Post Modern Art in Relation to Sport

Daniel Shorkend

Wizo-Ner Bloomenfeld School of Design, Israel

Abstract: In this article, I develop the implications of the Post Modern "language turn" first for art and then applied to sport. The combined idea of ineffability and meaninglessness seems to pervade art and post-modern sports. There is a sense of heightened body culture in contemporary sports that draws from a philosophical and art-aesthetic her-itage. I then end with a model that suggests the dialectic between art and sport that i believe could be a sub section or parralell the better known relationship, namely that between sport and science or sports science.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Art, Sport, Aesthetics, Meaninglessness, Inclusivity, Dialectic

If one takes as a starting point the post structural shift marked by the "language turn" that meaning is de-centred, de-ferred, mere traces rather than locate the meaning of the word (or image for that matter) as corresponding with a particular referent or interpretation, then culture begins to reflect that in terms of plurality of dis-courses and narra-tives, detotalising, inclusivity and at the same time a relativism, and a lack of core identity. The "language turn" has implications as far as art (theory and practice) is concerned within postmodern culture, namely the duality of, on the one hand, detotalising crea-tive play and ineffability, and/or, on the other hand, a potential sense of meaninglessness. Sport, as one in-stance of postmodern culture, likewise can be viewed via the lens of the "language turn", especially as it, like art, is not necessarily an "authentic" expression, a natural and innocent game (an original point), but is embedded in a culture where commodification, consumerism and idealistic image-construction is the order of the day. Nevertheless, sport may offer much in the way of articu-lating bonds between people over-and-above native tongue. Consequently, as with art, one may discern the place of sport in postmodern culture as engendering the dual aspects of 1) ineffability and/or 2) meaninglessness. I shall explicate these concerns below using specific sports to make things clearer and take as an axiom that art whose handmaiden is often philosophy also exhibits these features or more precisely because it does it is no surprise that other cultural expressions do so likewise.

1. Postmodern art

The "language turn" and Derrida's postulate of the "other" of language, means that the postmodern paradigm un-der-mines notions of the "grand narrative" or a me-ta-narrative. In this light Connor (1992:120) writes: "Postmodernism rejects foundationalism, essentialism and transcendentalism…truth as correspondence and representational knowledge…they reject realism, final vocabulary and canonical descriptions". Thus, this deto-talising means that what is significant about art and in-deed the very reason art serves a useful function that need not be reinterpreted and translated "back" and "into" language, is precisely because of a quality that cannot be articulated, namely its ineffability. In this respect one can also speak art as eliciting metaphorical language (1). In addition, there is a certain freedom and "play" (2) that this "spatial other" allows, in a sense, that signs and symbols now function within a framework that is not centred in a definitive language or a system of "given signification" or as a description of an already theorized "reality". Finally, the "play" (struggle) of language and its "other" means that postmodern art and culture seek to restore imbalances, rather than the valorisation of one term to the exclusion of another, and so seek the "voice" of the silenced "other" and an agenda of inclusivity (3). These three notions will be developed below as aspects of the "other" or in verbal terms, the ineffable.

2. Methods and results

2.1 The ineffable

Language itself gives rise to the non-lingual and the "other" of effability. Art's ineffability can be understood by the concepts of metaphor, freedom and "play", and inclusiveness, insofar as metaphor is a subtler way of not saying what something is; freedom and "play" is a creative way of not settling for hard and fast finality, and inclusiveness implies a common bond, but without the humanist, discursiveness to sanction it – rather it is an ineffable quality that brings differences together. I shall develop each of these implications of the "language turn" for art and culture in what follows.

2.2 Metaphor

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

meaning…", this may point to the instability of circumscribing the signifier within a definite language game.

Another way to perceive the metaphorical play of images and/or words is to recognize the difference that analytical philosophers draw between different senses of the word "is" or as in mimetic resemblance. On the one hand, "is" means identity as in X "is" Y, that X and Y are necessarily the same entity. On the other hand, "is" specifies that X and Y are not identical but contained within the same set, so that they share in Wittgenstein's terms, a "family re-semblance". Metaphor belongs to that second category in as much as one is not equating two seemingly disparate concepts, but rather suggesting a confluence, a similarity, while they remain distinct entities. For example, to draw a likeness between a painted tree and the notion of, for example, a life generating principle is not to say that the latter concept "is" the tree in terms of identity, but merely pointing to a shared aspect of both such concepts. This renders the metaphoric play of art akin to a type of "fuzzy logic"[] and "paraconsistent logic"[] and Gödel's "un-decidability"[] that coheres with my task of demonstrating parallels and confluences between art and sport and thus constructing an interplay - or a blurring of boundaries - between the two. If metaphor does function in this way, we may say that art is an activity that can forge new meanings and connections. Thus, although one may not be able to say what the precise meaning of an artwork is, and an artwork is not just a discursive idea, it is emotive, imaginative, instinctive, aesthetic…one can offer another metaphor to engage with the art form. This kind of ineffability prompted Potgieter (2007:56) to remark: "All meaning is a metaphoric interpretation of a metaphoric interpretation". In other words, though postmodernism has discredited the correspondence thesis as applied to the image and/or the word, this does not necessarily foreclose on meaning, and here I suggest this meaning is in that art may evoke a kind of metaphorical "play". Kearney (1988:358) states that postmodernism may "be the twilight of great art or the clearance of a space where alternative modes of communication may evolve". In this sense, Lyotard's paralogy (1984) comes to mind as metaphor may induce a constant changing of the rules of the game so as to inspire new games and ignite a metaphorical subtlety.

