Cultural Technology and Sporting Value: A Philosophical Investigation

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Abstract

Few people would dispute that today's world is highly technological. But what do we mean when we talk of 'technology', and is it possible to quantify its effect on human beings? This thesis considers the relationship between technology and humanity as being one of symbiosis - we shape our tools and in turn, our tools shape us. The nature of this relationship is described by 'essentialist' critics of technology as narrowing the focus of human endeavour towards a technological value-set dominated by efficiency, to the detriment of other values important to the human animal.

Sport provides an excellent framework for examining the impact of technology defined in this way, as it is a ubiquitous and highly technological arena. If it can be plausibly argued that an increasingly technological and performance-centred approach to sport is detrimental to an holistic understanding of sport's potential to benefit both the individual and society as a whole, it may be the case that sport provides accessible and irrefutable evidence for the truth of the essentialists' claims regarding the impact on society of technology writ large. This thesis presents such an argument.

Furthermore, if we grant the essentialist critics their contention and admit the impossibility of returning to an 'untechnological' world, we have to find some way of restoring and maintaining an holistic existence in the face of the restricted value-set imposed by our technology and our interactions with it. To this end, the latter part of this thesis promotes 'metaphysical' sporting values (freedom, self-affirmation and beautiful, harmonious action) as a way to counter-balance the impact of technology in sport and suggest ways to solve the 'technological problem' more generally.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed: 

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Contents:

Chapter One: Introduction

It seems clear that even the most humble sports have been technologically revolutionised. Consider javelin and pole-vault, which have been a part of the Olympic furniture for as long as anyone cares to remember. Both disciplines arose from everyday use of spears and poles: the javelin had been used for centuries as an offensive weapon in warfare, while inhabitants of low-lying areas such as Friesland in the Netherlands and the Fens in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk used poles to get across the interlocking canals that drained their land without getting their feet wet. These sports have changed little in appearance since their inception, but have seen many changes to their record distances. In 1896 the world record in the pole-vault was 3.3m, which is just over half the current record of 6.14m. In 1908 throwing a javelin more than 54m would win Olympic gold; nowadays, one would have to throw further than 90m. These distances tell a tale of improved performance, but they omit the story of the evolution of the poles and javelins themselves.

Both sports operate under specific International Association of Athletics Federation's (IAAF) rules that govern what types of materials may be used in each sport, although pole-makers seem to have more leeway for invention than javelin-makers: "The pole may be of any material or combination of materials and of any length or diameter," but "the surface of the shaft [of the javelin] shall have no dimples or pimples, grooves or ridges, holes or roughness, and the finish shall be smooth and uniform throughout."[1] This is not

[1] IAAF, *Handbook, division IV: Technical Rules.* Monaco: IAAF, 2011 <http://www.iaaf.org/competitions/technical/regulations/index.html> [accessed 20th May 2011].

technological favouritism; the increasing distances the javelin was being thrown meant that "it was becoming increasingly difficult to identify when a javelin had landed tip first"[2] as required by the rules. The IAAF therefore changed the specifications for the javelin and the centre of mass was moved forward 4cm so that "pitching movements would reduce the angle of attack and make the javelin land tip first."[3] If increased distances were becoming a problem, innovations that supported throwing further, such as drilling holes in the tail of the javelin and roughing-up its surface were also to be banned.

Unlike the javelin, the 'anything goes' attitude towards the pole used in pole-vault has meant pole-vaulters have demanded a greater understanding of the forces at work on their equipment. In 1942 Cornelius Warmerdam of the USA claimed the pole-vault world record of 4.77m using a bamboo pole. Subsequent investigations of density and failure stress led to the emergence of poles made first of aluminium and later of steel; by 1961 George Davies had set a world record of 4.83m using a glass fibre pole. Today, carbon fibre is used alongside glass fibre and performance in the pole-vault has leveled-off. As Haake observes, "poles are about as efficient as they can be physically, [and therefore] any extra energy has to come from the athlete."[4]

Whether one sees the innovations detailed above as overly technological or not, the increase in distances and heights achieved certainly points to some sort of progress, even though the sports themselves retained their original 'look and feel': who can use this pole to jump higher, and who can throw this javelin further. Consider, on the other hand, the sports of field hockey and cricket, and our idea of just what constitutes a technological

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[2] Haake, S. J. "The impact of technology on sporting performance in Olympic sports", *Journal of Sports Sciences*, vol. 27, no. 13, 2009, pg. 1426
[3] Haake, S. J. "The impact of technology on sporting performance in Olympic sports", pg. 1426
[4] Ibid, pg. 1428

revolution seems to change. We may concede that it is debatable whether performance in a linear record sport such as pole-vault is comparable to performance in a complex invasion or contest sport, but what is uncontestable is that although teams do not score more goals or runs than they did in the past, technology has changed the two games. It is undeniable that both hockey and cricket have embraced technology, and that technology has changed the 'look and feel' of these sports on a fundamental level.

Field hockey is now played on artificial, grass-like surfaces by players with geometrically curved graphite and carbon-fibre sticks, with goalkeepers wearing condensed foam padding. There have been numerous rule changes to improve and experiment with the way the game is played, from removing the offside rule to being able to play oneself from a free hit; furthermore, video analysis equipment is used in-game to verify umpiring decisions. Cricket is similar. New helmet, padding and bat technology allows players to be quicker, safer and more powerful as they strike the ball. Video analysis has long been in use in the case of a run-out, but has now been extended to other umpiring decisions. Cricket has even changed its format twice, introducing shorter fifty- and twenty-over versions of the game to increase 'ball-by-ball action' and woo the crowds.

Technological changes such as the above can be found in most sports. With scientific and technological improvements athletes now jump higher, throw further and hit harder for longer. Games have also become quicker and more significant, results more precise and rewards greater, as sport responds to the demands of the market and a population keen on sports entertainment.

Along with these positive (some might argue) innovations come the ever-present threat of doping and the worries associated with genetic enhancements; athlete's lives are not private anymore; the gap between technologically advanced countries and the rest keeps getting bigger; international sporting events have become the subject of environmental sustainability studies; children are pushed into elite sport earlier and earlier. In light of these concerns, it could be argued that our technological sword is not just double- edged, but that we sit as precariously as the King of Damocles beneath it.

How then do we understand the technological revolution we have seen in most sports? Indeed, when we consider the technological innovations of javelin and pole-vault, and of field hockey and cricket, it might be argued that we are not talking about similar processes at all. In light of this, questions concerning the limits of justifiable technological innovation in sport might prove difficult to answer, and if certain rules need to be reconsidered in light of some new technology, and the technical and ethical geography of games must change fundamentally because of this, the need to understand the impact and direction of technology becomes all the more urgent. The problem is that arriving at such an understanding is more difficult than it might initially appear.

Butryn acknowledges that "what remains murky is what technology means within the context of sport, and…there is presently no coherent conceptual framework that might aid in differentiating between sport technologies."[5] He attempts to provide such a framework, by dividing general sports technologies into:

[5] Butryn, T. "Cyborg Horizons: Sport and the ethics of Self-Technologization", in Miah, A. and Eassom, S. (eds) Sport Technology, Oxford: Elsevier, 2002, pg. 111

(i) Self technologies, that alter the physical or psychological makeup of the athletes that employ them,

(ii) Landscape technologies, which refers to those technologies that form the sporting landscape in which athletes compete,

(iii) Implement technologies, which are those technologies (equipment, instruments) that are used during the event,

(iv) Rehabilitative or medical technologies,

(v) Movement technologies, which assess the form and efficiency of an athlete's body, such as video or computer analysis technology.[6]

However, there are two problems with classifying sporting technology in the above manner. First, there may well be a type of technology that fits into more than one category. A scanner in the form of an innersole that prevents overpronation while assessing running efficiency and recording lactic acid levels may fit into (i), (iv) and (v) of Butryn's classification system. Second, and far more importantly, even though Butryn argues that self technologies have rendered the dichotomy between 'natural' and 'artificial' sporting performances obsolete, his framework is still based on the idea that humans and their sporting environment are influenced by technology, or vice versa. In other words, there is still a separation between technology and the athlete, even if the former has managed (in the case of self technologies, anyway) to extend itself into the physical and psychological makeup of the athlete. Absent is any sense of these technologies as already being representative of human values; their production is not

[6] Ibid, pp. 112-113

symptomatic of any particular attitude, and their influence extends, in whatever way, only to the performance of the athlete. Butryn may be correct when he says that it is futile to name and maintain 'a pre-technological I'; the worry, however, is that in calling for the examination of the moral ideals of sport "as they interact with the emerging ideals of modern technoculture"[7] Butryn mistakenly posits two distinct animals – humankind (and its associated morality) and technology. We will return to this point later.

Another attempt at classifying technology has Loland differentiating between body techniques, technology in competition and out-of-competition technology. Further, Loland describes three theories of athletic performance and their relation to sports technology: the non-theory, the thin theory and the thick theory.[8] The non-theory states sport is merely an efficient means towards achieving external goals, and therefore accepts all sports technology as long as it serves the purpose of reaching the desired external goals. The thin theory sees sport as an arena to test out human limits in objective terms, and therefore allows all sporting technologies as long as there is equality of opportunity in terms of equal access to all competitors; this "can be linked to various kinds of technological optimism in which any technological innovation is considered a good innovation."[9] It is the thick theory and technology's role therein that interests Loland the most, however. This is because the thick theory understands sport as a social practice with its own norms, values and internal goods, and therefore implies the most regulations

[7] Ibid, pg. 130
[8] Loland, S. "Sport technologies - a moral view", in Miah, A. and Eassom, S. (eds) Sport Technology, Oxford: Elsevier, 2002, pp. 159-161
[9] Ibid, pg. 169

on technology. Moreover, Loland sees it as "the only possibility of a sound technological ethic in sport."[10]

If Butryn's classification system hinted at the purpose underlying the development of sporting technology, Loland's is more direct:

> [This] understanding of technology as *human-made means* to reach *human interests and goals* seems to be the one that underlies most discussions of technology in sport, and shall be the one upon which I shall build… Sport technologies, then, are human-made means to reach human interests and goals in or related to sport.[11]

Butryn focuses on the impact of self technologies on our understanding of sporting performance in relation to our idea of the athletic body and its performance, while Loland begins with the question of why sport is valuable to us and works towards defining acceptable technological norms from there; both, however, implicitly endorse a definition of technology that sees technology as an *output*. Technology is seen as something created, something that can become, as in the case of certain self technologies, part of an athlete physically or psychologically, but always as a docile implement. This thesis will contest this point, positing technological innovation in sport and its effect on humanity as an active, two-way process concerned almost exclusively with efficiency and performance. Technology, it will be argued here, promotes a very specific set of values which in turn influence both the production of further technology and the mindset of those who produce and use such technology. In sporting terms, the symbiotic relationship

[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid, pg. 158

between humanity and technology influences the moral direction of sport, creating problems for the sporting community whilst distracting that community from some of the possibilities and positive outcomes of sporting endeavour.

However we choose to define the term, sport is undeniably a highly technological, and extremely visible arena, but technology had been influencing human affairs long before the grandeur of the modern sporting event. It would seem prudent then, to begin this inquiry into the nature of sporting technology by considering a question that comes before the question "What is sporting technology", namely, "What is technology?" It is in answering this question that the facets of sporting technology that will be of interest in this thesis will be uncovered.

It is worth noting right at the outset that merely examining the history of technology and categorizing and collating facts concerning what technology is and how it manifests itself is not much of a starting point, as it ignores the interplay between technology and its creators and users. It is this interplay that will be of primary interest:

> We shape our tools, and our tools shape us. It's a fair and free exchange, our technology is [a] process of evolution by accelerated means, machines reconfiguring their capacities and states of consciousness in ways comparable to those by which dinosaurs become birds and apes change into Mormon choirs.[12]

If Lapham is right, then any answer to the questions we have raised is going to have to take note of the predominant *attitude* that underlies technological innovation. This is because that attitude, whatever it may be, would seem to have a direct bearing on the

[12] Lapham, L. "Mudville" in Harpers Magazine, March 2008, pg. 12

problems we might encounter as technology plays a greater and greater part in our lives, sporting and otherwise. Furthermore, the attitude with which we produce technology and the ends we have in mind while producing it is reflected in what we produce. These products in turn are improved upon; the sundial helped us manage our days, but a wristwatch ensures you are not a minute late. "I'll see you sometime tomorrow morning," is no longer an acceptable answer. We have not only refined the watch, but also our attitude towards timekeeping. Similarly, as technology has become important in sport, our attitudes towards sport have reflected this increasing technological influence. Now we want to perform, to win, above all. And it is this attitude – a 'technologicalised' attitude – that has created some of the problems we now face.

Consequently, the project of this thesis is to examine the influence of technology on our thought and value systems as evidenced by some of the technological problems facing sport today, and to suggest a reemphasis of those values which might counter-balance the negative consequences of an overly technological attitude.

Chapter Two begins by looking at definitions of and possible claims concerning technology, before introducing the ideas of Langdon Winner and Ollivier Dyens. The similarity between Winner and Dyens' views is that technology is the sum of our cultural output: we are 'cultural bodies'. This view of technology helps us to understand the efficacy of the two-way relationship mentioned above by Lapham. When we admit that our culture depends on alarm clocks, watches, mobile phones, microwaves, Ipods, televisions, dishwashers, cars, pharmaceuticals, computers, satellites and the Internet, we

come to understand that we are already a highly technologicalised species; our thought patterns and social interactions are conditioned by this technological existence. Technology is not an external implement, but an influential partner. This idea in turn readies the conceptual ground for the essentialist view of technology embraced by Jacques Ellul and its associated critique.

The essentialist critique takes issue with the moral neutrality of traditional definitions of technology, which have posited technology as a tool, or as totally subject to human ends and manipulation – even Dyens' account of technology does not pass judgment on the effect our increasingly technological culture has had on our value system. Essentialists such as Ellul and Martin Heidegger criticize technology on the grounds it moves us toward ever more efficient, rational and sterilized means at the expense of less efficient but value-rich perspectives, techniques and experiences. What is more, technology functions in a self-serving and self-propagating fashion: through our increasing reliance on its methods and our uncritical attitude towards its products, we allow technology to dictate the terms of our partnership. On the essentialist account, the values which are sacred to technology and a technologicalised existence, such as efficiency, have become of paramount importance to society. The most pressing question concerning technology is therefore "What type of society is being built by the relationship between technology and humanity?" or, in other words, are the essentialists correct?

Chapter Three extends the essentialist critique to the current technologicalised state of sport in the world, arguing that what Ellul saw as worrying in our unthinking acceptance of technology and its values manifests itself (albeit in a slightly different form) in the sporting sphere as well. Here a number of case studies are used to illustrate the salience

of the essentialist critique, with possibly the two biggest problems facing sport today, namely doping and the production of genetically enhanced athletes characterized as a form of self-inflicted wound. The idea is that the technologicalised sporting environment values performance and winning (and the associated economic gains) over anything else, and this leads inevitably to those involved in sport doing anything possible to gain a competitive advantage.

If the essentialists are correct and a certain attitude pervades technology in all its various guises, then perhaps the way to correct for this is to reevaluate the purpose of sport in a way that negates the inherent drive towards ordering and efficiency in technology, personified in sport by the primacy of performance.

Chapter Four introduces the concepts of 'metaphysical' sporting value and existential movement meanings to this end. Building on a solution to the 'technological problem' as proposed by Feenberg, by emphasizing sport's ability to promote freedom, self-affirmation and harmony we can both highlight and counter-balance the negatives of the technological process.

Chapter Four defines freedom as an act of self-expression. Vizinczey argues freedom resides in an individual's ability to do what makes sense to her; to allow herself to do what she feels she must. The examples of Bill Briggs and Mestre Russo in this chapter demonstrate how sport and physical activity can show us the value of this take on freedom. Both Briggs and Russo found their life's expression in the use of their bodies and a commitment to their activities; their sense of fulfillment and the positive impact of their lives on others is a tangible result of the choice to do what makes sense to them.

Furthermore, sport provides a framework for us to constantly redefine the parameters of our existence. In moments of virtuosity from our bodies we define ourselves in terms of our actions, as opposed to our thoughts or our best intentions. Sport allows us to act, in the words of extreme skier Stefano de Benedetti 'with all of ourselves', and so is a conduit for a holistic experience of the self. This is the authentic action of Sartrean existentialism: man creating himself. Chapter Four concludes that the existentialist idea of freedom as being free to create oneself sits comfortably with Vizinczey's concept of freedom as self-expression, and that both point to engaging in physical activity as being a good way to understand being free.

Chapter Five takes further the adaption of the existentialist idea of sport being a vehicle for creating the self, and examines the idea of self-affirmation as it is characterised by Nietzsche's 'noble ideal'. In discussing the noble existence, Nietzsche refers specifically to certain self-affirming activities necessary for a full and flourishing life, among them hunting and war-games – activities that extend us in a similar manner to sport.

Our energies, audacity, courage and physical and intellectual capacities are tested when we engage in difficult physical challenges, and we learn about ourselves in a manner which would be impossible if we simply sat around watching television all day. Sport also offers us varying levels of risk and adventure (depending on what sport one chooses), prerequisites for a confident and self-reliant life.

Finally, Chapter Six discusses the achievement of beautiful and harmonious action through sport. Here beauty and harmony refer to the ability to act as the situation demands and without the influence of what Schopenhauer would call the 'cacophonic admonishments' of our Will. Important in this section is the Taoist concept of *wu-wei*,

which refers to those actions which flow naturally and gracefully, as if by some divine ordinance; in other words, actions which are self-justifying and unforced. Far too often in both sport and life we feel forced to do something for some future benefit, to ensure we do not lose the game. This constant forward thinking (imperative in the technological society) detracts from our ability to live in the 'now', and so we risk losing the beauty of the moment and the satisfaction of having done something purely because it fitted well in that moment or appealed to us at the time.

This is perhaps the most insidious characteristic of the technological milieu: we feel that nothing can be done purely for its own sake, as a form of authentic expression in the moment which demands it. Contemporary sport is so concerned with performance and winning – the sporting manifestation of the technological drive towards efficiency in future outcome – that it is perhaps not remiss to start searching for an in-present solution to the 'technological problem' on the track, the field or the court.

Chapter Two: What is Technology?

Questions Concerning Technology: An Historical Overview

To understand the essentialist critique as it applies to sporting technology specifically, it is first necessary to situate the essentialist critique within the history of philosophical inquiry into technology writ large. This chapter will examine the historical background of critical thought concerning technology, and in so doing ready the ground for the examination of the essentialist critique – and the application of that critique to sport – in the chapters to come.

In 1836 Ralph Waldo Emerson observed in *Nature* that beasts, fire, water, stones and corn all serve man; he goes on to paraphrase George Herbert in his poem *Man*: "Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but also the process and the result…The useful arts are reproductions or new combinations by the wit of man of the same natural benefactors."[13] Emerson was writing at the beginning of the industrial revolution, at a time when technological innovation would lead to major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and transport, all of which had a profound effect on the socioeconomic and cultural conditions in the world.

Starting in the latter part of the 18th century there began a transition from manual labour and draught animal-based economy towards machine-based manufacturing. Textile industries were mechanized, there was a greater dependence on iron, and an increased use of refined coal. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals and improved

[13] Emerson, R. W. "Nature", in Nature and Selected Essays, New York: Penguin, 2003, pg. 41

roads and railways. The introduction of steam power fuelled primarily by coal, wider utilization of water wheels and powered machinery underpinned the dramatic increases seen in production capacity. The First Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century, merged into the Second Industrial Revolution around 1850, when technological and economic progress gained momentum with the development of steam-powered ships, railways, and later in the 19th century with the internal combustion engine and electrical power generation.

Although it was at this time of technological acceleration that the best-known initial investigations and critiques of technology and its impact on humanity appear, thoughts and arguments about the nature of production occur as far back as Aristotle, who thought that 'making' (or the production of objects) was not an end in itself but was in fact subordinate to possible understandings of the good and the political orders they entailed. In the 17th century Francis Bacon attempted to turn human attention toward technology with ideas concerning the successful union of natural philosophy and technology as a means for improving humanity's lot, while in 1750 Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* heralded a new romantic criticism of technological advancement and its offspring. In the *Discourse,* Rousseau remarks that politicians of the ancient world were always talking of morals and virtue, whereas those of his day spoke "only of commerce and money."[14] Even in the 18th century, the link between technological advancement and profit was becoming clear.

[14] Rousseau, J-J. in Mitcham, C. The Path between Engineering and Philosophy, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 39-40

All of the above, however, begs the question of just what technology *is*. How best to enquire about something that would seem to be all around us, or indeed, as some scholars such as Ollivier Dyens and Donna Harraway have it, already a vital part of us? Frederick Ferre suggests technology can be approached in a manner similar to that employed in investigating the traditional topics of philosophy:

> We shall see that [an investigation into technology] will warrant adding 'technology' to the long horizontal axis of human concerns, analogous to religion, art, science, law, society, history, education and the like, that can organize philosophical reflection in a fruitful way.[15]

Despite a small group of philosophers and sociologists taking Ferre at his word, a review of the literature reveals a thorough investigation of technology has never been high on the agenda of the academic establishment. In light of our increasing reliance on technology, some philosophers and engineers have argued that it would seem pertinent to ask exactly why we have been slow to attempt a systematic philosophical investigation into something that has had and continues to have such a profound impact on our lives. Langdon Winner suggests

> much of the answer can be found in the astonishing hold the idea of 'progress' has exercised on social thought during the industrial age. In the 20th century it is usually taken for granted that the only reliable sources for improving the human condition stem from new machines, techniques and chemicals.[16]

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[15] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995 pg. 10

[16] Winner, L. "Technologies as forms of life" in Shrader-Frechette, K. and Westra, L. (eds.) Technology and Values, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, pg. 57

A possible rejoinder to the above concerns us not wanting to limit ourselves; is it possible that this type of questioning might prevent further progress? As Ferre infers, the implications of technology for reality itself are fascinating. Consider the potential for stem cell research, and how much it has been hampered by ethical and religious concerns with its processes, or the furore surrounding cloning. Advances in technology such as organ growth and cloned animals might improve the lives of thousands of people; likewise, the development of new modes of 'artificial intelligence' could improve our present metaphysical theories to do with the nature of mind and consciousness to a point where we can begin answering those questions that have been plaguing philosophy for centuries. Some might argue that the sooner such technologies are wholeheartedly embraced, the better.

It might also be claimed that technology gives us a new understanding of our relationship to our own realities, in that it represents the constant malleability and permeability of those realities. A hundred years ago we could not 'see' viruses. Nowadays, we can 'see' on a sub-atomic level. Conversely, it might be claimed that a certain conception of technology subjects humanity to technological determinism. What if the blind watchmaker was himself the product of physical and technological forces? Or, as Ferre puts it:

> The metaphysics of mechanism borrowed key elements from the technology of mechanical clocks; are there post-mechanistic metaphysical visions available that might influence newer technologies?[17]

[17] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pg. 12

The answer to this question foreshadows the central issue addressed in the rest of this thesis, namely: if a ubiquitous and inescapable technological process has meant a negative restructuring of humanity's value systems, then we should be looking for ways to recover lost metaphysical ground from within that process.

Ferre argues that an investigation into technology, however we come to define it, is indeed of philosophical import, and this can be shown by considering it in those terms with which philosophy is traditionally concerned: epistemology, axiology and metaphysics. The technology of a society reflects what at least some members of that society know how to do, as well as revealing and embodying what at least some members of that society want (or want to avoid), and what they consider legitimate ends and means; in other words, their *values*.

> Knowledge alone, unharnessed to human valuing, would not result in technology any more than valuing alone, lacking the necessary knowledge, could find effective embodiment. It would not be wrong, and it might be revealing, to say that technology is the offspring in *praxis* of the mating of knowledge with value, epistemology with axiology.[18]

The corollary of Ferre's point is that any exercise that gives us insight into our values also gives us insight into our existence as supposedly rational creatures, and is therefore a worthy undertaking. Indeed, the central task of this thesis is to examine the value set that, combined with human knowledge, has created the technologies we use today.

To begin the investigation into the philosophy of technology, Ferre suggests an ambiguity that requires attention: the word 'technology' is sometimes used (by analogy

[18] Ibid, pg. 11

with bio*logy* or anthrop*ology*) to mean the study of the practical arts – the word is used this way when one refers to an Institute of Technology. 'Technology', however, can also refer to the practical arts and products themselves.

> In particular, when the word is preceded by a definite article or is used on the plural, e.g. '*the technology* of an era' or '*technologies* in use by certain nations,' the term does not point to second-order studies but to the implements, instruments, crafts, devices, utilities, contrivances, inventions, machines, artifices, tools, engines, utensils, and techniques that constitute the first-order subject matter of the institutes of technology.[19]

It is the latter, intuitively plausible definition of technology which concerns us in this thesis. This definition of technology naturally gives rise to the following types of questions, which seem at first glance to enable the definition to become more precise:

(i) Must technology be made of matter? In other words, must it reduce to "things?"

(ii) Must technology be science-based?

(iii) Should technology be credited to animals?

(iv) Is technology necessarily unnatural?

(v) Is technology wholly natural?[20]

[19] Ibid, pp. 15-20
[20] Ibid, pg 15

However, a brief discussion of each will be sufficient to show the murkiness of our intuitions about just what 'technology' actually is, and to show the need for a more thorough investigation and definition of it.

It is tempting to answer (i) in the affirmative, because there would seem to be a "popular sense in which the technology of an era is simply the collective hardware that one could point to, weigh and measure."[21] There is a tendency towards viewing technology as microwaves, running shoes, computers, mobile telephones and other disembodied objects. This tendency is supported by the highly *technical* nature of these products (and our consequent lack of understanding about their design and production), as well as the fact they are seldom seen as being natural, in the sense that we regard our physical beings, a rose in the garden or sunlight as being natural. This view of technology, however, begs the question of what else technologies may be made of.

Ferre points to an assortment of new arrangements and techniques in human activity: the invention of the military phalanx in ancient Greece that revolutionised warfare; agricultural practices that were improved by the introduction of crop rotation; Fredrick W. Taylor's studies of time and motion in the early days of mass production that led to new and more effective ways for workers to spend their energies.[22] Similarly, Dick Fosbury's radical high-jump technique – known as the 'Fosbury flop' – led to athletes being able to set new records in that discipline, just as systematically organised competition gave a tangible form and goal orientation to athletic achievement. When one takes into consideration these ideas and techniques, it becomes clear that even if material

[21] Ibid
[22] Ibid

embodiment is a necessary condition of technology (and this is far from clear), it certainly is not sufficient for defining it. "A tool is never mere matter. It is matter designed by intelligence for a purpose…. Matter may or may not be essential to technology; intelligence clearly is."[23]

So, (ii) asks, if intelligence is essential to technology, does this mean technology is necessarily dependent on the intelligence of scientists or the scientific method? What is the connection between science and technology? Mario Bunge writes that,

> In past epochs a man was regarded as practical if, in acting, he paid little or no attention to theory or if he relied on worn-out theories and common knowledge. Nowadays, a practical man is one who acts in obedience to decisions in light of the best technical knowledge… And such a technical knowledge, made up of theories, grounded rules, and data, is in turn an outcome of the application of the method of science to practical problems.[24]

This view however, would seem to negate the types of technologies prevalent in some cultures where the modern scientific method was unknown. One might think of the ancient Egyptians, who used the ramp and the lever to aid construction and rope trusses to stiffen the beam of ships, and who mass produced papyrus and pottery for exportation around the Mediterranean basin. James Feibleman makes the point thus:

> Speaking historically, the achievements of technology are those which developed without benefit of science; they arose empirically either by accident or as a matter of common experience. The use

[23] Ibid, pg. 16
[24] Bunge, M. "Toward a Philosophy of Technology," in Mitcham, C. and Mackey, R. (eds.) Philosophy of Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology, New York: Free Press, 1972, pg. 62

> of certain biochemicals in the practice of medicine antedates the development of science: notably, ephedrine, cocaine, curare, and quinine. This is true also of the pre-scientific forms of certain industrial processes, such as cheese-making, fermentation, and tanning. [25]

The question raised in (iii) takes the above one step further: if technology antedates humanity's scientific method, is it possible technology could antedate humanity itself? "If the beaver builds dams with skill and determination, and enjoys the benefits – in food supply, dwelling space refuge – of the resulting pond, why should this not be termed a technological activity?"[26] Surely, goes that argument, drawing the conceptual line for technology at the human race, is, to use Richard Ryder's well-known phrase, speciesism.[27] Lewis Mumford makes a similar point:

> In any comprehensive definition of technics, it should be plain that many insects, birds and mammals had made far more radical innovations in the fabrication of containers than man's ancestors had achieved in the making of tool until the emergence of *Homo sapiens*… The consequences of this perception should be plain: namely, that there was nothing uniquely human in early technology until it was modified by linguistic symbols, social organization and aesthetic design.[28]

Against such a position it could be argued that humanity's technological structures introduce at least some degree of artifice into the world; humanity by its very nature

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[25] Feibleman, J. "Pure Science, Applied Science, and Technology," in Mitcham, C. and Mackey, R. (eds.) Philosophy of Technology, pg. 36
[26] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pp. 17-18
[27] Although it was Peter Singer who really popularized the phrase, Ryder coined it. See for instance Ryder, R. "All beings that feel pain deserve human rights", *The Guardian* (UK), 6th August, 2005 pg. 25.
[28] Mumford, L. "Technics and the Nature of Man", in Mitcham, C. and Mackey, R. (eds.) Philosophy of Technology, pg. 78

intelligently bends, moulds, shapes, destroys and recreates nature – there is something seemingly artificial about the molecules, alloys and plastics humans can create. Likewise, there is something instinctive and natural about a beehive that seems absent in the creation of a space shuttle. Defining technology so that there is no difference left between the natural and the artificial, so it might be argued, defeats all clarity on the subject.

