

# Investigating the Interrelationships Between Sport and the Arts

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## The Fields of Vision Sport/Arts Initiative

This special issue is one of the outputs arising from the *Fields of Vision* initiative. Previously there have been a number of seminars around the UK, a conference and subsequent publication of papers (Sandle et al. 2013), a manifesto<sup>1</sup>, several exhibitions, a film screening and even a revue.

*Fields of Vision* started because its founders identified their shared interest in both sport and the arts even though they are thought of so separately in the fields of education, philosophy, research, policy and provision, and people excelling in one are not expected to excel, or even show interest, in the other. Transgressive exceptions are remarkable because they are exceptions. One of the first goals for *Fields of Vision* was to locate other transgressors and bring together practitioners and policy makers in dialogue with scholars and researchers to create a shared understanding of the benefits of co-operation. The resultant network examined the potential economic, social and cultural benefits from bringing together sport and the arts, and has sought to foster interdisciplinary work by scholars and researchers and collaborations with practitioners and policymakers. Now, of course, sport and the arts, like other leisure and social practices, may be used to exercise social control. Both worlds are social constructions contributing to hegemonic relationships. For example, Doyle (2009, 4) observes:

It is tempting to think that Art and Sport sleep in separate beds ... we tend to imagine these worlds as separate spheres, in which sport is fully masculine, and art is coded socially as effeminate.

However, we contend that at the very least they represent sites of resistance as well as repression.

We started from the proposition that there are links between the arts and sport which can help to increase participation in each and promote cultural citizenship. Some social groups with lower income and educational levels are often put off by the air of exclusivity and high 'cultural capital' requirements of traditional arts activities. Equally, it seemed plausible that the arts could play a role in changing the sporting experience and widening audiences for sport by communicating alternative messages about what sport is. We also wanted to explore the collaborations between sport and the arts which can stimulate cultural experimentation and take a fresh look at the aesthetics of sport, as well as look at the potential benefits to physical and mental wellbeing of greater collaboration, which might address problems generated by modern lifestyles.

## Different Worlds Coming Together

The cover of the earlier collection of papers (Sandle et al. 2013) features an artwork by Jason Minsky, who, in 2007, was artist in residence to Leeds Rugby and Headingley Carnegie Stadium, home of the rugby league team, Leeds Rhinos, the rugby union team Yorkshire Carnegie and also Yorkshire Cricket. Using a variety of media and processes he endeavoured to capture the life of a stadium that hosts three different sports on its adjacent international standard rugby and cricket pitches, and the presence of a double sided stand. For example, his large photomontage diptych, 'Over the Garden Fence' features both close-up and distant views of a perplexed captain of Leeds Rhinos (the rugby league team) standing on the rugby pitch, rubbing his head and holding up a cricket ball. The other panel shows the captain of the Yorkshire County Cricket team standing on the

adjoining cricket pitch bemusedly holding a rugby ball. He thereby evokes childhood memories of back street games and 'please can we have our ball back'. More importantly in the current context, in highlighting the unique nature of the stadium he draws attention to the uncomprehending distance between sports separated by a matter of a few yards, just in the way we are confused by the lack of understanding between the realms of sport and the arts despite their being part of the same government ministry (see Long and Bianchini in this issue). Taking a more international perspective, Jahn (2006, 17) suspects that at least since the 1990s, the relationship between the two has been one of 'mutual scepticism or lack of interest'.

The screening presented by *Fields of Vision* was the film of David Storey's book, *This Sporting Life*. Although he straddled the worlds of sport and the arts (playing rugby league for Leeds Reserves while studying at the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art in London), Storey reflected on how uncomfortable this was: 'being perceived as an effete art student made the dressing room a very uncomfortable place for me' and 'at the Slade meanwhile I was seen as bit of an oaf' (Collins 2013, 53). There are of course others prepared to engage with both sport and the arts. For example, at one of the Fields of Vision exhibitions (ceramic sculptures by artist Mandy Long, which explored physicality and human movement in sport) the running coach of Olympic medal holders the Brownlee Brothers observed: 'Excellent – every sports stadium should have an art gallery'.

