Toward an Experiential Sport Aesthetic

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional aesthetic theories and philosophies of art have been concerned with the art object and usually with the beauty of the object via some mode of sense perception. The artist has been considered only in relationship to his having produced the object. Some dancers, for example, suggest that dance as an art experience is essentially a creative process. However, often this definition and aesthetic which examines, or is based upon, the process still concerns itself with the object—the dance. Ultimately, it concerns itself with the elements of the art object—color, space, shape, flow, time, and continuity—rather than with the dancer’s experience of dancing. In short, the aesthetic experience and its examination has almost always presupposed an object. Although the sport aesthetic necessarily presupposes an object—the body and its movement—it will be the contention in this paper that it does so only insofar as it allows facilitation of the athletes’ experience.

To follow traditional aesthetic theories in the development of a sport aesthetic, the focus would be in the beauty of the human body in motion and would consider the grace, efficiency, and effortlessness of movement achieved in skilled performance. Some sport movements such as those in gymnastics, figure skating, synchronised swimming, and diving which have dance overtones have often been termed beautiful and artistic. However, in other sports this expertise and “beauty” conjures a utilitarian, structured, and mechanistic process rather than the expressive reactions which have served as criteria for aesthetic theories. Since it is theoretically apparent that this objectification of the body and its movements cannot be considered artistic, the necessity arises to look away from the art object and toward the artists’ experience and the nature of the aesthetic experience as a probable alternative in the development of a sport aesthetic.

The aesthetic experience has been defined broadly as a feeling attributed to an experience in which the sensuous, qualitative aspects are encountered apart from all mediation by ideas, and independently of any determination as to whether or not anything else exists. Use of this definition from the perspective of the artist points the way to a subjective, highly individualistic, and affective experiential aesthetic. Although any single definition of art is necessarily limiting and inflexible, the following operational definition is the synoptic result of definitions offered by many aesthetic theoreticians. Art is the object of the aesthetic experience, i.e., from the audience perspective it is the object which is the cause of the aesthetic experience or from the artists’ perspective it is the object which results from, or symbolizes, the aesthetic experience. This resultant object can be defined further as a concrete representation via some
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media or, as this paper will attempt to show, as a reflective description of a feeling or emotion resulting from man's involvement with sport. The intent of this paper is to develop criteria in which sport, from the performer's perspective of the experience, may be considered as an aesthetic experience.

AN INITIAL CONSIDERATION OF SPORT AS AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Before establishing specific criteria for considering sport as an aesthetic experience, it seems appropriate after independent discussion of the aesthetic and sport experience to cite some of the commonalities already expressed in the two previous chapters. There is no intent here to be all-inclusive in noting similarities nor to suggest that because of these similarities there is sufficient reason for regarding the sport and aesthetic experience as synonymous. For whatever purpose the existence of art and sport is considered to have, the fact remains that art is done by artists and viewed by audiences for different reasons than sport is done by athletes and viewed by audiences. Also, it must be noted that reasons for doing and viewing in both art and sport differ. However, the contention in this and the following chapter is that the experience of the performer in doing art or sport is similar and that the nature of these two experiences can be considered aesthetic.

What Huizinga defines in the following passage is the nature of play but the definition as Hein\(^4\) points out could just as well be of the aesthetic experience.

... a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is different from "ordinary" life.\(^5\)

Huizinga has cited a number of features common to both the play and aesthetic experiences: spatial-temporal characteristics, arbitrary rules, non-utilitarian qualities, affectivity, and the fact that it is marked off, as Dewey has outlined, from everyday and ordinary experiences.

Competition, whether direct or indirect, against self, others, or some arbitrary standard, is a dominant characteristic of sport. There is present an intent and desire to win if winning is the nature of the specific activity, achieve what has not been achieved, or attain some standard of excellence whether this standard is internally or externally imposed. "It is a relative matter, the victory being over self and previous performance or over fellow competitors of comparable standard rather than against an arbitrary standard or a record." Similarly, the artist has an intent and desire to reach goals of achievement and excellence. Despite the absence of score, there is an internal competitiveness to do well or to express what was intended. Within this context of self-imposed competition, little distinction can be made between the artist and the athlete. The product of these efforts, be it a score or an art object, is similarly "measured" and evaluated, albeit with different tools and scales, by outside observers and critics.