So, as one unresolved question leads to another, (iv) asks whether technology is therefore necessarily unnatural? "Here, it may be argued, is the home ground of the use of the term 'artificial.' If technological phenomena are not artificial, thus 'unnatural' in the most literal sense of the adjective, then nothing qualifies for the term."[29] Against such an idea, and apart from demanding better definitions of words like 'artificial', it may be argued it is far too difficult to draw a definitive line anywhere on the continuum from 'unnatural' or 'artificial' to 'natural'. Some of the greatest technologies of our time have needed little (if any) help to manifest themselves; penicillin, for instance. The production of steam is surely a completely natural occurrence; one would be hard-pressed to argue that it suddenly becomes unnatural in the context of a steam engine. Far from being the harbinger of artificiality or unnaturalness, man's 'interventions' into nature might justifiably be seen as simply another manifestation of it. This contrary position therefore asserts that "the activities themselves of building shelters – and aircraft – are expressions of a specific nature: *human* nature, of which what we proudly call the 'technological' is simply the natural outcome."[30] Taking this line, we are in danger of collapsing the boundary between the natural and the unnatural in much the same way as in (iii).

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[29] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pg. 18
[30] Ibid, pg. 19

Finally then, asks (v), is it possible that we should, in light of the above, consider technology to be wholly natural? The immediate response is that we might, but at the risk once again of losing a potentially useful distinction. It might be suggested that whatever is completely natural could not possibly be bad for the environment; if this were the case, then any argument for technology being wholly natural loses force, as some of humanity's greatest technological innovations have proved, over time, to be disastrous in that regard. We would seem to need, as that idea suggests, not only further conceptual refinements, but also the type of distinction that would enable us to think carefully about humanity's technological impact.

The next section therefore introduces *practical intention* into the definition of technology. For if we accept that practicality – intending to do things and make things happen – is a prerequisite for technology, we take the first step towards admitting the inexorable inclusion of human values in the technological process, and we begin to understand the emergence and direction of the essentialist critique.

Towards a definition of Technology

Ferre cautions that in thinking about the meaning of 'technology' it is possible, in attempting to define the term, to become prone to excessive breadth or narrowness. Technology, he suggests, should be seen as implemented, practical, embodied and

intelligent, as opposed to 'empty handed', 'for its own sake', 'in the head alone' and 'blind'.[31]

Lewis Mumford suggests the "mind-activated body" itself might be considered as a "primary all-purpose tool."[32] After all, we are constantly *doing* things (being practical), and in an intelligent manner, too. As attractive as this notion is, it flirts with a separation inherent in some types of mind-body dualism,[33] as it tends to ignore the role of the body as an access point to the world. It is not the case that our bodies just perform the actions dictated by our minds; they are also a conduit for experience and its assimilation into thought. Further, it suggests a technological view of the body, which is in opposition to the intuitive idea of the naked human body being the paradigm case of 'naturalness'. If we begin by defining the body as a tool, we are going to end up with little that is not in some sense 'technological'.

Practicality, however, would seem perhaps the 'most necessary' requirement in any definition of technology. Whereas expressions of emotion, personal or political statements and storytelling at times might well be within the remit of technology, they are usually characteristic of activities performed for their own sake. Technology, on the other hand, would seem never to be created simply to be created – that is why we do not refer to new musical forms, innovative dance or theatre, or 'modern' art as 'technological'. What we require of technology, implicitly, is that it *does* something for us. Technology should make life easier or order life in such a way as to make it more enjoyable. At least, this is what we feel it should do.

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[31] Ibid, pp. 23-25
[32] Mumford, L. "Technics and the Nature of Man", pg. 78
[33] Most famously, that of Rene Descartes as expounded in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

The above would suggest as well that we should not stretch the definition of technology to include all types of methods and techniques, even wholly mental ones. Whereas complex mathematics and physics undergirds feats of civil engineering like suspension bridges and 100-storey skyscrapers, the technique of doing the sums in one's head may be related to technology, but should not be equated to it. "The crucial difference between non-technological and technological in these cases seems to lie between the activity of intelligence alone and the embodiment, somehow, of that activity."[34] Even if, as Ellul claims,[35] technology predisposes us to a certain *form* of thought aimed at optimization and efficiency, it is still the case that we want to see such thought *produce* something.

Finally, it would seem necessary that anything technological be a product of some form of intelligence or forethought. Given the foregoing discussion,

> *techne* is not literally attributable to anything that occurs blindly, without some degree of calculation or means to ends. If this is so, then the concept of technology will not usefully be extended to behaviour that, among humans, is merely accidental or, among other species, is entirely instinctive.[36]

Thus for Ferre, technology "shall mean practical implementations of intelligence."[37] Mesthene agrees: "We define technology as the organization of knowledge for practical purposes… [or] tools in general, including machines, but also including linguistic and

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[34] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pg. 25
[35] I will examine his argument in more depth in the coming chapters.
[36] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pg. 25
[37] Ibid, pg. 26

intellectual tools and contemporary analytic and mathematical techniques." [38] Mesthene is willing to concede, however, that there is a moral aspect to technology in that new technologies can have positive or negative effects. New technology creates new opportunities for society, but these new opportunities bring with them their own problems. Sports scientists, for instance, can manufacture whey protein extract to build muscle mass more effectively and accelerate healing by using hypobaric chambers, but that same knowledge of chemicals and how the body reacts to them might bring with it the temptation to develop steroids. By this definition the positive and negative effects of technology occur at the same time and in virtue of each other.[39]

Mesthene also urges us not to see technology as either an unalloyed blessing for mankind or an unmitigated curse, the latter being the view of Marxist thinkers like John McDermott:

> Technology… is a self-correcting system. Temporary oversight or 'negative externalities' will and should be corrected by technological means. Attempts to restrict the free play of technological innovation are, in the nature of the case, self-defeating. Technological innovation exhibits a distinct tendency to work for the general welfare in the long run. *Laissez-innover!*[40]

McDermott's point is that if the cure for technological problems is simply more technology, we are in danger of relying on something which, as has been made clear, we have thought little about. For McDermott, the outlook is still darker: Technology "refers

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[38] Mesthene, E.G. "The Role of Technology in Society" in Shrader-Frechette, K. and Westra, L. (eds.) Technology and Values, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, pg. 74
[39] Ibid, pp. 74-75
[40] McDermott, J. "Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals" in Shrader-Frechette, K. and Westra, L. (eds.) Technology and Values, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, pg. 90

fundamentally to systems of rationalized control over large groups of men, events, and machines by small groups of technically skilled men operating through an organizational hierarchy."[41] Technology is in essence a tool of repression and subjugation, and one which resists impartial appraisal. If religion is the opiate of the masses, technology is, for better or worse, their yoke.

Importantly for this thesis, and in a similar vein to the classifications of sporting technology proposed by Butryn and Loland, the theories above all have in common a view of technology as implement; technology as tool. Technology is still in some sense foreign, or 'outside of us' in that it has no direct bearing on our rationalisations concerning the world. The process of technological development proceeded from man to machine, but not the other way.

Considering Technological Symbiosis

According to Winner, the weakness of this 'conventional' view of technology is that

> it disregards the many ways in which technologies provide structure for human activity…If the experience of modern society shows us anything, however, it is that technologies are not merely aids to human activity, but also powerful forces acting to reshape that activity and its meaning.[42]

Winner illustrates his claims by suggesting the introduction of a robot into an industrial workplace not only increases productivity, but also radically changes the processes of

[41] Ibid, pg. 95
[42] Winner, L. "Technologies as forms of life" in Shrader-Frechette, K. and Westra, L. (eds.) Technology and Values, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, pg. 58

production, leading to a redefinition of what 'work' means in that setting. Likewise, when new technologies are adopted in the medical sphere, it transforms not only what doctors do, but also how we think about sickness and health. Drawing on his own experiences as a teacher, Winner reflects on how he had to come to terms with computer crashes preventing his students from submitting papers: He had to recognise a "new world of parts and pieces" and to acknowledge different practices and expectations held in that world. "Shortly thereafter I got used to computers crashing, disrupting hotel reservations, banking, and other everyday transactions; eventually, my own papers began crashing in this new way."[43] Winner's claims find support in the sporting world when one considers the development of the game of field hockey.

As recently as the early 1990s, field hockey goalkeepers wore pads made of sponge rubber and cane, gloves similar to those of a cricket batsman, and only the most rudimentary face protectors and helmets. Nowadays, wearing kit like that would be to invite serious injury. It is not the case that the game of hockey has changed so much that it is easier to make circle entries and shoot for goal, nor is it the case that there are new striking techniques that put goalkeepers at a disadvantage and make them more vulnerable. On the contrary, provisions have been made (especially in set pieces like the penalty corner) that make it harder to score. These include making it compulsory for the ball to leave the circle – the shooting area – before it is allowed to be returned for a shot on goal. The simple answer to the question of why goalkeepers need much better protection, and why rules such as the above have been introduced, can be summed up in two words: the stick.

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[43] Ibid, pg. 58-59

Hockey sticks have developed from long pieces of curved yellowwood, in a shape similar to that of a flat banana, into potentially lethal weapons. Today's players use sticks made of a combination of graphite, aramide, kevlar and carbon fibre. Sticks like these enable one to (literally) hit the cover off a ball; ten years ago, that would have been unthinkable. However, the evolution does not end there. Sticks are now geometrically curved in a shape similar to that of a hunting bow, with the head of the stick often at what would seem to be unnatural angles to the shaft. This enables anyone wanting to flick the ball (lifting the ball by slinging it along the stick) to do so with much more power, as the ball gathers more momentum as it travels across the length of the stick. Consequently, the 'drag-flick' at a penalty corner is now the default option. International teams such as Pakistan, Germany and Holland have perfected it to such an extent that they do not need any other variations to score since their players can flick a ball at the same speed as they can hit it. The implications for the goalkeeper and the defending players should be clear. First, these improvements have meant that defending teams have had to put more emphasis on safety: face masks and groin and hand protection have become mandatory for the field players involved in the penalty-corner defense. Second, with improvements such as these, it is getting harder to stop the opposition scoring from their penalty corners.

The above technological innovations and their ilk give credence to Winner's ideas concerning the impact of technology on our activity and value structures. If it is possible now for a 10 year-old hockey player to kill a goalkeeper in a game of hockey (and it is), it would seem that certain ideas concerning the social and moral matrix of the sport would need rethinking. The idea of proper sportsmanship, for instance, might now need to

extend to limiting the number of short-range or lifted shots in a practice, simply to minimise the risk of serious injury. The sport's governing bodies might need to be aware that spectators too need to be defended against deflected shots or lifted balls that could seriously injure them; to that end, new fences and protective barriers might be needed. Due to these innovations in stick technology, and also the introduction of artificial surfaces and new rules, the speed of the game has also increased dramatically. On a more metaphysical level, the whole idea of what type of play constitutes 'good hockey' has already changed, and continues to be a fluid concept as more rules are amended.[44] As Winner argues, "The kinds of things we are apt to see as 'mere' technological entities become much more interesting and problematic if we begin to observe how broadly they are involved in conditions of moral and social life."[45] It may be the case that the introduction of composite hockey sticks means not only reconsidering the rules of the sport, but the moral basis (what type of actions are, or should be, acceptable) of the sport itself.

Winner's response to this view of a symbiotic relationship between humanity and technology is to argue for a 'return to Making'; humanity needs to recognise the 'world-making' that resides in social activities, and of which technological innovation and utilization is the biggest part. "From this point of view, the important question about technology becomes, As we 'make things work', what kind of *world* are we making?"[46] This is the basis for his description of technology as a 'form of life'. The idea that technological innovation is a 'cause' and is followed by whatever 'effects' is here

[44] The most recent rule change, for instance, allows you to 'play yourself' from a free hit.
[45] Winner, L. "Technologies as forms of life" pg. 58
[46] Ibid, pg. 68

supplanted by the idea of a greater technical system that involves human beings both as decision makers and working parts. We have to recognise the fact that technological developments have a direct impact on our moral and social structures, and therefore that technology fundamentally changes us, too. This admission requires critical reflection on our interaction with technology and its consequences for our lives.

Cultural Bodies and Cultural Technology

The fact that human behaviour is demonstrably modified by the forms and processes of technology suggests

> that we pay attention not only to the making of physical instruments and processes, although that certainly remains important, but also to the production of psychological, social, and political conditions as part of any significant technical change. Are we going to design and build circumstances that enlarge possibilities for growth in human freedom, sociability, intelligence, creativity, and self-government? Or are we headed in an altogether different direction?[47]

Winner's ideas are taken further by Ollivier Dyens in *Metal and Flesh*. Dyens discusses the place of homo sapiens in the world as being one of an interaction of 'cultural bodies'. "We are thinking matter….We exist in order to inseminate this planet with representations, ideas, and culture, with conscious and thinking dynamics…We are containers of representations, colonies of ideas, and systems of thought."[48] What separates us from other evolving species is that thing or those things that have allowed us

[47] Ibid, pg. 68
[48] Dyens, O. Metal and Flesh, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, pg. 6

to evolve up until this point: namely, our ability to think, our consciousness, our intelligence. Dyens' point is that human intelligence is not just something we are born with or have bestowed upon us. It is more than that. Just as the cheetah's evolutionary niche is speed, and the chameleon's is camouflage, humanity's evolutionary niche is intelligence. We have developed intelligence to a far greater degree than any other animal; it has been a fruitful niche in which to expand. It is not just our ability to think, however, that ensures our continuing evolution. Our intelligence is in a symbiotic relationship with its products: our tools, our books, our media and our culture.

> Technologies are both the materialization of intelligence and the seed which makes it grow and expand. For if every living being converges as much as possible towards his niche, then every living being also attempts to draw his niche in toward him….Technologies are our extensions, not only sensory and nervous, not only prosthetic and mechanical, but also ontological. Technologies are human beings fused to their niche.[49]

This combination of our intelligence and its offspring is roughly defined by Dyens as 'culture'; we are inescapably 'cultural bodies'. Recall Emerson's observation that the field is man's work-yard, his playground, his garden and his bed, and his useful arts are simply reproductions or new combinations of those raw materials found in nature. Both Dyens and Emerson are implying that nature is not only a producer, but is produced in turn – as culture.

Thus the symbiotic combination of ourselves – humanity – and what we produce requires that we add a further category to the human/machine and natural/technological

[49] Ibid, pp. 7-8

dichotomy. We have reached a point where the binary logic which underscores the questions posed above is no longer valid. Contemporary culture is a third entity; one which blurs the lines between traditional understandings of natural and unnatural. In the words of Dyens,

> Our world is now filtered, translated and transformed by culture. Technologies, news media, sciences, and so forth are the basic materials of our new abiological reality. We can no longer define, understand or represent ourselves without culture's help…We already are cultural bodies.[50]

And as much as sport has within it different cultures, sport is also a culture and is also part of culture.

Far from being simply a sprinter, Usain Bolt is a cultural body. The day before an important race his alarm-clock or wristwatch wakes him up in the morning so that he can drink his protein shake and drive down to the track for a light, pre-breakfast workout with his biokineticist and coach. His agent and publicist are also present to make sure the media is entertained. While doing his 20m repeat sprints he undoubtedly relies on the advice of his coach, on his tracksuit, running spikes and heart-rate monitor. On his way out of the stadium, he stops a while to sign autographs for his fans before eating his so-many calorie breakfast and drinking his creatine and electrolyte-replacement fluids. In the afternoon he appears in a television interview where he learns of the banning of Shawn Crawford and Marlon Devonish after positive anabolic steroid tests. He tries not to let the news affect him, but he knows the field will be weaker in the race tomorrow. The evening

[50] Ibid, pg. 19

is spent reviewing tapes of his starting technique and practicing visualization and breathing exercises. Before going to bed, he uses Google image search to find action shots of himself winning the 100m and 200m in Beijing. He emails them to his mom, who left him a voice message about wanting to frame some pictures.[51]

For Donna Harraway, the imaginary Usain Bolt described above, along with the rest of us, is already a 'cyborg'. The boundary between the traditional, half-metal cyborgs of *Blade Runner, Terminator,* and *Universal Soldier* and our social reality is an illusion – that organism called Usain Bolt is a totality of human talents and potential *and* machine processes, even though he does not have a laser attached to the side of his head. For Haraway, we need to get over our puritanical reactions to the invasion of human minds and bodies: "Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. We can be responsible for machines. The machine is not an 'it' to be animated, worshipped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment."[52] Perhaps then Hollywood has misled us about the true nature of a cyborg. Usain Bolt may be, in biological terms, fully human; it is just that the techno-parts we are used to seeing on the bodies of Arnold Schwarzenneger and Jean-Claude van Damme are in reality the culture-parts we know are acting on our Olympic champion every day.

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[51] If this imaginary Usain Bolt is too radical a picture, see Pam Sailors on the technologicalisation of Paula Radcliffe: Sailors, P. "More than a pair of shoes: Running and technology", *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2009, 36, pp. 207-216

[52] Haraway, D. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181

It is indeed these culture-borgs – our real Olympic champions – that Kalevi Heinila has in mind when he refers to the process of 'totalization' in sport.[53] Heinila argues competitions have a 'hidden validity' - they have ceased to be about the athletes themselves. What are competing now, instead, are total systems of human, economic, scientific and technological resources. Sigmund Loland, paraphrasing Heinila, states that he is "talking [here] about everything from scientifically regulated training and diet programs and nutritional supplements to the use of drugs, and in the future, genetic technologies."[54] The similarity of Heinila's idea of total athletic systems to Dyens' idea of cultural bodies and Haraway's cyborgs is striking. As Dyens notes, there are many critics who share the view that living and thinking beings are part of a planet-large collective made of biology, artifacts and culture, from Lovelock and the *Gaia* hypothesis, to Pierre Levy and the cognitive ecology, through Kevin Kelly's swarm systems and Gregory Stock's *Metaman*.[55]

The question is therefore not "What is Technology?" or "What is the difference between the natural and the technological?" as much as it is "What is the nature of that culture that we are continually creating?" Put this way, the question has much more urgency. After all, if it could be determined (or at least plausibly argued) that at some point in our technological development certain values took precedence and that their domination came at the expense of others – in other words, if we have been creating a culture (indeed

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[53] Heinilä, K. 'Notes on the Inter-Group Conflicts in International Sport' in Dunning, E (ed.) The Sociology of Sport, London: Frank Cass, 1971

[54] Loland, S. "The vulnerability thesis and the use of biomedical technology in sport", in Tamburrini, C. and Tannsjo, T. (eds.) Genetic Technology and Sport, Oxon: Routledge, 2005, pg. 159

[55] See Stock, G. Metaman, New York: Doubleday, 1993; Levy, P. Cyberculture, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001; Lovelock, J. Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth, Abingdon: Oxford University Press, 1979; Kelly, K. What Technology Wants, New York: Viking, 2010

a reality) founded on an unbalanced moral or metaphysical scale - we ought to want to discover how best to restore the balance.

The above sets the scene for the introduction of the essentialist critique of technology and the work of Jacques Ellul in particular. The picture of technology that Winner and Dyens paint compliments the critique of technology given by Ellul in two ways:

First, it helps the reader to see technology as having an overt and symbiotic impact on human thought and design, a point that Ellul and the essentialists take for granted. Technology is not reducible to tools or scientific methods. Questions of 'natural' and 'unnatural' are misguided in that they do not see the pebble path, the road outside and the autobahn as being a natural progression of production for man the animal – in this sense, all those things are natural. Technology is not tools, science, or the 'unnatural'. Technology, it will be shown, is a relationship between humanity and world.

Second, Winner and Dyens' idea of technology is morally neutral: not so Ellul. Winner and Dyens ask us to consider not what technology is, but what our relationship to technology is; Ellul and the essentialists ask us to consider the ontological and metaphysical symptoms of what they consider to be a relationship gone wrong.

Introduction to the Essentialist Critique

Technology is defined above as humanity's cultural output: our modern, super-fast, ultra-mediated interactions with the world. If we want a definition of technology, perhaps instead of *thinking* about an abstract concept, we should consider what we are *doing* every day. Humanity is now unable to exist without alarm clocks, mobile phones,

dishwashers and many other examples of technology. Importantly – and this is the crux of Dyens' argument – we are as much a part of that techno-cultural system as the machines we use. Therefore, as we build more complex and intelligent machines, our increasing interaction with and dependence on these machines in turn restructures our social and moral matrix, our very thought patterns. It was the factory that gave birth to the rat race.

Unsurprisingly, some thinkers such as the essentialists discussed below have taken a dim view of technology and its ability to fundamentally change us. Their contention is our interaction with technology drives us to ever more efficient means, and as we streamline the processes of our lives, we lose those values which appear when efficiency is not our prime concern. Consider, as a commonplace example of a technologicalised activity, microwave cooking.

The microwave drastically decreased cooking time, as well as the energy (both in terms of power and human activity) required to prepare a meal. Furthermore, the invention of the microwave led to the invention of the microwave meal – a cheap, ready-made hunger cure, which further reduced the time needed to prepare food. These savings in time, money and energy, however, come at the expense of those values traditionally associated with cooking food. The microwave meal may be quick and cheap, but it is nowhere near as social (or as much fun), say, as the 'team effort' of cooking and eating a meal with your family. Furthermore, microwave meals typically consist of refined food, which is to say, food that has been stripped of its original nutrient and fibre content.

The speed and efficiency with which microwave meals can be prepared and consumed, in combination with television has also had a demonstrable impact on eating habits: the

'family meal' has been replaced by a nutrient quick-fix. After a study investigating the eating habits of families, *Time* magazine reported that the more often families eat together, the less likely children are to smoke, take drugs, get depressed, develop an eating disorder or contemplate suicide; despite these facts, the amount of families that eat together has dropped by a third from the 1950s. A combination of social, economic and technological factors is to blame for this, with both parents now expected to work, children participating in a variety of extramural pursuits and the television a constant distraction. Thus it became clear that "the message embedded in the microwave was that time spent standing in front of the stove was time wasted."[56]

Sport too has suffered from a focus on those values promoted by an increased reliance on technology. Sports events are now more visible and lucrative than ever before, and the ever-increasing significance of The Result means that we pay attention to performance more than any other sporting value. We will return to this point in the coming chapters. The important idea here is that the essentialist critique of technology has been given the label 'essentialist' because it ascribes a certain essence to technology – an 'essentially negative' essence – which moves us away from activities and processes that are not the most efficient, rational or self-directed. As a result, we lose out on those things that stand outside of technology's value-set.

To isolate where the essentialist critique fits into a modern philosophy of technology, Mitcham first differentiates between what he calls an Engineering Philosophy of Technology (EPT) and a Humanities Philosophy of Technology (HPT).[57] When 'of

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[56] "The Magic of the Family Meal", Time Magazine Online, 04/032006,
< http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1200760-1,00.html> [accessed 06/09/2011]
[57] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994

technology' is taken as a subjective genitive indicating the subject or agent, "[a] philosophy of technology is an attempt by technologists or engineers to elaborate a technological philosophy"[58], rather than "an effort by scholars from the humanities, especially philosophers, to take technology seriously as a theme for disciplined reflection."[59]

Mitcham is forthright: the former tends to be more pro-technology and analytic, with the latter being more critical and interpretive.[60] It is the more critical and interpretive framework of the Humanities approach in which the essentialists are to be found. This does not mean the EPT has nothing of value to add; quite the contrary, and this will be demonstrated later in the challenges it offers HPT. Rather, HPT is of more interest because it eschews defining the parameters of technological development, and aims to develop an understanding of the processes - mental, physical and cultural - that underlie and are created by such development.

Ergo, if HPT can show technology has an impact on our culture and society that supervenes its actual physical characteristics (although this impact might at the same time be in some sense dependant on these physical characteristics), and if sport is not only a part of our culture but also a culture in itself (and a highly technological one at that), then HPT is going to be able to tell us something important about sport. This, however, is what Chapter Three will examine.

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[58] Ibid, pg. 17
[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid

One of the most influential sociological philosophers of the Humanities tradition – the so-called "romantic critics"[61] – is Jacques Ellul. Before considering his work however, it is worth noting that similar sentiments were expressed by other romantic critics before Ellul had applied himself to the question of technology. In his *Signs of the Times*, Thomas Carlyle writes, "It is the age of machinery in every outward and inward sense of the word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance."[62] Carlyle raged at what he considered a hostile technological takeover of man's intellectual and spiritual faculties, claiming, in a similar manner to another influential romantic essentialist, Martin Heidegger, that

> these things, which we state lightly enough here, are yet of deep import, and indicate a mighty change in our whole manner of existence. For the same habit regulates not our mode of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand.[63]

For Carlyle, as for Heidegger and Ellul, dissecting the physical components of technology – and separating these from the 'natural' world – is not as important as understanding that the products of the symbiotic relationship between humanity and technology are themselves value laden and as such, drive the relationship in a certain direction. Although Carlyle wrote lyrically about the technologicalisation of humanity, it

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[61] Ibid, pg. 40
[62] Carlyle, T. "A Sign of the Times", in Selected Writings, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980, pg. 64
[63] Ibid, pg. 67

is perhaps by briefly considering Heidegger's view of technology that a fuller introduction to Ellul's essentialism is gained.

Heidegger argues that all human production implicitly contains and promotes a certain world-view or value orientation. He borrows from the Greek understanding of *techne*, which was associated with *episteme* as a kind of knowing, a fitting in, an understanding or expertise; hence the application of *techne* to the arts. Artists were '*techne*-cal' in that their art developed from and brought forth a certain understanding or accord, an attitude or world view; their labour 'revealed' something, and was connected to the world in a way that did not challenge or disturb any sense of harmony. This Heidegger calls a *poiesis*, or a 'bringing-forth.' The basis for Heidegger's criticism of the essence of technology is the idea that modern technology challenges nature in a way that ancient technology never did. Indeed, "modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis*… modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such."[64]

Take, as an illustration of the above, the windmill and the coal mine. What is 'revealed' by each and what do we learn from a comparison of the two? For Heidegger, the windmill requires the wind to work, but it does not challenge the air in an effort to unlock or store energy in the same way that a tract of land is 'set upon' to yield coal, ore, or the produce of mechanized agriculture. This 'setting upon' of nature is also a 'setting-in-order', an expediting of natural resources. Not only is nature challenged to yield produce,

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[64] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, New York: Harper &Row, 1977, pg. 14

but this produce is stockpiled for later use, and this expediting "is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e. toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense."[65]

Thus the essence of modern technology to Heidegger concerns a challenging of nature in a way that maximises efficiency; it is a method or a set of attitudes that re-order nature's energy by stockpiling it, or to use Heidegger's phrase, transforming it into *Bestand* or 'standing reserve'. Ferre calls this attitude the 'technological *a priori*', and understands it as a way of thinking ('a machine way' of thinking) about and approaching nature as something to be challenged, ordered or mechanized.[66] Mitcham points out the unthinking adoption of this attitude means these

> modern artifacts always stand ready and available to be manipulated, consumed or discarded… *Bestand* consists of objects with no inherent value other than human use…. Modern science is characterized by an objectification of the natural world, the re-presentation of the world in mathematical terms that necessarily leave out of account its earthiness, thus setting up the possibility of producing objects without true individuality or thinghood.[67]

A similar idea underscores the central point concerning technology in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. In a quest to uncover why some people feel so alienated by modern technology, Pirsig finds himself having to deal with the dichotomy between what he terms 'classic' and 'romantic' views of technology. The classic view tends to see only the structure and function of constituent parts and their consequent

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[65] Ibid, pg. 15
[66] Ferre, F. Philosophy of Technology, pg. 66
[67] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pg. 52

hierarchies, while the romantic view tends to look only at the impression the whole creates and how it fits in with whatever is around it. Pirsig's idea is that the two views are not mutually exclusive, but that each one contains truth that is inaccessible to the other because disciples of both views fail to see where the two meet. Pirsig's term for this meeting point is *quality*, which he defines in its essence as being "the response of an organism to its environment."[68] The ugliness some people see in modern technology, suggests Pirsig, "lies in the relationship between the people who produce the technology and the things they produce, which results in a similar relationship between the people who use the technology and the things they use."[69] There is a lack of identification with these mass produced objects, and a therefore a lack of quality in both their production and their use.