2.3 Freedom and "play"

Having acknowledged the role of the metaphor, one

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

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

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

Part of this freedom and "play" is in the elision be-tween art and "everyday" life. Danto does not seem to distin-guish between art from a "mere real thing". Thus, the ideal forms of "Plato's beds" for example, wherein the artis-tic version is a second or third-order copy of the ideal concept was ruptured when Rauschenberg, Olden-burg and Segal included real beds, for example, within the artistic framework. With Warhol's Brillo Box (1960) this goes further to the extent that the meaning of art could not be given via examples or via perception. Dan-to believes his idea, namely that you cannot easily dis-tinguish between art and the "everyday", brings art-making and art history to an end[]. The result: art can take any conceivable trajectory, and this allows a certain freedom and "play", or at least an "imitation of dead styles" (Danto 1995:65), where art no longer has tran-scendental value but "historical as opposed to eternal significance" (Reez & Borzello 1986:70). It is precisely in the elision of art and "everyday" life that this histori-cization comes to the fore, as works of art are treated as special sorts of signifiers, neither more nor less than any other tightly defined and highly institutionalized form of image, such as the advertising poster, the product label or the technical book illustration. In this sense, art's free-dom consists in the "play" of the endless possibilities of "surfaces" with no distinction apportioned to the a priori status of the work of art drawn from fine art as opposed to "kitsch" and the "everyday".

2.4 Inclusivity and diversity

Having acknowledged "play" as the consequence of a certain chaos and instability or lack of definition as far as art is concerned and because language is open ended,

one can deduce that it is the very inclusivity implied by the "language turn" and the constant hankering over an "other" that is not to be forgotten. One may posit that the notion of difference in language at the same time allows for the inclusion of otherwise oppressed and silent voices. In this respect, art theory and practice are well appointed to address these imbalances.

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

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

Furthermore, the "decentring" of the word and/or the image means that many a sign may be linked to another and even in that relationship other linkages can be made so that an "other" is forever generated as the text expands. In this way, art is a powerful tool to create intersubjective, interdisciplinary cross-overs and hybrids. It would be misguided to call this intertextual "space" a unity of differences, for one cannot perceive the totality and thus grasp it as a unity. At best one may say that art is inclusivity compounded of differences. One might then regard this call to mistrust unities and totalizing as democratizing and detotalizing culture. This requires the undoing of hierarchical systems. In this sense rather than a "grand narrative", one emphasizes seeming minor narratives. As Sim (1992:402) puts it there is a "Multiplicity of little narratives, all of which have their own integrity and sense of importance, but none of which can be considered to take precedence over any of the others. Grand narrative is held to dominate and suppress little narratives and is therefore to be resisted". Another more direct way of saying this is the observation that the valorisation through art of the Western, first-world, male, Euro-American "fine" art is a myth and that it cannot claim to have universal validity but is itself a Western construction. In this sense, the postmodern "language turn", with its emphasis of endless differences becomes a self-reflexive activity of not only maintaining a sense of identity but realizing that one's identity and art is a) part of "others" and vice versa and b) has no moral high ground. If a) and b) are maintained within artistic circles and beyond, this would lead to an inclusive and diverse life-praxis and aesthetic sensibility.

2.5 Meaninglessness

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

If knowledge and experience are language-bound, and language itself is an unreliable creation, does this not

mean meaninglessness? Are we entering a world in which all hierarchical distinctions are literally exhausted and lacking in authority, and in which no form of experience can be regarded as less, or more, valuable than another? A world in which we can identify no qualitative distinction between rap and Beethoven, Tretchikoff and Manet, Wilbur Smith and James Joyce? If there are no external points, no positive terms, to serve as final authorities in the hierarchical evaluation of knowledge, experiences and values, does this mean that all things are equal and that nothing then has particular value?