While there are contemporary artists following the example of the ancient Greeks in producing art work in response to sport, and some major sporting events such as the Great North Run that celebrates running with an accompanying arts programme, these are inspiring exceptions. However, as contemporary artists increasingly use a diverse range of media, such as video, performance and installation, opportunities exist not just to represent and celebrate sport but for critique and issue-based work that questions and interrogates aspects of sport practice and its culture. Perhaps too, the greatest opportunity for synthesis lies with new arts practices (like poetry slams and graffiti) and sports (like skateboarding or free running). The papers in this issue not only highlight the potential for greater collaboration and interdisciplinarity between the arts and sport in theoretical discourse, social and cultural policy, education and professional practice, but also present opportunities giving some optimism for the future.

## **The Papers**

Within the complex context of historical debates on the aesthetic nature of sport and its relationship to art (e.g., Best 1974, 1985; Whiting and Masterson 1974) and extending his own work, such as on spectator's engagement with sport (Mumford 2011), *Stephen Mumford* argues here that sport cannot be an art as such and that the two are fundamentally distinctive. However, he argues for 'the special nature of the sporting aesthetic' and that while the aim in sport is to compete, rather than the production of aesthetic value, competition in sport is at least part of the explanation of its aesthetics. He establishes three features of sport: competition, indeterminism and emergent holism in relation to team sports. These lead to sport's distinctive aesthetic. One of his points is that the distinctiveness of sport and the arts resides in their being subject to different historically evolving institutional processes. While sport may not be 'art', nonetheless it does have 'a special and distinctive aesthetic role, providing an experience for the viewer that cannot be found elsewhere'.

*Jonathan Long* and *Franco Bianchini* demonstrate and bemoan the separation between sport and art in their respective UK and England strategies and identify a paucity of 'intercultural mediators'. They consider this somewhat counter-productive given the similar social remit given to the arts and to

sport with regard to health and wellbeing, education, employment, countering crime, cohesion and inclusion. Fortunately, despite the separation at the national level, they see more hope in what is happening at the local. Having offered their critique of existing strategies, they then identify the potential that is not being fully realised and suggest policies that might help to secure that.

Bringing art and sport together has the potential to extend audiences for both and lead to positive outcomes for promotion, community programmes, public relations and funding. However, *Lynn Froggett* is looking for more. The evaluation her team conducted of the *imove* component of the Cultural Olympiad identified different forms of project that combined sport and the arts, from those that are simply 'additive' to others that are 'interactive' (combining to produce something novel) and 'transformative' (professionals dependent on participants to develop completely new cultural forms). In light of this Froggett considers the potential for 'transcending dualities of mind/body and art/sport' in the creation of 'third space' in the search for a new language with which to discuss the relationship (akin to the emergence of sci-art).

*Stephen Arch* challenges the Cartesian dualism of a mind-body split, certainly insofar as it relates to sport as an embodied practice. Using literary narratives about sport to explore embodied subjectivity and their representation of the sporting self he reveals how the self is transformed through athletic training and competition. The literary skills of the authors allow them to do more than simply describe sporting experience, and come closer to the felt/lived experience through inclination, repetition, and habit that achieves deep physical, emotional, and psychic transformation. This serves to create an aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of sport for participant and spectator alike.

Recognising the coincidence of the emergence of modern sport and photography, *Mike O'Mahony* examines how they came together despite the technological limitations of the medium in its early years. He shows how the visual vocabularies that were deployed generated new visual conventions. In part because of the technological limitations 'artistry and artifice' were used to produce fine examples of sports photography. Although initially limited to traditional forms of portraiture and posed shots intended to represent sporting action, the composite technique was used to compensate for the inability to capture the movement central to the practice of sport.

