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Parallel Worlds. Art and Sport in Contemporary Culture (Aalto ARTS Books 2015)

Abstract

This research maps the relationships between art and sport through various perspectives using a multidisciplinary approach. In addition, three artistic projects have been included in the research. The research produces a reasoned proposition why art and sport should be seen similar practices in contemporary culture and why this perspective is beneficial.

In everyday view art and sport seem opposite cultural practices, but by adopting an appropriate view similarities can be detected. In order to eliminate these superficial differences the research examines art and sport as cultural practices. The cultural practices of art and sport are analyzed from various points of view including cultural history, social structure and philosophical aesthetics. The special focus is on artist's and athlete's viewpoints to the practices. The artistic projects provide an additional perspective to the relationship of art and sport.

When cultural practices are examined from today's point of view, our current understanding of them has an effect on our view of their historical forms and they appear existing in a similar form and carrying similar concepts through history. However, a closer look exposes that most cultural practices, including art and sport as we understand them, have not existed as distinct realms before the emergence of modern European culture.

Employing the idea of the historical formation of cultural practices, the development of art and sport towards their current forms is traced. Historical practices, where the end-results have resembled artworks or athletic performances, have existed, but that at the level of practices they have been noticeably different from modern concepts of art and sport. Also the meanings these practices carried were different from modern art and sport. The practices of art and sport organized into their modern forms between the early eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. The central concepts of art and sport: artist and athlete, work of art and regulated and fair competition, the key concepts of aesthetics as well as comparable records found their current meanings over that time. Our contemporary understanding of art and sport is based on this development, even though further change has taken place, especially during the latter half of the twentieth century.

The similarities in the social structure of art and sport practices are examined. Both practices have a special place within modern culture: they have formed their own systems, semi-independent worlds, inside the modern culture. These worlds have established their own internal rules that are not perfectly accordant with the rules of ordinary life. Furthermore, the division into the protagonists, artists and athletes, and the audience who follows the action as well as the rituals that emphasize the roles connects art and sport practices.

The aesthetic link between art and sport is established two ways. Firstly, they are connected by the concept of aesthetic experience and secondly, the contemporary

understanding of aesthetics as the sensuous knowing instead of the philosophy of art of makes possible to apply aesthetic consideration all kinds of phenomena. The key ideas about the aesthetics and its relevance in sport are outlined and the recent arguments about the relationship of sport and art within the field of aesthetics are analyzed. In addition, prospects of artification in sport are explored.

The art projects that form a part of the research continue the established tradition of artistic research by exploring and commenting on the subject of the study using artistic methods. In my study, the works of art had lesser importance for the study, whereas the artistic work preceding the public exhibitions provided possibilities to ruminate the relationship between art and sport without the burden of academic rigor as the artistic work has different criteria for quality. In addition to the artistic work, I employed my hobbyist distance running practice for providing understanding about athletic experiences.

After the exploration of links between art and sport, their current relationship is analyzed. Various intertwined features of today's art and sport separate the understanding of the contemporary practices from the previous, modern conception of them. The importance of the art object has declined; instead the artistic processes and produced experiences have drawn nearer the center. The central concepts of the competitive sport, achievement and record, have been remodeled: in today's recreational sport the rival is no more another participant, but oneself. Today's recreational athlete competes – if she feels for it – against her own results, not the other participants.

Furthermore, both art and sport have moved towards everyday experiences. In the field of art, this is visible in both the artworks and the artistic processes: artworks do not necessarily differ from everyday objects and the artistic work can take forms that benefit other fields of life outside the artworld. The shift towards everyday in sport has a different form: the recent expansion of sport has taken place in the recreational sport in close contact with people's everyday life.

Additional aspect separating today's art and sport from their modern precursors is the growing significance of participation. However, the mechanisms of participation diverge. In art, the participation is conducted, at least in some degree, by the artists; sometimes it is carefully instructed, and sometimes the instructions open a sphere of activity for participants to play. The participation in sport is related to the grass-root level of recreational sport where all the people involved are participants and in alternative sports where the borderline between the "real athletes" and the others is significantly lower than in modern competitive sports.

While these changes are somewhat visible in the actual practices of art and sport, they are more apparent in the fringes of the practices: on the creative art-like practices and alternative approaches to the physical activity. These activities borrow features from the primary practices, but adapt them, accommodate them for their own ends that deviate from the ideals present in the contemporary practices of art and sport.

The recent transformation of both practices has lead into a situation where there are

wider ties between art and sport than before. Even though similarities between art and sport have existed since the emergence of their modern forms, the recent development of art and sport has generated a situation where there are more compelling reasons to see their connections and promote adopting new perspectives to them. The current cultural atmosphere promotes the cross-fertilization of cultural practices as well as utilization of the new perspectives for benefit the further development of practices into novel areas. The ambiguous construction of today's practices as well as their frayed borderlines creates a new area of activity where art-like and sport-related activities can flourish. This is the sphere where the fresh connections between art and sport, as well as other cultural practices, can arise.