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

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

2.5.1 Metaphor means we cannot really know

The idea that an image is no longer authentic expression (Kearney 1988:3), as the individual, and the image, is already part of a language structure that denies the self as present, notwithstanding the power of the image, implies that the veneer of "metaphor" is just another way of saying that the artwork does not mean anything, for meaning is forever deferred. Potgieter (2007), though not necessarily in agreement with the following possible implication of the "language turn" on art, observes that: "Representations of representations, works of art which lose authenticity as a consequence of being mass produced, photographs of photographs, reflections of reflections, parody upon parody, the end of originality and the end of modernity's search for the "real" inner structure of art ... ." In other words, if the nature of metaphor is to say X is like Y, and Y like X or Z and so on, one is caught in the "non-presence" of the post structural web of language. That is, if an artwork functions metaphorically, it means one cannot pin down a definite meaning and that while these "kindred associations" (Kant's phrase [1952 {1790}]) may be creative, at no point can

one claim final knowledge about the work of art[5]. This may be liberating as argued above, but it may also be debilitating for if "anything goes" then boundaries are eroded. Consequently, there may be no logical distinction between a casino and an art museum as an institution of art!

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

is meaningless.

2.5.2 Freedom and "play" may mean there is no "inner" substance

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

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

Potgieter (2008) writes that the postmodern condition may lead to a kind of panicky schizophrenia (recalling Deleuze and Guattari) for as signifiers and signified no longer match there is nothing absolute. The "play of surfaces" is the order of the day and change is but cosmetic. And cosmetic indeed! For in a world of cloning, cyber disembodiment, mass media images, the digital world and so on, experience, perception and identity are constructed without re-course to "truth". This can be construed as the "free play of the network of signs" (Hans 1980:307) rather than human agency, a cause ascribed to the "inner self". Baudrillard echoes this idea of the subject being trapped in a network of decentred signs in the sense that within the postmodern condition one cannot make the distinction be-tween "reality" and simulations thereof. These simulacra or simulations (Baudrillard 1988) are not simply false as opposed to the real; a distinction that one cannot make for the simulation absorbs the real itself (Poster 1988:6); "reality" is hyperreality. Thus "play" of signification becomes another word for hyperreality, a kind of chaos drawing from the "language turn", in which there is no centre. Without a centre, there is an infinity of "surfaces", and

that which appears "deep" is but another sign that constitutes the language system. Therefore, considered thus, art no longer has claims to ontological truth. The seeming freedom of the hyperreal and the resorting to "play" in art may thus amount to very little.

2.5.3 Inclusivity may mean the lack of discernment

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

This kind of chaos means that ethically one is not enjoined to act in a specific way. While this may mean a certain liberation, it also equates to a lack of discernment

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

It is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis to interrogate how contemporary art may instantiate the theories above – how current art is ineffable, resisting theory; diverse, resisting categorization and subversive, precluding definite ways to experience it. What I would, however, like to mention that much art today that makes direct use of the body (as opposed to indirect figure painting, for example, that is representing bodies) makes a case for arts (worldwide) proximity to activities such as sport. So, we find skin pierced and live bodies hanging from hooks (for example Stelarc's work), sub-cultural body piercing and tattoos; naked-bodies around an art performance; odd water-falls (as for example Olafur Eliasson's work) interspersed at key venues in New York; cloud simulation machines that give off peculiar aromas such as Cai Zhisong's "sculptures" (and other multi-sensory installations); digital bodily extensions and robotics (again Stelarc is an example of this trend) and improvisational dance performances (or the choreographed world-wide flash mob art happenings at designated social arenas). These interventions suggest a counter movement away from conceptual art, from art as idea towards a sensory-perceptual awareness (aesthesis), ameliorative strategies such that knowledge is sought through the body, rather than alienated from the very

tools that provide for knowledge in the first place. In this sense one might describe much contemporary art and "sub-cultural" practices as well as new age "art for living" (such as yoga, alternative medicine and tai chi) as well as sport practiced without hierarchy, in much the same way that art of the past may have included the mechanical arts and in Ancient Greece the gymnasium and the arts worked in tandem. But beyond suggesting a certain way of life or rather a practical, tangible kind of knowing and the subverting or blurring of hierarchical distinctions, one can discern that much current art on offer is extreme, such as bodies inserted with hooks and hanging in the gallery or other venues and this can easily be linked to the death-defying current trend commonly known as extreme sports which I briefly analyse further on in this chapter.

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

and postmodern aesthetics the "body is meant to help people reflect, explore and question" (Xian 2015:158).