The 'ugliness' Pirsig alludes to bears a striking resemblance to the attitude which Heidegger calls "an Enframing" (*Ge-Stell*).[70] Enframing is the technological direction of our systems of thought, interaction and production – our societal systems. It moves us towards efficiency and rationalised control while convincing us that this is indeed the optimum direction. Unconsciously, we turn away from personal, individual, subjective meaning and experience towards the standing reserve of objective, instrumental value. As Feenberg notes, "For Heidegger the fundamental mystery of existence is this self-manifesting of things in an opening provided by man."[71] The technological things we allow to manifest themselves do so in a 'technological space', a space we have created and that the continued production of technology protects.

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[68] Pirsig, R. Zen and the Art of Motorcyle Maintenance, London: Vintage, 2004, Pg.236
[69] Ibid, pg. 273
[70] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, pg. 19
[71] Feenberg, A. Questioning Technology, London: Routledge, 1999, pg. 184

Ellul and Technique

Proposing a similar conception of technology to that denoted by Enframing and the technological *a priori*, Jacques Ellul terms the product of the relationship between humanity and technology "technique".[72] To eliminate what he considered a common error, Ellul first distinguishes between technique and the idea of 'the machine'. Any previous history of technique, according to Ellul, amounted to a history of the machine, because the machine is the biggest, most impressive and most obvious example of technique, and historically the first. Technique certainly began with the machine, and without the machine, technique would not exist; indeed, further examples of technique all developed out of mechanics. However, to equate technique to the machine is erroneous because

> it leads to the idea that, because the machine is at the origin and centre of the technical problem, one is dealing with the whole problem when one is dealing with the machine. And that is a greater mistake still. Technique has now become almost completely independent of the machine, which has lagged far behind its offspring.[73]

If the mechanical understanding of technique is ubiquitous and the simplest to grasp, where else does technique reside? Ellul distinguishes between economic technique, the technique of organization and human technique. The first refers primarily to production, and has as its objects the organization of labour and economic planning. The second

[72] Ellul, J. The Technological Society, New York: Vintage, 1964
[73] Ibid, pp. 3-4

concerns the great masses of commercial, industrial and administrative organizations such as the police, judiciary and civil service. Finally, human technique refers to everything from genetics to propaganda, where "man himself becomes the object of technique."[74]

What we see of technique in all these cases is a replacement of what Ellul calls the 'natural milieu' by the 'technical milieu'. The natural milieu refers to a time when humanity's thought processes were not dominated by those values implicit in technique such as rationality, artificiality and efficiency; when the cycle of the day and the year was dictated by the rising sun and the changing seasons, not by the alarm clock and the advent calendar. People had been using shovels and ploughs long before they were yoked to the shift siren; it took years for technical systems of thought to become ubiquitous.

Technique demands a rational process in whatever domain it is applied, and tends to bring "a mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous and irrational."[75] Primary in this rational process is the production of discourse (which excludes *spontaneity* and *creativity*)[76] and the distillation of the facts and forces of method to its logical dimension alone.[77]

Artificiality refers to the products of technical processes, which are not natural in the sense that they require the imposition of humanity on nature to come into existence. Man applies technique to nature and the product is a replacement of natural means with technical means, and natural products with technical ones. Technique

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[74] Ibid, pp. 22
[75] Ibid, pp. 78-79
[76] I use emphasis here because these concepts are very important to the idea of metaphysical sporting value as it will be discussed further on.
[77] Ibid, pg. 79

> destroys, eliminates or subordinates the natural world, and does not allow this world to restore itself or even to enter into a symbiotic relationship with it. The two worlds obey different imperatives, different directives, and different laws which have nothing in common.[78]

Ellul argues further that technique's primary characteristics of rationality and artificiality are complimented by five others: technical automatism, self-augmentation, monism, universalism and autonomy, the first two of which are of the most import here.

Technical automatism refers to finding that 'one best way' of doing things. This method is selected through the application of rational thought and mathematical calculation (themselves methods of technique), and when it is "manifestly the most efficient of all those hitherto employed or those in competition with it, then the technical movement becomes self-directing."[79]

Furthermore, this 'one best way' tends to progress without critical forethought or the conscious imposition of limitations by man. It is not that humanity defers to it or refrains from passing judgments about it, but rather that our position is generally one of support and enthusiasm for the technical process. We are immersed in it and what it produces, which makes disinterested criticism all the more difficult. Our common efforts for progress amount to a common effort towards technical progress; thus the machine maintains itself. This is what Ellul means when he refers to self-augmentation.[80]

Ellul's criticism highlights the effect that the increasing mechanization of the world has had on the human animal physically, but also – importantly – psychologically. In the

[78] Ibid
[79] Ibid, pg. 80
[80] Ibid, pp. 85-94

technical milieu our understanding of the proper form and direction of our life processes has a distinctly mechanistic edge: "Medicine, education, sports, and entertainment all become subject to input-output, cost-benefit analysis in search of the 'one best way' to achieve results."[81]

Technique and Sport

The processes of technique are also visible in the increasing mechanisation of the sporting sphere. Ellul argues that the Romans viewed sport as a means to improve the efficiency of their legionnaires, and it is the Roman conception of sport that prevails today. Sport has become mechanised; in the exact measurements of the stop watch, the precision training of muscular actions and the concept of the record, "we find repeated in sport one of the essential elements of industrial life."[82]

Ellul also sees sport as furnishing precise and measured relief from the precise and measured life of industrial work – sport entrenches the idea of demarcated boundaries and traditional authority found in the technique of the office or factory. Moreover, in the office and factory nothing gratuitous is allowed to exist; all must meet the technical expectations of rationality and efficiency. Such is also the case in mechanised sport:

> Real play and enjoyment, contact with air and water, improvisation and spontaneity all disappear. These values are lost to the pursuit of efficiency, records and strict rules. Training in sports makes

[81] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, pg. 59
[82] Ellul, J. The Technological Society, pp. 382-384

> of the individual an efficient piece of apparatus which is henceforth unacquainted with anything but the harsh joy of exploiting his body and winning.[83]

These ideas on 'sporting technique' foreshadow the arguments made in Chapter Three. Before examining them, it will be helpful to consider the consequences of technique more generally, as well as the solutions proposed by the essentialists.

The Consequences of *Technique*

Both Ellul and Heidegger are sounding a warning. The processes of technique have ushered in a technical milieu, and humanity's complicity has meant that we have placed an existential bet.[84] We have wagered on the ability of mankind to solve, technologically, any of the problems we encounter or create because of our reliance on technology. Unfortunately we are often unaware of the problems we create, such is our submersion in technique.

Few people stop to question the number of things they have to do each day, the number of things that vie for their attention. We are bombarded by advertisements for better products (and better lives) while we try our best to make sense of what is happening at work, what is happening at home, and what multimedia technologies tell us is happening everywhere else. Our contact with nature is minimised, we live to schedule, and we fight constantly for unity against forces that would fragment our lives. Man was made to move "at six kilometers an hour, and he goes a thousand. He was made to eat when he was

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[83] Ibid, pp. 387
[84] Ellul, J. The Technological Society

hungry and sleep when he was sleepy. Instead, he obeys a clock."[85] Furthermore, the technical milieu imposes on all people; thus the 'mass society' is created. Before technique become all-pervasive, man was in essential agreement with his social structures, indeed, these structures took their form from the psychology of the individual. Collective societies built on the human ideal of brotherly relations functioned well because the structures of the societies mirrored that ideal. Today, that ideal is still prominent, but our societal structures express diametrically the opposite:

> The fundamental rule of the world today is the rule of economic, political and class competition - and this competition extends to the social and human relations of friendship and sex. The disequilibration between the traditional affirmation and the new criterion of anxiety and insecurity is characteristic of our epoch and of our neuroses.[86]

The 'mass society' takes its cue not from individual sensibilities, but from the dictates of technique, which demands homogenization. Societal structures thus display those traits necessary to further mechanistic ideals such as efficiency and rationality. The result is a move away from the 'natural' nature of man towards a nature defined by technique. The bet is therefore hedged against us: we are hoping that we can create technology to solve technology's problems, when the biggest problem is our unthinking adoption of technology.

One must admit the essentialist critique as outlined above admits of a bleak state of affairs. Our use of technology has led us down a path dictated, it would seem, by

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[85] Ellul, J. The Technological Society, pg. 325
[86] Ibid, pg. 333

technology (or at least, what essentially constitutes technology) itself. What solution do the essentialists offer?

Heidegger argues for a detached (*Gelassenheit*) questioning of technology's essence, stressing meditative, non-discursive thinking (*Denken*) and the role of art and poetry in revealing truths about the world to us. Recall that Heidegger asserts art in the classical Greek sense of the term was also a revealing in the way that Enframing is today, in that it 'radiantly brought forward' truths about the human condition; what Heidegger calls 'the dialogue of divine and human destinings'. The *poiesis* of the arts therefore also bore the name *techne*. It is important that because the essence of technology is nothing technological itself but simply a mode of revealing, any critical reflection on technology must happen in "a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence technology [in that it is also a mode of revealing] and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art."[87]

Ellul's answer is similar. He argues for an ethics of 'non-power' that would delimit technical practice. We must, as a technological culture, refrain from doing all of the things our technological powers enable us to do. An ethics of non-power will

> turn off television sets, drive cars at slower speeds, and turn away from overconsumption and environmental pollution, all of which can engender new ways of speaking and listening, building and inhabiting, thinking – which in turn can be nourished by and promote not only the freedom to question but also a certain countertechnical wager.[88]

[87] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, pg. 35
[88] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, pg. 61

Both Heidegger and Ellul advocate a ‘slowing down’ of our fast-paced, technological lives in favour of a more measured approach that would seem to hearken back to times where technology and its associated thought patterns were present in, but did not dominate, human affairs. Heidegger’s references to poetry and art in particular seem to point towards a reevaluation, on metaphysical grounds, of the role of technology in our lives. There is something valuable to be taken from these approaches to a solution for the technological problem, and we will return to them in considering Feenberg’s critique of the essentialist position later in this chapter.

Critiquing the Essentialist Position

There are a number of objections that can be raised against the preceeding, however, before getting to specific arguments against the essence of technology as understood by Heidegger and Ellul. The first of these concerns the question of whether there could even be a Humanities Philosophy of Technology theory without technology. It was, after all, pre-modern man’s ability to use the natural environment which led to tools and clothes, and much later settlements and agriculture. There could be no reflection on our tool-making ability without first having tools and the luxuries they created. As Mitcham notes though, this objection is at best an argument for the primacy of engineering over philosophy, not of EPT over HPT. “Furthermore, historical priority does not entail logical primacy. Indeed, the imputed historical primacy itself is questionable, since it is in no

way clear that pre-modern and modern technology are not the same."[89] However one attempts to solve this chicken-and-egg scenario, the grain of truth in the objection is that "insofar as the humanities are dependent on technology, then to that degree a philosophy of technology that takes its bearings solely from the humanities rather than technology must be deficient."[90]

The above preempts an objection to HPT that if not overly forceful, must surely be valid: the HPT theorists never seem to engage with technology on technology's terms. There is a distinct lack of understanding of engineering method and terminology, and hardly ever an attempt to engage the arguments of the defenders of pro-engineering philosophy. This is certainly true of the abstract theorising of Heidegger, and to a lesser extent, of Ellul as well.

But note that these types of objections to HPT do not address what is *actually claimed* in the HPT theory laid out above. What the EPT objections are doing is arguing against a method of criticism rather than the criticism itself. And this should not surprise – engineers and those involved in the production of technology are as likely to claim expertise in their trade, and defend it on these grounds exclusively, as anyone else. However, if one admits that any valid criticisms of technology must understand the language of both camps, then it is worth noting, as Mitcham does, that "HPT must in principle stay open to the engineering perspective. It is not clear that engineering qua engineering has a similar principled openness."[91]

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[89] Ibid, pg. 138
[90] Ibid
[91] Ibid, pg. 140

It is certainly true Heidegger has little, if any, appreciation for the language and processes of engineering. But is it necessary to understand how landmines are manufactured to conclude that they have a devastating effect on whoever stands on one? There may well be an artistic beauty present in, and simplistic mathematical efficiency to, the arc of a switchblade glinting in the moonlight; we do not have to understand metallurgy to know that muggings in dark alleys should not be applauded. The issue thus becomes one of perspective: to the engineers that witness the greatest of man's technological achievements, technology may well seem heaven-sent. To those that reflect on the effects of this technology on the human animal, the blessings of technology appear as a disguise.

A More Helpful Critique: Feenberg and Meaningful Intervention

While Andrew Feenberg attempts to dispute the essentialist critique of technology, he does so without partiality (or indeed, even reference) to the EPT tradition. His objections come from within HPT itself. Feenberg defines the essentialist position as one which posits technology as "an autonomous force separate from society, a kind of second nature impinging on social life from the alien realm of reason in which science too finds its source. For good or ill, technology's essence – rational control, efficiency – rules modern life."[92] For all that, he is quite willing to concede that the essentialist critique does offer something constructive to our understanding of technology: "Technical disciplines are constituted around devices conceived as *essentially* functional, and therefore as

[92] Feenberg, A. Questioning Technology, London: Routledge, 1999, Preface, vii

essentially orientated toward efficiency…. [Essentialism has] produced a powerful critique of the obsession with efficiency that is indeed prevalent in our society."[93]

Feenberg uses the example of the technologically advanced houses that are common in society today to illustrate his objection to the essentialist critique. To the house-builder, or to someone living a different way, a house may appear to be merely a conglomeration of technological artifacts such as reinforced timber, adhesives, double-glazed windows, carpets, complex heating systems, electronic devices and multi-purpose furniture. It could be argued that all these devices function at base to improve our lives, or as the essentialist might say, improve our everyday efficiency. The house efficiently protects us against the elements; it is a repository for food, and a comfortable place to relax. But Feenberg's point is that the house also functions as a safe-haven, a social meeting point and a reservoir of fond memories:

> We have 'domesticated' the technicized house and made it ours in all sorts of ways that have little or nothing to do with efficiency. The essence of technology, whatever that is, ought to encompass this complexity in principle. It ought to have categories under which we can recognize aspects of the house that are not reducible to a means-ends relationship.[94]

As the following will show, Feenberg attempts to counter the essentialist's main claim – that 'technological life' is inimical to a life rich in meaning – by 'updating' the essentialist critique, and then showing that the 'top down' view taken on technology by

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[93] Ibid, ix-x
[94] Feenberg, A. Questioning Technology, London: Routledge, 1999, Preface, xi

the essentialist blinds them to much of the meaning they claim is absent from the technological sphere.

Feenberg begins by drawing similarities between Heidegger's critique and contemporary philosopher of technology Albert Borgmann's "device paradigm."[95] This paradigm holds that "modern technology separates off the good or commodity it delivers from the context and means of delivery."[96] Thus the modern dishwasher miraculously delivers clean plates in contrast to the (often social) effort of scrubbing pots and pans. The dishwasher has 'functionalised' plate-cleaning, but the gains in efficiency must be weighed against a certain distancing from reality. In a similar way, the social networking phenomenon has had an incredible impact on inter-personal relationships. Is seeing all your friend's pictures really better than seeing her in person? In defense of the point, Feenberg notes that

> One need not claim that the rise of fast food 'causes' the decline of the traditional family to recognize a significant connection….What Borgmann calls 'focal things' that gather people in meaningful activities that have value for their own sake cannot survive this functionalizing attitude.[97]

As with the work of Ellul, Borgmann's distinction between the decontextualisation of the device on one hand and the essentially contextual 'focal thing' on the other have clear parallels with Heidegger; in this case, the distinction between 'modern technological

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[95] Borgmann, A. Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984
[96] Feenberg, A. Questioning Technology, pg. 187
[97] Ibid, pg. 188

Enframing' and the "gathering power of traditional craft production, that draws people and nature together around a materialized site of encounter."[98]

Feenberg objects to the above by way of another example, this time citing online computer networks and Borgmann's evaluation of them.[99] Borgmann terms the digital revolution in communication 'hyperintelligence', and claims that it simplifies people to disposable experiences that can be turned on and off at will; the person as a focal thing has become a commodity delivered by a device:

> Plugged into the network of communications and computers, they seem to enjoy omniscience and omnipotence; severed from their network, they turn out to be insubstantial and disoriented. They no longer command the world as persons in their own right. Their conversation is without depth and wit; their attention is roving and vacuous; their sense of place is uncertain and fickle.[100]

Although it may sound a lot like the grumblings of an old man out of touch with the pace of the world, there is an element of truth in this. Personal encounters are simplified by technology, and we can escape each other's attentions by pulling out the plug. But there are two major problems with this type of essentialist critique.

First, because computer networks developed in response to the need to transmit raw data as simply as possible between engineers and technicians, defining the potential and impact of these networks in terms of this original function *only* ignores the process of making it a more expansive technology, as well as the effects of this transformation: "To impose a narrow regimen of data transmission to the exclusion of all human contact

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[98] Ibid, pg. 189
[99] Ibid
[100] Borgmann, A. Crossing the Postmodern Divide, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pg. 108

would surely be perceived as totalitarian in any ordinary institution. Why is it not a liberation to transcend such limitations in the virtual world that now surrounds us?"[101]

Second, the essentialist critique ignores the variety of communications mediated by the functionalising influence of the computer, just as it ignores the variety of interactions possible in the 'technicized house':

> The problem is that we tend to judge face-to-face at its memorable best and the computer-mediated environment at its transcribed worst. Borgmann simply ignores more interesting uses of computers, such as the original research applications of the Internet, and teaching applications which show great promise.[102]

One of these applications, which Feenberg thinks not only demonstrated great promise, but made a significant and positive contribution to the quality of life of users of network technology, was the discussion group on the Prodigy Medical Support Bulletin Board, which was dedicated to sufferers of Lou Gehrig's disease.[103] These online patient meetings enabled those afflicted by the disease to discuss feelings of dependency, their thoughts on death and dying and the problems associated with sexuality. The frankness of these discussions may well have come about because of the anonymity Borgmann so abhors in the computerised environment; the technological sword, in this case anyway, seems to be double-edged.

Contemporary examples that illustrate the two-sided nature of technology abound. Telephones and computers may be symptomatic of 'hyperintelligence', but without them,

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[101] Feenberg, A. Questioning Technology, pg. 191
[102] Ibid, pg. 191
[103] Ibid, pg. 192

the large-scale response to the swine flu epidemic in the UK in 2009 would not have been possible. Without complex global technological infrastructure systems, any international humanitarian response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti early in 2010 would have been impossible. Hyperintelligent technology by its nature has the ability to isolate, simplify and disenfranchise. But it is possible, to paraphrase Heidegger's use of Holderlin's words, that where danger is, grows the saving power also.[104]

Feenberg's point is that Ferre's technological *a priori*, Heidegger's Enframing, Ellul's *technique* and Borgmann's device paradigm all claim to offer an idea of what *essentially* constitutes technology from outside of its influence, but in reality, argues Feenberg, the essentialist critique 'looks down' upon a phenomenon while moving along with it, and as such remains "partially caught in the very way of thinking it criticizes."[105] There is much meaning to be found in progressive technology, as the example of the medical patient's network illustrates. Further, essentialism fails to give us an answer that empowers us. Why must we necessarily commit to detachment or non-power? Is there no way to turn the technological tide and still retain the power of its forward momentum?

Feenberg's solution is to posit a different conceptualization of technology, one that includes "secondary instrumentalizations, i.e. the integration of technologies to larger technical systems and nature."[106] His idea is that

> Real change will not come when we turn away from technology toward meaning, but when we recognize the nature of our subordinate position in the technical systems that enroll us, and begin

[104] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology, pg. 28
[105] Ibid, pg. 193
[106] Ibid

> to intervene in the design process in the defense of the conditions of a meaningful life and a livable environment.[107]

This begs the question of just how we are to decide the fundamentals of a meaningful life and a livable environment. Feenberg here displays much more of an affinity with Borgmann than he might admit; Feenberg himself states that, following Borgmann, we cannot hope to change technology 'in itself'; indeed, "At best, we can hope to overcome our attitude toward it through a spiritual movement of some sort."[108] The contention is between changing technology 'in itself', i.e. changing the essence of technology (which Feenberg would seem committed to by virtue of his call for intervention in the design process), or overcoming our attitude towards it. In both cases however, there is the need for value reappraisal on the part of the makers and users of technology. If we can change the essence of technology by intervening in its creation, we need to decide how we want to change it; and if technology is a self-perpetuating efficiency machine (and we are complicit in the creation of its value hierarchy) we must decide on a value change that mitigates any potential technological flashpoint. Both approaches have merit, simply because they share the opinion that *something* must be changed; the discussion of solutions admits that there *is* a problem with technology's relentless march.

[107] Ibid, Preface xiv
[108] Ibid, pg. 193

Concluding Remarks

The essentialists have a case. Detaching ourselves from the technological rush that constantly surrounds us must surely be the first step to any solution to the technological problem. This is the wisdom of 'non-power': more careful thought and a limiting of technological action would surely decrease the risk of problems further on. But it is Feenberg's solution which holds the most promise. If Winner, Dyens, Heidegger and Ellul are right, then technology the entity, *technique*, is well nigh inescapable, because it is, in a very real sense, us. Consider Mitcham's excellent summation of the essentialist critique: "Technology [or *technique*] is a kind of existential rejection of the metaphysical or spiritual – in the sense of not paying attention – in the same ways that any dogma, precisely in its worldly powerfulness, rejects or ignores the more subtle affairs of mind and heart."[109] The solution then, as Feenberg rightly implies, is to bring up to technological speed those 'meaningful life values' that we have forgotten as we surf the technological wave.

Chapter Three examines technology in the sporting sphere - sporting *technique* - and aims to further elucidate Feenberg's solution, while at the same time setting the scene for a solution to the problem of technology or *technique* (in sporting terms anyway) in the latter part of this thesis. It will be argued the current direction of sport provides ample examples of the essentialist's warnings concerning the impact of technique. The solution to this problem is to decide how sport can function in an existential manner; how it can promote those metaphysical and spiritual values that technique tends to marginalise.

[109] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, pg. 54

Chapter Three: Contemporary Sport and the Essentialist Critique

The product is entertainment, but the brand is the Democratic ideal made flesh, Adam at play in the field of the Lord before partaking of the contract with Steinbrenner…

- Lewis Lapham[110]

Towards the end of the Chapter One we introduced the idea of technology as being a form of life, in the sense that it moulds and shapes, and is in turn moulded and shaped by human behaviour. Dyens builds on this, describing technology as our cultural output – our thought patterns and intelligence itself are structured by our ongoing interaction with a highly technical world. There is no doubt that this present, more homogenous global cultural environment is radically different to the world of 100 years ago, but we have been surprisingly reticent in our reflections and criticisms about the change to hyperintelligent modes of being. One would think that with such momentous upheaval in our cultural conditions we have more often than not given serious thought to how we are currently restructuring our lives, but as Winner points out, "the interesting puzzle in our times is that we so willingly sleepwalk through the process of reconstituting the conditions of human existence."[111] This 'technological somnambulism' refers to the way we have allowed technology to 'dictate' how we use it. Both Ellul and Heidegger, in warning us about the impact of technology on our lives, implicitly endorse this idea: we have let technology run away with us, and away from us.

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[110] Lapham, L. "Mudville" in Harpers Magazine, March 2008, pg. 11
[111] Winner, L. "Technologies as forms of life" in Shrader-Frechette, K. and Westra, L. (eds.) Technology and Values, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, pg. 61

This chapter will examine the relationship between commercialism (our economic technique), performance (the eminent sporting value today) and technology (physical and cultural). It will describe a fluid yet principled (in the sense that the constituent elements move in the same direction) relationship between the three, a relationship which pushes us further from an holistic idea of the value[112] of sport and towards the types of technological problems we are currently encountering. What this relationship produces is what will be called 'sporting technique'. Recall that Ellul argues the Greek idea of sport has been supplanted by the Roman ideal - for the Greeks, physical exercise freely and harmoniously developed the form and strength of the body, whereas for the Romans it was a technique for improving the Legionnaire's efficiency. In contemporary Western sporting culture we have just added significant levels of money, worship of performance and the hypermagnification of the sporting sphere to that equation. It is no wonder that Walsh and Giulianotti refer to this mix as "a sporting mammon."[113]

The first section of this chapter explores the idea of sporting technique, while the second focuses on two significant challenges facing sport today, namely doping and genetic engineering. This section also begins to uncover a possible solution (following the answer to the technological problem proposed by Feenberg) to these and other problems associated with the rise of sporting technique. The last section uses two recent examples of significant technological developments aiding human athletic endeavour to make the solution explored in the remainder of this thesis explicit.

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[112] Heidegger might here talk of the 'truth' of sport; our emphasis on commercialism and performance obscures other sporting value to the extent that the 'whole' of sport is not revealed.
[113] Walsh, A. and Giulianotti, R. Ethics, Money and Sport. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007

Setting a sleepwalking record on the way to the bank: Technology, Performance and Profit

A defining characteristic of the human animal is the compulsion of our curiosity – we constantly push both our own individual boundaries and those of collective society to 'see how far we can go'. If something might be done, we have to see if it can be done, and if it can be done, it usually is. It is this aspect of ourselves that Heidegger is referring to when he talk of a 'technological space';[114] these are the human attributes that allow technology to progress unchecked.

In the 1920s, prior to his fateful attempt to become the first person to summit Everest, George Mallory summed up this aspect of humanity with the immortal words, "Because it's there". In more recent history, people have run non-stop for hundreds of kilometers, dived to unimaginable depths, skydived from balloons in the stratosphere, travelled faster than the speed of sound, built satellites to map space and split atoms. However, the tendency is to view each of these events in isolation and not as a salient part of the whole of humanity's accomplishments. In fact, our achievements rarely stand alone; rather, they tend to spur us on to greater things. The sum of all our successes can be greater and more terrible than we could ever imagine; sometimes, we come to realise too late that we have set in motion events over which we no longer have control. Oppenheimer could have been speaking for human nature when he said "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."[115]

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[114] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, pg. 20
[115] Bird, K. & Sherwin, M. J. American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, pg. 243

Whether Oppenheimer knew his work on an atomic bomb would usher in an era of nuclear proliferation and constant fear, or whether he was simply trying to help the Allies to a swift victory in a conflict that had destroyed millions of lives is debatable. The point is that our successes with technology often have far greater ramifications than we are able to foresee at the time of (supposed) triumph. Thus we sleepwalk towards our futures, alternately solving and creating technological problems.

The essentialist critique of technology posits a drive to efficiency as being fundamental to technology's essence. This may be the case, but it is also true that technology allows those aspects of human nature that developed the atomic bomb the room they needed to take charge. This is not to be necessarily negative, but instead to point out that the 'essence' of technology speaks most to that part of us that rejoices in our technological genius while trusting it to right any wrongs it may do along the way. Winner's point is that we often seem to be asleep and dreaming as we place Ellul's existential bet. An example of this is swimming's recent 'suit' debacle.