Rather than photographs, *Chris Stride and Layne Vandenberg* analyse the way sporting statues represent values. In this case it is how footballing statues in China uphold cultural and political values such as the primacy of hard work, learning and saving face in defeat. At the same time, they are required to support China's efforts to integrate itself into global football and win the right to host (and win) the FIFA World Cup. The tension between the popularity of football locally and the lack of success of the national team has produced statues that represent ... rather than celebrating individual stars.

Running is one of the sports that has aroused the interest of those writing about aesthetics (Martin 2007). Here, *Kai Syng Tan* and *Matti Tainio* both draw upon running to discuss social cultural aspects of sport and human movement. In her paper *Tan* provides an account of the RUN! RUN! RUN! Biennial programme as an interdisciplinary discourse, using creative methodology, metaphor and arts practice. Discussing the wider cultural and social questions raised by the programme her paper challenges existing assumptions in the arts about sport and highlights the socio-cultural context of running and its use as political act of defiance. Individual experiential aspects of running are used alongside examples from the RUN! RUN! RUN! programme to argue for a closer understanding and

synergy between arts and running. Tan concludes by asserting that ‘works of art that have continued to intrigue are not those that provide the answers, but those that problematise, interrogate, and provoke’.

*Tanio* asserts that aesthetic aspects of sport are neglected and marginalised compared with physical aspects of human movement that can be measured and quantified statistically. Acknowledging the historical context of such a bias he argues that this hegemony can nonetheless be challenged and modified by newer sports practices and social trends. His argument is that sport and its ‘corporeal openness, enjoyment and creativity’ are part of an aesthetic experience that can produce positive life effects and have an obvious social impact on what is referred to as ‘post-sport practices’. He concludes that the aesthetics of physical movement widens our understanding of contemporary culture, which if embraced would result in a more inclusive physical culture involving a wider range of activities and experiences.

In a very different literary project from *Arch*, *Cătălin Parfene* considers the opus of the Romanian writer, Camil Petrescu, who used his literary skills to advance the cause of securing an ethnically pure national football team as part of the construction of the culture of the new Romania between the two world wars. Regarded in Romania as the founder of the modern novel, Petrescu argued persistently for Romanianization of the national football team by removing the representatives of ethnic minorities (mainly Hungarian and German) even if this meant the team losing its matches. In case readers need reminding, like the statues considered by Stride and Vandenberg, this crusade against foreigners highlights the political ramifications of both arts and sports.

Using the example of *Urban Dig* in Athens, *Dikaia Chatziefstathiou*, *Eirini Iliopoulou* and *Matina Magkou* assess the contribution of the kind of local initiative referred to by Long and Bianchini. *Urban Dig* uses sport and the arts together to facilitate community development. At the same time it serves to illustrate one of Froggett’s themes, with the authors arguing that ‘sports and art can compose a common cultural language’ and that this represents a tool for communities to ‘co-create urban space’. The project offers an illustration of how these sports-art representations and practices can be used in participatory-planning in re-imagining the production of space.

## **Coda**

The full title of the journal, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, demonstrates how suitable a location it is for this collection of papers. Just as the members of the Fields of Vision network itself, the contributors to this collection come from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds: aesthetics, community development, cultural studies, history, international relations, leisure studies, literature, sociology, philosophy, policy analysis and psychology. Like the works of art that Tan prizes, we believe that these papers ‘problematise, interrogate, and provoke’. They shed new light on sport and the arts as representations of cultural identity embodying processes of social change. Despite the conceptual distance that has been put between these two social constructions it is clear, as demonstrated by these papers, that there are initiatives that show how these barriers between sports and arts can be hurdled. That kind of appreciation is not just the preserve of scholars writing in academic journals. A visitor to one of the Fields of Vision exhibitions commented:

Inspirational: It's a celebration of movement and physical expression. Sport should not purely be about the outcome. How we physically interact with our environment is such an integral part of who we are. We must never take that for granted. Thank you

## References

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<sup>i</sup> To read this common declaration of principles and practice and find out about becoming a signatory, please go to the Fields of Vision web site: <https://artsinsport.wordpress.com/a-manifesto-for-the-arts-and-sport-together/>