Many sociologists feel that there is a rise in body culture (Ryynanen 2015) and I conjecture that somo – the living body – captures this sentiment. I would argue it is precisely sport as an aesthetic, cultural phenomenon that exemplifies this. Moreover, it is precisely the agitated, extreme shock value invoked which counter much art of the past that determines an "extreme body" – again reflected in sport in various degrees. er body building, the elite swimmer's physique, the athlete, the wrestler – these "body types" are a certain reconfiguration of the body to ac-tualise what the mind wills, and is integral to a society where adaption, replication, subjectivity, enhancements and extending beyond to achieve records or maintain a body with a specific function. Thus, one may say that arts' representation of the body and in more recent artistic practice, the direct use of the body is such that some art forms parallel the enormous popularity and the pushing beyond the limits evident in competitive sport. Even at a level where art and sport are more about play rather than fierce competition, for the viewer, one can make the argument that with the sophistication of digital technology, the body has become stretched (stretched skin…) navigating in uncharted realms, giving us "eyes" and "ears" and "touch" beyond our immediate surroundings (as sport, for example is broadcast via satellite world-wide) and art is said to be pervasive so that play, aesthetics and "body-consciousness" appears to be the order of the day. Whether this is wholly positive is debatable.[6] One point, however, is that taken to extreme levels of distortion, intensely abstract (digitisation) and aesthetic play without a coherent system, may be damaging. It is in this light that even as I argue that sport is art-like, this does not entail a necessary good. It is in this respect that som-aesthetic with its emphasis on "healthy living" and a possible return to beauty without notions of autonomy in art and unchanging truths − at least in the fixation on imagery − may redeem the situation. The moving body in sport, the body in flux and motion, the body reaching for a certain goal, the ephemerality of our games suggest, on a philosophical level, that it is the living body, not the static image that may lead towards healthy living. In these respects, sport in turn offers art an image of beauty without an image! This is similar to the non-presence of the sign postulated by the "language turn".

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

3. Discussion
3.1 Postmodern sport: Ineffability

If the "other" of language is the body in relation to the mind, then the latter's employment of reason is given sensual expression via the body. The body then is not simply an embodiment of mind, but has itself a reason, or a logic grounded in biological processes. While one can understand these processes to an extent, bodily-"play" is also trans-rational. Therefore, sport, that is bodily- "play" is ineffable. This is particularly true in a postmodern context, where the number of sports/games increasingly "side-step" being quantified. Examples in this respect are NAS-CAR racing and extreme sports which I have chosen to look at briefly as instances of the ineffability of contemporary sport. Thereafter I argue for a "poetic imagination" derived from Kearney (1988) and apply this reading to sport generally with the intention that the "bridging capital" of sports constitutes a "rational" that is ineffable.

Macgregor (2002) argues that NASCAR is the quintessential postmodern sport. In postmodern society, everything is transformed into a saleable commodity and therefore NASCAR is the "…central postmodern metaphor: racing ever faster in circles, chasing a buck" (Macgregor 2002:2). The ineffability is in the latent postmodern overtones. That is, in the "racing ever faster in circles" there is a form of "play" that seems to go no-where and yet may be captivating in that kind of ineffable redundancy.

Ironically this "ineffable redundancy" can be seen

to be aligned with commercialism. Commercialism is so openly and honestly embraced and celebrated so that "NASCAR is an immanent semiotic system critically isomorphic with Post Modern society" (Macgregor 2002:2). Fans can drive the brand of car driven by their favourite drivers. Post-modern life is often characterized by a desire to participate in such image-dominate experiences. Furthermore, the narrative of NASCAR's colourful background means much to the sport. NAS-CAR could hope for nothing more during its current success than to be identified with the authenticity of the newly virtuous, rural South so that myth and profits go together. In the identification with the car of one's choice and the combining of rural mythology with profits, the ineffable is that which is both a contemporary fixation with the high-tech and the mythologized past.

In terms of a "mythologized past" postmodern sports such as NASCAR provide validating myths that rival those of the religious spheres. Postmodern athletes reconstitute the mysterious (the ineffable) into a mystic sphere of their own making. Earnhardt, a famous NAS-CAR driver, "did not perform to honour G-d; his performances were evident in themselves that he was G-d." (Macgregor 2002:9). The number "3", for example, which may have religious con-notations, is emblazoned on the driver's jacket and one could argue that it acts as a semiotic premise so that "signifiers become abstracted from the signified" (Gartman in Macgregor 2002:17). The "3" is a consuming image, and as such exemplifies the postmodern vision where the ability to reproduce the disembodied appearance of things portends a vast market in images. More importantly, the market value of the image gets magnified, or synonymously, made spectacular, through the process of mass production and distribution. With Earnhardt as with other elements of postmodern culture sacralising articulations are used to distance the text from its superficial status as a commercial product. In this sense, the ineffable is maintained even as consumerism takes root.

