Idealist theories of sport in relation to art

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ABSTRACT

If what can be described as “ideal” in relation to art may be somewhat abstract, then in this article I will apply the basic notion that the ideal is that which links the invisible (thought-content) and visible (the form, “frame”, “vessel”) to that of ideal as it manifests in sport. For, since we cannot speak intelligibly about x without some image or word, sport “pictures” or shows are an ideal in specific forms, some of which is certainly artistic, rendering a watered-down version of the ideal (abstract), though no less a reflection thereof. In such terms, it is not that sport is “lower” than art; rather it concretizes the abstract in a less intellectual format though no less powerfully and meaningfully. It draws from art and spreads its message downward, as a material framing device of the ideal that satisfies not only a need to relate and socialize, but an intuitive grasp of the hope for a better, more ideal existence. In these respects, sport like art necessarily has moral implications which will be developed toward the close of the article with a view to determining the manner in which the ideal shapes both sport (and art).

It may seem an oddity, but my intention in this article is to outline one way in which one can conceive a kind of inter-disciplinary overlap between art and sport. However, this is not altogether new, considering recent developments in aesthetics, namely the aesthetics of the everyday, wherein the quotidian is considered as potentially giving rise to aesthetic experience and, moreover, in some formulations, as an extension of the arts, art being the exemplary instance of the aesthetic. This harks back to theorists such as Dewey and predates postmodernist thinking even in the case of Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant, who argued for the aesthetic depth even in such instances such as humour. The real purchase, however, in developing an account of sport through the lens of art and aesthetics, as it were, is to highlight the potential beauty and even philosophical depth that pervades a common cultural expression such as sport, not only to emphasize the potential political and ideological allure of the aesthetic, but also to draw attention to the formal beauty inherent in the bodily art that is sport. In this article, I develop one approach where this may be achieved, namely through what I term idealism.

If what can be described as “ideal” in relation to art may be somewhat abstract, then in this article I will apply the basic notion that the ideal is that which links the invisible (thought-content) and visible (the form, “frame”, “vessel”) to that of ideal as it manifests in sport. For, since we cannot speak intelligibly about x without some image or word, sport “pictures” or shows are an ideal in specific forms, some of which is certainly artistic, rendering a watered-down version of the ideal (abstract), though no less a reflection thereof. In such terms, it is not that sport is “lower” than art; rather it concretizes the abstract in a less intellectual format though no less powerfully and meaningfully. It draws from art and spreads its message downward, as a material framing device of the ideal that satisfies not only a need to relate and socialize, but an intuitive grasp of the hope for a better, more ideal existence. In these respects, sport like art necessarily has moral implications which will be developed toward the close of the article with a view to determining the manner in which the ideal shapes both sport (and art).

Idealization in sport

Although there are no explicit theories of idealization in sport, the praising of the game itself, whether in terms of aesthetic beauty such as Gumbrecht’s (2006a) description or Weiss’s (1969) relatively early account of sport’s capacity to assist a person in self-development and Plato’s vision of the gymnasium as integral to an ideal society, one could argue (theorize) that sport (and art) has much to offer when assessed in terms of idealism. It will be argued that sport offers the participant and viewer a “frame” for his or her deepest emotions and that in so doing expresses visions of the ideal. These “visions” or moments are framed by the imaginative, fantasy world of the ideal encapsulated by
the sheer order—both rational and mythical—that defines the sports event. In the process, the human body, while not glorified to the extent of being nude as was the case in the Ancient Greek Olympics, reveals “moments” that parallel traditional artistic imagery. Similarly the highly ordered, manicured arena and landscape associated with a great variety of sports can be compared to the idyllic charm of an “ideal” landscape painting. In drawing out these parallels, one could theorize that sport speaks the language of art, albeit covertly. In drawing from the arts, the material forms (“vessels”, frames) that define sport offer an idealized image. These “vessels” and frames are the stadium”, “the trophy”, “the human body in action” and “the arena” which are a “parallel reality” to the analysis of idealization in art, namely where I argued for the framing device of “the gallery”, “the nude” and “the landscape”.