Speedo's LZR Racer swimming suit is made of woven elastane-nylon and polyurethane with ultrasonically welded seams, and was developed in association with the Australian Institute of Sport. The suit allows for better oxygen flow to the muscles, holds the body in a more hydrodynamic position and is hydrophobic. Approximately 94% of the races won and 23 out of the 25 world records set at the Beijing Olympics were by swimmers wearing the LZR Racer. As of the 24 August 2009, 93 world records had been broken by swimmers wearing the suit. Swimmers who were not sponsored by Speedo, such as certain Italian and Japanese athletes sponsored by Mizuno, Asics and Descente, risked fines by wearing the LZR suit in defiance of their contracts. The outcome of the number

of broken records and general clamor the suit prompted was an abrupt reversal of the decision to allow the LZR Racer (and its imitators) to be worn in competition. The FINA Congress voted on the 24th of July 2009 during the World Aquatics Championships in Rome to revert to its previous policy and ban all body-length swimsuits. The new policy states that men's swimsuits may maximally cover the area from the waist to the knee; the women's counterpart may maximally cover the area from the shoulder to the knee. Neither swimsuit may have any fastening devices (besides drawstrings for the male costume). Despite these amendments, the records set during the 'suit era' still stand, a fact that sits uncomfortably with many, as no one is sure whether humans can swim that fast without technological aid and therefore whether any world records will be broken again.[116]

The engineers at Speedo saw a way to swim faster, to break records and win races, and the world got swept along with the tide. In the end, no one was happy about the ease with which races were being won and records were being broken; no one, that is, except the people at Speedo. In an article for the Wall Street Journal, Roger Thurow and Christopher Rhoads note the reaction of the Speedo hierarchy to the suit's success:

> Peering down at the pool, Stephen Rubin shouted, "Eight of eight." The Winningest Olympian: Michael Phelps dives off the blocks toward his 11th career gold medal, a record. The chairman of Pentland Group PLC wasn't prematurely celebrating Michael Phelps's quest to win a record eight gold medals in eight races while wearing Speedo's new LZR Racer suit. Mr. Rubin, whose London-based company owns Speedo International, was looking at the starting blocks seconds

[116] Partridge, B. "Fairness and Performance-Enhancing Swimsuits at the 2009 Swimming World Championships: The 'Asterisk' Championships", *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 2011, Vol. 5:1, pp. 63-74

> before the women's 100-meter butterfly race. All eight swimmers were wearing the LZR. "We can't lose," someone in the giddy Speedo cheering section said. "Well, we will lose," Mr. Rubin said with a chuckle. "But we'll also win." The order of finish was Australia, U.S., Australia. But it was all the same to Speedo… On a yellow legal pad, Stu Isaac, Speedo's head of sales and team marketing, sketched a treasure map of LZR gold: Six countries, four continents. The U.S., Australia, South Korea, Japan, Britain and the Netherlands. Six more countries with silver and bronze: China, Zimbabwe, France, Russia, Austria and Slovakia. "That tells us we're making a global statement, and that can only help Speedo throughout the world," Mr. Isaac said. At the Beijing Games, Speedo's goal - like Mr. Phelps's campaign - is nothing short of world domination.[117]

It seems that there are always beneficiaries to the process of sleepwalking (or sleepswimming) through the reconstitution of the conditions of our existence. Perhaps Speedo did not have the influence necessary to keep FINA from changing the rules – an about-turn that cost them millions as their technological marvel was left dead in the water. They did however exploit a temporary loop-hole in the rules of the sport and the mentality of those governing it while that loophole was open. Constant redesigns and technological improvements in equipment from swimsuits to bicycles, from hockey sticks to performance fabric generally mean, however, that someone is always making a profit from the development of new technology. Usually, it is those who develop such technology. The relationship between new technology and profit is clear.

The case of the LZR swimsuit illustrates Winner's point, but it also allows us to draw some important conclusions concerning sporting technique. First, we need to examine the

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[117] Rhoads, C. &Thurow, R. "Fast Times", *Wall Street Journal Online*, 14/08/08, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121865005500237497.html > [accessed 3 March 2009]

potential impact of new technologies on sport in much closer detail *before* we use them, or else we risk unintended consequences that impact sport negatively, such as the current situation with swimming world records.

Second, since performance is the primary value in elite sporting competition (and much else besides), most if not all new technologies are developed with performance in mind.

Third, there is a triangular relationship between performance, profit and new technology such that technology helps performance, performance generates profit and profit in turn aids the production of new technology. The drive to efficiency in sporting competition (records, medals, victories) runs in a comfortable, symbiotic parallel with the drive to make efficient profit from sporting competition. Even in sports where the impact of new technology[118] is minimal, the latter would seem to hold true. One need only consider the recent 'question and answer' session witnessed at Arsenal Football Club to realise the truth of that statement. Here we see the club's shareholders calling an open meeting to question the tactics of their manager, as if responsibility for the monetary side of a sports club brings with it the ability to question the coach's decisions.

As manager of Arsenal Arsene Wenger has won the English Premier League three times, two of which saw him also lift the FA Cup in the same season (he is also the only non-British manager to win the 'double'). He has delivered a further six cup titles to boot, and has been responsible for the development of icons like Dennis Bergkamp and Thierry Henry. With a style of play that is widely regarded as the most attractive in world football, Arsenal have been ever-present on the European stage as well, reaching the

[118] And here I mean physical technologies, or what Loland terms "technology in competition", as opposed to cultural technology or sporting technique.

UEFA Cup final in 1999/2000 and the UEFA Champions League final in 2005/2006. Wenger has been the Premier League Manager of the Year on three occasions, and was awarded an OBE in 2003. In the words of Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein, Wenger "has a job for life."[119] In an era where a club can have two or three managers in a single season, such praise is indicative of the respect Wenger has earned both at Arsenal and in football more generally. The reader should take note of the above facts before reading the following excerpts from the transcript of Wenger's meeting with his shareholders on the 14th of May 2009, below.[120]

> Arsene Wenger: The vibes around the team are very negative but with the policy we've gone for with a young team, to finish in the position we have is not a shame. I'm very proud of the team and I regret that, from the first day of the season, we had negative vibes around the team. It was the most energy-demanding season because we had to support the team against all the odds. We lost Gallas, Adebayor, Fabregas and Rosicky to injury and lost Flamini and Hleb [transferred] and we suddenly lost the whole midfield, experience wise, and had to completely rebuild it.
>
> Shareholder: I don't believe we've got a player who's capable of being captain.
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> AW: Maybe we have too many captains as we've had nine this year, but I believe in shared leadership. Fabregas is a good captain.

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[119] Cary, T. "Wenger promised job for life", *The Telegraph Online*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/2346827/Wenger-promised-job-for-life.html> [accessed 04/07/2011]

[120] News of the World Online, "Wenger Speaks Out", 15/05/09, [accessed 12/08/2009, but no longer available] See instead *The Sunday Times Online*, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/football/premier_league/arsenal/article6289940.ece> [accessed 04/08/2011]

SH: You were quoted as saying, ‘We live in a league where divers are rewarded’. Do you accept Emmanuel Adebayor is a perpetrator of the diving scam and many supporters feel his lack of commitment and arrogance would make him somebody you ought to dispose of in the summer?

AW: I do not agree. Adebayor’s a great player who has done fantastically for the club.

SH: A lot of us feel he doesn’t bring great credit to this club and we wouldn't be sad if he was to go.

AW: If players don’t do well, it is because they have lost confidence. But the best way to help a guy is to support him. Slaughtering him does not help.

SH: It's very difficult to understand how we lost five international midfielders - including injured Rosicky. How did you think we could compete in the Premier League having lost those players? I just don’t understand your mindset. Also, I can't understand the swapping of Senderos with Silvestre. It seems totally against your philosophy to allow a 23-year-old centre-half to go and bring in a geriatric. Silvestre has been unfit for half of the season.

AW: I do not accept the statements you make about our players. Are you a shareholder?

SH: Yes.

AW: You should not use these terms. You should see him in training every day. And I can’t understand how we lost five internationals?

SH: But how could you not bring in replacements?

AW: Because we had plenty of young players. If you don’t play the young players you will lose them. They will show you they are great players. What I don’t like is you saying I am wrong to play them.

SH: What extent do you consider trophies and medals to be the be-all and end-all?

AW: I want to win trophies, but you cannot survive a long time as a club without a style of play. Today, Arsenal is hugely respected, with a massive reputation all over the world. But the smallest respect we have is here in England! If I say, “Today we will buy a £70m player”, everyone is happy. But if we don’t win, people ask, “Why?” But what this team has done, with the average age it has now, no team has done that. It’s important to support the team.

SH: At Man United in the Champions League, you saw the way we defended the corner which led to their goal. The whole back four left three players unmarked, while Adebayor just wandered off.

AW: He’s a striker, he was looking to get forward and score.

SH: Isn’t it the job of the coaches to make sure, when we’re defending, a player the size of Adebayor is marking?

AW: Do you really think you work 25 years in football but don’t tell these things to your players? You have to accept mistakes. With that goal I agree with you, it was a problem of concentration, but when a player is offensive-minded he can make this kind of mistake.

SH: I've been mystified at the number of times players have been played out of position. Why don't you play them where they are best suited?

AW: You ask players where they want to play and they say in the middle. But you cannot play everyone there.

It was following this meeting to discuss Arsenal’s lack of success [*sic*] that Wenger would announce that “it [the questioning of the club, his tactics and lack of recent trophies] has become ridiculous. You sit here, you are in the last four in Europe, and every day you feel you have killed someone. It is unbelievable. If you do not take a

distance with it, you think, '*What kind of world do we live in* [my italics]?'"[121] This is the same question Winner, Heidegger and Ellul are asking.

That elite sport has become a monolithic commercial and industrial machine is uncontestable. Walsh and Giulianotti are unequivocal: "Elite sport is now, more clearly than ever before, a commodity – a commercial enterprise governed by the laws of supply and demand. Its aims, ethos, institutional organization and very ludic structures are increasingly determined by market forces."[122] At a time when Michael Jordan alone can have a $10 billion[123] impact on the economy of the United States, sport - with those involved at the elite level leading the charge - has unquestionably become big business, and very good big business at that. Is it any wonder then that those who control the purse-strings of a successful sporting business like Arsenal Football Club have come to expect their opinions on the sport itself to be taken seriously?

The emergence of money and commercialism as driving forces in sport is inevitable considering today's global culture. This is the central insight of the Essentialist critique discussed in the previous chapter: our commercial-technological-industrial culture has narrowed the focus of all endeavour across all societies. Sport is now primarily concerned with profit, and has - in virtue of this but also as a natural consequence of our obsession with technique - as its primary object and sanctified value, performance.

The true sentiments of the Arsenal shareholders are thus easily identified. The only way Arsenal the business is going to make money is if the Arsenal brand and the players that

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[121] Fleming, M. "Wenger: It Feels Like I've Killed Someone", *Independent Online*, 16/05/09 < http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/wenger-it-feels-like-ive-killed-someone-1685658.html> [accessed 12/08/2009]
[122] Walsh, A. and Giulianotti, R. Ethics, Money and Sport. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pg. 1
[123] Ibid

are incorporated under it are marketable. In other words, if they can sell the naming rights to the club's stadium to a multi-national corporation like Emirates Airlines; if the club can sell shirts with the player's names on them; if the next contract signed by the club's superstars include clauses that ensure a percentage of that player's coming endorsement deals; or if the club can tack "Champions League Winner" onto any of their players before selling them and thus demand more money, Arsenal the business *makes more money*. No one is interested in sponsoring an underachieving club or buying the shirt of an also-ran, and no big-name players (an apparent prerequisite for further success as the comments above demonstrate) will want to play for a team that is not going to win anything. In short, Arsenal the business needs Arsenal the football team to perform. It is no longer simply a question of pride or owning local bragging rights; it is now a question of profitability through performance.

In their 1999 book *Winner and Losers: The Business Strategy of Football*, Szymanski and Kuypers note that previously it had been difficult to prove a powerful relationship between differences in league position and differences in profit.[124] However, in 1996 the Nomura Index of football club stock market prices showed a 360% increase, which was based around the experience of one particularly successful club, Manchester United. Success according to the Directors of Manchester United depended on the commitment and loyalty of supporters; clearly, they were attuned to the needs of their target market. To this end, they promised to provide attractive and entertaining football. In detailing the Directors' commitment to United's fans, Kuypers and Szymanski conclude that "to make

[124] Kuypers, T. & Szymanski, S. Winners and Losers: The Business Strategy of Football, London: Penguin, 2000, pg. 29

money for the shareholders, the football on the pitch would have to be good. So far this enterprise has been a resounding success."[125]

In *Sport Inc.* Schaaf refers to "leveraging the sports platform" – creating an environment where the broader public are aware of a sporting brand and will continuously buy into it.[126] The best way to do this, Schaaf argues, is by winning. To illustrate his point, he considers the Los Angeles Lakers and Boston Celtics during the 1980s. The contrasting styles of the two teams and the respectful rivalry of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird enabled the NBA to emerge from the malaise of the 1970s, while the Lakers and the Celtics in turn maximised their profile and revenue streams:

> The Celtics even went public, sold stock in the franchise, and built a new facility, The Fleet centre. The Lakers, meanwhile, took the concept of 'Showtime' and created a culture as much as a fan base…. It also helped attract marquee sponsors like Great Western Bank to groundbreaking marketing and advertising campaigns. [Their] good fortune is due to shrewd management of on-court talent and leveraging the success of their team in the local market place. It didn't happen by accident![127]

The commercial system in sport is thus founded on the primacy of performance as *the* sporting value. It is not just winning teams, though, that generate profit. Successful individuals are visible, accessible, and often beautiful – in other words, marketable. Schaaf calls the successful athlete "an influencer."[128] When a popular athlete changes equipment, training supplements or soft drinks, millions of fans notice and adjust their

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[125] Ibid, pg. 30
[126] Schaaf, P. Sports Inc. New York: Prometheus, 2004, pg. 245
[127] Ibid, pg. 249
[128] Ibid, pg. 184

behavior accordingly. Such is the money made by endorsing a product that NBA basketball star Alan Iverson's coach at the Philadelphia 76ers once quipped that Iverson actually worked for Reebok.[129] Thus it is the market – the sports and lifestyle boutiques, the endorsement deals, the celebrity status – and not a rational evaluation of the instrumental value of hitting a ball that determines a baseball player is paid $150,000 per week. Of course, he must be a good batter to earn this high market value; in other words, he must *perform*. And as the rewards for performance increase, so does the incentive to perform. Baron et al sum it up succinctly:

> Athletes are rewarded for winning at virtually every level of competition…. Given this reality, it is not surprising that athletes and coaches will sacrifice and risk a great deal in order to obtain a competitive edge and enhance performance at all costs. Performance enhancement in Olympic and professional sport has now become a medical, ethical, and legal problem for modern athletes and athletic organizations. This is primarily due to the amount of money associated with winning in today's sports industry. Multimillion dollar contracts, appearance fees, international endorsement and sports merchandising represent a billion dollar industry that offers today's athletes, their sponsors and entourage previously unheard of financial gains. When *Sports Illustrated* interviewed a cohort of elite Olympic athletes, one of the questions was: "If you were given a performance enhancing substance and you would not be caught and win, would you take it?" 98% of the athletes responded "Yes". The more chilling question was: "If you were given a performance enhancing substance and you would not be caught, win all competitions for 5 years, then die, would you take it?" More than 50% said "Yes".[130]

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[129] Ibid, pg. 181

[130] Baron et al, "Doping in sports and its spread to at-risk populations: An international review", in World Psychiatry, 2007 June; Vol. 6:2, pg. 119

The mentality behind the answer to the last question is readily illustrated by the tragic case of Taylor Hooton, a talented teenage baseball player who committed suicide after falling into a steroid-induced depression. When asked what he thought of record-breaking home-run hitter Barry Bonds' use of steroids, Don Hooton, Taylor's father replied:

> Our focus is on the kids. What a 40-year-old man does with his own body is his own business, and to some extent I don't care. However, I do care about the impact that professional athletes' behavior has on the youth of our country. These guys are role models – our kids look up to these guys and want to do anything they do to achieve their success… These guys are setting an example that as parents we have a very difficult time overcoming when we are sitting around the table trying to teach our children the lessons of life.[131]

The story of Taylor Hooton stands as an example of society's obsession with records, winning, and performance. It is a common sense conclusion that if, at an elite level, performance is the primary value, then there will be a trickle-down effect into sport played on a semi-professional or amateur basis. If all we see on television are those sportsmen and women who win – more often than not, smiling and using products which they are paid millions to promote – the 'winning meme'[132] outlives other ideas of sporting value not only because winning in itself is supposedly a good thing, but because winning also brings with it other valuable opportunities, such as commercial success.

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[131] "An Interview with Don Hooton", US Justice Department Online, 02/06/06 <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/hooton_interview.html> [accessed 15/08/09]

[132] I borrow the term from Susan Blackmore, who in turn borrowed it from Richard Dawkins. A meme (like its genetic counterpart the gene) is an idea that easily replicates itself and is thus easily passed between humans. Christianity, the "double-click" and the notion of inalienable human rights are all examples of successful memes. Here it refers to the idea of 'winning at all costs', which is now a much more potent driving force in sport than ever before.

This is not to say that all elite sports or elite sportspeople promote winning and financial gain above all else, but rather that the ubiquitous examples of sportspeople (in advertisements, on talk-shows, in the media) all confirm the idea of the primacy of performance. This is a function of both the popularity and the marketability of those sports and sportspeople. Turn on the television, open the newspaper or search a sports website and there will be David Beckham, Kobe Bryant or Venus Williams, all successful sportspeople before they were successful celebrities. Even if the sportsperson on the front page is not rich, she will almost certainly be the best at something, or tipped to *become* the best at something. Either way, the message is clear: society rewards *winners*.

Tannsjo has taken the above truism one step further. He argues that society's reverence for the outstanding athlete – the winner – is fascistoid, as it necessarily entails contempt for those who do not win.[133] Because we see excellence in the winner, goes the argument, we value that person more than those who are less excellent; this is because our value terms are necessarily comparative. It is this contempt for those who are perceived to be less fortunate that lies at the root of fascist ideologies like Nazism. Today, however, the nationalist sentiments of a supposedly superior racial group or country have been replaced by the elitist sentiments of high-performance sport as the marker of highest value. It is not non-Aryans that are pitied today, but non-winners.

Whether one perceives the culture of celebrity and fan-worship surrounding elite athletes as fascistoid or not, there is no doubting the culture of performance that elite

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[133] Tannsjo, T. "Is it fascistoid to admire sports heroes?" in Tannsjo, T. and Tamburrini, C. (eds.) Values in Sport London: Taylor and Francis, 2000, pp. 9-24

sport endorses. Baron et al conclude their review of steroid doping and its spread to at-risk populations thus:

> Modern sports and the media's misplaced fixation on fame, fortune and winning at all costs have unintentionally created a growing market for doping substances. These substances, once only abused by elite athletes, are clearly spreading into our schools and health clubs worldwide. They are being accepted by a whole new generation of young customers who see reports daily in the newspapers of sports icons accused of abusing drugs only to continue playing, breaking records and claiming fortunes. These same performance-enhancing drugs are also abused by adolescents and weekend athletes and non-athletes who have wider behavioral and health risk problems. In addition, these drugs are now being abused by male and female adolescents for cosmetic purposes in an attempt to achieve the 'cut' and sexy look promoted by the media.[134]

With the above in mind, Lapham surely has it right when he states that our current way of life is "a ceaseless effort to boost performance, hype the message, enhance the product."[135] Indeed, Dimeo has argued that the focus on performance in contemporary sport logically entails the use of performance enhancing drugs, and it is therefore no wonder that sport finds itself in the midst of a doping crisis.[136]

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[134] Baron et al, "Doping in sports and its spread to at-risk populations: An international review", in World Psychiatry, 2007 June; 6(2): pg. 121
[135] Lapham, L. "Mudville" in *Harpers Magazine*, March 2008, pg. 11
[136] Dimeo, P. A history of drug use in sport 1876-1967: Beyond good and evil Abingdon: Routledge, 2007

Self-Inflicted Wounds: Doping and Genetic Technology

This section will explore two of the most serious problems facing sport today, namely doping and genetic technology, and cast them both as consequences of society's adoption of the technological attitude discussed above. Both of these problems have at their core the idea that science can be used to improve athletic efficiency and therefore performance, the two values most coveted by technology as defined in the essentialist critique. This section will also show that it is not just the unthinking adoption of efficiency and performance as the most important values that underlies these problems, but also the tacit acceptance of Ellul's wager concerning technology: instead of slowing down and thinking more, we are betting on more technology to solve the problems we have created through our use of technology.

(i) Doping

Given society's emphasis on winning and the rewards for doing so, no one should be surprised by the 'war on doping'; this would seem the logical consequence of an industry concerned primarily with performance and profit. The fact that we have even adopted the 'war on doping' metaphor, Hemphill suggests, is indicative of just how serious this problem has become in the minds of some.[137]

Recall Ellul's idea that what we have done by embracing *technique* is in fact placed a bet. We have wagered our ability to produce new technology against the unforeseen

[137] Hemphill, D. "War on Drugs in Sport", *Bulletin of Sport and Culture*, Melbourne: Victoria University Sport and Culture Group, March 2008, pg. 3-4

shortcomings of older technology; we have bet that we can solve the problems of yesterday with the technology of tomorrow. The problem is that of an infinite regress: new technology creates problems for newer technology to solve; this newer technology creates more problems, and on and on, ad infinitum. The international sporting community's 'war on doping' epitomises this process.

It is widely believed that advances in pharmacology will always outstrip the ability of doping watchdogs such as the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) to enforce doping controls. An example of this is the development of modafinil, an analeptic drug manufactured ostensibly to treat conditions such as narcolepsy, shift work sleep disorder and obstructive sleep apnea. Modafinil is a stimulant, and like other stimulants increases the release of monoamines, specifically norepinephrine and dopamine; however it also elevates hypothalamic histamine levels, leading some researchers to consider it a 'wakefulness promoting agent'.[138] It is unsurprising then, that the following appeared in *The Independent* in October 2003:

> Modafinil, the drug which the world 100 metres champion, Kelli White, claims she took for a sleep disorder, has become the 'fashionable' stimulant of choice among certain American athletes, the sport's top anti-doping official said yesterday. "It's a little odd to find an epidemic of narcolepsy in top athletes," Arne Ljungqvist, the head of the International Association of Athletics Federations' medical commission, said. "The disorder of narcolepsy is not that frequent."[139]

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[138] Ishizuka T, Murakami M, Yamatodani A, "Involvement of central histaminergic systems in modafinil-induced but not methylphenidate-induced increases in locomotor activity in rats". *European Journal of Pharmacology*, Jan 2008, 578 (2-3): pp. 209–15

[139] Rowbottom, M. "Modafinil is drug of choice, says IAAF chief", *Independent Online*, 28/10/2003 < http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/general/athletics-modafinil-is-drug-of-choice-says-iaaf-chief-584885.html> [accessed 15/08/09]

Then, in December 2003, the United States Olympic Committee announced that five other athletes, sprinter Chryste Gaines, hurdlers Sandra Glover, Chris Phillips and Eric Thomas, and the hammer thrower John McEwen had also tested positive for modafinil.[140]

Modafinil was only officially added to the banned list ten days before the start of the 2004 Summer Olympics. Furthermore, drug testing and effective international implementation of WADA's standards is only possible with the full cooperation of the various national sporting bodies, which in the past has proved difficult to ensure. For instance, after the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics 100m winner and world-record holder Canadian Ben Johnson was stripped of both the gold medal and the world record because the anabolic steroid stanozolol was found in his urine (Johnson would later admit to using dianabol, testosterone cypionate, furazabol, and human growth hormone as well). This meant that American Carl Lewis - who had come second in the race but had also broken the previous world record - was awarded the gold medal and credited with a new world record. Then, in 2003 Dr Wade Exum, a former director of drug control administration for the United States Olympic Commission (USOC) brought forward documentation proving Lewis had failed drugs tests during the 1988 US Olympic trials and should not have been allowed to compete.

Such is the need for extra vigilance against ever-improving doping technologies that we would seem in danger of creating an international police-state for our elite sportspeople. British tennis player Andy Murray:

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[140] Gloster, R. "US confirms six athletes failed tests for Modafinil", *Independent Online*, 31/12/2003 < http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/general/us-confirms-six-athletes-failed-tests-for-modafinil-578099.html> [accessed 15/08/09]

> These new rules are so draconian that it makes it almost impossible to live a normal life. I got a visit at 7am one morning at my home right after I had traveled home from Australia. I woke up not really knowing where I was and suffering badly from jet lag. It seemed ridiculous to me as I'd been tested just four days earlier, straight after the match I had lost in the Australian Open. The official who came to my home wanted me to produce identification to prove who I was. He insisted on watching me provide a sample, literally with my trousers round my ankles, and then insisted that I wrote down my own address, even though he was at my private home at 7am. I may miss a flight or a flight could be delayed, yet I have to let WADA know exactly where I will be, even when I am resting. They even turned up at my hotel in Miami while I was on holiday... I support drug testing and strongly condemn any use of drugs in sport, but there has to be a more realistic and practical way to deal with the problem…[141]

WADA's "whereabouts system" currently requires athletes in the registered testing pool of their International Sporting Federation or National Anti-Doping Organization to specify a one-hour time slot between 6am and 11pm every day during which they can be located at a specified location for testing. Previously, WADA had made this a '24/7' requirement.[142] Even with the new revisions, the academic community is understandably divided on the merits of such a policy. Hanstad and Loland have defended the whereabouts system on the grounds that it simply represents an extension of basic anti-doping principles, and by surveying the attitudes of athletes in the registered testing

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[141] "Andy Murray Criticizes New Anti-Doping Rules", ProCon.org, 27/01/10 < http://sportsanddrugs.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=001386> [accessed 22/08/09]

[142] "Q&A: Whereabouts Requirements", WADA Website, 27/01/10 < http://www.wada-ama.org/en/World-Anti-Doping-Program/Sports-and-Anti-Doping-Organizations/International-Standards/Testing/QA-on-Whereabouts/> [accessed 22/08/09]

pool.[143] Verner Møller, on the other hand, cites the extra demands on athletes and the unreasonableness of testing procedure, and questions whether such guidelines could be effectively implemented in other professions. Møller argues further that the whereabouts system seems to collide with both leisure and work perspectives on sport, and the testing procedures and constant suspicion that is inherent in the control system collide with the dignity and integrity of the athlete.[144] Some might argue, of course, that if they do not like it, athletes are free to withdraw. But as Møller points out, this is not a justification of the whereabouts system as being morally sound.

In return, it could be argued that modern elite athletes are globe-trotting celebrities: waited on by sponsors, fans and the media, there is good evidence to suggest calls for 'respecting their privacy' when it comes to drug testing are laughable when considered in light of their daily lives. Moreover, one might argue our heroes owe this pound of flesh to their adoring public, that any measures taken to help to remove drugs from sport should be embraced, or that in reality even those in the registered testing pools are seldom going to be bothered like Andy Murray seemed to be. As professional cyclist Thomas Voeckler says, "It is not complicated to provide a location for one hour a day. We are lucky to be able to make a living from our passion, so if it takes this kind of efforts to make sport more credible, everybody should contribute to this system."[145]

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[143] Hanstad, D. V. & Loland, S. "Elite athletes' duty to provide information on their whereabouts: Justifiable anti-doping work or an indefensible surveillance regime?" *European Journal of Sports Science*, January 2009, Vol. 9:1 pp. 3-10

[144] Moller, V. "One step too far: About WADA's whereabouts rule", *International Journal of Sport Policy*, July 2011, Vol. 3:2 pp. 177-192

[145] "Pro vs. Con: The WADA Whereabouts System", ProCon.org, 27/01/10
< http://sportsanddrugs.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=001386> [accessed 22/08/09]

In light of the above, it might justifiably be claimed that organisations like WADA face an uphill battle to ensure testing methods are kept as up to date as doping methods, and that individual sporting federations and the powers-that-be are honest in their dealings with their athletes and the international sporting community with regards to doping. Furthermore, it is unclear what our expectations of athlete behavior should be. These are difficult issues, and it is debatable whether current doping regulations such as WADA's International Standard for Testing gives us clear guidelines for solving elite sport's doping problems. Indeed, as Parry argues, "Sometimes the sheer weight of competing considerations, together with the uncertainty of empirical determinations, overwhelms our ability to arrive at conclusions acceptable even to ourselves – sometimes there just aren't any clear-cut answers."[146] To illustrate his point, Parry makes use of some well-known UK doping scandals, three of which are discussed briefly below.[147]

Alain Baxter was a British skier who used an American decongestant nasal spray that unlike the British version he was used to, contained lev-methamphetamine. The IOC's Court of Arbitration for Sport cleared Baxter of intending to cheat and he was only banned for three months because of the obvious mitigating factors. Although it is widely believed he gained no advantage on the day (besides the restorative benefit of the medicine), neither his bronze medal nor his result was reinstated. It must also be pointed out that the IOC's test does not in fact distinguish lev-methamphetamine (which is generally thought to have no performance-enhancing properties whatsoever) from dextro-methamphetamine or 'speed', which may sharpen reaction times. Baxter's supporters

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[146] Parry, J. "Doping in the UK: Alain and Dwain, Rio and Greg – Not Guilty?" in Schneider, A. and Hong, F. (eds.) Doping in Sport, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pg. 93-94
[147] Ibid, pg. 93-120

might justifiably claim the ‘science’ we rely on to determine whether our athletes are cheating should be capable of making such distinctions.