Huizinga and Hein both note the voluntary nature of play and the aesthetic
experience. Although there are philosophic and definitional distinctions between sport and play, both share the common element of voluntary participation by the performer. Voluntary involvement means freedom from external force and choice by the performer to participate. However, it may be feasible that the performer will participate due to an internal compulsion, or drive, which may, in that sense, render participation an involuntary function. In the case of sport or art being an individual's occupation, there is, for example, evidence in the baseball history of Boston's Jimmy Pearsall or Detroit's Willie Horton and in the opera history of Italy's Maria Callas to suggest that the option to not perform or leave in the midst of a performance is available to the performer. The "scratch" and the "understudy" are integral parts of the sport worlds.

Both the aesthetic and sport experience are characterized by the structures of time and place. Where sport has its courts, fields, and stadia, art has its stages, canvasses, and concert halls. And, although it may be argued that the proscenium arch is being eliminated in the staging of the dramatic production, it may be similarly noted that in such activities as lacrosse, skiing, and frisbee formal boundaries have been eliminated. Most sports are marked off in periods, quarters, or halves, or at least, in the case of mountain climbing and skydiving, by a definite beginning and ending. Parenthetically, at this point, it might be noted that Sartre's concept of adventure and the "perfect moment" which was rooted in art was marked off by definite beginnings and endings and was not drawn out. Most art media in which the aesthetic experience occurs are also characterized by temporal separation into acts, measures, beats, or in the cases of painting and sculpture, by a beginning and ending.

Sport and aesthetic experiences share the commonality of being "outside" of daily experiences. In comparing artist and athlete, Weiss sums up what Dewey, Lechner, Adams, and Sartre, have stated about the aesthetic experience and what Loy, Metheny, and Huizinga have said about the sport experience:

The athlete's world is set over against the everyday world. Economic demands and the satisfaction of appetites are for the moment put aside. . . . Artists and historians similarly bracket off their distinctive, dynamic spatio-temporal worlds. What he (artist or athlete) is and what he does is for the moment thereby severed from the rest of the world.

Hein's main thesis in her comparison of play and the aesthetic was not only that the two are non-utilitarian and autotelic in nature but that they both have the quality of being detached from reality, i.e., artificial restrictions are imposed upon real situations by social convention or by the arbitrariness of a group or an individual. These restrictions can take the form of previously mentioned spatial and temporal dimensions or of rules which are specific to the form and understood by the performer prior to performance. Rejection of these rules or failure to comply fully can result in a variety of individual penalties, expulsion, inhibition of others' performance, or ineffective execution of a work. Even jazz improvisation requires that everyone play in the same key.
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The artificiality of the sport and aesthetic experience has also been noted as providing grounds for self-realization and as a special way of knowing self and the object. With regard to the artist, Lipman reiterates a viewpoint that Metheny and Slusher hold for the athlete:

The art form (media) represents a searching, a casting about for oneself, and when, out of this, an organized poem or painting emerges, the sense of personal achievement permeates the entire situation as the immediate qualitative experience of self. Creation implies self-creation.  

This way of knowing is seen to be based on the experiential process rather than the result or product of the experience. It is a process which is immediate, present rather than past or future, concrete and affective as opposed to abstract and cognitive, lived rather than reflected.

Both the artist and the athlete can be classified as Dionysian in the spontaneity, affectivity, and subjectivity of the experience in which they participate. The essence of the Dionysian kind of experience is the development of feelings without regard to the necessity of conceptualization or analysis of these feelings. This does not, however, preclude actual or attempted conceptual analysis prior to or following the experience.

Both the artist and the athlete can be placed in Sartre's first dimension where "things" have been transcended by the performer and he enters into "oneness" with his endeavor. In contrast, the audience, viewing the product and the cognitive, analytic thingness of the performer's experience, remains objective and apart from the experience—Apollian. The experiential process is as Dewey and Slusher in particular, have noted: a deep and holistic involvement of the subject and object. Says Herrigel of archery: "In the case of the archer, the hitter and the hit are no longer two opposing objects but are one reality." Again, in comparing artist and athlete, Weiss notes: "He does not make and is not interested in making something that is beautiful, or in grasping the very being of space, time, or energy; instead he holds himself away from everything else and gives himself wholly to the game (process)."

