed final structure like winning" obscures "the aesthetic qualities," the "artistry of another's performance." The spectator transcends the narrow partisanship of we-they antagonism in that he views the struggle with "physical distance."<sup>46</sup>

Hence the most explicit criticism of the exclusively agonistic theory of sport.

Unfortunately, at least from an aesthetic appreciation posture, excellence in athletics has been equated with quantitative measures. Winning has become the necessary condition for achieving excellence. The fetish for the scoreboard does not accurately define the conditions of the contest, or man as athlete engaged in athletic phenomena. This constraint to victory would be a restriction on the freedom of the aesthete to perceive other forms of beauty and excellence in athletics.<sup>47</sup>

The tragic view of sport is protected from the charge against a simple hedonistic view that sport then becomes mere recreation. The aesthetic value of tragedy requires pain, which can be subsumed into this concept of a bipolar beauty. "When the distasteful can be perceived as a means for further developing and cultivating an experience, it may be viewed as aesthetic and enjoyable."<sup>49</sup>

A game may not have the specific meaning of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, so that we can say what it is about. Even if there is no text and characters acting out a plot, still there is an answer to the question of what is sport's "significance" or "meaning" or "revelation" or "symbolic import." "The tragedy symbolizes man's struggle with the inequities and paradoxes of life. In tragedy, man is featured in an attempt to overcome hostile forces to which he inevitably must succumb. The display of courage in the face of adversity is prized because it reflects something beautiful about man—the spirit with which he enters marvelous combat with an overwhelming and unpredictable world."<sup>49</sup>

This analysis transmutes the *agon* into *mimicry*, that is the struggle to win is made into a necessary aspect of the imaginary world presented to us. It is a larger perspective that does not glorify winning at any cost, and therefore would tend to reduce the trickery and violence that have become the marks of bad sportsmanship. Hence, although introduced as an "aesthetic" philosophy, it is also a moral philosophy of sport.

Yet even if the athlete plays in a game viewed as a tragic drama, he is not an actor in a tragedy. We must guard ourselves against forgetting we are applying aesthetics to sport, seeing likenesses and making analogies, but not trying to identify sport and art.

Much has been written about sport as tragedy but nothing about sport as comedy.<sup>50</sup> The summer of 1973 will not be forgotten as the time of the battle of the sexes, Bobby Riggs the hustler challenging Billie Jean King. The American public needed relief. Farce is sometimes needed because of the high tension of contest in sports and politics. The great authority on Greek athletics reconstructed the five days of Olympic games. The programme closed with the race in armor. It was popular, picturesque and "afforded a welcome relief" as an obstacle race: runners in helmets and greaves and carrying shields must have been amusing. It returned to the connection of sport with real life.<sup>51</sup>

Paul Weiss makes the thesis of "sport as a form of art" turn on revealing "something of the nature of man." In contrast to art, the "athlete . . . does not seek to convey anything." If it is art to be "removed to a second degree," for the athlete as the artist to grasp the meaning of the sport as a drama, then it seems to me that the philosophy of sport is a move towards making sport more

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meaningful.<sup>52</sup>

Forms of sport develop and change, and who is to say what these forms will not become? The activity is complex and history shows much mutability. "The preference for agon, alea [favor of destiny], mimicry, or ilinx [pursuit of vertigo, spasm, seizure, shock] helps decide the future of a civilisation."<sup>53</sup>

Once centuries ago the Venetians raced in boats to the Lido for sling practice. From this simple challenge to triumph has come the magnificent Regatta. The first Regatta is recorded in 1315 and the Regatta of 1973, is claimed to be the 670th. It is not nearly as old as the Olympic Games (776-B. C.-393 A. D.), 1,168 years,<sup>54</sup> yet our modern Olympic games, by comparison, are merely 77 years old.

The historic Regatta of Venice is now a combination of gondola races between pairs of gondoliers and crews of a dozen oarsmen in larger boats. There is music and dancing and acrobats building pyramids. All is infused with a great sense of the tradition of the Venetian Republic and its role in history as the trading center connecting east and west. The Grand Canal is alive with tapestries and flags and the event expresses the pride of the people.

As I witnessed this great pageant of the city on September 2, I felt confirmed in my belief that there can be great art in sport, and the Regatta of Venice satisfies all sorts because it is so rich and varied.<sup>55</sup>

### FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>The article "Sports" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII, pp. 617H is followed by "Sports, Moral Aspect of," p. 620, McGraw-Hill, N. Y., 1967.