The second case concerns 100m sprinter Dwain Chambers, who tested positive for Tetrahydrogestrinone (THG) during an out-of-competition test in 2003. At the time, Chambers denied knowingly taking any banned substances and laid the blame at the door of his nutritionist and Georgian-born coach. Even if Chambers was innocent of knowingly taking the drug, the legal principle of strict liability means that responsibility must ultimately lie with the athlete concerned. Importantly, THG was one of the first ‘designer steroids’, drugs that proved that there were people high up the pharmaceutical supply chain intent on creating substances that could avoid detection by the tests of the day. The development of more tests such as the one for THG has also led to calls for samples from previous years to be retrospectively tested, and although some sporting codes (such as athletics and swimming) have done so, other codes (such as football) have not, prompting further calls for an adequate codification of the rules if not their consistent application.

The Chambers case also raised concerns over the conduct and responsibility of support-team members, as well as how the conduct of members of a sports team should affect the results of those teams. The question of whether to ban the athlete alone, or their coach, nutritionist, physiotherapist and other team members as well is a complex one. Furthermore, one must ask whether it is fair to take away *all* the relay medals Chambers helped to win, and not to nullify the results of a football match in which a player on

performance-enhancing substances competed. Parry notes the Chambers case raised issues that sports authorities have not yet been able to resolve satisfactorily.[148]

Finally, England international footballer Rio Ferdinand's no-show for a standard drugs test had authorities in a quandary because, as they admitted, the tests were not designed with someone who had simply 'forgotten to attend' in mind; failure to attend is treated as a willful violation, or as a refusal to provide a testing sample, carrying with it a presumption of guilt. If Rio simply forgot, or did not appreciate the gravity of the situation, then he, his club and to some extent the Football Association are to blame, and some sort of punishment should be shared out. The situation is more complicated, however, if he avoided the test because he felt it might reveal a banned substance, a recreational drug or a private medical condition. In the first case, one would expect the punishment to be as harsh as possible (although in reality, he tested negative 48 hours later); in the second, one must ask questions about the breadth of the anti-doping agency's role and remit, as allowing tests for recreational drugs might extend the agency's role beyond the performance-enhancement rationale that gives it unquestioned authority and such wide-ranging powers. WADA's broad remit is based, after all, on 'fairness preservation'; intrusions into players' private lives prejudice this already fragile legitimacy. Since there is no clear and agreed procedure for dealing with medical privacy issues, if this was a factor one would certainly feel more sympathy for the player.

Most significantly, after his failure to attend the test, Ferdinand continued to play for Manchester United up until he was fined and banned for eight months. In other professions, and indeed, other sports, an individual is not allowed to continue activity

[148] Ibid, pg. 108

while under enquiry relating to conduct, or appeal. As Parry points out, there are two competing principles at work in this case: one protecting the right of the individual to be 'innocent until proven guilty', the other protecting the integrity of the sport. Perhaps a fairer outcome might have been to suspend Ferdinand until the outcome of his drugs test was known.

The above are amongst the numerous cases of opaque and inconsistent applications of doping regulations and testing.[149] Furthermore, the science on which the testing is based is not above questioning. For example, after hard training it has been shown that nandrolone levels can go up above the legal limit. In light of this, the Court of Arbitration for Sport can rule that despite WADA rules (which state that 4 nanograms per millilitre of urine is the legal limit for nandrolone) 2 to 5 nanograms constitutes a 'grey area' because such a level could be the result of the endogenous production of the human body.[150]

Recall Ellul's idea of the existential bet we have placed with technology: the solution to the problems of technology is not less but more technology. It seems clear we have indeed wagered on the ability of our regulatory and testing technologies to solve the technological problems (such as doping) created by professional sporting technique. In all the examples listed above, more technology is assumed to provide the answers to the problems of technology, but the answers provided are far from unproblematic themselves. Thus some question whether we have, in Ellul's terms, made a safe bet at all.

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[149] See Smith, A. C. T. and Stewart, B. "Drug policy in sport: Hidden assumptions and inherent contradictions", *Drug and Alcohol Review*, Vol. 27, March 2008, pp. 123-129

[150] Parry, J. "Doping in the UK: Alain and Dwain, Rio and Greg – Not Guilty?" pg. 117

Morgan, for example, argues any remedy to the doping problem is going to have to start with the question of why athletes dope in the first place. His answer, unsurprisingly, is money:

> That is, it is mainly because elite sports are played for such large economic stakes nowadays, as I see it, that athletes are prepared to do just about anything to win, including doping, and that athletic regulatory institutions are prepared to do just about anything to catch them to safeguard their brand name…. For when the IOC sometime in the 1980s or so, under Samaranch's leadership, decided to sell its logo, and in the process, I am convinced, its soul, to the highest corporate bidders, which in short order transformed it from a poor, cash-strapped organization to a wealthy one with more cash than it knew what to do with, it firmly cast its lot with the very professional conception of sport that is, I believe, the root of most if not all of the moral problems like doping that plague sport today.[151]

Morgan argues further that any lasting solution to the doping problem cannot be achieved in the way Ellul's wager dictates, and when one considers the problems this solution itself raises, such as designer drugs, athlete privacy and the inconsistent and illogical application of anti-doping procedures discussed above, it is hard not to agree. Morgan in fact gestures at a solution which will in part be taken up in the latter part of this thesis; it is simply that he couches in 'moral' terms what we will frame later in the metaphysical:

> If we are really morally serious about dealing with the doping problem in sport, then we will have to look for a moral solution to what is at bottom a deep moral malaise, and not, as is customary in contemporary America, *seek a technical solution to what is wrongly perceived to be essentially a*

[151] Morgan, W.J. "Fair is Fair, Or Is It? A Moral Consideration of the Doping Wars in American Sport", in Schneider, A. and Hong, F. (eds.) Doping in Sport, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pg. 19-20

> *technical problem* [my italics]. At the very least, that means taking a hard moral look at the emphasis we place on winning in sport as evidenced by the outsized economic rewards we attach to it.[152]

Morgan points to the relationship between performance and profit as being detrimental to sport in a moral sense, although he does not view commercialism as itself being a technological (or technical) entity in the way Dyens might. His solution to the problem, which seems to depend primarily on staunching the flow of money into sports,[153] is therefore at best only part of a greater solution which would involve working with a full understanding of the professional-technical-commercial system (and all the rarely mentioned benefits this brings), while ensuring that our conception of sporting value (and value in competition) is not corruptible by it. This might necessitate more of an overhaul of the idea of sporting competition than Morgan could concede as being at all possible. For our purposes however, it is important to note the connection between financial gain and the necessity of breeding the win-at-all-costs attitude.

Symptomatic of the focus on performance and its bedfellow, professionalism, is the inaugural Youth Olympics, held in Singapore in 2010. The event featured 3594 athletes competing over 26 sports, and was the brainchild of IOC president Jacques Rogge. Prior to the games, British IOC member Sir Craig Reedie confirmed the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) would be taking its outreach programme to Singapore in an effort

[152] Ibid, pg. 2
[153] Ibid, pg. 20

to 'educate' young athletes about drugs and doping;[154] meanwhile, organising committee chairman Ng Ser Miang had the following to say:

> I would like to reassure you that sport is our number one priority at the Youth Olympic Games.... We are paying a lot of attention to ensure that all the competition events are good enough. We're working closely with Omega to ensure there is a very good timekeeping system in place. We want to make sure that all the athletes can come here and have the opportunity to perform at their best.[155]

Hopefully, the organisers of the Youth Olympics will not have to face the problems FIFA encountered when trying to verify the ages of players in the u17 Football World Cup. In August of 2010, FIFA announced that MRI scans would be used to check the age of players after Niger was disqualified for fielding an older player. [156]

It seems that as children are pushed to compete at earlier stages of their lives, they (and those that are involved in their sports) cannot be trusted to play fairly. Some important ethical considerations crop up when considering children and sport, not least of which concern the responsibilities of parents and coaches. But with advances in science progressing as they are, a new issue has arisen: genetically modified athletes. It may soon become the norm not to rely on the whims of nature to produce talented offspring or

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[154] "War on doping starts at Youth Olympics says Reedie", Sports Beat Online, 07/10/09 < http://www.morethanthegames.co.uk/121st-ioc-session/076561-war-doping-starts-youth-olympics-says-reedie> [accessed 22/08/09]

[155] Ibid

[156] "Wrist screening verifies competitors' eligibility", Diagnostic Imaging Magazine Website, 15/01/10, <http://www.diagnosticimaging.com/magazines/di-asia/display/article/113619/1510934> [accessed 29/08/09]

tomorrow's goldmine of sporting champions; instead, in the near-future parents might be able to select the talents and manufacture the physical makeup of their own 'superkids'.

(ii) Genetically Modified Athletes

Although the comprehensive and widespread genetic manipulation of athletes (and humans more generally) is not at present a reality, theorists such as Hoberman and Miah amongst others agree genetically enhanced athletes are simply an inevitability given the nature and demands of elite performance sport.[157] Munthe considers four categories of genetic technology which could be relevant in a sporting context:

(1) Genomics (using genetic technology to improve methods of performance enhancement by creating more effective drugs and training techniques);
(2) Somatic cell modification (altering the non-hereditary cells of the body, such as those specific to muscle tissue);
(3) Germ-line modification (altering the hereditary cells of the body very early on in life) and
(4) Genetic pre-selection (using information of a person's genotype to conclude suitability for sport either at embryonic stage or infantile stage).[158]

Critics arguing against the proposed use of genetic technologies like those above often frame their objections in a similar manner to objections against doping. Apart from the

[157] See for instance Miah, A. Genetically Modified Athletes, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, or Hoberman, J. Mortal Engines, Caldwell: Blackburn Press, 2002
[158] Munthe, C. "Genetic Treatment and Pre-selection: Ethical Differences and Similarities", cited in Miah, A. Genetically Modified Athletes, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, pg. 46

arguments to do with the harms against sport - and assuming that any of the above procedures could be carried out in a safe enough manner, allowing that no invasive medical procedure can be 100% safe - there may be something about ourselves, some essence or 'humanness' that we are tampering with if we reconstruct our bodies in this way; further, we may be detracting from a basic idea of what constitutes human dignity by designing ourselves so purposefully.[159] However, many of those in favour of genetic technology point out the slippery slope from training regimes and nutrition though to computerised testing and legal performance enhancers like Creatine and whey protein extracts as going further – logically – to include (safe) forms of doping and eventually genetic technologies. If humanness is to reside in some type of 'body concept' as opposed to some form of demonstrated personhood, then we are going to have to have some idea of how to demarcate natural and technological boundaries with regard to the body, and as Magdalinski points out, this is extremely hard to do:

> The natural/artifice binary has altered over time according to ideological changes and variations in accepted training practices. Whilst illicit technologies now represent the antithesis of all that sport is supposed to represent, it must be remembered that these substances are simply the latest in a long line of potential 'contaminants', as, across the decades, various perils and moral panics, each located along the margins of what is 'natural' have threatened to disrupt and 'pollute' sport.[160]

Tamburrini meanwhile raises the objection of personal autonomy. It could be considered a denial of my personal freedom for my parents to predispose me towards being a fantastic track athlete or a millionaire tennis player by pre-selecting my genetic

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[159] Miah, A. Genetically Modified Athletes, Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, pg. 65-77
[160] Magdalinski, T. Sport, Technology and the Body, Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, pg. 43

makeup.[161] The problem with this objection, as Tamburrini rightly infers, is that it is too comprehensive. There is no reason to believe, for example, that a student who was good at mathematics at school *definitely will* study civil engineering over English literature. In much the same way, genetic enhancement does not compel a person to become an athlete simply because they have some of the attributes necessary to become one. Indeed, when one reflects on how students choose their careers or how the elite athletes of today are actually trained, one might conclude that 'nurture' does in fact play a much bigger role than 'nature' (however loosely one defines nature).

Thus it might be argued that the external forces acting on Venus Williams when she starts playing tennis at age four, enters an academy at eleven, turns professional at fourteen, signs a multi-million dollar contract with Reebok at fifteen and has an academy named after her before her eighteenth birthday are more powerful than anything genetics can offer. One might even be tempted to conclude that Richard Williams' behaviour as a parent was unethical.

If it is not clear whether genetic enhancement will be as effective as external pressures in producing winning athletes, or whether it can be adequately defended as an acceptable means of performance enhancement, what does seem to be clear is that genetic enhancement is one type of response to the constant demand for human improvement and the market forces of sporting technique.

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[161] Tamburrini, C. M. and Tannsjo, T. Genetic Technology and Sport: Ethical Questions, Oxon: Routledge, 2005, pg. 132

It is here, in the midst of the debate about altering humans on a fundamental level that Heidegger's warning concerning the dangers of technologicalisation becomes important: When mankind,

> in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of standing-reserve, then he comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve…. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct.[162]

Increasingly, we have moved the human athlete away from the personal, individual, subjective meaning of their sporting *experience*, and towards the objective, instrumental value of their *performance*. It is possible that with what some see as the inevitable use of genetic technologies in sport we are in the process of further relegating the human athlete (or for that matter the human being) to the position of standing reserve; humans are becoming, to use Hoberman's terminology, "mortal engines".[163] If this is the case, the imminent application of genetic technologies in sport would seem only to reinforce the impression that we as humans have mastered nature, and that our relentless march to the beat of 'progress' is the best and only way.

Morgan takes the issue of human mastery over nature in hand when he argues against enhancements such as doping and genetic technology on the grounds they "inflate human agency in an instrumental way that makes a mockery of the form of life sport is

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[162] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays pg. 27
[163] Hoberman, J. M. Mortal Engines: The Science of Performance and the Dehumanization of Sport, New York: The Free Press, 1992

emblematic of." [164] Biomedical ethicist Michael Sandel makes a similar point when he claims the main problem with human enhancement, both in and outside of sport, is it

> represents a kind of hyperagency – a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery.[165]

Sandel's use of the terms 'mechanism' and 'mastery' echo Heidegger's caution about man coming eventually to see everything as his own construct. In fact, it could be said of Heidegger's criticism, to quote Morgan again, that it

> calls into question one of the main pillars of our increasingly instrumentalist culture: namely, the morally pernicious technological idea that if something can be done, that if we have figured out how to do or make something, be it a cluster bomb or a way to prolong or enhance life in all its various forms, it should be done.[166]

It was, after all, possible to design an LZR swimsuit, and that possibility ended in the current problem with swimming world records. Simply because it has become possible to tamper with our genetics is no argument for us to pursue the practice. It appears Winner's point stands, and we have not learned as much as we should have from Oppenheimer.

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[164] Morgan, W.J. "Fair is Fair, Or Is It? A Moral Consideration of the Doping Wars in American Sport", in Schneider, A. and Hong, F. (eds.) Doping in Sport, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pg 18
[165] See Sandel, M. "The President's Council on Bioethics", 2002, or Sandel, M. The Case Against Perfection, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007
[166] Morgan, W.J. "Fair is Fair, Or Is It? A Moral Consideration of the Doping Wars in American Sport", in Schneider, A. and Hong, F. (eds.) Doping in Sport, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pg 18

Whichever side one takes, the debate over genetic technology is at least useful in its illumination of certain systematic characteristics of sport we have assumed exist across the board. Often, we debate the impact of genetic technology or doping on 'sport', but it is far from clear that all sports are affected in similar ways by these problems.

Issues of compulsion and autonomy aside, the Williams sisters' chosen sport provides a good example of what Loland terms a 'less vulnerable sport'.[167] Tennis requires a mix of learned skills and natural bio-motor abilities; in other words, even bigger, slower players can be very good if they make up for their lack of mobility with powerful, precise hitting and deft touches around the court, for example. Loland's thesis is sports such as the 100m sprint are uniquely vulnerable to the impact of bio-medical technology because they are 'specialized': "These are performances that are based on one or two bio-motor abilities."[168] Loland suggests new sports with different ideas of growth and progress may supplant the traditional, specialised sporting forms we have become so used to:

> The so-called board sports – surfing, skate boarding, snow boarding, wake boarding and kite boarding – are good examples. With their relatively non-precise measurements of technically (and tactically) complex performances, and with their lack of well-defined, standardized conditions, they might become a less vulnerable performance paradigm in times to come.[169]

The implications of the vulnerability thesis can be taken even further. One way to make sport far less vulnerable to the influence of performance enhancement in its myriad forms

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[167] Loland, S. "The vulnerability thesis and use of bio-medical technology in sport", in Tamburrini, C. and Tannsjo, T. Genetic Technology and Sport, Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, pg. 158-163
[168] Ibid, pg. 161
[169] Ibid, pg. 163

would be to use the idea of 'the competition' as simply a framework in which to showcase the beauty of the athletic body. Møller, for example, argues for a redefinition of sport in aesthetic terms: "Although one can practice sport for a living, as in the case of the arts, it is qualitatively different from work and education in that it does not serve any external purpose. It is, like art, an expression of human surplus and useless in an ordinary sense."[170] One possible way to salvage the essence of sport from the clutches of the drive toward efficiency, performance and profit would therefore be to recognise sport as valuable primarily as an aesthetic exercise, and to either soften or forgo entirely the emphasis on sport as a purveyor of social or moral value.

It is worth noting Loland's 'board sport' examples have some interesting common features. First, the winner is (usually) decided purely on aesthetic merit (unless, or course, one is talking about snow-board or kite-board racing). Second, and by virtue of the way each sport is judged, competitors are allowed a freedom of expression – they are given artistic license to impress the judges with their manoeuvres – not found in the vast majority of mainstream, competition-centred sports, where the aesthetics of an action are secondary to its ability to generate victory. Note the difference between these 'freestyle orientated' sports and those like gymnastics and figure-skating: the latter places great emphasis on set moves and artistic form, whereas the former is more concerned with 'radicalness' and pushing the boundaries of self-expression. Finally, absent the competitive aspect, these 'radical' sports themselves may still be played in exactly the same way and with the same sense of purpose (for example, a lone skateboarder will still attempt to land his tricks in the same way as he would in competition). This is not the

[170] Ibid, pg. 21

case in, say, rugby or football. As a footballer, I cannot 'play by myself' – competition is intrinsic to the notion of the sport itself.

Heidegger places an emphasis on the arts (and by extension, aesthetics) as being a mode of revealing in the sense of *poiesis*; a bringing-forth that displayed a certain connection to the world around it, a connection that did not challenge the world in the same way as the technological Enframing challenges the world: "Could it be that revealing lays claim to the arts most primally, so that they for their part may expressly foster the growth of the saving power, may awaken and found anew our look into that which grants and our trust in it?"[171] The similarities with Møller are clear: in a sporting sense, it might be helpful to return to a view of sport as being primarily artistic because this view of sport could reveal more about the essence of sport and 'humanness' than an attempted marriage of sport-as-competition and sport-as-moral-agent. It might be the case that the way to salvage sport from the technical-commercial-industrial quandary it finds itself in begins with a fresh look at sport through a more artistic or aesthetic lens.

The solution to the problem of technology proposed by Feenberg can be seen partly in the solutions to doping and genetic technology proposed by Loland and Møller. When one begins to move sport away from technique, one unsurprisingly moves it towards more artistic, metaphysical and spiritual terrain, where sporting performances are richer in value and meaning than our current focus on performance allows. Recall Mitcham's summation of the essentialist critique, paraphrased here to suit the emphasis of this chapter: sporting technique is a kind of existential rejection of the metaphysical or

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[171] Heidegger, M. The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, pg. 34-35

spiritual values inherent in sport.[172] A direct confrontation with technology or technique is impossible, as in a very real sense (and this is an insight shared by Dyens and Feenberg) we *are* technology or technique. Rather, we must reemphasise the artistic side of sport, the aesthetic value of sport, the metaphysics and spirituality of sport. It is not a case of stopping the demons from running amok; it is a case of ensuring fair play for the angels.

It could be argued in turn that technology, profit and performance – sporting technique – would seem not to allow for much of this supposed re-emphasis, ingrained as it is in our psyche, in our very understanding of sport; this surely is why Heidegger portrays technology's essence in such a negative light and prescribes detachment as the only solution. The answer implicit in this thesis is that it is simply a matter of what every individual chooses to emphasise. To illustrate this, we will consider two apparently dissimilar examples of athletic performance, and characterise them in a way that firstly demonstrates the re-emphasis mentioned above, and secondly allows for certain similarities between them to emerge.

The Spaceman and the Cyborg: Towards A Techno-Metaphysical Solution

As one proceeds upwards through the stratosphere temperatures increase due to the absorption of ultra-violet radiation from the sun. During his journey into space, it is debatable whether Colonel Joeseph Kittininger felt it getting warmer. On the 16th of August, 1960 Kittinger was sitting inside a pressurized suit in the helium balloon

[172] Mitcham, C. Thinking through Technology, pg. 54

Excelsior III as it made its way upwards to a final height of 102,800 feet (31,300m). As the balloon reached its target altitude, Kittinger whispered: "Lord, take care of me now." And then he jumped. The jump (the last in a series designed to test the effects of high altitude on the human body) was made in a 'rocking-chair' position, descending on his back, rather than the usual arch familiar to skydivers, because he was wearing a 27 kg 'kit', and his pressure suit naturally formed that shape when inflated.[173]

While high-altitude balloon jumping is not a sport, Kittinger's leap is undoubtedly an athletic achievement, and one made possible only by technology. Kittinger fell for 4 minutes and 36 seconds reaching a maximum speed of 614 mph (988 km/h) before opening his parachute at 18,000 feet (5,500 m). Pressurisation in his right glove malfunctioned during the ascent, and his right hand swelled to twice its normal size. He set records for the highest balloon ascent, highest parachute jump, longest drogue-fall (4 minutes), and fastest speed by a human through the atmosphere, all of which are *still* USAF records. Only a high degree of physical fitness, robust courage and skill – only the most accomplished parachutist could attempt such a jump – allowed Kittinger to make it back to earth alive. To the US Airforce, Joe Kittinger was a guinea-pig; a way to measure, compare and collate. Science needed a fall-guy, and Kittinger was the man.

When one hears Kittinger describe his jump, however, the records and the science fade into the background. After the jump Kittinger related the deeply personal and metaphysical (even spiritual) experience he went through just before he jumped:

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[173] "Joseph Kittinger", Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Kittinger> [accessed 25/06/09]

> After 20 years you analyse a lot, you remember people….Many people come up to me and say that had they been there, they surely would have died. Now, that makes no sense. Because until you are in a situation like that you have no idea how you'd feel. Confronted by solitude without decadence, or a single material thing to prostitute…it elevates you to a spiritual plain…where I felt the presence of God. Now there's the God they taught me about in school, and there's the God that's *hidden by what surrounds us in this civilization* [my italics]. And that's the God I met.[174]

There is a tension – an imbalance even – between what Kittinger achieved in objective, scientific terms, and what his experience meant to him on a metaphysical level. It is clear (and Heidegger and Ellul have tried to tell us) where the emphasis lies in today's world.

Joe Kittinger had a profound experience 31 kilometres above the earth. Technology enabled him to connect with himself while seeing himself in relation to all things. His freedom from 'material things' and 'what surrounds us in this civilization' allowed a life-changing experience to take place. Such technologically mediated experiences epitomise what Feenberg is talking about when he says we *can* intervene in the technological process in defence of the conditions of a meaningful life. Thus Kittinger's experience is important for two reasons: First, it shows us how deeply personal and metaphysical meaning can appear in what looks like a technological experiment. Second, it gestures at a way in which technology, properly conceived, could consciously be used to aid the achievement of that type of 'full' life which stands in such stark contrast to our Enframed, 'default' lives today. Technology it seems, contra Heidegger, might also be a

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[174] Joseph Kittinger talking about the Excelsior III jump, transcribed from "The First Man in Space - Skydiving from the Edge of the World", YouTube.com,
< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgg2NcvDPyo> [accessed 25/06/09]

positive revealing. Indeed, technology *already* reveals this much on a daily basis, and this can be seen easily in the world of sport.

Oscar Pistorius is a double amputee world record holder in the 100, 200 and 400 metres (class T44). He is known as the 'Bladerunner' because he runs on carbon-fibre 'Cheetah Flex-Foot' transtibial artificial limbs. Pistorius had been banned by the IAAF from competing against able-bodied athletes in January 2008 because it was ruled that his 'blades' gave him an 'unfair advantage' over other runners; a situation comedian Katt Williams sums up better than most of the pundits and experts who commentated on the case:

> They made him some aluminum racing legs…like some bent back paper-clips and shit…And the craziest fucking thing started happening. This motherfucker not only started running, this motherfucker started wining…And these hating-ass motherfuckers at the Olympic Committee let this motherfucker race, and then waited till he won, and then disqualified him and said, and I quote, 'He had an unfair advantage' [Puts hand up in the air like he wants to ask a question]. ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THE MOTHERFUCKER RUNNING WITH NO GODDAMN LEGS?!"[175]

Williams' blunt verbosity is refreshing; it shows us the right way to look at what Pistorius has achieved. A quick look at the facts puts the lie to the IAAF's reaction to the Bladerunner. He was a full 0.7 seconds slower than the Olympic qualifying time for the 400m – a metaphorical country mile. And yet, he was treated as a harbinger for the coming cyborg apocalypse. Consider, for instance, the comments of Elio Locatelli,

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[175] Williams, K. "Poor little tink tink", YouTube.com,
< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qlNEmpxQxI> [accessed 02/04/10]

director of development at the IAAF: "It affects the purity of the sport. Next will be another device where people can fly with something on their back."[176] This after the IAAF initially suggested that it would be dangerous for Pistorius to run in a relay situation because his blades might harm other athletes.

Pistorius challenged the IAAF ruling in the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and the decision was duly reversed after the Court could not find enough evidence to support the claims of the IAAF.[177] Throughout all of this, the fact that he had had both legs amputated as a baby because of a congenital condition that meant he was born without fibulas in both legs was largely forgotten. The world's media did not champion the will to compete in 'normal' rugby and waterpolo as a schoolboy, or the sense of humour which allowed him to laugh as he woke up in his school's boarding house to find that his friends had hidden his legs.[178] The focus was on his performance, and once again, other values were ignored, or at best, included incidentally in stories about Pistorius in competition.[179] The tension or imbalance between achievement in objective, scientific terms and achievement in a metaphysical or spiritual sense returns. In spite of bureaucratic sanction, Pistorius stands firm as a monument to self-affirmation, self-belief and a refusal to accept limits – in short, to freedom. Furthermore, his achievements are only possible because of technology. All this he has in common with Joe Kittinger.

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[176] Tucker, R. and Dugas, J. "The Remarkable Physiology of Oscar Pistorius", SportsScientists.com, 17/07/2008 < http://www.sportsscientists.com/2008/07/oscar-pistorius-remarkable-physiology.html> [accessed 03/09/09]

[177] Pistorius duly tried to qualify for the South African athletics team to participate in Beijing. He did not achieve the Olympic qualifying time of 45.55 seconds, nor was he fast enough to make the 4X400m relay team.