The stadium and the trophy as a framing device of the ideal

Ancient Greece and later imperial Rome developed the ideal framing-device for the sports-contest. Spectators huddled around a tier system that was ideal for consuming sports. In the process, the athlete becomes the performer. This “frame” heightened the intensity and drama of the event. Modern sporting events through technological innovation would build on this form (frame) and create massive stadiums, galvanizing masses of people and transporting them in the process to a fantasy world. Whether this renders the fantasy an opiate of the masses or a healthy form of individual expression is debatable. What is significant, I believe, is that the stadium creates a sense of awe and power which appeals to an intuition or sense of the hidden mystery of existence. This “hidden mystery” made somewhat visible is tantamount to saying that the “ideal” (“idea”/“light”) has assumed a framework, a pattern and thus becomes a cultural symbol, which by definition both effects and produces structural relations between the individual and society. In this sense, once again “the stadium” reverts to its state as an “idea” or in other words, an ideal. An example ought to make this clearer.

Imagine the famous Old Trafford stadium, the official ground for the Manchester United Football club in England. I would argue that there is a beauty to the elliptical shape1 of the stadium in which the rectangular field is inscribed. The alternating red and white of the seats (signifying “the team”) against the green of the field is also attractive. It is not only external, formal, visible beauty or the aesthetic that determines an appeal to the ideal, but the notion that “behind” this formal coherence or appearance is the actual concept of the ideal (the “invisible”). In other words: the appearance that is the stadium is not a mere “pretty picture” but a formulae the world over for the concept “stadium” and thus is elevated to that of the symbol as hitherto mentioned. As a symbol it represents a cultural world that includes, in this example, the whole edifice of Manchester United Football club—its ethos, fans, paraphernalia, history, players past and present and so on. Thus the stadium “holds” or is vessel of the memories and aspirations of the club. It has entered a cultural domain and invests in the minds and hearts of its supporters. The stadium is the vessel then for the ideals and emotions to all those connected to the club. These ideals I would go so far as to say, as contained in the “stadium-image”, is precisely the hope for something better. Certainly in the case of Manchester United it would be easy to believe in some kind of “victory” or “success” given the team’s superb track record. But even in the case of minor, more modest teams with a less grandiose “stadium-image”, it is a vessel/frame for ideals such as: overcoming barriers, never giving up, fighting against all odds and the like. Therefore “the stadium” is a frame for ideals with the sole intent to reinvigorate life and make it easier to bear and perhaps, at times (when the team wins, when life is more comfortable) to secure victory even if, in reality, the fan did not directly attain it.

Furthermore, the concept of “the stadium” can be likened to a gallery in that they both “house” or frame and facilitate cultural exchange. An even clearer correlation or parallel is that between the stadium and the theatre, where in both cases there is a structure that frames a performance and while sport is said to be more “real” as opposed to acting, I would claim that the sports-act insofar as it is a kind of performance, is theatrical and many players are known for their antics or play-acting. Conceived as a kind of “gallery” or “theatre” the stadium is a “field of dreams” and thus corresponds to an ideal. This is so as the stadium is an imaginative projection that has evolved over time to demarcate a fixed time-and-space in which energy is focused, cloistered from the realities beyond it and thus reflecting a perfect, ideal realm. This ideal realm makes life easier for many, while at the same time suggests “something” beyond the toil of mundane existence owing to “the stadium’s” sheer scale which I believe is not grasped consciously by the majority of “the fans” (or “players” for that matter).