To analyse the matter further, namely the ineffability of NASCAR, one should note that pre-modern sports were at-tached to the "realm of the transcendent" (Gurtmann in Macgregor 2002:26). Offering contests to the gods could be a way to appease them. Athletic festivals were forms of worship (for example, Ancient Greece). Modern sports, by contrast, were played for their own sake or for some other secular end (for exam-

ple the nationalism of fascist Germany of the 1936 Berlin Olympics). They are intrinsically inimical to spiritual and mysterious encoun-ters. Postmodern sports such as NASCAR, however, enter the realm of the immanent (Macgregor 2002:17). In postmodern terms, immanence "refers, without religious echo, to the growing capacity to generalize itself through symbols" (Hassan in Mac-gregor 2002:18). In postmodernity languages (symbols) extend our senses, recasting na-ture into signs of their own making. Nature emerges as culture, and culture turns into an immanent semiotic system (adapted from Macgregor 2002:17). Macgregor (2002:19) concludes: "NASCAR isn't just a postmodern sport. It is an imma-nent semiotic system". This semiotic system in question plays off the ineffable with the fetish of objectification or commercialism. One says it is ineffable for the fan may live a more "authentic" life through the racing car hero and the hero himself is said to be more himself ("authen-tic") when he is racing. In other words: the fan can have a more heroic image of the self which he or she may identify as "true" (authentic) and the sports hero may only truly feel himself or herself when engaged in his or her chosen sport.

Another sport which reveals a certain ineffability is that of extreme sports, an alternative ("other") to tradi-tional sports. Redei (2002) argues that a common feature of post-industrial societies, as symptoms of postmodern life is individ-ualism, post materialism and alienation (between natural and artificial environments). Redei (2002) makes the point that people engage in extreme sports to escape the mundane, the monotonous, habit and routine, in contrast to over-regulated, competition-based and masculine dominated traditional sports. In this way the extreme sportsperson demonstrates his or her differ-ence from mainstream society (an "other" of mainstream sports). But more than that, the prime motivation for such engagement is to accomplish a sense of aliveness and emotional satisfaction which may be described as an attempt to do something in which an ineffable experience is made possible. To put it in other terms: extreme sports are a means whereby one tries to "grasp" life itself so that the ineffable mystery of one's own life is brought into sharp focus which can then reinvigorate the more controlled aspects of one's "normal" existence.

Extreme sports often defy the traditional assump-tions about sport, namely spectatorship and commercial-ism, so that the individual or group may take risks with-

out public awareness. These risks may be extremely dangerous, thus denying the simple polarity between "reality" and the imagined, safe world of sport or between the seriousness of life and the game that is sport. As such, extreme sports defy objectification and marketability and in the search for an ineffable experience, breaks the usual codes separating life from sport (art). This is taken further in the recent book by Kidder (2018) where he explores the risk-taking sport of Parkour in postmodern culture, where run-ning, jumping, climbing, vaulting and flipping through city streetscapes assumes great interest to passers-by and is extremely dangerous. It also is a highly popular utube phenomenon, a particularly postmodern expression.

From the two examples above, it becomes evident that the sign-language of certain sports, whether embracing commercialism or not, is essentially about wanting an "authentic" experience, or in other words: a sense of the ineffable. Another way of arguing for the ineffable is by making the notion of "poetic imagination" as defined by Kearney (1988), apply to a reading of sport, whereby the ineffable of sport is a function of the capacity to feel for the "other".

Kearney (1988:368) writes: the logic of the imaginary is one of both/and rather than either/or. It is inclusive, and by extension, tolerant: it allows opposites to stand, irreconcilables to co-exist, refusing to deny the claim of one for the sake of its contrary, to sacrifice the strange on the alter of self-identity. Later he writes (1988:369): The language of the unconscious, expressed at the level of the imaginary and the symbolic, is the portal to poetry. Poetry is to be understood here as the extended sense of play of poesies; a creative letting go of the drive for possession, of the calculus of means and ends. It allows the rose – in the words of the mystic Silesius – to exist without the why. Poetics is the carnival of possibilities where everything is permitted, neither censored. It is the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person's skin ...".

Applied to postmodern sport one may argue that Kearney's "sublime intimation of alterity", of imagination, may en-hance a sense of global unity. Markovitz and Rensmann (2010:2) observe that "hegemonic sport, as part of popular culture, play a crucial role in shaping more inclusive collective identities and a cosmopolitan outlook open to complex allegiances". In watching the "best of the best" it may enhance acceptance of an oth-

erwise possibly disliked "other" which Markowitz and Rensmann dub "bridging capital". Sports thus may have the power to cut across all national and cultural boundaries and transform identities. Markowitz and Rensmann (2010) even argue that postmodern sports have the power to topple political powers "from below". Thus far from viewing sports as the opiate of the masses, they write: "we regard their contemporary global presence as antinomian forces that challenge encrusted sources of domination" (Markowitz & Rensmann 2010:30). Thus, postmodern sports may oppose fundamentalism (without itself being fundamentalist or intolerant). Because sports rules are arbitrary, they can be said to be value neutral and therefore readily accepted and understood across cultures, nations, communities and classes, bringing together "human collectives that often do not want to understand each other otherwise" (Markowitz & Rensmann 2010:30). One may thus assert that the artistic postmodern "turn" wherein a utopian world view is opposed on the grounds of its simplistic universalism and flawed reasoning, may allow a space for the embracing of a shared humanity through sports, without a metaphysical, epistemological or moral edifice to be adhered to. However, this lack of structure may tend to the meaningless, the subject of the following section.