Louis Arnaud Reid, "Sport, the Aesthetic and Art," *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 18, October, 1970, pp. 245-258.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph S. Ullian, Review of Paul Weiss's *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry*, in *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXX, No. 10, May 24, 1973, pp. 299-301 rebukes Weiss for shunning "the rich lore of the sports world and missing all of that world's magic," p. 299, I do not agree at all with this review but I am anxious to satisfy the demand because it is more the sports world that is asking for philosophy than the philosophic world that cares to consider sports. In a paper of last year, "The Aesthetics of Sports," given at the VII International Congress of Philosophy, Bucharest, Romania, I surveyed the American aesthetic literature that touches on sports. This is slight compared with the sports literature that touches on aesthetics.

<sup>3</sup>L. A. Reid, *op. cit.*, does the former. Bernard Jeu, "What is Sport?" *Diogenes* 80, pp. 150-163 does the latter.

<sup>4</sup>A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, Macmillan, New York, 1938, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>E. F. Kaelin, "The Well-Played Game: Notes Towards an Aesthetics of Sport," *Quest*, Monograph X, *Towards A Theory of Sport*, May, 1968, pp. 16-28.

<sup>6</sup>Dean Warren Fraleigh suggested the questions for my paper. I am not sure, in the light of his "Theory and Design of Philosophic Research in Physical Education," unpublished mimeographed essay, 48 pp., that I have been sufficiently careful in formulating the issues.

<sup>7</sup>Keith Coulbourn, "Why Neal Shartar Won't Get a Haircut," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, January 23, 1972, pp. 28-30, 32.

<sup>8</sup>One knows coaches who say yes to this and spring to the defense of the University of Georgia's Athletic Department. Tony Simpson, "Real Men, Short Hair," reprinted from *Texas Coach*, May, 1973, in *Intellectual Digest*, November, 1973, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 76-78.

<sup>9</sup>Students of Greek point out that "the single aim in all Greek athletics was—as the etymology (from *athlon*, "prize") suggests—to win. There were no awards for second place; in fact, losing was considered a disgrace." E. Ich Segal, "It is Not Strength, but Art, Obtains the Prize," *Yale Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 4, Summer, 1967, p. 606.

<sup>10</sup>Keith Coulbourn, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>Art. "gymnastics," *Sports Rules Encyclopedia*, comp. and ed. by Jess R. White, National Press, Palo Alto, 1966, pp. 293-294. (italicized words by present author). Compare the statement on style in diving: "The run shall be smooth, straight and forceful . . . The take off shall be bold, reasonably high and confident." *Ibid.*, p. 480.

I have searched for essays interpreting the judges' use of these rules and the conceptual problems, but I have failed to find any such. It would also be worth knowing how many "sports" are officially so judged, how many might be so judged, and to what degree.

<sup>12</sup>Foster Rhea Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, 2nd ed., Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1965.

Paul Weiss, "A Philosophical Definition of Leisure," in *Leisure in America: Blessing or Curse?* Ed. by James C. Charlesworth, American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, 1964, pp. 21-29.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Weiss's interpretation of the play theory is excellent. See my forthcoming review-article of *Philosophy in Process*, "The Philosophy of Sport" in *The Modern Schoolman*.

<sup>14</sup>Richard Schechner, "Approaches to Theory Criticism," *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Summer, 1966, pp. 20-53.

<sup>15</sup>Vernon Lee, "Empathy," does not seem to apply the theory to sports performances, see Melvin Rader, *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, 4th ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, N.Y., 1973, pp. 357ff. Herbert Sidney Langfeld, *The Aesthetic Attitude*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., N.Y., 1920, drew examples from figure skating, swimmers and acrobats, pp. 138-142.

<sup>16</sup>Several essays are too general to be helpful on this point: Helen M. Simpson, "Physical Education and the Arts," *Physical Education*, Vol. 59, July 1967, pp. 54-60; R. Carlisle, "The Concept of Physical Education," *Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 3, January 1969, pp. 5-22; W. J. Anthony, "Sport and Physical Education as a Means of Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Physical Education*, Vol. 60, No. 179, March 1968, pp. 1-6.