Another way in which the ideal is framed or the invisible made visible is through the image of “the trophy”. Certain trophies “stand for” particular competitions. The formula is simple: gain victory and you will lift the trophy aloft to the delight of your supporters. Imagine an image of that thrilling moment as a declaration that an end point has been reached, the climax to the action is now associated with this stirring moment. In so doing, the ideal is manifest as a
moment of joy and the trophy a physical embodiment of the effort, pain, dedication and perseverance to ultimately win the contest. It’s as if players and fans loose themselves in the sport and the team in order to acquire the trophy. Thus the trophy is not just a material object. It is a vessel or frame for the history and emotional and mental investment in the game that culminates in that final moment of elation with “the cup”. “The cup” then becomes an ideal, a secular idol of sorts. Even if it should change hands over a short period of time or as in the case of the FIFA World Cup every four years, players and fans alike wish to hold their hands aloft in a pose in which the hands are higher than the head, meaning that “doing” precedes “thought”, commitment precedes assessment. And the trophy that the hero holds aloft is the tangible symbol that indeed doing and commitment are trans rational, that the ideal cannot be sought and found purely through reason. The arms are held aloft to that which is “above” (invisible) stretching the body even higher and praising the ideal. “The trophy” embodies that ideal without which the hands aloft would not necessarily read as implying an ideal; it would simply be a momentary feeling, whereas “the trophy” is enduring and physical and the winning athlete or team is inscribed thereon. In this sense “the trophy” acquires value as an idealized commodity.

The idealized body and idyllic “landscape”

While “the stadium” and “the trophy” are clearly integral to sports and developing a theory of idealization concerning sports, perhaps a more obvious framing of the ideal is via the human body itself. The body becomes a vehicle for the direct expression of perfection in the best moments of the game; it is an ideal as communicated via energized movement through and in space and with precise timing, tempo and rhythm. Furthermore, the dancing, moving, skilled athlete in its aesthetic and formal appeal, could be considered beautiful and artistic precisely because the athlete encapsulates an ideal moment, move or image. In this sense, one could theorize that sport represents in terms that many people can identify with, artistic ideas/ideals attenuated and “captured” (held) by a vessel that is easily understood, namely the joy of movement, game-playing and entertainment. In a way, the ideal shines through and thus I believe one can forge a connection between art and sport. Drawing from Clarke’s (1956) analysis of the nude, I will briefly argue that such artistic ideals have resonated with the sports image generally, though I have used imagery drawn from football to illustrate this.

Clarke’s (1956) conception of the nude in terms of basic postures of the body is a useful analysis/interpretation that lends itself to a further set of categories of human movement in sport and hence I have found recourse to incorporate these “categories”. Clarke (1956) divides his analysis into a few key chapters. I will mention just three that have a bearing on the argument, namely how sport is a reflection of art insofar as sport and sports imagery force the human subject (the athlete) into an idealized space that bears a resemblance to portrayals of the human figure in art. One such chapter is entitled “energy” which he defines as “eternal delight” (Clarke 1956, 162). He argues that the joy of the movement of the human figure which began with the Ancient Greeks was captured artistically by virtue of theories of perfection and the notion of the ideal form which was carried through into the Renaissance and beyond. In order for this energy to reveal that “eternal delight” there needed to be a distortion or accentuation and emphasis of some kind. This is what makes Myron’s sculptures so idealistic, or Michaelangelo’s robust, muscular bodies so unreal. Now it appears to me that the sports contest wherein the athlete is enjoined to perform and play with great energy necessitates the athlete to push his or her body to the limits. In so doing, everyday movement is transformed into the unreal, the extreme and the distorted—all of which is a kind of idealization. It is a movement away from the expected to the unexpected or the unpredictable and conjures a sense of what things could be like. Therein lies the process of idealization, a drawing out of the usual parameters of thought (or body movement) into another dimension (different body position or series of movements). When those moments in sport are captured we realize that, in fact, there is a resemblance to the arts.