3.2 Postmodern sport: Meaninglessness

The postmodern language "turn" means that all signs operate together but that their structure is complex and shifting. In this regard, distinctions become blurred and this may result in a decentred self and by extension, sporting body (for example distinctions between the "authentic, natural self" and self-expression in say, sport).

Butryn (2003) writes that there are tensions within many world-class athletes between modernist notions of the "natu-ral" body and postmodern conceptualization of corporeality. By this he means that in postmodern terms our "hu-manness" has been altered by intimate, available and seemingly unavoidable engagements with technology, and therefore that humans should be reconceptualized as posthumans, or cyborgs. As such the boundaries between humans, animals and machines are tenuous. Identities are thus constructed and reconstructed through hu-man-technology interfaces. The "21st century self is no longer characterized by a singular identity, but an assort-ment of politicized and fractured cyborg 'selves'," writes Butryn (2003:17-18). He says this as in identify-

ing the original "I" whose performance we want to enhance, may be difficult. There is no clear separation between the natural and the artificial, whether technological innovation, at a certain point, pollutes and takes away a certain "authenticity" or whether, as in modernist instrumentalism, technology is seen as value-free and neutral. In the lat-ter sense, technological progress is deemed to be societal progress, a liberation from time immemorial, and opti-mistic. This latter conception is particularly relevant in a postmodern context of scientific "progress" but at the same time may render meaningless "the athlete", the "I" that performs at a high level precisely because his or her identity and humanness is called into question.

As early as 1964, Ellul , for example, argues that sport is a total "extension of the technical spirit" (in Butryn 2003:34) and that the emphasis on quantification and efficiency which manifests itself in the performance ethos of elite sport precludes non-instrumental sporting practice (the enjoyment of sports for the innocent and natural enjoyment and spiritual growth) or the kind of poetic imagination that Kearney (1988) appeared to argue for as elucidated above. Eichberg (in Butryn 2003:32) noted that historical trends towards technologization has often been accompanied by 'green' movements and it remains to be seen whether track and field, and elite sport in general, witness a concerted back-lash against increasing cyborgification, and concludes quite ominously that "given the prospects of genetically enhanced competitors, robot competitions, and virtual reality sport, the infinite and fractured images of the cyborg will be highly relevant, if not vital, to those working within sport sociology and sport studies in general" (Butryn 2003:36). In this sense, sports at the high-end level may be rendered a kind of meaningless, anti-human and commercial cultural form.

Another aspect of the meaninglessness of sport derives from its ideologically, relativistic nature. By this I mean that if we should say that say Roger Bannister was the first four-minute miler who achieved this accolade on 6th May 1954, one may note that this "fact" is not so "innocent", so "authentic". If one is politically correct, we may call the choice to focus on his success as opposed to the many "black" record-breakers of shorter distances at the time, racially biased. Furthermore, the date is not objective. It follows the Gregorian calendar by year, the month by the Roman goddess Maia

which is a Eurocentric dating system, one not subscribed to universally; while one mile is the British unit of spatial measurement derived from the "Roman lineal measure of a thousand paces" (Oxford English dictionary) which is a traditionalist rejection of the rationalism represented by the metric system. So that one may question the meaning of "recorded" sports history at least as an ideological (political, religious…) bias, rendering facts somewhat meaningless.

Another side of this "meaninglessness" may be gleaned from the commercialism of sport and thus the "inauthenticity", the lack of innocence of sport. We live in a world saturated with sports imagery. Wallis (1984:80-82) writes that the "death of the author" (Borges) and that meaning is in the interpretation of the viewer/reader (Acker) for the com-pletion of the artwork or texts (Crimp, Owens) as opposed to the special world/value and time of the art-object and artist (Krauss) – lends itself to the proliferation of images of sports. This is so as with the denial of the sacredness of art, the "intrusion" of images from the mass media, that of sport becomes the new means with which to assert the celebration of the body, of global culture and a discourse that is understood (or enjoyed) by the majority. As Wallis (1984: xviii) writes: "Our society, supersaturated with information and images, not only has no need for individuality, it no longer owns such a concept". Sports image after image confirms the desire to obliterate the subject, like the Greek Khouri, copies after copies and so the modernist valorised polarity, that is the "original", is played down. Rather, the surface, the bodily, the machine, the repetitiveness is given its due which can be said to find "a parallel" with Warhol's emphasis on surfaces, repetitiveness, art as business and shallowness. Thus, the abundance of sport and the abundance of images around sports, minimizes the meaning that can be found in sport (consider a once off marble sculpture of a great athlete as opposed to innumerable photographs of the same athlete in a newspaper).