[178] Kessel, A. "Oscar Pistorius", The Guardian Online, 10/01/10 < http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2010/jan/10/oscar-pistorius-paralympics-interview> [accessed 10/02/10]

[179] Although Pistroius' competitive position has changed somewhat since this thesis was written, the general point stands.

And then, just as Pistorius became an inspiration to millions, enter the profiteers. One of Nike's advertisement features a picture of the 'Bladerunner' in a Nike running suit flanked by the words:

I was born without bones below the knee.
I only stand 5ft 2.
But this is the body I have been given.
This is my weapon.
How I conquer. How I wage my war.
This is how I have broken the world record 49 times.
How I become the fastest thing on no legs.
This is my weapon.
This is how I fight.[180]

Words such as 'weapon', 'conquer' and 'war' shift the emphasis from the possibility of self-affirmation and freedom – from metaphysical value – to beating, winning, conquering; optimum performances all. 'Even without legs, you can be a winner; even without legs you can break the world record 49 times.'

It is possible that the 'war' referred to is a war against one's own limitations. World records, however, and being the fastest 'thing' on no legs have much less to do with personal triumphs than they do with overt, objective performance. Thus metaphysical sporting value faces attack from those concerned with performance, those concerned with profit, and all those concerned with both. The Hydra of sporting *technique* has many heads to rear.

Pistorius says of the Paralympics that they "taught [him] so much more about doing your best, while able-bodied sport is just about winning at any cost. [He] can win now

[180] Nike Advertisement <http://www.adverbox.com/ads/nike-what-is-your-fight/> [accessed 17/08/11]

and be disappointed, or [he] can come fifth and be happy."[181] He might have added that it would seem the best place to look for examples of technological *poeisis* and an affirmation of metaphysical sporting value as well.

Concluding remarks

Although he was writing before sport faced the problems described above, Ellul sums up these problems of sporting technique when he describes the lack of improvisation, creativity and spontaneity, and the primacy of performance inherent in contemporary sport.[182] In our pursuit of records and victory we have devalued a truly important part of the sporting experience. Furthermore, we have caused problems which admit of no easy solution because, at base, they actually support the performance-centred sporting apparatus they so overtly affect. We are loath to admit this to ourselves, because something inside of us intuitively and instinctively rebels at the notion of using drugs or changing our genetic makeup just to be better at sport. This intuition has much to do with what we *feel* is the true value of sporting endeavour, even if we cannot enunciate it properly. It is simply the case that as we face the industrial-commercial-technological monstrosity of contemporary sport, we imagine ourselves powerless against it. There are just too many people, too many interests; there is just too much at stake. This Ellul points out as well:

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[181] Kessel, A. "Oscar Pistorius", The Guardian Online, 10/01/10
< http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2010/jan/10/oscar-pistorius-paralympics-interview> [accessed 10/02/10]
[182] Ellul, J. The Technological Society, pg. 383

> The most important thing, however, is not the education of a few specialists, but the extension of the sporting mentality to the masses. Insofar as this represents a vigorous reaction to the mere passivity of spectator sports, it is good. But the usual result is the integration of more and more innocents into an insidious technique.[183]

As a global society, we have let ourselves be carried along by the technical (understood as technique) current in sport. But technology also has the power to be a useful ally in the search for the type of meaningful life mentioned by Feenberg; it is simply that we must first reconsider the value set technology seems to favour. Our 'technological space' must change from an unthinking commitment to efficiency, to a thoughtful skepticism concerning the direction of our lives.

The second part of this thesis takes us away from technique and towards those metaphysical and spiritual aspects of sport we have been ignoring. In restating the case for metaphysical sporting value we will also explore ways in which technology (understood again as 'physical technology') can help in the attainment of such values. This is Feenberg's solution (here explored in the sporting sphere) to the problem of technology as posed by Heidegger and Ellul: that technology can, when considered in the right light, aid us in achieving a life full of meaning and value. It is simply the case that we must first understand – we must first make the case for – the elements of such a life. It may be the case that exploring this question in what is ostensibly a sporting framework also provides insight into that important question itself.

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[183] Ibid

Chapter Four: Sport and Freedom

Metaphysical Sporting Value and Existential Movement Meanings

The following chapters deal with some of the subjective and possibly even esoteric experiences to be found in sport and human movement. These experiences are, on the whole, antithetical to the contemporary technologicalised understanding of just what type of sporting experiences are ultimately of value; their emphasis therefore presents one possible way to pursue the solution proposed by Feenberg.

There are, however, some important caveats:

(i) This discussion is not intended to be limited to traditional, organised versions of sport, as much of what is said here can be applied to human movement experiences more generally. It is simply that the concepts discussed here find their apotheosis more readily in sport (as the word is understood by the layman), and perhaps even in certain sports more than others.

(ii) Many of the examples used here to illustrate these concepts concern activities which are sports in a looser sense of the word - they combine strenuous physical activity with a high degree of technical proficiency, but they lack some of the structural elements (such as defined rules, officials and goal-orientation) conventionally found in sport. Examples such as extreme skiing and big-wave surfing are considered because they provide the most

vivid illustrations of the ideas put forward in the remainder of this thesis; with a little imagination however, the reader can easily take the general concepts exhibited by these examples and apply them elsewhere.

(iii) The emphasis placed on metaphysical sporting value and existential movement meanings *is not* intended to imply that their attainment is, or should be, the primary or correct purpose of sport or athletic endeavour. People play sport for many reasons, and gain much of value from their efforts. It is not the purpose of this thesis to posit one reason as better than another or to denigrate anybody who might play sport only to win, for example. This thesis does however make an impassioned and unapologetic plea for the recognition of those values that are the antithesis of the values of the technological attitude, while saying little of that which lies in between.

(iv) The ideas discussed below *are not* intended to reflect the ideals of any particular sporting or population demographic. Metaphysical sporting value and existential movement meanings are, and should always be, accessible to everyone.

The central idea in what follows is sport has the power to produce experiences that

(a) Give us a dynamic understanding of human freedom,

(b) Are a route to self-affirmation and self-discovery, and

(c) Can promote beautiful and harmonious action.

These experiences have what we will term a ‘metaphysical value’ – ‘metaphysical’ because it stands outside of the immediate internal and external goods of sport, such as excellence, fitness, socialisation, and monetary rewards. Another accurate description of these experiences would be ‘existential’, in that they provide information concerning an individual’s manner of existing in the world.

These experiences have a worth that is in a sense less tangible than that of winning or maintaining fitness; there is something intensely personal and therefore ‘inscrutable’ about them. To ask a fell runner whether they are fit is completely different to asking them to comment on whether or not they have found freedom and harmony on the side of the mountain. It is important to understand that while fitness can be felt and friends can be made during a run, metaphysical sporting experiences offer a much more ‘internal’, personally meaningful interpretation of a physical experience.

Recall Mitcham’s summation of the problem of the technological society: it is characterised by an existential rejection of the metaphysical or spiritual. The technologicalised state of contemporary sport reflects this rejection; we simply do not think about our sporting experiences in terms other than those related to politics, performance or profit. The lack of reflection on our physical achievements feeds the problem: human movement meanings are streamlined to serve the interests of technique, and we lose the ability to enjoy our bodies holistically.

Indeed, Husserl argues actions within the lived stream of conscious experience cannot properly become meaningful until we reflect upon them:

> We must distinguish the pre-empirical being of the lived experiences, their being prior to the reflective glance of attention directed toward them, and their being as phenomena. Through the attending directed glance of attention and comprehension, the lived experience acquires a new mode of being. It comes to be differentiated, 'thrown into relief', and this act of differentiation is nothing other than being comprehended, being the object of the directed glance of comprehension.[184]

When we reflect on our physical experiences, some of those that stand out will undoubtedly have to do with winning; there will however be others. Perhaps what comes to mind is the first time a route was successfully climbed, the unthinking flick of a boot that sent the ball into the top corner of the net, or the Zen-like peace found inside a curling wave. Aside from the possibility of victory, movement experiences – exemplified most commonly by sport – also offer us an opportunity to test ourselves and overcome obstacles, to express ourselves without restraint, and to find moments of connection with the natural environment. It is only when we reflect on our physical experiences in light of their ability to fundamentally change our character and understanding of ourselves and our relation to the world that we begin to discern the possibility of a deeper, metaphysical and existential import within the movement (or sporting) experience.

Although it is by no means always the case, these types of meaningful experiences often take the form of what Arnold calls 'peak experiences'. The idea of a peak experience is useful

[184] Husserl, E. The Phenomenology of Time Consciousness, Jonestown: University of Indiana Press, 1971, pg. 179

> because it would appear that movement and sport seem to produce conditions that are conducive to them. They may be regarded as discrete experiences which are intensely felt and meaningful, and which are recollected as joy-giving high spots which stand out like mountaintops in one's past experience. Far from being mundane they are extraordinary, savoured over and recalled without much difficulty.[185]

The late extreme skier Doug Coombs sums up the idea of a peak experience when recounting his first descents of more than a hundred peaks in Valdez, Alaska: "I can still visualize almost every single first descent, every run I've done; if you just transported me there by a magic transporter on top a peak, I would tell you exactly where we were. That would be no problem. That's how vivid the memories are."[186] The quality of Coombs' experiences would seem to be evidence for Ravizza's claim that

> the performer intent upon his project does not have to worry about all the mundane problems of daily existence, but instead is able to go all out, to totally immerse himself in the activity, and to experience his unique self at the outer limits.[187]

This is the territory of metaphysical sporting value. The peak sporting experience

> is sometimes spoken of as the kind that encompasses the whole being and in this respect is often akin to what has been described as a mystic experience about which there is sometimes talk of oneness and unity with the world.[188]

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[185] Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, London: Heinemann, 1979, pg. 22
[186] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)
[187] Quoted in Arnold, P.J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, pg. 23-24
[188] Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, pg. 23

This idea lends credence to what will follow, and also to my claims that metaphysical sporting value exists in a deeply personal and 'inscrutable' space. The characteristics of the peak experience are summarised by Arnold as follows:

(i) *Uniqueness* (and clarity when recalling the experience)

(ii) *Transience of self* (sense of harmony, oneness with object and/or environment)

(iii) *Total immersion* (state of concentration)

(iv) *Euphoria in perfection* (everything is as it should be)

(v) *Control* (not fought for, but simply present in the moment)

(vi) *Loss of fear*

(vii) *Effortlessness* (absence of pain and effort)[189]

The defining characteristics of the peak experience detailed above will be made clear by the interpretations of the sporting experiences that will be discussed in the coming chapters. It is the deeply personal nature of these types of experiences, and what is drawn from them upon reflection that classes metaphysical sporting value and the peak experience as a type of existential movement meaning; a reading of an experience that stresses "the dynamic quality of human existence and emphasize[s] its ecstatic, authentic and transcendent possibilities."[190]

The intention in presenting these ideas is not to argue for their primacy over other interpretations of sport or physical activity. Nor do we want to say everyone should play

[189] Ibid
[190] Ibid, pg. 38

sport or do something active in pursuit of metaphysical sporting value. Any sportsman or sportswoman, when reflecting on their performances will be able to recount enjoyable experiences and feelings which are of metaphysical or existential import. Sadly, it is the case that these values are increasingly marginalised by our preoccupation with performance primarily, but also with the tangible physical and social benefits of sport. Lifestyle improvement through sport is also big business. “Get fit, meet people, do the best you can…” We are all familiar with those types of sporting epithets. We hear “Just go out and express yourself” less and less, and we do not hear “Ski down this mountain and discover freedom” at all. My project here is to consider interpretations of the sporting experience that might counter-balance the dominance of the value-set imposed by sporting technique.

Sport and Freedom

We all have tons of responsibilities, but I can get up and walk down to Laguna Beach when it's small with my ten-foot longboard and come back stoked again. Surfing does that for you, it's like freedom, it's a release.

- Ian Cairns, Big Wave Surfer[191]

Extreme skiing is a way of life. It was my way to become a man… when you live in touch with the mountain, when you spend most of your time in the mountains, your vision changes completely. And after three or four years, I could see the possibility to ski where nobody saw it… perhaps only in these moments am I truly aware that this is my mode of expressing myself. That this is my mode of talking to the others of freedom.

- Stephano de Benedetti, Extreme Skier[192]

Very few people can go through life and say they have been doing something for forty five years. What have you been doing for forty five years? I will surf till I die.

- Michael Tomson, Surfer[193]

I think my wife is super tolerant… But to make me stop doing something that I love, she knows it's not possible.

- Doug Coombs, Extreme Skier[194]

[191] From "Bustin' Down the Door" (2008), Screen Media Films, Jeremy Gosch (Director)
[192] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)
[193] From "Bustin' Down the Door" (2008), Screen Media Films, Jeremy Gosch (Director)

The question of whether human beings are indeed 'free' has occupied philosophers for millennia. Do humans have the capacity to choose freely a course of action from among various alternatives, or are our choices in some way determined? In other words, in what sense can we claim to freely have been able to choose tea over coffee this morning, and does it make sense to say that we could quite freely have done otherwise?

The concept of free will is connected to the idea of moral responsibility. If my hand was forced this mitigates my responsibility for a particular choice of action; if I had to shoot the robber before he shot me, I am not held responsible the way I would be if I had not been defending my own life. Moreover, free will would seem to be a condition on desert for one's achievements, on our own personal dignity and autonomy, and on the value we place on our interpersonal relationships.

The analytical tradition in philosophy asserts that the main threats to our freedom of will are the presence of alleged determinisms, such as physical/causal, psychological, biological and theological determinisms. Broadly speaking, philosophers tend to deny the reality of these determinisms, accept their existence and assert their compatibility with human free will, or accept their existence and deny human free will (these are roughly defined as the libertarian, compatibilist and determinist camps).

For all that, the analytical tradition has been unable to provide a positive answer to the question of whether human beings actually have free will or not:

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[194] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

> A recent trend is to suppose that agent causation accounts capture, as well as possible, our pre-reflective idea of responsible, free action. But the failure of philosophers to work the account out in a fully satisfactory and intelligible form reveals that the very idea of free will (and so of responsibility) is incoherent or at least inconsistent with a world very much like our own.[195]

It would seem that as far as analytical philosophy is concerned at least, the threats posed by the various determinisms are too potent to dismiss. The idea of freedom that is going to be explored in this chapter does not rely on the complicated and nuanced language of metaphysical or epistemological philosophy, nor does it have much to do with any sense of 'could have done otherwise', and it therefore avoids the problems associated with those definitions. Furthermore, on the account of freedom to be detailed here, the question of whether our actions are physically, biologically or otherwise determined is moot. What is at issue is the expression of individuality, and therefore, some people are free while others are not.

The establishment of technique in contemporary society has meant that many of the actions humans perform every day are not actions that they would freely choose to perform; these actions are not performed out of a love for the action itself. Both Cairns and de Benedetti refer to freedom in their quotations at the beginning of this section; the quotations from Thomson and Coombs that follow afterwards speak of the love of an activity being a powerful motivator in their lives. The idea of freedom discussed in this chapter aligns human freedom with actions performed because the agent concerned loves to do what he is doing – the performance of the action itself, not any of the effects of that

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[195] O'Connor, T. "Free Will", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online, 14/04/2005 < http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/ > [accessed 06/08/09]

action, entails freedom. By this account, the surfers and skiers quoted above are indeed free. My intention here is not to defend the account of freedom that follows as comprehensively explaining the philosophical question of whether humanity is indeed free, but rather to use it to try and make sense of the way the word freedom and the idea thereof is sometimes used within the context of sport and physical activity.

Why does the word ‘free’ seem appropriate when applied to someone skiing down a mountain? The word could refer to the absence of physical constraints – we can assume the skier is not ‘on the clock’ and she was not coerced into making the run. It might also be the case that she could have chosen not to ski at all. But the use of ‘free’ in this case implies more; there is something about skiing down a mountain that suggests freedom resides in the performance of the action divorced from any ulterior or extrinsic concerns. Very few actions in the technologicalised society can lay claim to such an unadulterated mechanics. Sport, perhaps more than any other activity, has the power to demonstrate the value of performing actions for their own sake: for loving what you do, and therefore, according to the definition proffered here at least, being free.

Vizinczey, Steiner and Freedom as an act of Love

There is a fundamental insight expressed in the following:

> Philosophers who distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will do so because our success in carrying out our ends depends in part on factors wholly beyond our control. Furthermore, there are always external constraints on the range of options we can meaningfully try to undertake. As the presence or absence of these conditions and constraints are not (usually) our responsibility, it is plausible that the central loci of our responsibility are our choices, or 'willings'.[196]

But it is not the case that our success depends only *in part* on factors wholly beyond our control. It is the case that our success depends almost exclusively on these factors. The salient question is therefore not whether we could or would have chosen or willed otherwise, but whether that which we did choose, or will, is truly reflective of ourselves. We will examine this conclusion in due course; first, however, we must examine the meaning of the phrase 'factors wholly beyond our control'.

Nothing follows as a matter of course. Not even this sentence, if you the reader suddenly find your gas and electric service provider the subject of discussion with a zealous door-to-door salesman, or your mobile phone rings because someone at the bank wanted to inform you of the interest rates on a new savings account. We can make reasonable guesses about what will happen in the near future: it is certainly probable that you can walk down the road to the bus stop and board the next bus into town - that is, unless that bus knocked someone over on its way to you, or an unanticipated

[196] Ibid

conversation with the neighbour does not cost you precious minutes. We can make these guesses because we are more aware of the immediate probabilities which could affect our actions, and therefore have more power to bend them to our will. It is, after all, quite simple just to ignore the neighbour. Curiously, our confidence in foretelling and influencing events increases in inverse ratio to our ability to do so. The above is Vizinczey's point when he writes, at the time of the Vietnam conflict:

> In San Francisco a couple of years ago I met a radio reporter who was planning to get married. 'Thanks,' he said diffidently when I wished him good luck. He made an uncertain grimace. 'I'll need it. You never can tell how it will turn out, can you?' Although the marriage was to involve only himself and a girl he knew well, or at least thought he did, he couldn't help feeling apprehensive. But he was dead certain about the future of Asia, which involved some two thousand million human beings and countless political situations more fraught than any to be found in the most complicated political farce. He had no doubt whatever that if America withdrew from Vietnam, 'the whole of Asia would go communist…' The stress of living in chaos is intolerable, so we conceive order. We're mortal, so we conceive immortality. We live in continuous change, so we conceive permanence.'[197]

If it is true that ultimately nothing is predictable,[198] nothing in today's world reflects humanity's need to conceive a long-term plan – order from chaos – more than the systematic anxiety created and sustained by the pension industry. In his book *How To Be*

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[197] Vizinczey, S. The Rules of Chaos, London: Macmillan, 1969, pg. 16-18

[198] What about the sun rising tomorrow? Hume addressed this problem when discussing inductive logic: we can at best make an extremely good guess that the sun will rise tomorrow, but our guess is based only on what we have seen in the past, not on all the factors which contribute to the sun rising. When the 999 swans in a row have been white, one might be foolish to bet on the 1000th being black. But black swans do exist. For an excellent explanation of this principle in economic terms, see Taleb, N. N. The Black Swan, London: Penguin, 2007.

Free, written *before* the recent global financial crisis that affected Britain so badly, Tom Hodgkinson rails against what he sees as exploitation based on fear:

> The pensions industry does its damnedest to instill fear about the future in us poor consumers. Trapped on the train platform or on the bus, we are blasted by their anxiety-inducing messages. Anything can happen, they say, so it makes sense to plan ahead. But, of course, it is easy to sell products on the basis of events that haven't yet happened, because you have virgin territory in which to stir up all sorts of fears…. The other point to make about pensions is that security itself is a phantasm. It simply doesn't exist. It's a construction of the mind, a mere hope, a will o' the wisp. Things are unpredictable. How do you know what is going to happen tomorrow or even in the next minute? A natural disaster could wipe out your savings – or a stock market crash. If you've got money, for God's sake spend it. Life is change, flux, flow, process.[199]

There is a manifest truth to the foregoing, yet humanity as a species, it seems, will do anything to prove to itself the contrary. This has much to do with our own private neurosis, fuelled as they are by the previous success of the inductive logic so necessary to ease our nerves. This type of thinking is based, as Hodgkinson points out, on fear; but we are also guilty of hope in the form of expectation. Today, the devil has forgone the goat's horns and appears instead in the guise of the health and safety officer and the mortgage lender. "Don't climb those trees," he tells the children, "you might fall out. It's safer in the next park." To the adults he says: "Our interest rates are so low! So what if you'll end up paying more money back to us than we lend to you. In the end, you'll own your own house!" Possessed as we are by fear and hope, we quite literally bank on the future.

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[199] Hondgkinson, T. How To Be Free, London: Penguin, 2006, pg. 244-247

Some may see this as a natural reaction to an unclear future, and point out that if nothing is certain, then it becomes extremely difficult to make the right choice or doing the right thing. In fact, if everything is pure chance, we might ask why we should do anything at all.

But here lies the rub: our admission of helplessness before chance is also the source of our freedom in the most meaningful sense of the word. The following vignette from Vizinczey is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Throughout history, men have built themselves imaginary prisons, where their deepest longings for joy and adventure are barred from fulfillment by the iron gates of 'impossibility'. The world is full of people whom no one has put in chains but who bind themselves with frozen thoughts and fears. A man whose mind conforms to the conditioned responses of his daily life is a coward and a slave. To *free* himself, he must *free* his imagination, so that he may conceive the world as it is: a place where it is possible to be *adventurous*, that is, *to be himself* [my italics].
>
> Once we understand that we live in an irrational world, we can understand that we are free to act – and ought to act – spontaneously, for we cannot count on any other reward for our action than the satisfaction of doing it. A man is free when he understands that every act is like the act of love.[200]

For Vizinczey, freedom consists in acting and responding in a way that reflects who we are, and his use of the terms 'free', 'imagination' and 'adventure' are revealing, and will be discussed relative to sport further on. Because we cannot count wholeheartedly on any particular outcome, our actions should be intuitive and spontaneous reflections of ourselves; we should make our choices on the basis of our character. True freedom therefore consists in not feeling that any action one takes is dependent on anything except

[200] Ibid, pg. 52-54

the inclinations of one's self. The only condition is that those actions are performed for their own sake – that one loves what one is doing.

The Austrian philosopher Rudolph Steiner lays out a similar argument to Vizinczey in *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Crucial to Steiner's idea of freedom is what he refers to as the 'ideal' part of the individual being: that part which interrogates a range of notions within the realm of ideas. Vizinczey simplifies this to 'a man's imagination', but the point is the same. Steiner, too, stresses the need for love of one's actions, actions performed for their own sake. He writes:

> Only when I follow my love for my objective is it I myself who act. I act, at this level of morality, not because I acknowledge a lord over me, or an external authority, or a so-called inner voice; I acknowledge no external principle for my action, because I have found in myself the ground for my action, namely, my love of the action… My action will be 'good' if my intuition, steeped in love, finds its right place within the intuitively experienceable world continuum; it will be 'bad' if this is not the case… I act as I, this particular individuality, find I have occasion to do.[201]

The obvious retort here is that trumpeting the claim that true freedom exists in the individual's right to act on his intuitions is to invite all manner of immoral action: the psychopath is given license to indulge his sadism. Vizinczey, however, reminds us that the cold-blooded murderer would at least have to admit he was a murderer by choice, as few people actually desire the horrors they perpetrate. Rather, they glory in the (hoped-for) future benefit of their crimes. [202]

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[201] Steiner, R. The Philosophy of Freedom, Research Archives Online < http://www.rsarchive.org/> [accessed 16/05/2010]

[202] Vizinczey, S. The Rules of Chaos, pg. 54-114

Steiner's reply, while more complex, is once again similar to that of Vizinczey. Following Steiner, our individuality is expressed by the extent to which we can rely on our intuition. Out intuitive faculties, in turn, are shaped by the sum of the ideas which are effective in each of us. The greater our range of experience – and therefore, the more we can use our imagination - the more numerous our ideas and the sharper our intuition. All men have common instincts, urges and passions, but

> What is individual in me is not my organism with its instincts and its feelings, but rather the unified world of ideas which lights up within this organism… it is the fact that something of the idea world comes to expression in a particular way within these urges, passions and feelings that establishes my individuality.[203]

This is not to say that the truly individual and intuitive actions of the unapologetic serial-killer are in fact moral, but rather, by Steiner's account, like Vizinczey's, we would then be dealing with a genuine psychopath – a person not constituted like the vast majority of humankind. Many rulers have had the blood of thousands on their hands without genuinely wanting to, yet we are able to explain away their responsibility for their killing by rationalising it: there are always *good reasons* for firing missiles into cities and fire-bombing villages.

That our moral sensibilities are conditioned by our imaginations explains a lot of the cruelty in the world. The same men who hack off shark fins and leave the sharks to drown might be appalled by the senseless beating of a helpless puppy; it is not the case that these men love mutilating sharks, it is just the case that providing the ingredients for

[203] Steiner, R. The Philosophy of Freedom

shark-fin soup feeds their family. In other words, they rationalise their actions in a way that the majority of us do not. These men are not free because they have not conceived the world as it may be; while they might be able to imagine a better way to treat a puppy (as most of us can), they can imagine no other way to live and provide for their families, and so they continue to maim and torture. The crucial point is that our intuitive emotional responses are conditioned by ideas – the imagination. For Steiner, if we put ourselves in as many different situations as possible, if we expose ourselves to as many ideas as we can, we paint for ourselves a more realistic picture of the world and how it works – a truer *image*. Thus our imagination is set free, and we can learn to trust the immediacy of our senses as a path to true freedom: "Our sense and sensibilities relate us to the present; our reason is an instrument of speculation. Which is why our spontaneous inclinations, our 'emotional judgments' are usually more correct than our calculated decisions – reason forever leads us astray."[204]

What of our responsibilities? It is possible that all this individualism and 'following your instincts' is simply a glorification of irresponsibility. Vizinczey is swift and sure: "But what exactly is responsibility if it rests on the denial of personality?"[205] In other words, what of our responsibility to ourselves? The 'unfree' man is fettered by false responsibility and poisoned by the negative feelings it creates. The 'free' man is at least happy in the knowledge that anything he chooses to do for others or society is done in love, not in dutiful (or spiteful) resentment.

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[204] Vizinczey, S. The Rules of Chaos, pg. 113-114
[205] Ibid, pg. 58

It is tempting to take both Vizinczey and Steiner to task for what could be perceived as a reckless, limiting and immature understanding of freedom. It might be argued that these ideas promote an egotistical selfishness or narcissism. However, Vizinczey and Steiner are not arguing against duty, considering others or being a valuable member of a community. Their philosophy depends instead on the idea of the primacy of the individual consciousness. It is quite possible to support this idea of freedom and still be bound by duty; it is just the case that the individual concerned must have determined that that particular duty is one worth committing to. Neither philosopher would deny a fulfilling life requires worthwhile interactions with other people on terms agreeable to all parties; rather they want to stress that one need not ever be dictated to. This understanding of the idea of freedom sits most comfortably with the quotations that begin this chapter; indeed, when sportspeople talk of being 'free' it is the ability to perform actions that they love performing, the way they want to perform them, free of coercion and external compulsion to which they are referring.

It is often the case lives lived in this way serve as an inspiration to others. At the very least, there is a frankness about such lives that enables an honest interaction with the world. When extreme skier Doug Coombs died in a skiing accident in the French Alps, leaving behind his wife and two children, some might have been tempted to bemoan his lack of responsibility and selfishness. The words of his wife Emily, however, tell another story: "I fell in love with Doug and I fell in love with the mountains… We had an understanding out there… I just couldn't imagine a better way for Doug to have gone."[206] Extreme skiing was a way of life for Doug Coombs, and he never pretended otherwise.

[206] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

This honesty does not lessen the pain felt by his loved ones after his death, but it does mean they loved and accepted him for who he was, and will remember him as being true to himself.

The above philosophy is summed by Steiner: "An action is felt to be free insofar as the reasons for it spring from the ideal part of my individual being…. Man is free insofar as he is able to obey himself in every moment of his life."[207] After all, it is well-nigh impossible not to love doing ('to do with love') what you really want to do; true freedom consists not in trying always to do 'right' by reference to duty or deontology, but in acknowledging, through action, your*self*. It is difficult to make any argument for the ultimate correctness of this understanding of freedom (or, for that matter, any other, as is readily acknowledged by analytical philosophers).[208] However, one *can* examine the consequences of lives lived in this way, and the world of sport offers many examples of these, some of which will be discussed below.