In this respect, consider a documentary photograph in which a soccer player strikes the ball. Seen as an image within a soccer match, such a pose is orthodox and not surprising. But looked at as an energetic moment of “eternal delight”, one cannot help but notice the aesthetic beauty, the sheer athleticism. More than this: he is somewhat in the air; the crowd that has become a mass of dots forms the background and he is watched in awe by his teammates. In other words, the capturing of “that moment” is an idealization of the “real”; it raises that game and that moment and so reconfigures the real. I am aware that this is a photograph of a sports event and not the game itself, live as it were. However, such an image was not intended to be fine arts (like a television broadcast of the event) and more significantly to watch the game live and see and isolate those moments in its full glory and delight, is certainly, I maintain, a means of accessing—or a portal—into an idyllic space. Here I am not simply imputing aesthetics to sport, but theorizing that this beauty is beauty insofar as it is an image of the ideal.
A second chapter by Clarke (1956) is entitled “Pathos” wherein instead of the triumphant “energy”, the overcoming of gravity and inertia, there is defeat and pain. Here he analyses images such as *Laocoon*² and the numerous crucifixions and Rodin’s *Three Shades*.³ What is evident in these examples is that pathos also requires a certain distortion and emphasis of features in order to reveal emotional depth. To that end, the harsher side of life (of art) is also ideal or rather idealized. In order for the viewer to placate his or her own pain, an image can be used to draw out his or her feelings that lead to an identification with that image and a form of therapy occurs. In that process, one can release that “dark cloud” and once more believe that things can and ought to be better, or in other words: aspire to that of the ideal.

An image of a marathon runner reveals the thin body of the marathon runner soldiering on despite his grimacing and obvious pain. His forehead is furrowed, his eyes deep set in a kind of wildness, as he sprinkles water on his head, anointing himself with the hope of salvation, and an end to the race. Being a sports image we know that the man is an athlete. He is not suffering in life proper. This is an ideal realm, an arena in which to think, feel and do. So while we identify the pain, we know that it is but a race and he will endure. And so we take that lesson from this idealized setting and apply it as a life lesson. That we too should prevail notwithstanding the seemingly insurmountable difficulties. That even in the athlete’s pain, he is a hero. For victory is sometimes just in the effort, not in making a mark in the record books. Perhaps even this athlete is the representative of “the athlete”? And who is “the athlete” but the consumer of sports that identifies with this runner and assumes the number code emblazoned on his vest shirt and is enjoined by the Nike symbol/emblem to “just do it!” What I have been describing is thus not simply a mimetic projecting of self into the sportsperson which has a parallel to fine arts’ icons and images, but again, this “moment” emphasizes (contains certain ideals) and “holds” the emotion not as simply resemblance, but as an idealization in that “the athlete” becomes the everyman and in the pathos, paradoxically transcends it. The ideal element thus refers to the symbolic import of the image, that is, how the visible (frame, form, “vessel”) elicits the invisible (content, “light”).

Lastly, a third chapter by Clarke (1956) deals with “ecstasy” which he defines as “the body possessed by some irrational power” (Clarke 1956, 264) and he analyses in such terms images as far apart historically as Greco-Roman images of Dionysus to that of Matisse’s *Dance*.⁴ In so doing, he argues that ecstatic images of the human figure suggest a kind of rebirth that conforms to ideals of physical grace (Clarke 1956, 296) and more to the point, in reference to Michelangelo’s muscular bodies, and images of Christ, that “he has not lost faith in physical perfection and feels it almost as a recommendation to a higher world” (Clarke 1956, 297). This “recommendation of a higher world” is precisely another way of saying a tending towards an ideal. In my estimation, images of the euphoria experienced in gaining victory or scoring a goal in sport and the like concerning both players and fans alike conjure the ideal or idealized. They may be described as artistic images of the human body in ecstatic “poses” and “moments”, overcome as they are by their emotions or an “irrational power”. This jarring of the sensibility and overwhelming emotion could be equated with the Kantian concept of the sublime which tends to be formless, a kind of ecstasy.