Thus, sport is fated with what Baudrillard (1988) described as objects dominating subjects divesting them of human qualities and capacities, their sign-value masks seeming control and individuality. Modern societies are organized around production and the consumption of commodities while the postmodern is concerned with simulation and the play of images and signs. Postmodernism is about "dedifferentiation", implosion, and hy-

perrealism. In terms of the latter, we might say that entertainment, information and communication technologies elevate sports experience as more than the quotidian. Sports events can be experienced as more real than real and may even influence thought and behaviour. In the ensuing "ecstasy of communication" (Baudrillard 1988:25), "the subject becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and reabsorption surface of the influent networks" (Baudrillard 1988:27), thus the participant and spectator alike experience a sort of non-self while engaged in sports. It is the spectacle itself, the hype itself which leads to such feelings; a feeling, I would argue that is without "centre". It can be described as vacuous, meaningless. Yet, our culture keeps adding to these empty experiences, sports event after sports event where the climax of a victory (or defeat) never quite satisfies so that the next season or match or tournament beckons in a meaningless circle going no-where.

The "individual", influenced by the media, technology, and the hyper-real (match after match …) produces what Baudrillard (1988) described as a "narcoticized", "mesmerized" media-saturated consciousness wherein there is no "reality", only mirrors, no depth or essence. The cultural tide seems to be a seeking after the spectacle rather than meaning and this is nowhere more evident than in the sports event. One may, nevertheless, impute the beautiful to the sports spectacle, a kind of aesthetics of the "kitsch" or the aesthetics of the everyday, which is to "elevate" sports to the category of the "beautiful". One can find "parallels "in art and see pop art as a kind of aesthetic precursor in this regard; so too the prominence of the body in Fluxus, as with the dissolution of the "thing itself" and art in the form of the "ready-made". From such examples, sport becomes an exemplar of the mass (re)produced, the "kitsch" and the aesthetically hybrid. Even conceptual art is influential here as it opposes the "will to form", with a non-sensory experience perhaps akin to the disembodied experience of watching sports as the self is dissolved in the abstract form projected onto the television screen or even in live sports, as the imaginative, patterned construct that is the game with its rules, geometric structures and fantasy take hold. In this way, the body is rendered a cultural and symbolic "entity". In this light, one is pressed to call sport any more a real reflection of "reality" than art and therefore in eroding the boundary between art and sport, in what sense then is a sportsperson an athlete or ac-

tor/ress. This lack of clarity could be a lack of meaningful content for in what sense then is "an athlete" real!

This lack of a "reality" means that to say that postmodern sport is only a matter of celebration and sensual creativity or its ineffability, is only half the story. The body can also be seen as a contested region of the personal and the political as Foucault warns: "The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1976:25). Through discipline (the productive and subjected body) and control for economic use, the body is maintained by the production and circulation of discourse. For example, there is the perennial patriarchal disciplinary power that pervades sporting culture. Furthermore, this is fuelled by the working on the seeming individualism of "desire", via the mass media so that sport and the body offer icons of youth, health, beauty, excitement and personal "freedom". All this really is an inundation of consumerism which, I would argue, is as a direct consequence of sporting practice. I believe that this consumerism is insidious to the extent of rendering "authentic" sport verging on the meaningless.

4. Conclusion

4.1 How does this comparison result in an enriching dialectic?

Having argued that both art and sport in contemporary culture reflect both positive and negative aspects, one can ask the question whether this results in an enriching dialectic. In this respect, one can imagine a model to define a rela-tionship between art (theory and practice) and sport (theory and practice) derived from the postmodern "language turn" that tends towards the infinite, though with finite pockets of "knowledge" ([human] understanding[), rather than this detotalizing as potentially, on the other hand at least, as signifying meaninglessness. In this sense, an en-riching dialectic between art and sport is set in motion.

4.1.1 A deduction: A model of the ence between art and sport derived from the postmodern "language turn"

Figure v shows a relationship between art, sport and the "language turn". All "three elements" are circumscribed as one text. But to be true to Derrida that text has an "other" beyond it and it too is circumscribed by a larger text. Together the first text and the "other text" are

circumscribed by "language" which becomes itself another "text" and so the sequence continues indefinitely. Now, "stemming from" the "other" (text) is the duality of art theory and art practice ("practice" being the "other" of "theory" or vice versa). And in accord with this thesis, there is some relationship or comparison to be made between art and sport so that from art theory is "extended" sport theory and from art practice is "extended" sport practice (sport "theory" is the "other" of sport "practice" or vice versa).