<sup>17</sup>Maureen Kovich, "Sport as an Art Form," *JOHPER*, October 1971, Vol. 42, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, a less analytic but more circular recent paper is Linda Kay Moore, "Music, Art, Theater, and Physical Education," *JOHPER*, October 1972, Vol. 43, No. 8, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>Robin Maughan, *Escape from the Shadows: An Autobiography*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1973. English edition 1972.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) by Peter C. McIntosh, "Twentieth Century Attitudes to Sport in Britain," *International Review of Sport Sociology: A Yearbook* edited by the Committee of Sport Sociology of the International Council of Sport and Physical Education (UNESCO), Warsaw, 1966, p. 21 (italics mine).

The mechanical view is still with us: "It is not helpful to lump American football, Real Madrid and international athletics with Gordonstoun, fishing or diving off a pier, boating or camping. The only thing they have in common is that some males and fewer females of varying ages are using their muscles." M. I. Finley, review of P. C. McIntosh, *Sport in Society*. *New Statesman*, May 22, 1964 (italics mine).

<sup>21</sup>Helen M. Simpson, "Physical Education and the Arts," *Physical Education*, Vol. 59, July 1967, pp. 54-60. "Herein lies, at its deepest level, the intimate relationship between physical education and the arts, for trust in the senses and the response to sensuous experience are all-important in the arts of painting, music and sculpture concerned as they are with colour, sound and shape in significant relationship." p. 55.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Peter C. McIntosh, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup>Frank and Keith Beken, *The Beauty of Sail*, commentary by John Scott Hughes, Robert Ross Ltd., London, 1952. Here E. V. Lucas is quoted about yachts: "Never shall I forget their majestic urgency."

Beken of Cowes, *The Glory of Sail*, 1897-1914, Dodd, Mead and Co., N.Y. 1966.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Schapp, *An Illustrated History of the Olympics*, 2nd ed., A. A. Knopf, N.Y., 1967, p. ix (italics mine).

It might well be objected that the sports enthusiast is claiming a more worthy cultural degree than is warranted. For are not the emotions those of nationalism and striving for victory among competitors who represent nations, and we are too well aware of hatred and violence. Are not the emotions developed in artistic expression far more subtle and

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various? The rituals of modern Olympics are not genuine solemn religious festivals of ancient Olympia. There are many protests that the oath is a farce.

Generally it was a very bad year for American athletic ideals. Our losers, who were numerous, rather than taking defeat gracefully, bellyached piteously. Our winners, who were much rarer, tended to be of the Bobby, chess champion Fischer type. The most important one after Fischer was Mark Spitz, who already had the reputation of being the spoiled brat of swimming. At the Olympics he quarreled with his teammates, who said they would rather have beaten him than any foreigner, hot-dogged in victory and then went home, not to talk to boys clubs about what he owed to swimming, but to talk to business agents about converting his seven gold medals into half a million dollars worth of endorsements. (Bill Gilbert, *Gleanings from a Troubled Time, Sports Illustrated*, Vol. 37, No. 26, December 25, 1972, p. 43).

We need to stop here to remark that "American athletic ideals" may represent something even more prudish than Frank Merrywell. Is it only being a good loser, even if one is never a winner, to be praised? If the art of a sport is truly perfected, does not winning naturally follow?

That the Olympic victor Mark Spitz turned to commercialism is quite irrelevant to this prowess as a swimmer. His critics have neglected aspects of his achievement. In the art of swimming he proved superb in spite of his arrogance. The personality of a brat is unimportant compared with the willingness, from the age of six, to train. He perfected the art of swimming and this resulted in victory. Should we not also say that the commercial use of this achievement, regrettable if we expect an amateur to be always an amateur, is irrelevant to his status artistically? Regardless of how many endorsements he gave, or even how many pin-ups posed, his swimming was justly appraised as superb.

There is no overwhelming difficulty with the thesis that aesthetics applies to sports as well as to the arts. Artists strive with each other and are often spiteful and vindictive. It is very difficult to get support for activities that are set apart from the normal economic life. Just as philosophy bakes no bread, artists bake no bread, athletes bake no bread. There are prizes for the stars who occupy the status of heroes, and brave temptations to use either an art or a sport as a means to fame and wealth.

<sup>25</sup>Roger Bannister, *The Four Minute Mile*, Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1956, pp. 11-12 (italics mine).

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 248-249.

<sup>30</sup>John B. Kelly, Jr., "Amateurism in Sport as a Viable Ideal in the 1970's," in *Athletics in America*, Arnold Flath, ed., Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, Oregon, 1972, p. 75H.

<sup>31</sup>*Democracy and Sport*, A. S. Barnes, New York, 1941.