An example is in order to show (“light”) and verbally unpack (“vessel”) the sense of emotional energy of an ecstatic kind that resonates with the arts. Another common sports image is that of a documentary photograph of a number of team players celebrating a victory. One player is almost air born, another with his back to us bends to begin an embrace, while the others shout for joy. I would argue that this moment with all its enthusiasm and irrationality (for what is “a goal” in relation to life⁴) is a visible instance of the kind of climax that we hope for and hence we expect to find the partisan fans celebrating with equal joy and intensity. In other words: the athlete gives us a “taste” of the sense of rebirth, the culmination of a life lived, pockets of success and a cohesive force forged between players and fans alike that nullify individual aloneness. In so doing, we are given a vision of that ideal moment when self surrenders to a higher force (the group), when past failures are forgotten and worry for the future is suspended. I would further argue that the players create a “sculptured mass” and reveal facial expressions of heightened emotions. While this aesthetic aspect is not necessarily articulated or even a conscious part of a viewer’s perception, I would argue that the sheer, mass enjoyment of the spectacle including “the ecstatic moment” is precisely the intuitive need to experience joy and climax, and this pattern, rhythm and order that defines such moments. Yet its duration is relatively short. Ecstasy yields and while the game may soon end, there is always the promise of another. One “rebirth” leads to another in an ever increasing tally of ecstatic moments, which is precisely the search for the ideal or put more crudely: a better goal that results in a more wild and euphoric state. It is a unification of entropy and order and in the unification of these polarities the ideal is that which joins the state of wild abandon and the desire for coherence. In other terms this is the combination of the irrational and the rational, connoted in simple terms as the body and
the mind. But since the body and the mind affect one another, this duality is inaccurate. A better formulation is to say that there is an integration of the body and the mind as the ideal is vividly communicated, an integration that is more clearly defined as an aspect of realizing the ideal as it can be achieved in moments of victory on the sports field.

The framing of the ideal by way of the human figure in sport as argued above can also be associated with the playing area. Just as there is a parallel between the nude in art and the human figure in sport, so one can find a parallel between landscape painting and the finely manicured arena that defines many sports fields. The soccer field for example, especially concerning games at the highest level, is usually prepared so that the grass is geometrically coloured according to various shades of green. There are white lines to demarcate the field including circles and semi-circles (perhaps cricket is an even more interesting case). The search for perfection via the landscape painting at various junctures in history, whether in terms of light, the interplay of detail and the landscape painting at various junctures in history, whether in terms of light, the interplay of detail and the whole or general, and the abstracting of “the real”, can be compared to the highly ordered, aesthetic quality of the “field of dreams” of many sports.

The “field of dreams”, like Ruskin’s insistence on detail, illustrates a marked concern for the ideal playing surface at the most ideal or highest level of a particular sport. The “field of dreams”, like Hanzlitz’s insistence on the general, emphasizes the abstract, fantasy world of the sports-game that “frames” nature in such a way that it should be subservient to the abstract—the cultural world of human relations. Nature is tamed and in accordance with both Ruskin’s and Hanzlitz’s argument that the idyllic landscape is yet derived from a subject/object, namely the reality of nature, so many a sports arena while having “tamed” nature to satisfy human desires, is nevertheless present (again cricket may be an interesting example). In most cases, however, nature appears synthetic (especially when viewed on television) and yet we know it is not and thus nature piers through. It may be abstracted and idealized, and so the beauty of the ground itself plays homage to the players that perform on it.

I have been arguing that there are various “frames” / vessels/forms that define sport such as “the stadium”, “the trophy”, the human figure in action and so recorded, and the arena itself. These elements tend to the ideal insofar as being vessels they resemble the concept that holds the content just as words may reveal thought (more or less). It was also argued that they are ideal precisely because these elements of sport parallel an artistic mode of perception and materialization and in reaching to the condition of art rise above the mundane and transport player and fan alike to an(other) idyllic world or state of being. We now have to determine how this theoretical parallel enriches our understanding of both art and sport.