But it is not as simple as that: Art practice could be the "other" of sport practice and vice versa or art theory could be seen as the "other" of sport theory and vice versa. Furthermore: art practice could be the "other" of sport theory and vice versa and sport practice as the "other" of art theory and vice versa. All this is indicated on the model and has been given some "depth" in the comparative analysis of the confluences between art and sport. We shall now have to define how that dialectic is enriching?

It is precisely because there is such a dialectic that continues to iterate itself that we may speak of creativity, that it can elicit new meanings (even if one such meaning is that it is meaningless). The fact that this dialectic cannot hold to absolutes, to an "ultimate reality" and the like, does not mean everything is reduced to the same valueless muck. If this model holds some semblance of approximate accuracy, then it acknowledges that, since the "self", the word or image or movement is decentred, that culture (art or sport) makes us as much as we make it. As Degenaar (1986:108) puts it: "man is a meaning-giver who cannot disengage the meaning he creates from the process which brings it forth".

I am aware that the model is an impossibility for the "process" is moving and changing so that "circles", "arrows", la-bels and the reading of it as if sequential, hierarchical (art "before" sport) is off the mark. There is no beginning point to this dialectic. What one can say is that it involves duality, rather than monism so that meaning (or the lack of), based on the conception of the "language turn" with its notion of "difference", is a result of the "play" of one thing "as opposed" to another. This duality allows for a range of possibilities like the decimals between integers. In this respect art and sport as two different signs (tending to one integer or the other) can be said to exhibit similarities. With that insight, the common postmodern duality of ineffability and mean-

inglessness within a postmodern context might emerge. At the very least it should yield a measure of understanding concerning the overlap between art and sport arguably as a result of post structural theory. In this way one might envisage an inter or transdisciplinary venture and a riposte to talk of an "essence" or "purity" of definition and functions as pertains to art and sport.
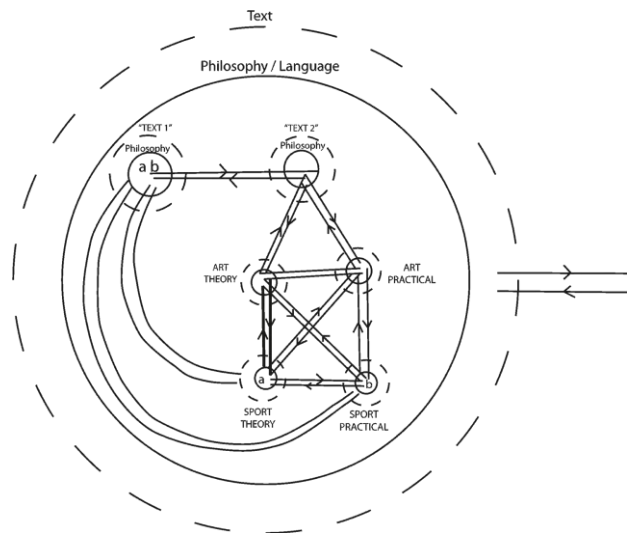
References

1. Baudrillard, J. 1983. The ecstasy of communication. In postmodern culture. Foster, H (ed). Translated by J. Johnston. Port: Bay, pp 126-134.
2. Baudrillard, J. 1988. America. London: Polity.
3. Baudrillard, J. 1994. Simulacra and simulation. Michigan: Ann Arbor (University of Michigan Press).
4. Baudrillard, J. 2000. The vital illusion. New York: Columbia University Press.
5. Butryn, T. 2003. Posthuman podiums: cyborg narratives of elite track and field athletes. Sociology of Sport Journal 20 (11):17−39.
6. Degenaar, J.J. 1986. Art and the meaning of life. Published paper. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education & Extra-mural Studies of the University of Cape Town, 39−46.
7. Degenaar, J.J. 1993. Art and culture in a changing South Africa. S.A. Journal of philosophy 12(3):51−56.
8. Foucault, M. 1976. This is not a pipe. Translated by J. Harkness. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
9. Kearney, R. 1988. The wake of the imagination:

ideas on creativity in western culture.
London: Hutchinson.

10. Kidder, J.L. 2018. Parkour and the city. Rutgers University Press.

11. Macgregor, J. 2002. Dale Earnhardt and NASCAR nation. Sports Illustrated (July 1).

12. Markowitz, T. & Rensmann, L. 2010. Gaming the world. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

13. Redei, C. 2007. Motivations for participating in lifestyle sports. Lucrari Stiintifice, Seria 1, XI:76−89

14. Wallis, B (ed). 1984. Art after modernism: rethinking representations. Boston: David R. Godine.