Coutts is surely right when he argues "One basic reason man emerges in sport is the sense of freedom which he finds there."[209] Coutts could be talking about a freedom from responsibility and worldly concern, but it might be argued that the athlete could find such escapes in other, less strenuous activities, such as movies, video games or drugs. Quotations such as the ones which begin this chapter refer to a deeper understanding of freedom as it is felt by people performing certain physical actions *through love and for their own sake*. One cannot help but notice the similarities with the idea of freedom as it

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[207] Steiner, R. The Philosophy of Freedom
[208] O'Connor, T. "Free Will", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online, 14/04/2005 < http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/ > [accessed 06/08/09]
[209] Coutts, C.A. "Freedom in Sport", Quoted in Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, London: Heinemann, 1979, pg. 43

expressed by Vizinczey and Steiner. Slusher builds on these ideas: "Freedom in sport is a necessity, not because of the ability to achieve desired ends, in terms of victory or defeat, but because of the *for-itself* autonomy."[210]

Much sport is played simply because people like playing it. Sport stands apart from everyday life as source of 'in the moment' living: sport is 'immediate' in this respect. There is no time to worry about other worldly concerns. This idea will be expanded on in Chapter Seven, but for now, it suffices to say the idea of freedom as it is used by Coutts and Slusher refers to the way that sport is played *for sport's sake*, and is undoubtedly fair comment. In what follows though, a deeper meaning of the idea of freedom as it applies to sport is discussed. The aim here is to understand the sportsman who through his physical activity personifies the freedom of Vizinczey and Steiner: the sportsman who finds not a momentary escape, but a life's expression through the use of his body.

[210] Slusher, H. S. "Man, Sport and Existence", cited in ibid, pg. 44

Sport and Freedom: Mestre Russo and the Free Roda de Caxias

Our work has its foundations in philosophy, and one of the things that I try to communicate to people is to encourage them to never, never give up the fight. I tell them there exist difficulties, difficulties exist in our lives, but the worst defeat of man is when he runs away from them; when he behaves like this, he is defeating himself.

- Mestre Russo[211]

Historians differ in their opinions as to the development of capoeira. Some say it is a direct descendant of African fighting arts, while others refer to it as a uniquely Brazilian dance form. All agree, however, capoeria culture began with the African slaves of the sugar and coffee plantations. The movements themselves must necessarily be accompanied by the music of traditional instruments such as the *berimbau*, and capoeria *rodas* are undeniably social occasions: The slaves of the New World "sought both violent and jovial means of coping with their oppression."[212] Capoeria became a way for slaves to express themselves while also learning techniques with which they could defend themselves against attacks from slave owners. The Brazilian authorities, wary of the influence of capoeira, banned it; up until the 1930s capoeiristas were still being arrested for practicing their art form. After the ban was lifted, capoeira enjoyed promotion as both an art form and a competitive sport. Capoeira then, perhaps uniquely, is a sport, a

[211] From "O Zelador" (2007), Bantam Films, Darren Bartlett (Director)
[212] Assunção, M. R. Capoeira : A History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art, New York: Routledge, 2005, pg. 13

fighting style ('martial art'), and a cultural art form which symbolises the defiance and spirit of a subjugated people.

Although it has long been abolished, slavery left an indelible mark on Brazilian culture, with many of the most economically deprived areas being home to the descendents of former slaves. The Baixada Fluminense is one of Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighbourhoods, and the home of Jonas Rabelo, known as Mestre (Master) Russo because of his 'Russian' appearance. Russo is one of nine brothers and sisters born into abject poverty; his story begins like many rags to riches tales, but that familiarity ends abruptly as the hero discovers the true nature of his calling:

> I made [capoeira] my education. I started to realize that it was a culture composed of elements. When I began, the element was that of a game. Today, now that I have more maturity, I see some capoeiristas that are older than me, I see wisdom in them. I also have capoeira as a life philosophy…. It's really about passing on what people cannot see. Because people today tend to see capoeira in terms of movement, music and singing. But I think we have to pass on our objective, which is to achieve *freedom* [my italics]. But when I say freedom, I am not talking in physical terms. When I say freedom, I mean to distance ourselves from feelings that are damaging to us such as selfishness, vanity and revenge. Feelings that aren't good for the human being.[213]

Acknowledged as a Master of capoeria, Russo prefers simply to be known as 'O Zelador': the caretaker. In the words of Russo's son, Del, "Capoeira is everything for him."[214] By his own admission, a love of capoeira allowed a transcendence of Russo's

[213] From "O Zelador" (2007), Bantam Films, Darren Bartlett (Director)
[214] Ibid

material poverty: the freedom of an activity performed through love allowed a physical and emotional freedom in the most dire economic circumstances.

Through capoeria, Russo has also had a significant impact on his society. His love of capoeria led to the formation of the *Free* (hopefully my emphasis here gives the reader pause) Roda de Caxias, a capoeira 'circle' that has run for years (and continues to run), every Sunday on the streets of the Rio suburb of Caxias. Here all capoeiristas are welcome to come and 'play' (the correct term to denote participation in capoeira); it is not uncommon to see disabled people participating as well. The Free Roda stresses community, respect and responsibility, and expects appropriate behaviour from all participants. It is "the work of the people who believe in the culture."[215] These values have resonated with the youth of Caxias and the Baixada, as Russo explains:

> One thing of note that occurred in my life was when the boys from the district came to me to develop their capoeira. My relationship with the people who look for me, who believe in my work, is a tight relationship. Because my objective is not to form a group, but to expand my family. But I wanted to find a way in which capoeira could serve as a form of self-help, a way of increasing self-esteem. Therefore it was an important moment. I said that I could show them how much they could grow, how beautiful each one of their souls were. And so today they demonstrate this to me, they pass this to me, I can see this in them, and this makes me proud.[216]

Far from producing a denial of responsibility or a self-centred existence, Russo's love of capoeira has had a manifestly positive impact on himself, his family and his community. And although the history of capoeira as an activity speaks of emancipation and cultural

[215] Ibid
[216] Ibid

affirmation, it must be admitted that all the good that comes of Russo's work can be traced back to one man's love of capoeira, and his willingness, his *need*, to make it his life's expression.

Russo's take on freedom also lends credence to the ideas of Vizinczey and Steiner. For a man to be free he must act from love and from himself; it is the negative and damaging feelings which Russo refers to that more than anything prevent these types of actions. A fearful, vain or vengeful man cannot truly act out of love (unless, as already noted, he is a lover of sadism, and the exception to the rule) and is therefore incapable of freedom. When in the grip of negative emotions our intuitive reactions are most often rash and regretful. Our responses are not reflective of our true selves, and we often disown such actions with phrases like "I was in a bad place at that time." Who would be happy to be known as a perennial golf club-breaker? If freedom consists in trusting our intuitive and emotional reactions to a situation, then it stands to reason that the absence of negative emotions can only promote freedom.

Important too is the personal change of perspective Russo acknowledges. Initially, capoeira was a game, a distraction, and something at which to excel. But as his love of capoeira grew Russo realised the 'game' had the power to unite people. The boys of the Baixada, normally so prone to drugs and crime, suddenly found friendship and a common bond in the Free Roda. Capoeira, and one man's love of it, provided a vehicle for the promotion of positive energies like compassion and empathy. These *ideas* (note once again the connection with Vizinczey and Steiner), such as community, respect and responsibility, increased self-esteem and confidence, and suddenly the boys would rather play at the Free Roda than take drugs or steal. This is not a phenomenon unique to

capoeria or the Baxaida. Many studies have shown that sport increases self-esteem and confidence.[217] What does set the Free Roda apart is where it chooses to place its emphasis: *winning* does not matter. This is not a coincidence.

As Russo further developed his skills, his capoeira enabled him to make a positive change to his community. Sometimes, however, doing something because you love doing it can do more than improve the lives of one's family and friends; in the case of Bill Briggs and Andrew McLean, their exploits have proved inspirational to thousands of other skiers around the world.

Sport and Freedom: Bill Briggs and Andrew McLean

Skis are appropriate on mountainsides. And, all kinds of mountainsides.

- Bill Briggs[218]

In June 1971, Bill Briggs, a skier and mountain guide from Wyoming, became the first person to ski from the summit of the Grand Teeton, one of America's highest mountains. People told Briggs that skiing the Grand was impossible. There were avalanches and falling rock; sections were too steep; he would have to ski along cliffs that dropped off for thousands of feet; the smallest misstep could be fatal. Briggs paid them no heed, even

[217] See for instance Bowker, A. "The relationship between sport participation and self-esteem in early adolescence", *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 2006, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 214-229 or Sonstroem, R.J. "The physical-self system: A mediator of exercise and self-esteem", in Fox, K. R. (Ed.) The Physical Self: From Motivation to Well Being, Champagne, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1997

[218] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

though he was climbing and skiing on a surgically fused right hip that caused him to limp when he walked.

Briggs had expected the three other skiers in his party to climb with him to the summit, helping him to break trail, before they all descended together. But before they reached the peak, the others told Briggs that they would go no further, it was simply too dangerous. "Oh", said Briggs, "that means I have to do it."[219] Hours after Briggs disappeared from view, a huge avalanche ripped past the other climbers. They feared the worst, but Briggs had managed to avoid the falling snow as he skied from the summit, and continued his descent. After skiing for almost five hours and descending six thousand vertical feet, Brigs finally reached the bottom: "When I get to the bottom, I'm really tired. I'm really physically beat. And… overjoyed. I did it, okay. Man, this is… this is the biggest thing I'll do in my life."[220]

Briggs refers to himself as a mountain person. His love of skiing and of the mountains led to a descent which, in the words of professional skier Rick Armstrong, "opened people's minds."[221] Briggs himself puts it this way: "The idea wasn't, for me, that I would be the only one that would ever do this; my idea was everybody should be doing this. At the time, nobody was, but this is something… it's too much fun to pass up."[222]

There was no monetary reward, no trophy, and very nearly, no recognition at all. No one had seen Briggs reach the summit of the Grand, nor ski the high snow fields. Luckily, the next day the proof of Briggs's run was still etched in the snow. The editor of the local

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[219] Ibid
[220] Ibid
[221] Ibid
[222] Ibid

paper flew with Briggs around the summit, and managed to take four photographs of his tracks.

> One of them was just a classic. The beauty of the mountain enhanced a bit by human contact. It was fabulous. I don't know, you dream up what you want to accomplish in your life… I don't know that many people get a chance to fulfill that… but I had at that point fulfilled a dream. Totally.[223]

Through a love and dedication to his sport, Briggs had fulfilled a lifelong ambition. Importantly though, that ambition itself stemmed from the activity he loved.

Another skier who has found his life's work by following Briggs' example is Andrew McLean. McLean describes himself as a throwback, and has much in common with his mentor. Eschewing the world of extreme skiing movies and daredevil fame, McLean's passion is simply to climb up steep mountains and ski down them. In a world where the last frontiers are all but conquered, McLean pursues his passion in far-flung places such as Patagonia and Iceland.

> I've never really taken skiing that seriously…. You know, I'm going to get a job and a real career and get with the program. But what always happens is, you know, I'll have the opportunity to get with the program and then there will be a ski trip. And it will be like, 'I'll do the ski trip first and then get with the program.' Twenty years later [laughs]…. Skiing always takes precedence over getting with the program. At some point you just have to realize, this is more of a full time thing, and just accept it as it is. It's my destiny.[224]

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[223] Ibid
[224] Ibid

McLean is forthright about the risks he takes, and they do not stop him from doing what he loves. There is an honesty about his appraisal of his life that one seldom finds amongst those overly concerned with the future and haunted by the spectre of responsibility:

> I know it's dangerous, but if I give it up, what's the future going to be like? Is it just going to be sitting at a desk job? You need to figure what is going to take the place of that? Where are you going to get the same adventure or the same excitement out of your life? There is just something about mountains that appeals to me on a very basic DNA level. I'm just a mountain person.[225]

There is no denial of personality to be found amongst people like Russo, Briggs and McLean. This is the source of their freedom. Capoeira and skiing are simply both manifestations of, and the implements with which they discovered, the freedom Vizinczey and Steiner talk about. And as boys from the Baixada play capoeira rather than steal, and adventurous skiers everywhere follow Briggs' example, it is clear this freedom, this 'doing for the love of doing' often has a positive impact on other people as well.

After his first ascent of the Himalayan peak Annapurna, Maurice Herzog echoes Briggs and McLean when he speaks of his life and ambitions thus:

> In overstepping our limitations, in touching the extreme boundaries of man's world, we have come to know something of its true splendor. In my worst moments of anguish, I seemed to discover the deep significance of existence of which till then I had been unaware. I saw that it was better to be true than to be strong. The marks of the ordeal are on my body. I was saved and had won my

[225] Ibid

> freedom. This freedom which I shall never lose, has given me the assurance and serenity of a man who has fulfilled himself.[226]

Herzog here equates his personal freedom to self-fulfillment, and the serenity such fulfillment brings. When he speaks of 'freedom' he is not only talking about the ability to fulfill what he sees as his destiny, but the fact that this destiny falls outside of typical societal expectations. It takes a strong person to climb a dangerous mountain; or, for that matter, to ski down one. Despite their achievements, what is most noticeable about people like Briggs and Herzog is their abject humility, coupled with a practical sense of their own mortality. After admitting to themselves that they must do what they felt necessary – they must act of themselves and out of a love of what they were doing – and after risking so much in doing it, there is a confidence about their words that stems from a realistic understanding of the world and their interactions with it. There is no posturing, trash-talking or prima donna-ism here. They are both free in that they both made a conscious choice to seek their own fulfillment. Vizinczey would approve.

Furthermore, Herzog, Briggs and McLean 'opened the minds' of other skiers and mountaineers; people had never *imagined* (that core activity that by both Steiner and Vizinczey's account is a prerequisite for freedom) that skiing the Grand or mountains like it was possible. A whole new range of possibilities and experiences opened up for people who were willing to follow their example.

It is worth noting that one does not have to make a sporting activity the locus of one's life in the manner of Russo or Briggs for sport to be able to promote the type of freedom

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[226] Herzog, M. "Annapurna", quoted in Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, pg. 45-46

under discussion here. This is what Slusher means when he talks of sport's 'for-itself autonomy': sport can remind us that life more generally can (and should) also have a for-itself autonomy, an individualist validity. Indeed, it is the individual validity of a life that is often touted as one of the first casualties of the technological process.

Most people will have heard someone complain about 'just being a number', or feeling like 'another cog in the machine'. Our individuality suffers under the homogenisation inherent in the rise of *technique*. In sport, too, athletes suffer under the demands of the performance worshipping commercial-industrial sporting behemoth. The first question Usain Bolt asked Michael Johnson in a recent interview was: "When you retired, did you miss it?" Johnson said he didn't. "I'm not going to miss it either," Bolt replied.[227] If the most talented, exuberant and charming sportsman in the world is feeling the pressures of performance perhaps a reemphasis of sport's ability to show us true freedom is indeed necessary.

Sport, Freedom and Existentialism

Vizinczey and Steiner argue for an understanding of human freedom that helps to explain the notion as it used by sportspeople. Playing sport allows one to be oneself as it frees one from those concerns that while engaged in by the self, do not represent the self. Playing sport is a choice to engage in an activity for its own sake, and therefore allows the possibility of expressing a self unfettered by external constraint – a 'truer' self. But

[227] "The Fastest Man Who Has Ever Lived", BBC Three, July 2010, Stephen Lyle and Leon Mann (Directors)

there is another interpretation of the idea of freedom that could be applied to sport, and one which compliments that presented above.

In *Homo Ludens* Huizinga points out that while "play is free, is in fact freedom", play is also not ordinary or 'real' life.[228] Play is, instead, a voluntary activity that distinguishes itself from material or other instrumental forms of life to realise values intrinsic to the activity. Paradoxically, although play represents a voluntary freedom from material interests or obligations and offers new possibilities for engaging in creative and meaningful activity for its own sake, Novak argues that

> The spirit of play is the invention of rules. At the heart of play is love for the finite, the limited, the bounded.... The description of a fixed universe is the first and indispensible step of every free act. For human beings are embodied spirits. The free spirit is not pure spirit, pure will, pure intellect, pure desire; it is incarnate in hands and legs and lungs and sinews, in a place, at a time, in a culture, amongst others like oneself.[229]

Thus play does require rules, even if they are spontaneously invented: a game without boundaries would not be much of a game. The idea of 'bounded play' can be seen as much in the exhortations of a five year-old to her father ("Daddy you must stand *here*, and do *this;* I will stand there and do *that*") as they can in the unwritten rules and implicit conventions of schoolboy touch-rugby.

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[228] Huizinga, J. Homo Ludens, London: Paladin, 1970
[229] Novak, M. The Joy of Sports, New York: Basic Books, 1976, pg. 225

For Schmitz, sport is simply an extension of play, by virtue of the fact that it too requires submission to a form necessary to make the game possible; the binding force of rules freely accepted is the same as the decision to spontaneously create a game and play:

> Sport is in its origin and intention a movement into transcendence which carries over from the founding decision to play and which builds upon that decision an intensified thrust towards the values of self-consciousness tested through performance, competition and victory.[230]

Thus the possibility of transcendence as it is offered in the sporting context evolves from a free submission to the form of sport and a detachment from material concerns, and more importantly, provides an insight into another understanding of freedom (and one which sits comfortably with that discussed above) as it applies to sport.

"Only action can testify to the validity of thoughts and emotions: action alone verifies the personality. It is the only authentic form of self-expression: *I act, therefore I know who I am,*"[231] writes Vizinczey, and he could well have been referring to the opportunity sport gives us – through the physical performance and competition mentioned by Schmitz – for a realistic understanding of ourselves. Extending the logic of Vizinczey's assertion, we might say: "*I act, therefore I become who I want to be.*" This is the 'authentic', self-defining action of Sartre and the existentialists.

Sartre argues that

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[230] Schmitz, J. "Play and Sport: Suspension of the Ordinary", in Morgan, W. J. and Meier, K. V. (eds.) Philosophic Inquiry in Sport, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1988, pg. 35
[231] Vizinczey, S. The Rules of Chaos, London: Macmillan, 1969, pg. 80

> man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards… . Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.[232]

The authentic action is therefore one that is rooted in choice, and the spontaneous acceptance and utilization of this choice, *even though* we face the rules and boundaries of a sport or society. Accepting this ability to choose also means that no one else can choose for you; you can discover and define the parameters of your own existence. Regardless of our fate or the facts of our existence, we can still choose the meaning we give to our lives; our freedom also consists in the ability (or at least, the attempt) to make ourselves the type of person we want to be.

Sport offers us this chance: to perform actions solely because we want to perform them, and thereby also to create and define ourselves. Furthermore, because we are physical beings, truths about ourselves – our spontaneous moral sensibilities and potential physical and mental capabilities – are going to be uncovered all the more easily if we use our physical selves in their pursuit. If we can only define ourselves through and after acting, what better yardstick than the challenges offered by sport, with its capacity to test our intellectual, emotional, moral and physical faculties all at once?

There is something about knowing and expressing yourself in the manner in which sporting activity allows that is integral to acting both freely and authentically, as Vizinczey and Sartre would define those terms. Sport can show us the value of actions performed for their own sake; it can show us where (a certain conception of) freedom can

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[232] Sartre, J-P. Existentialism and Humanism, London: Eyre Methuen, 1975, pg. 28

be found. But sport also allows us to know ourselves better, and therefore to make better choices with regards to the way we interact with the world.

However, it might be claimed that while Vizinczey's freedom is a state of *being*, Sartre's authenticity requires a constant *making*; in other words, the former refers to a passive acceptance of self while the latter refers to an ongoing activity of self-definition. If this is the case, it might be that the two stand in opposition.

This argument relies on a narrow reading of Vizinczey's philosophy. Freedom does not depend on the passive acceptance of an unchanging self; rather, it relies on the constant evaluation of that self. The only requirement is that one is true to oneself, not that that self be an unchanging entity. What was true for a man yesterday may be false for him today; Vizinczey requires only that that admission be honestly made, and *acted upon*. Understood this way, Vizinczey's concept of freedom might conceivably be thought of as a prerequisite to the authentic action as Sartre would define it. First, you must accept that you are always able to do what you feel you should do; then, you should choose to do whatever it is with the whole of your being.

To express ourselves fully and therefore to achieve the type of freedom and authenticity discussed above is first and foremost to know ourselves as physical beings. The body, after all, is our instrument of action.

Arnold puts the point succinctly:

> In committing oneself to *a* sport one commits oneself to courses of action that are *necessarily limited*. The runner must run, the thrower must throw, the swimmer must swim. Yet to the agent the full content of the commitment is not grasped at the outset. It is only as the action unfolds and

> one becomes embroiled in it that one discovers there is no easy going back. What is more the action is real – the tackle involves me having to make it. There is no shirking or deferring of responsibility…. There is no time for armchair deliberation. In engaging myself in actions which are concrete and actual I both discover who I am and what I may wish to be…. Sport is authentic to the extent that it is a medium in and through which man can both *find himself* and *make himself* [italics mine throughout].[233]

Sport is unique because, as has been mentioned before, it has a for-itself autonomy not found in most other parts of our lives. Sport is also easily accessible; most of us have at some stage in our lives lost hours to an enjoyable kick-around in the park or paddled out into the surf only to paddle back in the moonlight. Those who play sport generally 'love' what they do - even elite athletes who feel the pressures of expectation and performance must initially have found joy in their athleticism. This spontaneous physical enjoyment presents an excellent opportunity to learn about ourselves and become the type of person we would like to be.

Thus sport functions as an important reminder that living (and therefore living well) is inescapably a physical activity. Not only can it show us the benefit of doing things simply because we love doing them, it can also show us the value in understanding what type of person we would like to be, and that we are free and able to make the choices required to be that person. Thus we can be authentic, both in the sense that we are free to do those things we really want to do, and in the sense that we are free to define ourselves any way we choose to. We are free, in other words, to obey ourselves.

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[233] Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, London: Heinemann, 1979, pg. 39-40

The existentialist ideas of freedom and authentic action discussed above serve as preliminary remarks to the next chapter, which will take a closer look at the importance of the physical component of authenticity by examining the idea of ‘self-affirmation’. If freedom requires one to express and create oneself, it stands to reason that an understanding of our natures as physical beings, of our potential and limitations, would be important in such expression and creation. The following chapter will examine how sport can function to promote this understanding.

Chapter Five: Sport and Self-Affirmation

Like Jean-Marc Boivin used to say: You can either live your life like a lamb, or live your life like a lion. We have a choice in life.

- Anselm Baud, Extreme Skier[234]

An Introduction to Self-Affirmation

The previous chapter examined how sport or the human movement experience presents an opportunity to do something simply because one loves doing it – in other words, how sport can show us the value of actions that have a 'for-themselves' autonomy. It is often the case that those actions we enjoy performing also teach us about ourselves and improve us; one might increase their concentration through repeating difficult 32-note fills on the drum kit, or learn of an inner strength they didn't know they had near the end of an arduous hike. Although practicing the drums might give one a sense of accomplishment, one is more likely to test one's limits by hiking up a steep mountain in winter; sport then, broadly defined, and more than any other physical activity, offers us the chance to affirm ourselves as physical beings. This chapter will explore sports ability to offer us this 'self-affirmation'.

Before examining the meaning of 'self-affirmation' as it is relevant to this thesis – in other words, before considering self-affirmation as the process of gaining knowledge of one's limits and capabilities – and its connection with the previous chapter, it may be

[234] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

helpful to first discuss two other uses of the term and to investigate their relevance to the idea of self-affirmation as it will be used here.

There is much discussion, both in the literature and by those in professional coaching positions, of the relevance of motivational thought patterns and their influence on athletic performance.[235] As Harris argues: "The only difference between the best performance and the worst performance is the variation in our self-talk and the self-thoughts and attitudes we carry around with us."[236] In this context, self-affirmation therefore refers to the ability of the athlete to convince herself that she *can* win, by building on previous successes and not dwelling on failure or poor performances.

A good example of this type of self-affirmation in action was Pete Sampras. Sampras would "often remind himself that he has been on this court before, played the same opponent, and now needs to shift gears."[237] In building an inventory of positive outcomes, an athlete or coach can judge the level of physical and emotional performance appropriately; self-confidence improves the more positive outcomes are recorded and recalled, and motivation to reach the required performance level is harnessed more easily. The ultimate goal of self-affirmative behaviour (such as positive self-talk) is "to have the athlete achieve a sense of mastery – a proficiency that becomes automatic."[238]

Clearly, this understanding of 'self-affirmation' refers to a kind of psychological 'pep talk' employed by athletes (and, one would assume, non-athletes as well) to give themselves confidence and therefore produce better performances. The ability to draw

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[235] See for example Hodge, K. Sport Motivation: Training your Mind for Peak Performance, Rosedale: Penguin, 2004
[236] Quoted in Ungerleider, S. "Build Confidence With Affirmations and Self-Talk", CoachR.org, < http://www.coachr.org/build_confidence_with_affirmations_and_self_talk.htm> [accessed 05/17/10]
[237] Ibid
[238] Ibid

and focus on the positive aspects of a performance form a parallel with certain features of the second interpretation of 'self-affirmation', which is used in the literature of psychology to denote those behaviors which are connected to a person's understanding or defense of their sense of self-worth.

Sherman and Cohen begin their paper on self-affirmation theory with a sporting analogy:

> In major league baseball, a hitter could have a long and productive career by maintaining a .300 average – that is, by getting a base hit 30% of the time. A great deal of money could be earned and fame accrued…. A major undertaking for most people is to sustain self-integrity when faced with the inevitable setbacks and disappointments of daily life – the 70% of the time 'at bat' when they do not get a base hit.[239]

Very often, when faced with evidence for the wrongness of our actions or beliefs we employ various defensive psychological adaptations which alter the meaning of an event in a way that shields us from any negative conclusions. We view ourselves as potent causal agents even if we had no control over an event; we link ourselves selectively with positive rather than negative outcomes; we resist changing our beliefs or downplay the importance of failed attempts; we are over-optimistic in our predictions of future success and estimations of our current knowledge or competence. Self-affirmation in this sense, then, refers to one way of reducing or even eliminating these defensive adaptations. Such self-affirmations might include reflecting on positive aspects of one's life that are

[239] Sherman, D. K. & Cohen, G. L. (2006). "The psychology of self-defense: Self-affirmation theory." In M. P. Zanna (Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 38, pg. 185

unrelated to the threat, or engaging in an activity that reinforces values unconnected to the present situation.[240] In order to limit the impact of a negative event, we find other positives in our lives or recall other much more positive moments, reminding ourselves that our sense of self-worth is not dependent on that particular negative event. If someone accuses me of being a liar, I might recall that I have often told the truth when it has put me at a disadvantage, or I might remember the time I stuck up for a friend in a tight spot.

Notice, however, the above makes two assumptions: first, people are motivated to protect the perceived integrity and worth of the self, and second, there in some sense exists a 'whole self' that needs such protecting. The first assumption is uncontroversial: we all have a set of beliefs about ourselves, and we all define ourselves in some or other way. As Steele observes, we all strive to "maintain a phenomenal experience of the self… as adaptively and morally adequate, that is, competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes."[241] It is the second assumption that requires closer inspection.

According to Sherman and Cohen

> The self is composed of different domains, which include an individual's roles, such as being a student or a parent; values, such as being religious or having a sense of humour; social identities such as memberships in groups or organizations and in racial, cultural and gender groups; and belief systems, such as religious beliefs and political ideologies. The self is also composed of people's goals, such as the value of being healthy or succeeding in school.[242]

[240] Ibid, pg. 190
[241] Quoted in Ibid, pg. 191
[242] Ibid, pg. 191

Along with the above, any idea of the self is also manifestly dependent on physical characteristics and my beliefs about my physical capabilities (as well as their interaction with other faculties). Moreover, the type of self-affirmation discussed above would also seem defensive, insofar as it is a reaction – a 'counter-punch' – to a perceived threat. There is nothing in this understanding of self-affirmative behaviour which speaks to *actively defining* the self. For all we know, the positives we recall may be the stuff of wishful thinking. I may overestimate just how truthful I am; perhaps not speaking up on my friend's behalf would have meant a thorough beating. The issue then, becomes: How do we create and maintain a truthful and realistic sense of self?