**How does the “lens of idealism” enrich our understanding of art and sport?**

The way I have been using the concept of the ideal, in both the philosophical sense (“idealism”) and in the more obvious sense (“make things better”), requires the postulate of a “higher” or “inner” dimension. In such terms, any materialization (form, “vessel”, frame) is defined as an instance of the “holding” of the “light”, and the ideal is equated to both that relationship as well as inhering in the “light” (thought-content) and “vessel” (word, image, culture) itself. But this is a simplistic reduction, perhaps ideal in a naïve sense. Certainly, the fact that there are levels in the relationship between “lights” (ideas) and “vessels” (forms) does not imply that that relationship expresses an evolution or devolution from “lower” to “higher” or “higher” to “lower”. Conceived as such, a sense of teleological unfolding towards a kind of Hegelian “absolute” is not necessarily true or may only at times appear true. Therefore, I shall observe that art and sport in the name of the ideal have been used as a vehicle (form, “vessel”) to express both totalitarian and liberal political and philosophical ideals with the consequence that art and sport implicate certain moral concerns. I will theorize further that it is the dual tendency to reach “higher”, more “inwardly” to the abstract (“light”) with that of the desire to package (frame) that light and worship that form and so to idolize. It is that dialectic, which I will call “idolization” that creates, as it were, the double-edged sword of not being satisfied with the invisible or visible and so our philosophies, political dispensations and indeed art and sport, never quite satisfy. In that precarious position, the ethical dimension is often compromised and the concept of the ideal looses its sense.

**A deduction: morality in relation to art and sport**

It is not clear at what point the abstract or philosophical becomes an idea that invests itself within the ambit of the social, of politics. Nor at what point the ideal of morality flows from a philosophical tenet to a political dispensation. That there are two distinct poles, namely one of thought (philosophy) and another of action (politics) is presupposed and I would argue that with existentialism in general this polarity is critiqued. With existentialism we note that philosophy turns in on itself, in the sense that it enjoins us to action and decision-making in life rather than continue trying to ascertain metaphysical truth within the realm of philosophy. Sartre (1948)
considered contemplation to be a luxury reflecting a bourgeois philosophy (which became the general stance of the Communist reproach). He argued that the ego cannot reach the other through the cogito. Most tellingly he stated that “existence precedes essence” (Sartre 1948, 28). Here he means that man first of all exists, “encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre 1948, 28). He thus believes that there is no human nature, not necessarily a God or “essence” that defines us and consequently human beings are what they make of themselves. In this sense, for the existentialist a person is responsible for himself or herself and in making decisions one is creating a certain image of man as he or she would have him or her to be. In this sense, existentialism could be seen as hopeful and idealistic. For “in fashioning myself I fashion man” (Sartre 1948, 30). Sartre’s “philosophy” is one of freedom. Everything is possible. There is no determinism. And there is no reality except action and there is no sense to life a priori. The point here is that this philosophy recognizes that the very project and ideals of philosophical investigation and its claim to find truth (a moral ideal, for example), is problematic (though this makes his own philosophy self-contradictory which Sartre would probably accept in his romantic irrationalism).

Moreover, Thilly (1965, 585–6) puts it in these terms: “Existentialism eludes the usual philosophical classifications, for it claims to have transcended the oppositions between naturalism and spiritualism, realism and idealism, pluralism and monism.” In this sense, existentialism is a “philosophy” that undercut the project of philosophy and of creating an ideal philosophical edifice. Instead, one’s way of living is philosophy. As the saying goes: “the personal is political”. The point here is that whereas there is usually a gap between philosophy and politics, between thinking and action and the personal and political, we find here that morality is not given by external or essential or even rational law, but is a personal decision. Consequently there are no absolute ideals, only one’s own ideal or lack thereof. Sartre, writing after the two world wars throws a sceptical glance at idealism in the sense of a prescriptive philosophy of how the world ought to be, and in terms of what social-political form is to be considered as ideal. The point here is that existentialism does not, as is the case in western metaphysical and political philosophy, operate “top-down”. Other philosophical and political systems creating a grand system of ideals have resulted in heinous moral depravity. Two obvious examples are the fascist and Marxist “ideals”. However, one need not believe that one cannot derive a moral system “top-down” such as a Libertarian one or say in accord with Plato’s Republic.