Aestheticians and sport theorists agree that the ability to focus away from technique, eliminate extraneous elements, and become involved in a transcendental process presupposes the mastery of technique. Even from the standpoint of the audience, Kaelin says that "like the virtuosity of a musical performer... sport technique is the best when it is noticed the least."

All sources seem to imply that the sport and aesthetic experiences are highly unique and subjective. It is further implied that despite the presence of others the performer is essentially alone in the experiential process. Being in rather than outside the experience creates a highly subjective evaluation and reporting. The idea that each performer brings to the experience a background, technique, self-concept, and perception which is different is consistently advanced by sport and aesthetic theoreticians. It is argued further that inherent in this uniqueness and individual aloneness, is the impossibility of drawing conclusions, generalizations, or universal truths about either the aesthetic or sport...
experience. It is even more difficult to empathize without some kind of personal involvement in one or both of these experiences.

PROPOSED CRITERIA

Authenticity of intent. — The first prerequisite for sport to be an aesthetic experience is that the movements during performance match the athlete's intent at the outset of the movement or game, i.e., the result was not accidental, and that the expertise exhibited was within the capabilities of the performer and meets the criteria for the sport. Development of intent prior to the movement experience may presuppose cognitive analysis, setting the stage for involvement in and reflection upon the experience. It is not suggested here that one plans to have a perfect moment for it may never occur in a lifetime of sport experiences. However, there is a necessity at the outset for the selection of an appropriate frame of reference in which the sport experience may occur. The desire or intent to win does not negate the spontaneity nor the ability to become involved in the experience. Nor does the recognition of one's abilities inhibit full and direct participation. However, winning is an authentic intent and an authentic achievement only when there is a legitimate and even chance to win. The upset is authentic only when the underdog truly has the capabilities and when the win would occur again under the same circumstances. Although one may intend to win given that the capabilities are present, winning is not relevant. The perfect moment occurs in the struggle, in the effort, in the process. Tritely stated, fulfillment and validation of intent is in "how you play the game."

Expertise. — A second requirement for the perfect moment is that the performance exhibit qualities of excellence and consistency as established within a given sport. Expertise is a prerequisite for the perfect moment but this does not mean absolute perfection. The surfer, for example, can constantly improve his technique by taking on bigger waves until he reaches the "perfect" wave or the impossible wave. This demands greater sophistication of technique but prior to this reach for perfection comes a point in the surfer's ability when he has a consistent command of the board. He is able to transcend thoughts of body and board position and is able to direct his attention away from himself and technique and toward the "feeling" of the experience.

Involvement and relation. — The third criterion to be met demands that the athlete establish a totally involved and committed relationship with the various sport movements in the sport experience which transcend cognitive considerations of technique. This transcendental experience will be deemed necessary to establish the aesthetic, or perfect, moment which will be the object of reflective description. Just as the perfect moment necessitates the unity of mind and body, the unity or integration of man and sport is a necessary criterion for the perfect moment to occur. This involvement precludes the interference of extraneous factors in the sport situation such as crowd noise, wind, cold, etc. Involvement keeps man in the "first dimension" oblivious to the gaze of others, alone, and, for the most part, unaware of other performers except as they are necessary to his performance.

Upon reflection, the athlete can sense the unity of being completely in-
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involved in the thing he is doing. Bannister describes a running experience: "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 found a new source of power and beauty. . . ."23 Beets24 comments on Bannister’s reaction to running and the fusion of subject and object in the aesthetic experience:

You will observe that he describes his hesitating movements under the wings of fundamental discovery: he experienced a new unity with nature in which he is not conscious any longer of parts of his body and movements thereof. . . . he forgets his body. . . . to find a sense of unity and a source of power and beauty, as he calls it.25

Whole man acting.—The last requirement for the aesthetic experience in sport is that the experience involve the total man, i.e., mind and body, and that the body be experienced as a subject rather than as an object. The perfect moment necessitates involvement of the whole man free from any implied or imposed dualism. It is further noted that I am my body and I have a body. Wenkart, VanKaan, and VanDenBerg allude to Merleau-Poncy’s idea of the possibility of man’s body-subjectivity and his body-objectivity.