<sup>32</sup>John R. Tunis, *The American Way in Sport*, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, New York, 1958, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xii (italics mine).

<sup>34</sup>The best statement of this policy that I can find is Stratton F. Caldwell, "Toward a Humanistic Physical Education," *JOHPER*, Vol. 43, No. 5, May 1972, pp. 31-32. Physical education should be "a path toward the peak experience" (or confined by Abraham Maslow—if one stresses the cultivation of rich emotions, then one has a standard by which to condemn much in sport. It means to "experience joy, frustration, pain, excitement, anxiety, the agony and ecstasy of the movement experience." "To achieve this goal [of persons] means the climination of the jock, the throw-out-the-baller, the military martinet. . . who died on the vine years ago. . . ." p. 32.

Another recent statement is Fredrick D. Schultz, "Broadening the Athletic Experience," *JOHPER*, April 1972, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 45-47.

<sup>35</sup>Richard Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre*. Discus Books, N. Y., 1969, pp. 86, 102-105.

<sup>36</sup>Paul Weiss, "Records and the Man," *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Summer 1972, pp. 89-99. "Strategems and Competition," *Sportwissenschaft*, 3. Jahrgang, 1, 1973, pp. 47-54 continues the same emphasis.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Warren Fraleigh, "On Weiss on Records and the Significance of Athletic Records," *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Summer 1972, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup>Roger Caillois identifies not only *agon*, competition between adversaries, and *mimicry*,

- the enjoyment of an imaginary world, but *alea*, favor destiny or chance, and *ilinx*, pursuit of vertigo, spasm, seizure, shock.
- Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, tr. Meyer Barash, London 1962.
- Ch. 3, "The Classification of Games." Reprinted in Eric Dunning, *The Sociology of Sport*, Frank Cass & Co., London, 1971, pp. 26-29.
- <sup>42</sup>Erich Segal, "It is Not Strength but Art, Obtains the Prize," *Yale Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 4, Summer 1967, p. 609.
- <sup>43</sup>Warren Fraleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- <sup>44</sup>Francis Keenan, "The Athletic Contest as a 'Tragic' Form of Art," *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Summer 1972, p. 126. Scott Kretchmar introduced the term "celebration" from Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play*, Harper & Row, 1969. "Ontological Possibilities: Sport as Play" *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Summer 1972, p. 117.
- <sup>45</sup>Morris R. Cohen "Baseball as a National Religion," *The Faith of a Liberal; Selected Essays*, Henry Holt, N. Y., 1946, stresses "catharsis." Laurence Kitchin, "The Contenders," *The Listener*, Vol. LXXVI, pp. 607-609, No. 1961, October 27, 1966, employs *hamartia*, turning point, climax, as well as modern aesthetic terms such as distance and empathy. Professor Keenan's essay is a far more detailed specification of the Aristotelian categories for sport.
- <sup>46</sup>Francis Keenan, *op. cit.*
- <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.
- <sup>50</sup>Ernest Hemingway characterizes the bullfight as a tragedy in three acts. *Death in the Afternoon*, Scribner's N. Y., 1932, Ch. X. The literature of bullfighting is singularly rich. If it has a content that can be discovered by depth psychology perhaps we can go further than to say it is about man's courageous fight with the power of nature. Louis A. Zurcher and Arnold Meadow, "On Bullfights and Baseball, An Example of Interaction of Social Institutions," *The International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, March 1967 claim it is about the son (the matador) facing the father (the bull) and conquering. A depth approach presumes any sport to be 'revelatory.'
- "How Bobby Runs and Talks, Talks, Talks," *Time*, September 10, 1973, pp. 50-54.
- <sup>51</sup>E. Norman Gardner, *Olympia: Its History and Remains*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1926, pp. 310-311.
- <sup>52</sup>Paul Weiss, *Philosophy in Process*, Vol. V, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 1971, pp. 706-707.
- <sup>53</sup>Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, tr. Meyer Barash, London, 1962, Ch. 3, "The Classification of Games."
- <sup>54</sup>Hermann Bengtson, *Die Olympischen Spiele in der Antike*, 2. Auflage, Lebendiche Antike, Artemis, Zurich & Stuttgart, 1972, p. 20.
- <sup>55</sup>Giulio Lorenzetti, *Venice and Its Lagoons*, Libreria dello Stato, Roma, 1961, pp. 20-21. "Rcgata Storica in Canal Grando, Venezia, 2. Settembre 1973, 4 pp.