The above invocation of a “top-down” approach evident in say libertarian philosophy and politics and totalitarian political philosophy (whether Marxist or fascist) involves the “ lumping” together of art and sport to serve political, national and world-changing ends. This manipulation usually renders culture (art and sport) manipulated to serve immoral designs. In contrast to this, an aestheticization of art and sport, which is evident in modern liberal capitalism, appears to render art and sport a-moral. The a-moral aesthetics of the beautiful transmutes desires for political (personal) freedom into visions of an ideal and so beauty sublimes political action. Or “beauty” can be used to “educate” and inspire political action (the Mexican muralist Diego Riviera is one such example), while under liberal capitalism one could argue that the overwhelming plenitude and access to the “image” may deaden the feeling for beauty or at least in terms of its social and individual upliftment.

The institutional realities of art and sport recognizes that indeed art and sport are a reflection of these extra-cultural designs, namely philosophical, religious and political concerns which have moral implications. The upshot is that art and sport regimes end up usually prescribing what kind of art is accepted or the form that sport should take and in the process art and sport become less than ideal, or simply a reflection of a philosophical and political system. Therefore, perhaps an existential “philosophy” safeguards moral ideals in that it attempts to “escape” overarching totalizing “top-down” theories as to what form political philosophy should take, but that in itself may render art and sport a-moral. Further, if one can draw a line from existential, humanist philosophies to that of the postmodern, then perhaps there is the making of an individual, “bottom-up” approach that allows for expressive play and questioning of all systems. Granted, however, that itself may not necessarily be a moral concern, it is at least a healthy scepticism towards a seemingly coherent “final” political and philosophical dispensation with its vociferous propaganda that includes the manipulation of art and sport. In other words: both art and sport are a platform for moral ideals that may reflect an overarching political dispensation or may be a site for a critique of certain “ideals”. A theory of idealization in art finds parallels in sport which enriches our understanding of the two through the common concern with ethical issues.

Moreover, it is here argued that a healthy scepticism mitigates the human propensity towards “final” truths and moral prescriptions which we tend to idolize and venerate in the name of some ideal. This tendency to find a stable form or image (“vessel”) and thus restrict the “light” (thought-content, and here indicative of dissent) with the appeal to a set of ideals I dub “ idolinization”. This begs the question as to
whether there can be a moral agenda that permeates art and sport. Historically and based on theoretical perspectives the answer has been affirmative, but the consequences often dire so that the very notion of "the moral" is not necessarily tenable as an ideal in either art or sport. Yet art and sport, intentionally or not, reflects a moral concern. For example: Minimalism reflected a positivist philosophical ideal and critiques that in its emptiness. In sport, Jessie Owens’s success at the Berlin Olympics of 1936 reflected that racial discrimination is unjustified. In both cases, one could argue that art and sport operating “bottom-up” does have something pertinent to say about ethical issues, that it is not simply a puppet or pawn in a larger philosophical and political super-structure, but at the same time one should be advised not to idealize art and sport. But then in saying that I have projected a moral imperative which in itself should not be idealized. In other words, there is a tenuous boundary between idealization and ideology (a moral imperative officially sanctioned and promulgated by the ruling dispensation) and it is not clear how to negotiate that “border line”. We are left with an existential abyss.

Notes

1. While I am aware that there is certainly a “form follows function” reasoning here, which cannot easily be justified as a form of idealization, I am here stressing the idea that the function itself is subject to the ideals and hopes of all those associated with the club, economic limitations and practicalities notwithstanding.

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