When the body is in action, as in sports, we can look at it as a human existence open toward the world. Man’s personal relation to his body can be explained in terms of his positional consciousness. Man can become deeply involved in an external situation but he always keeps a certain distance from it. That is why we can say that man not only is his body, but also has his body.26

. . . my body is already a meaning-giving existence, even if I am not yet conscious of this meaning-giving activity. My body invests my world with meaning even before I think about this meaning . . . . My body makes the world and the other available to me . . . . My behaving body—which I am—is the locus for the appropriation of sense and meaning.27

Man in the first dimension passes over, transcends the body, and experiences the task subjectively through it. However, in the second dimension under the gaze of others the body becomes an object.28

This dissectable thing-body is a derivative of the second dimension of the body . . . . Also the mountaineer himself can constitute the body in the second dimension. This happens, for instance, when he tends the wound in his leg. The wounded place is examined and touched in order to cure it or: in order to be able to continue on his way.29

To maintain that human existence, or man in his experiential world, is dualistic in nature is to disparage the body or to treat it as an object incapable of experiencing the world in a subjective, personal, or affective manner.
Reflective description.—When all these prerequisites have been established and met, the following premises will suggest that the totality of the aesthetic experience, i.e., perfect moment, and the athletes' emotions and feelings following such an experience may be verbally described.

1. The athlete enters the sport or movement act with an intent to experience positive affect. This is neither the sole nor primary reason for participation and may include the desire(s) to win, to perform satisfactorily or to achieve something not previously achieved.

2. The sport experience potentially may alter or intensify the initial affective intent.

3. The sport experience, or movement act, which results in an authentic perfect moment, creates a feeling about and/or an emotional reaction toward the experience.

4. Upon reflection, the athlete becomes audience to his own act and can attempt to verbally describe his subjective and affective experience.

5. The affective reflection, or aftermath of the perfect moment, becomes the representation of the experienced perfect moment. The description of these emotions or feelings are a valid representation of the perfect moment only when it matches the athletes' initial or experientially altered intent and reflects the authentic, totally involved, and expertly performed experience.

THE PERFECT MOMENT

The perfect moment is a somewhat eclectic concept belonging to the study of sport but which finds its basis in the similarities of some established idea. The term "perfect moment" originates in Sartre's novel, Nausea, in which Sartre uses the two terms synonymously and they can be very nearly equated with Maslow's concept of peak-experience in terms of intensity and affective involvement.

Although both Roquentin and Anny mark out various kinds of adventures, or perfect moments, both seem to lean toward art experiences: Roquentin in the "song" and the novel and Anny in the drama. It is literary convention to mark out a beginning and an end and the perfect moment, in Sartre's sense, has this characteristic. The song begins and ends. The play not only begins and ends but is further structured into acts, and sport can be seen to have this same design. One knows when the perfect moment is over and it can be defined apart from the rest of routine existence. Nowhere in the novel does Sartre suggest that there is any meaning derived from these adventures. Despite their design and harmony which set them aside from routine existence, perfect moments are really as absurd as life. This is not unlike Metheny's suggestion that sport, after the fashion of Sisyphus, is an absurd mode of being. Bergson has implied that melody is an interpretation and that the adventure is really in man and not in the thing he is experiencing. Although not concerned with the meaning of sport, there does exist the possibility that the meaning of sport, like the sadness of the song, is really in man.

Abraham Maslow's concept of the peak-experience "lays great stress on starting from experiential knowledge rather than from systems of concepts or abstract categories or a prioris." It uses as a foundation personal, subjective
experience upon which abstract knowledge may be built. There is a concern
with the authentic, unique, and alone individual and the need to develop con­
cepts of decision, responsibility, self-creation, autonomy, and identity within
this concern. The main concern in exploring Maslow’s peak-experience lies not in
the psychological implications of the experience but with the nature of the
experience, per se.

Maslow does not delineate how the peak-experience is achieved and in fact
says:

We don’t know how the peak-experience is achieved; it has not simply one-to­
one relation with any deliberated procedure; we know only that it is somehow
earned. It is like the promise of a rainbow. It comes and it goes and it cannot
be forgotten.32

A peak-experience is a realization that what “ought to be” is. In the Heideggeri­
ian sense, it is a coming into authenticity. The peak-experience is a unique and
almost mystic phenomenon, a coming into Tao or Nirvana, a state of Being rather
than Becoming. Maslow sees the peak-experience as an end rather than as a
means to something else.33 The aesthetic experience has been discussed as a
means but this does not imply that the peak-experience and the aesthetic
experience are antithetical. The aesthetic experience is essentially a process but
there are moments in the process which are significantly higher than other
moments, a moment which is perfect, which is a peak. Similarly, the peak­
experience is a process. However, the peak-experience and the aesthetically
perfect moment are ends in themselves in that they are not used to
accomplish other ends.

