

Sport, Art, & the Aesthetic

Hyland - Chapter 5

KIN 161

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Sport & Aesthetics

- We often talk about sport in the language of aesthetics
 - Beautiful swing/stroke (baseball/golf)
 - Graceful stroke or stride (swimming/running)
 - Beauty, creativity, style, grace, etc.

Two issues of sport an/as art

1. Sport IS an art form – there is an identity relationship between the two
2. Sport is not an “art” but since there is often a strong aesthetic component to sport – what, then, is the nature of this relationship.

But what is aesthetics?

The term **aesthetics** comes from the Greek "aisthetike" and was coined by the philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735 to mean "the science of how things are known via the senses."

Aesthetics, continued...

- **Aesthetics** is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgment.

Aesthetics, continued...

The classical conception of art as the imitation of nature was formulated by Plato and developed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

While modern thinkers have emphasized the creative and symbolic aspects of art.

Major Approaches

The major problem in aesthetics concerns the nature of the beautiful. Generally speaking there are two basic approaches to the problem of beauty:

- The **objective** approach asserts that beauty inheres in the object and that judgments concerning it may have objective validity.
- The **subjective** approach tends to identify 'the beautiful' with that which pleases the observer (context is important here as well).

What counts as "art?"

- The word **art** can refer to the **visual arts**, including **painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, decorative arts, crafts, and other visual works** that combine materials or forms.
- We also use the word **art** in a more general sense to encompass other forms of creative activity, such as **dance, drama, and music**, (sport?) or even to describe skill in almost any activity, such as "the art of putting" for example...

How do we judge?

- Monroe Beardsley (1915-1985) argued that whether or not a piece counts as art depends on what function it plays in a particular context; the same Greek vase may play a non-artistic function in one context (carrying wine), and an artistic function in another context (helping us to appreciate the beauty of the human figure).

Cont...

- **Theory of "intentional fallacy"**
 - **Must we know that the artist was up to declare an object art?**

Universalist Ideas

The philosopher Denis Dutton identified seven universal signatures in human aesthetics:

1. **Expertise or virtuosity.** Technical artistic skills are cultivated, recognized, and admired.
2. **Non-utilitarian pleasure.** People enjoy art for art's sake, and don't demand that it keep them warm or put food on the table.

Universalist Ideas

3. **Style.** Artistic objects and performances satisfy rules of composition that place them in a recognizable style.
4. **Criticism.** People make a point of judging, appreciating, and interpreting works of art.
5. **Imitation.** With a few important exceptions like music and abstract painting, works of art simulate experiences of the world.
6. **Special focus.** Art is set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience.
7. **Imagination.** Artists and their audiences entertain hypothetical worlds in the theater of the imagination

Sport as Art

- Many athletes seem to characterize sport as an art form
- Some, it seems, are involved in sport that are measured by some “artistic” criteria (figure skating, synchronized swimming, etc.)
- However, some philosophers make the stronger claim that sport is art

Sport as Art: Issues

- D. Best argues that while there do seem to be aesthetic elements in sport it is constructive to distinguish “purposive” sport from “aesthetic” sport

Sport as Art

- In *purposive* sport, the aesthetic is unimportant – the goal is apart from manner of achieving that goal so long as it is within the rules (examples?)
- In *aesthetic* sport the aim of the sport cannot be isolated from the artistic manner in which it is achieved (examples?)

Sport as Art

- Best’s suggestion is that we often move too easily from the necessity of artistic elements in particular sports to the notion that sport is art

Problems with ‘sport as art’

- One important issue is that there is no consensus as to what art is in the first place!
 - Readymade Art for example:
 - Marcel Duchamp
 - Fountain - 1917



Problems with ‘sport as art’

- So what counts as relevant criteria?
 - Intent?
 - Judgment of the public or of critics?
 - The object or activity must say something about our human condition?
 - Is completely relative?
- Best argues that, while vague, art cannot be “just anything.” He maintains that art must “allow for the possibility of the expression of a conception of life situations” (i.e. contemporary social, political, and emotional issues) Sport, on his view, does not do this

Problems with 'sport as art'

- Yet, Best does see that sport can be the location for dramatic social and political upheaval – but the value of artistic representations are, in a strong sense, that they are fictional and imagined and thus purposively move us beyond the realm of “reality” to, perhaps, a more contemplative space of understanding or inquiry