Although occurring in a spatial-temporal setting, the peak-experience is
characterized by a disorientation in time and space. “In creative furor, the poet
or artist becomes oblivious of his surroundings and of the passage of time.”34
The same can be said for the athlete. The experience is intrinsically valid, per­
fected, and complete. It is sufficient to itself and needs nothing else. It is felt as
being intrinsically necessary and inevitable, as good as it should be.35 “We
cannot command the peak-experience. It happens to us.”36 There is an
intensity and emotional reaction to the peak-experience that “has a special
flavor of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of humility and surrender.”37 In peak­
experiences that are classified as love experiences or aesthetic experiences, “one
small part of the world is perceived as if it were for the moment all of the
world.”38

The individual in the peak-experience can be viewed ahistorically in that he
is free from the past and the future.39 There is also a sense of uniqueness: “If
people are different from each other in principle, they are more purely
different in the peak-experience.”40 The person in the peak-experience feels
more integrated, more a total being, with a feeling that he is at the peak of his
powers.41 He is more able to fuse with the world: “the creator becomes one
with the work being created . . . the appreciator becomes the music or the
painting or the dance. . . .”42
Erwin Straus developed the gnostic-pathic moment concept in his essay, *The Forms of Spatiality*, which deals primarily with man's perception of space. The gnostic moment may be defined as the object of experience, "the sensation," while the pathic moment may be expressed as the experience, "the sensing." Like Maslow, Straus used these concepts to explain psychological phenomena and again the explanation of these concepts is included in the light of the concepts, *per se*. Although both the gnostic and pathic moments are present in the experience, there is a relative dominance of one over the other. Straus gives the following example: "In touching the pathic is dominant; in looking, the gnostic dominates. 'Looking at' brings every object into the domain of the objective and the general." Touch is the most primordial, direct and pathic of the senses because it allows more feedback and also permits more involvement. Man is a participant in rather than a spectator to what is occurring. It borders on being the subjective, Dionysian and uninhibited doer which as will be noted later, McLuhan calls "cool." The pathic moment is actual inside out lived experience. On the other hand, the gnostic moment is the object of reflection, dissection, and reduction in which man is the Apollonian spectator. The pathic moment is not locatable. Unlike the piano in which you hear it, the string quartet surrounds you to the point where you are almost in the sound. Similarly, the neon sign is the object of attention, specific and locatable, whereas twilight is the more pathic representation of light as it cannot be taken in at one glance.

In *I and Thou*, Buber views the world as a relational event, i.e., there is nothing inherent in the I alone or the world alone to make them significant or meaningful. "All actual life is encounter." His philosophy stresses the two-fold nature of relations as part of every activity or event in man's life. Every relationship, whether it is between man and man, man and nature, or man and object, is either I-It or I-Thou. God is met only as Thou. The kind of relationship which occurs depends on the attitude with which the I enters the relationship. The I-It relationship is typically a subject-object relationship. The I uses these "things" for some specific reason—to compare, to manipulate, to attain some goal. They are means to an end. Sport may be viewed in the It context when it is used for instrumental purposes—to vent aggression, to develop leadership, sportsmanship, or character, or to entertain. In the realm of It, men can see the characteristics of the It. This may be viewed as a detached view of self in which, for example, the body becomes an object. Man stands aside very much in the Apollonian mode to analyze, calculate, and compare.

On the other hand, Buber's second attitude of I-Thou has no bounds. The Thou cannot be bound up and limited by comparing or measuring and Thou cannot be placed in the ordered world of It. Inherent in the nature of the I-Thou relationship is the realization that the encounter cannot be explained or verbalized. Both I and Thou are involved in the relation in a oneness of directedness, mutuality and presence. Without genuine involvement, the meeting does not take place. The presentness, or nowness, of the I-Thou relation is, as Buber says, "the actual and fulfilled present." In the realm of It, man lives in the past and the future, analyzing what has happened and what can be exper-
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enced. With I and Thou there is no past and no future; it “exists only insofar as actual presentness, encounter, and relation exists.”49 The encounter of the I-Thou is not set in a context of space and time.50 The present has no time, it just is.

Marshall McLuhan in his *Understanding Media*51 discusses the concept of various media being hot or cool and he engages in describing, either implicitly or explicitly, many social phenomena in thermal terms. Cool indicates a commitment to and participation in situations involving many of one’s faculties.52 Using this thermal scale, hot implies abstraction and detachment from reality; and objective attempt to look at the world as it appears to be rather than as it is. How-to-do-it becomes more important than the thing being done. A hot medium is one of “high definition,” i.e., the state of being well-filled with data.53 Hot media are high in definition and low in participation.

In contrast, the cool media are high in participation, or completion, by the audience. According to McLuhan, humor is hot because it inclines one to laugh at something rather than getting one emphatically involved in something.54 McLuhan argues that the manner in which the medium is used determines its hotness or coolness. While both radio and the telephone use only the auditory sense, the telephone is “cool” because it is low in definition. Similarly, a Fellini or Bergman movie demands much more involvement of the viewer than does a narrative or a comedy and, therefore, takes on a “cooler” aspect.55 The emphasis in the “cool” medium or the “cool” phenomenon is on involvement, participation, and doing in contrast to the spectator perspective of an activity.

With regard to sport, the concept may be extended to suggest that from the audience perspective, baseball is “hot” and football is “cool.” Baseball is a linear, one-dimensional game in which the spectator watches one player throw, then another hit, another move to field, etc. However, football entails a total action and involvement of all players simultaneously as soon as the ball is snapped. From the participant’s viewpoint, sailing is “cooler” than boating in that the sailor must constantly shift to tend the tiller and sails and must become involved with the physical elements of wind and water as well as the mechanical steering elements. The power boater, however, needs only remain in one spot and has very few adjustments to make either in steering or operation of the boat.

The perfect moment, like the aesthetic experience, can be classified generally as Dionysian in nature. It is a highly affective and intense experience and is considered as a “happening” rather than as a planned occurrence. In this respect it can be likened to the peak-experience and cannot be considered to be cognitively rational. Although the movement sequence in the perfect moment may demand certain decisions, the spontaneity of the situation demands instant action rather than reflection. The reaction stems from the degree of expertise which allows the participant to react to and to transcend rational reflection. This does not preclude cognitive Apollian considerations of technique prior to or following the experience. There is a freedom and spontaneity in the perfect moment in which the participant feels free from external restrictions that may govern or inhibit performance, the most common factors being coaches and crowds. The participant feels free to act and is, as Friedenberg remarked, “loose
but tough.” There is the sense of being on the threshold of greatness. Sartre called it a “real beginning” like the fanfare of trumpets or the first notes of a jazz tune. Dianne Holum commenting on her gold medal performance in the 1500 meter speedskating event at the 1972 Winter Olympics: “I knew I had won; I didn’t know what my time was but coming down the stretch I knew. I felt great, just great. We trained for 2:20 and it was all there, I could feel it.”

Because of its experiential foundation and intense affectivity, the perfect moment is characterized by a high degree of subjectivity. Both the aesthetic and sport experiences have been noted as being highly subjective in nature, but the perfect moment within the sport experience can be considered even more individualistic in that it carries a uniqueness that sets it apart from experiences of others in the same sport and apart from the experiences of the same individual in the same sport given any variation in existing conditions. In short, the perfect moment is not repeatable in its entirety. This is similar to Maslow’s suggestion that people are more purely different in the peak-experience. The poet, painter, dancer, and athlete come to their media with a perception which is unique to themselves. What they do to and with the media can be imitated and perhaps repeated, but what they sense, feel, and experience is not repeatable.

The man truly in the experience is alone with his work and the bond between artist or athlete and the medium can be likened to Buber’s I-Thou concept, Sartre’s first dimension, and Maslow’s peak-experience. Buber talks about a “oneness” with the other which is synonymous with subject-object fusion in the discussion of aestheticians Adams, Lechner, and Dewey. This “oneness” presupposes fulfillment of the involvement criterion in which the “peaker” fuses with the world and becomes “one with the work being created.” Buber maintained that without genuine involvement the meeting does not take place, no bond is formed, and “oneness” is impossible, resulting in an I-It relationship. Parenthetically, what is here called the perfect moment is similar to Buber’s concept of the I-Thou in its nowness, oneness, and ahistorical nature. Although the perfect moment borders on being mystic, it is not, whereas Buber’s I-Thou relationship has religious and mystic overtones. Slusher alludes to sport as a religious experience and it may be feasible to see sport, especially in its perfect moments and within the framework of Buber’s writing, as a religious experience.

VanDenBerg in his discussions of Sartre’s three dimensions of the body, refers to this unity or “oneness” as a transcending or passing over as landscape. In the pathic sense that Straus describes, the object of the experience becomes non-locatable in that involvement and fusion place man with the object in the experience to the extent that there is a unification of entities which, from the performer’s perspective, cannot be viewed apart. Man becomes the thing he is doing. The perfect moment is “supercool” in its demand for high participation and the involvement of man’s total being. It is also essentially low definition in the sense that basic information, i.e., rules, strategies, and techniques, serves as the foundation but man creates the situation and must provide all thought and action to create the medium of self-expression.

Dewey and Adams noted the immediacy of the experience and its ahistorical nature. Maslow’s peak-experience and Buber’s I-Thou relation are
both characterized by a presentness, or "nowness." Similarly, Straus notes that
the pathic moment is an essential feature of primordial experience and that it is
"immediately present and sensually vivid." In short, they all maintain these
"lived" experiences are free from past and future experience. The perfect
moment can be seen to have this same characteristic. This wave at this time is
important. The player is urged to forget his mistakes and think-act as it
comes. Coaches know that any psychological nagging induced by previous per­
formance or looking ahead to the next performance diverts concentration and
involvement and destroys the immediacy of this performance. The perfect
moment exists in the doing and not in what was or will be done. It is free to be
what it is as it occurs.

In this immediacy is an inherent sense of timeless­ness. Like the pathic
moment which is not locatable, the perfect moment cannot be cognitively
timed or bounded by the participant. It becomes too intensely involved and
affective to be limited; it comes and it goes "out" of space and "out" of time.
The perfect moment is not sustained throughout an entire game but occurs
within the time and space of the game or performance situation. It varies in
duration and perhaps may be made most analogous to orgasm during the
sexual experience. In fact, Maslow suggests that perceptions of time and space
during the love experience and the aesthetic experience are similar in that "one
small part of the world is perceived as if it were for the moment all of the
world."61

The perfect moment is complete. It has a harmony, a relationship of parts
that gives it Sartre's feeling of melody. There is nothing left to be done and there
is a sense of wholeness and correctness in its occurrence. This parallels the sense
of unity and "altogetherness" of the aesthetic and peak-experiences. It can be
seen and felt in the rhythm of technique, the execution and timing of teamwork,
and as the perfect integration of desire, intent, and technique. The perfect
moment is the ultimate effort, a "cool" process of high participation and low
definition. It is a process which is an end in itself and which serves no
instrumental function. It may be a struggle, a conquest, or an achievement or it
may be effortless or a second place. In any case, it is the best man can do with
and in the sport experience. The perfect moment is a peak, pathic in perception,
cool to the point of being cold in the McLuhan sense, and the relational bond
of the I-Thou. (It is a happening in the first dimension and, above all, the
perfect moment which the aesthetic experience in and of sport is.)
FOOTNOTES

11Sartre, op. cit.
14Huizinga, op. cit.
16Hein, op. cit., p. 70.
17Metheny, Ch. IV; Lechner, Ch. III.
21Weiss, op. cit., p. 245.
25ibid.
29ibid.
30Metheny, op. cit.
33Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 76.
34ibid., p. 80.
35ibid., p. 81.
36ibid., p. 87.
37ibid.
38ibid., p. 88.
39ibid., p. 108.
40ibid.
41ibid., pp. 104-105.
42ibid., p. 105.
44ibid., p. 14.
TOWARD AN EXPERIENTIAL SPORT AESTHETIC

48 Ibid., p. 63.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 148.
52 Ibid., p. V.
53 Ibid., p. 22.
54 Ibid., p. VI.
55 Ibid.
57 Dianne Holum, NBC Interview with Curt Gowdy, February 8, 1972 from Sapporo, Japan.
58 As noted by Maslow.
59 Slusher, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-172.
60 Van DenBers, *op. cit*.