This account offers some assistance in exploring the idea of self-affirmation as it is relevant to this thesis. It gestures at the fact that our sense of self is in some way malleable: we can motivate ourselves to greater things, and we can mitigate negativity by emphasising positive aspects and events in our lives and building on these. Sherman and Cohen note "people can be affirmed by engaging in activities that remind them of 'who they are' and doing so reduces the implications for self-integrity of threatening events."[243] What follows in this chapter builds on these ideas. The core idea expressed here is not only that a truthful, realistic and indeed *preferable* sense of self is inseparable from physical action, but that this action must extend and confirm the self. We have to take risks to be fully ourselves, and in doing so, we affirm ourselves triumphantly.

[243] Ibid, pg. 193

Nietzsche and the Necessity of Action

What type of life would you like to lead? The question implies that we have some form of a choice in the matter. Few people debate the idea that *eudaimonia* is achievable regardless of one's social or economic standing, and examples such as Mestre Russo and the Baixada Fluminense testify to this; however, it is quite clear that most people, given the choice, would choose to 'live comfortably'. But absent a magic lamp, how to live becomes a practical concern: What types of choices should people make if they want to give themselves the best chance of happiness, and how should they should go about cultivating what is best in them? Nietzsche answers these questions when he draws a distinction between what he considers to be 'healthy' lives and their opposite, lives of *ressentiment*. It is to this distinction that we now turn, to begin to answer more fully the questions which ended the previous chapter.

The first essay of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* seeks to understand the origin of the concepts 'good' and 'bad' by tracing the etymology of the words 'good' and 'bad'. The origin of the words, following Nietzsche, in all cases reflects a conceptual transformation: the social concepts of nobility and aristocracy developed into the concept of "'good' in the sense of 'with aristocratic soul', 'noble', 'with a soul of a higher order', 'with a privileged soul'…a development which always runs parallel with that other in which 'common', 'plebian', 'low' are finally transformed into the concept 'bad'."[244]

The noble and powerful typically differentiated themselves from the common man by titles that reflected their superiority; they called themselves, for instance, 'the masters',

[244] Nietzsche, F. On the Genealogy of Morals, New York: Vintage, 1989, pg. 28

'the powerful', 'the rich', 'the possessors' or 'the truthful'. All this is distinct from the 'lying common man', those people who are the opposite of the powerful. Nietzsche's rule then is that "political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul."[245] He does, however, admit of an exception to that rule; this exception occurs when what he describes as the 'priestly caste' shares power with the 'knightly aristocrats', or indeed holds power by themselves. Whether Nietzsche's genealogical etymology of morality is correct or not need not concern us here; rather, what is of interest is the distinction Nietzsche draws between what he calls the 'knightly-aristocratic mode of valuation' and the 'priestly mode of valuation'.[246] These two opposites reflect two contrasting approaches to life, as well as two different expressions of the will to power.[247]

Nietzsche is not necessarily talking about dukes and lords, or deacons and archbishops, although his well-documented antipathy towards the Christian and Jewish churches and their justifications for the political power they wielded during his lifetime reveals a lot about his choice of words. It might be easier to say that priestly piety simply personified the type of reactionary and sycophantic attitude towards life that Nietzsche abhorred.

Nietzsche argues

[245] Ibid, pg. 31
[246] Ibid, pg. 33
[247] A full discussion of the idea of the will to power is not possible here, but it is sufficient to regard it as the way in which all human beings seek to make their way in the world; to impose themselves on nature and circumstance; to make a success of their self-interest. "Every living thing reaches out as far from itself with its force as it can, and overwhelms what is weaker: thus it takes pleasure in itself." (Nietzsche, F. The Will to Power, New York: Vintage, 1968, pg. 403-404)

> the knightly-aristocratic value judgements presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with what serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity.[248]

Being unable to compete on those terms, the priestly caste became deceptive, turning away from the savage, hostile world of the 'nobility' toward a scheming cleverness. This reaction Nietzsche terms an act of *ressentiment* (understood in English as a type of resentment) toward those healthy and naturally powerful natures not possessed by the priestly men of rank.

> While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself…the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul *squints*; his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as *his* world, *his* security, *his* refreshment; he understands how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble…[249]

For the purposes of this thesis, Nietzsche's distinction between these two contrasting conceptions of human nature is important because it affords reflection on the role of physical activity in the promotion of certain type of life. Nietzsche is establishing a link between his knightly or aristocratic value judgements, a noble mode of being, and the necessity of physical, self-affirming activities like hunting, dancing and war games. Further, he is gesturing at the form such activity should take - it should be vigorous, free and joyful. For Nietzsche, the noble man learns about and affirms himself triumphantly

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[248] Nietzsche, F. On the Genealogy of Morals, pg. 33
[249] Ibid, pg. 38-40

through these activities. Moreover, the physically confident *felt* themselves to be happy, "and they likewise knew, as rounded men replete with energy and therefore *necessarily* active, that happiness should not be sundered from action."[250]

This thesis does not intend to defend Nietzsche's use of the idea of a 'noble morality', or to posit it as an ideal towards which sport (or life) should be aimed. Indeed, Hoberman has argued that this idealised version of a male action figure, so powerful, pitiless and amoral, was the basis of an ideological compatibility between the International Olympic Committee elite and the Nazis, "based on a shared ideal of aristocratic manhood and the value system that derived from their glorification of the physically perfect male as the ideal human being."[251] Hoberman's idea is that the cultural archetype of the 'sports hero' sits comfortably next to that of the 'war hero' and the associated mythos of the dominating male adventurer;[252] this fact in turn is easily perverted into a value system that equates physical prowess with a God-given right to rule and an execration of the weak or unfortunate. This amoral individualism finds its paragon in the figure of SS General and Gestapo chief Reinhard Heydrich: fencer, horseman, pilot, skier, swimmer, sailor, mass murderer.[253]

Instead, we should stress Nietzsche's emphasis on physicality as being a necessary part of a life well-lived. It is not too much of a stretch for the reader to consider 'a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health' as a metaphor for the type of full life we often profess a desire for; a life brimming with confidence and ambition,

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[250] Ibid, pg. 38
[251] Hoberman, J. "Toward a Theory of Olympic Internationalism", *Journal of Sport History*, Spring 1995, Vol. 22, No. 1, pg. 17
[252] Think of Conan the Barbarian, Rambo, Jason Bourne, Kane from Kung Fu or Ned Kelly. This archetype is found in most cultures in the world.
[253] Hoberman, J. "Toward a Theory of Olympic Internationalism", pg. 22

where we are unafraid of taking a risk or trying something new, full of the ups and downs that build a strong character and a lively mind - the type of life that echoes Kipling's "If". It is not the case that sport provides a conduit for amoral urges or is a symbolic manifestation of them; rather, it is the case that the expression of the self in opposition to a physical challenge brings us to the 'cutting edge' of our lives, where true self-knowledge can be found. The noble mode of valuation "acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly"[254] or, as Chuck Palahniuk's Tyler Durden has it: "How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?"[255]

Today, the challenges present in most sporting activities allow us to affirm ourselves in the manner of Nietzsche's war games. Sport presents an opportunity for us to test ourselves and our physical limits and to affirm and discover ourselves in the process. This physical self-knowledge is necessary for understanding fully the physical person that we are, and for having the truthful and realistic sense of self mentioned above. As CLR James writes in *Beyond a Boundary*, paraphrasing Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown's Schooldays,* we need "something to try the muscle of men's bodies and the endurance of their hearts, and to make them rejoice in their strength. Otherwise they will fail or end in intellectual priggishness."[256] James writes further that

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[254] Nietzsche, F. On the Genealogy of Morals, pg. 37
[255] From "Fight Club" (1999), Twentieth Century Fox Films, David Fincher (Director). See also Palahniuk, C. Fight Club, Holt, New York, 1999
[256] James, CLR. Beyond a Boundary, London: Serpents Tail, 2000, pg. 180

> into the immeasurable chaos of his Guernica, lit by the electric chandelier, Picasso introduces a Greek face with an extended arm which holds a primitive oil lamp. They who laid the intellectual foundations of the western world were the most fanatical players and organizers of games the world has ever known.[257]

When the games were held at Olympia, Plato and Pythagoras were always in the front seats. Socrates, Anaxagoras, Demosthenes, Pindar, Herodotus and Diogenes attended the games. When the barbarians could not understand these childish escapades and asked why these great men risked life and limb to dirty themselves in front of others, Lucian, in one of his dialogues, put the answer in the mouth of Solon:

> By seeing what was going on you would be able to appreciate why we are quite justified in expending so much ardour on these spectacles. I cannot find words to give you an idea of the pleasure that you would have if you were seated in the middle of the anxious spectators, watching the courage of the athletes, their beautiful bodies, their splendid poses, their extraordinary suppleness, their tireless energy, their audacity, their sense of competition, their unconquerable courage, their unceasing efforts to win a victory. I'm sure that you would not cease to overwhelm them with praise, to shout again and again, to applaud.[258]

Although Solon is looking at the sporting spectacle form a spectator's point of view, his words mesh with the necessity of Nietzsche's 'noble' man affirming himself through war games; both ideas gesture at man learning triumphantly about man.

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[257] Ibid, pg. 154
[258] Quoted in Ibid, pg. 155

Self-affirmation in Sport

This self-affirming potential of sport has not escaped professional philosophers of sport. Heather Reid writes that

> Every sport has its moments of challenge, intersections of time and spirit when athletes encounter a specific task, know exactly what they must do to succeed, and face the reality of actually performing….This is precisely the allure of sporting challenges – the opportunity to test and learn some truth about yourself. If you were absolutely sure you would make that free throw, there'd be no point in trying…. In the lived question of the moment of challenge, philosophical athletes recognize two great opportunities: one, the chance to encounter ourselves as we really are, and two, the possibility to express that true self through our performance. Unlike the statistical banalities learned through a conventional approach to sport, what philosophical athletes seek is lived knowledge – things personally experienced rather than merely known. [259]

These sentiments are echoed by John Russell when he discusses the value of what he calls 'dangerous sports'. A dangerous sport is "a sport that involves activity that itself creates a significant risk of loss of, or serious injury to, some basic capacity for human functioning."[260] Sports, then, exist on a continuum; nearer the 'less risky' end of the continuum are sports like golf or snooker; further along we begin to find sports that Russell classifies as dangerous, such as marathon running, high diving, football and gymnastics; significant risks increase as we begin to encounter sports like skydiving, skateboarding, rodeo bronco riding, downhill or extreme skiing and mountain climbing.

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[259] Reid, H. L. The Philosophical Athlete Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002, pg. 20-23
[260] Russell, J. S. "The Value of Dangerous Sport", in *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2005, XXXII, pg. 3

In fact, it would seem that the majority of sports played today, and certainly the vast majority shown on television, would satisfy Russell's definition of a dangerous sport. Nondangerous sports, on the other hand, tend to give more weight to technical skill and place less emphasis on brute physicality. Also,

> A key distinction seems to be that in nondangerous sport no special provision is normally needed to protect basic capabilities for human functioning (because the risks are modest at most) or that when such a measure is thought necessary or prudent it can pretty much guarantee effective protection.[261]

It is the element of serious risk found in dangerous sport that is crucial to understanding its self-affirmative ability. Before discussing whether nondangerous sports such as snooker or golf have no self-affirming potential because of this lack of risk, a better understanding of the role risk plays in self-affirmation is needed.

Russell could have been describing one of Stefano de Benedetti's pioneering ski descents of the often deadly mountain ranges around Chamonix when he writes that

> participating in dangerous sports has the potential, in principle at least, to be more satisfying than pursuing nondangerous activity, which can often seem vaguely anemic by comparison, because it can incorporate a challenge to capacities for judgment and choice that involves all of ourselves – our body, will, emotions, and ingenuity – under conditions of physical duress and danger *at the limits of our being*…. Facing physical danger in sport thus represents an opportunity for self-affirmation that challenges us distinctly along all the basic dimensions – physical, emotional and intellectual – that constitute our being as practical, self-directed agents…. And so in confronting

[261] Ibid, pg. 3-4

> serious physical danger through our own choice and actions, we can be affirming our being by meeting and extending the boundaries of our existence. In this sense, dangerous sport can often appear to challenge us to the very limits of what it is to be a certain type of embodied rational being.[262]

In the 1980s skiers like de Benedetti, Patrick Vellencant and Anselm Baud were among the first to try some of the most hazardous ski descents in the ranges surrounding Mount Blanc, Europe's highest mountain. de Benedetti's descents in particular were so extreme that many have never been attempted since. Describing his life in the mountains and one particularly hazardous descent, de Benedetti reinforces Russell's claims:

> I had this romantic vision of the mountains. The mountains represented something different from a mass of rock. To me the mountains were the possibility to discover life, discover myself…. When I reached the top I knew that it was possible to ski. I knew that that day, I would find my perfect moment. And I did it. In the perfect moment, I was so concentrated, there was no space for other thoughts… when you are in the situation that if you fall you die, everything changes. You think very much about turning, you think very much about where to turn. And you do all this in a very special way. You act like a different person. You act with all yourself. You are making a completely different experience. And in some way, you are discovering yourself. This is the magic of the mountain. You can accept to die for this. You don't want to die, but to live so close to the possibility of dying, you understand what is really important and what not. And this makes you a better person. It's probably the highest moment of my life. Because in the perfect moment, I was, or I felt to be, a little superman.[263]

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[262] Russell, J. S. "The Value of Dangerous Sport", pg. 14
[263] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

Clearly, the risks de Benedetti and others faced were extreme. The average footballer almost never finds himself facing death. Author and extreme skier Lou Dawson voices the appropriate point: "Anything that produces this much joy in peoples' lives, is worth a certain amount of risk. Physical risk, emotional risk, whatever. But how much risk it's worth is an open question."[264]

Recall Bill Brigg's solo descent of the Grand Teeton, described in the previous chapter. Briggs sees risk as integral to life:

> If there's no risk, there's no adventure. I think adventure is a great part of life. For me, it's why am I living? Gee, it's to have some adventure…. Those of us that want the risk and want the challenge are going to do it one way or another. Whether it's in the mountains or on a race track or floating down the river. This should be a common thing for man to be doing. I think we get a little bit too safe in our lives these days.[265]

Briggs's comments echo Steiner and Vizinczey and their insistence on adventure as a necessary part of freedom. Unsurprisingly, a pronounced feature of the technological society is its abhorrence of risk and its limitation of adventure. The demons of Health and Safety have been mentioned before; when the children get tired of the demarcated play areas with their colour-coded climbing gyms and three-foot waterslides under the watchful gaze of the Youth Sport Coaches and a gaggle of lifeguards, the devil builds Disneyland and Alton Towers. Here adventure is sundered from action and responsibility on a rollercoaster with industrial strength seatbelts; and for only $50.

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[264] Ibid
[265] Ibid

When athletic city dwellers found a means of expression in Free Running, also known as Parkour (using urban landscapes to run, jump, flip and generally move through space creatively), *technique* decreed that there must be one Free Runner who is better than the rest: we now have the annual Barclaycard World Freerun Championship. Competitors are judged on their technical expertise (performing moves like wallhops, palmspins and kong vaults), execution, creativity and fluidity. The 2009 World Champion is Britain's Tim Shieff. Shieff is also a member of Urban Freeflow, a commercial Freerunning enterprise that does stunts for Hollywood movies and advertising commercials for clients like Coca-Cola, Disney and Toyota. Their website proudly proclaims: "The pioneering work set in place has seen Urban Freeflow develop into an international brand that exudes quality on every level."[266] Soon, you might only be able to Free Run in the appropriate places. The first step towards litigating life has always been to formalize it. The second, to profit from it.

It is not only risk aversion and circumscribed adventure which characterise the technological society of today. Also present is a suspicion of free thought, free creation and invention – unless of course, that creation and invention can be shown to lead unequivocally to profit. Such insidious rationale underlies the closure of university Philosophy departments;[267] it is also the reason major sporting finals are often lacklustre.

In *What Sport Tells Us About Life*, Ed Smith argues creativity and inspiration are two characteristics which sport played in the right way shares with the arts; they are necessary

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[266] Urban Freeflow Website <urbanfreeflow.com> [accessed 29/05/10]

[267] During the writing of this thesis, Middlesex University's Philosophy department was closed down because it was not 'financially viable'. See The Guardian Online<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/may/17/philosophy-closure-middlesex-university>[accessed 03/06/2010]

for the type of self-expression seen in both. The wisest minds in both, he argues, "do not undermine the muse by trying to master her."[268] There is a *freedom* of creative expression present in sport when the actual end result, if not forgotten about, is not at the forefront of the mind. Professional sport runs the risk of being far too over-analytical in this regard; its end result you see, the only result that matters, is winning. Players it seems, forget that they are, in essence, simply playing a game. The following is attributed to Luis Felipe Scolari, football World Cup-winning coach of Brazil: "My priority is to ensure that players feel more amateur than professional…. Now there is so much professionalism, we have to revert to urging players to like the game, love it, do it with joy."[269] The phenomenon of video analysis bares testimony to Scolari's words. Endless hours of opposition matches are video-taped and evaluated by the elite of rugby and football. Defensive patterns are mapped. Creative players' tricks are catalogued. Goalkeepers are studied to see which way they move for a penalty. Backline passing movements are recorded in infinite detail. Coaches now try and drill their teams to cope with the opposition instead of encouraging their players to play freely. Why? So as to stand a better chance of winning. All this adds up to a stifling of the creative spirit inherent in and vital to sport. This is why international football matches are, more often than not, much more exciting than the choicest Premier League fixtures. At international level, lineups change, players do not know the opposition's game that well and tactical approaches vary more; moreover, the players are playing with the passion of a nation, and not the money of a club, behind them. It is just a fact that the hyper-magnification of all

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[268] Smith, E. What sport tells us about life, Penguin Press: London, 2008, pg. 15
[269] Quoted in Ibid, pg. 16

facets of professional sport, coupled with contemporary sport media extravaganza, massive wage bills and the celebrity status and visibility afforded to athletes, means that playing (and recall Nietzsche here) freely, vigorously and joyfully, playing *like it doesn't matter*, playing for playing, is increasingly difficult:

> It is a fact that the more important a thing gets, the harder it is to do it well. We can all walk along a kerbstone in safety: but if the drop were not six inches but six miles, how then would we walk? [The great sportsman is often] …the person who can free himself from the straightjacket of professional concern and play the damn ball without thinking about it too hard. And if he can do so with joy, so much the better.[270]

In a televised debate on justice and power with Michel Foucault in 1971, linguist and social activist Noam Chomsky discusses an aspect of human nature which though suppressed by the dull drudgery of the everyday lives of the majority, finds its consummation far more easily in the arts, and, if we are willing to let it, in sport as well. Chomsky suggests that if

> a fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work, for creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effect of coercive institutions, then, of course, it will follow that a decent society should maximize the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realized.[271]

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[270] Simon Barnes quoted in Smith, E. What sport tells us about life, Penguin Press: London, 2008, pg. 17
[271] Comsky, N. "Justice and Power", 1971 <http://www.chomsky.info/debates/1971xxxx.htm> [accessed12/11/08]

The analogy we are drawing here – with the coercive institutions of performance and profit inherent in sport today – is clear.

To return to Brigg's point: we do not all have to ski down impossibly steep mountains to find the 'for-itself' adventure so necessary to life. It is a matter of perspective and capability. For some people, climbing mountains or skiing down them presents the challenges they crave; for others, simply floating down the river or stepping onto a hockey field and hitting a ball is enough to triumphantly affirm their existence. Just ask big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton.

Hamilton grew up in Hawaii; surfing massive, life-threatening waves therefore came slightly easier to him than most. But even a veteran of Pipeline, Jaws and Mavericks[272] was unprepared for the sight that greeted him on August 17th, 2000 at the Tahitian surf break of Teahupoo. Massive swells breaking suddenly on to very shallow reef 'suck up' all the water in front of them while holding the kinetic energy of an enormous ocean-traveling swell behind them: the *lips* of the waves breaking at Teahupoo that day were two stories thick. The waves themselves were so big and moving so fast that Hamilton had to be 'towed in' to them by a jet-ski. The subsequent photo of Hamilton surfing his first wave of the day graced the covers of surfing magazines all over the world. Accompanying the photo were captions like "Oh my God" and "The Heaviest Wave Ever Surfed". Hamilton's own take on the day was that he had only managed to ride the wave because of his fear of it: "If you think about it, the flip side of fear is commitment…. If you respect fear, face it straight on and act anyway. What you'll find isn't terror – it's

[272] Extremely big and dangerous surf breaks in Hawaii, Maui and California respectively.

exhilaration and moments that you will never forget."[273] Hamilton, like Briggs, understands that taking risks is relative to the person involved:

> I may be an extreme case, but we all need to take risks. I think it goes back to our primitive state, our deepest DNA, when we were hunters and had to avoid being eaten by large animals. Survival meant risk. The need for *adventure* [my emphasis] is part of human nature. It's in every cell of our bodies. When some people hear the word risk, they think of life-or-death situations they'd rather avoid. But risk doesn't always have to be life-threatening. It can be as simple as putting yourself in an unfamiliar situation.[274]

And herein lies perhaps sport's most fundamental characteristic: it is just you and the game, whatever that game may be. And that game is always going to give you new challenges; it is always going to ask questions of you. Commenting on Bill Brigg's descent, which inspired his life of extreme skiing, two-time World Extreme Skiing champion Doug Coombs emphasizes the self-reliance one needs in unfamiliar and potentially life-threatening situations:

> There's no one taking care of you on the slopes, it's not a 'ski area'. You're on your own. You have to make decisions on your own… I think the biggest thing is he was alone. You have this internal dialogue up there, all the time. You don't have your friend to talk to, like, "You think we should go around to the left a little?" or, "It's getting steep now". You know, that's all in your brain. You can't relate it to anyone else. And its 'fall you die' terrain. Where, if you get an avalanche, you'd be gone. It's tough when you're alone.[275]

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[273] Hamilton, L. Force of Nature, New York: Rodale, 2008, pg. 8
[274] Ibid, pg. 3
[275] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

The necessity of self-reliance is a feature of any sport, whether it is dangerous or not. The element of serious risk may exaggerate and emphasize this need, but it exists alongside the reliance on technical skill and physical proficiency found in dangerous and nondangerous sports alike. It seems at least possible that the electric, 'pressure-cooker' atmosphere of the World Snooker Championship, the final at Wimbledon or the final round of the Ryder Cup 'meets and extends the boundaries' of the athletes concerned in similar ways to running a marathon or diving off a high diving platform (I am quite happy to concede, however, that skiing the Grand Teeton or surfing Teahupoo is in another league all together).

The element of risk which presents so much to athletes involved in dangerous sports is missing in golf or snooker, but we might well wonder whether in some cases, a crushing defeat at the Crucible[276] could be more detrimental to a person than a broken arm. Emotional and psychological wounds are often more debilitating than physical wounds. Also well documented is the debilitating effect of a pronounced fear of failure. Hands shake, confidence levels drop; the mind betrays as it imagines the laughing crowd… Perhaps there is a triumphant affirmation (of sorts) to be found in the snooker or tennis player who overcomes that fear.

That does not change the truth of the observation that an element of physical risk adds greatly to the self-affirming potential of sport. In combining our decision-making and intellectual abilities, our emotions and our physical selves in unfamiliar and possibly dangerous conditions we redefine and affirm ourselves and our capabilities. But even if we are surfing the smaller waves at the beach down the road, simply having the

[276] The 'home of snooker' and the venue for the annual World Championship competition.

aforementioned faculties working together is a celebration of sorts: we are living, and we are living fully! This is the core idea at work in Nietzsche's insistence that happiness and an 'overflowing health' cannot be separated from physical action. Indeed, this idea – that through this combination of all our faculties sport can promote a greater harmony and balance – is central to Chapter Seven. On the other hand however (and with a furtive glance towards the high snow fields and thundering waves), it might just be that case that "the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of life is to live dangerously."[277]

[277] Nietzsche, F. The Gay Science, New York: Vintage, 1989, pg. 97

Chapter Six: Sport and Beautiful Harmonious Action

The sportsman is consciously or unconsciously seeking the deep satisfaction, the sense of personal dignity which comes when the body and mind are fully coordinated and have achieved mastery over themselves.

- Roger Bannister[278]

I discern great sanity in the Greek attitude… They saw that the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand was for the feet of the runner.

- Oscar Wilde[279]

When you wake up at midnight and you cross a glacier with stars in the black, and you start climbing these big walls with avalanches, with crags… you feel you are a very little thing in a big universe.

- Stefano de Benedetti[280]

Zen abhors media, even the intellectual medium; it is primarily and ultimately a discipline and an experience… When Zen wants you to taste the sweetness of sugar, it will put the required article right into your mouth and no further words are said… Where there is no creative originality, there is no Zen.

- D. T. Suzuki[281]

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[278] Quoted in Arnold, P. J. Meaning in Movement, Sport and Physical Education, London: Heinemann, 1979, pg. 45
[279] Wilde, O. "De Profundis" in Selected Essays and Poems, London: Penguin, 1954, pg. 207
[280] From "Steep" (2007), High Ground Productions, Mark Obenhaus (Director)

Beauty, Harmony and Human Movement

The previous two chapters have explored the way in which sport can promote a sense of freedom and enable a person to extend and affirm themselves. The notion of the 'for-itself autonomy' of sport is central to these ideas, but there is another reason for its importance. If the reader has ever jumped over a puddle and landed balanced and graceful on the other side, or taken a corner on their bicycle so perfectly that the forces of inertia and gravity combine to sweep them through the turn and preserve their momentum so that it feels, for a split-second, as if they are flying, perhaps they have wondered about the perfect coordination between body and mind needed to perform that action so well. Perhaps, like Oliver Sacks, the reader has simply noticed how the body can make the most mundane movements feel refined and full of poise. Here he describes walking across his living-room:

> The joy of sheer doing – its beauty, its simplicity – was a revelation: it was the easiest, most natural thing in the world – and yet beyond the most complex of calculations and programs. Here, in doing, one achieved certainty with one swoop, by a grace which bypassed the most complex mathematics, or perhaps embedded and then transcended them. Now, simply, everything felt right, everything was right, with no effort, but with an integral sense of ease – and delight.[282]

Sport produces these moments of 'movement harmony' easily - if we let it. Here, as we engage in a physical activity, the complete immersion that the for-itself autonomy of

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[281] Suzuki, D. T. An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, London: Rider, 1991, pg. 74-76
[282] Sacks, O. A Leg to Stand On, London: Picador, 1991, cited in Csepregi, G. The Clever Body, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006, pg. 96-97

sport allows us, transports us to a place where outside concerns (typically exemplified today by the need to *win*) do not reach us; where movement becomes effortless; where the completion of the activity provides an inner calm and a sense of wellbeing. In *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugene Herrigel explains this idea beautifully:

> After right shots the breath glides effortlessly to its end, whereupon air is unhurriedly breathed in again. The heart continues to beat evenly and quietly, and with concentration undisturbed one can go on to the next shot. But inwardly, for the archer himself, right shots have the effect of making him feel that the day has just begun. He feels in a mood for all right doing, and, what is even more important, for all not doing. Delectable indeed is this state.[283]

This chapter will examine sport's ability to produce movement harmony, and the implications of this, by an extended analysis of surfing, and of surfing's ten-time world champion Kelly Slater.[284] The idea is that sport played 'in the right way' can be beautiful in its silencing of the will; and further, that at least some sport played in the right way can connect us to something greater than ourselves. It is worth noting throughout the chapter we will use the phrase 'right actions' in the same way as Herrigel, in other words, to denote this movement harmony.

Sport can be described as beautiful for a number of reasons. When we watch a gymnast performing a floor routine, an ice-skater doing a triple axle, or a perfectly judged long putt, 'beautiful' is an oft-used adjective. We refer in these cases to the movements of the body; the precision of the shapes it creates; or the judgment displayed in, and the perfect

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[283] Herrigel, E. Zen in the Art of Archery, London: Vintage, 1999, pg. 45

[284] Much of this is taken verbatim from my "Sublime Kinetic Melody: Kelly Slater and the Extreme Spectator", *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, Vol. 4 No. 3, December 2010

execution of, the movement itself. Our understanding of 'beauty' is here linked, more than anything else, to our sense of the aesthetic. But there is another sense in which sport could be said to be 'beautiful'.

For an object or experience to properly be termed beautiful or sublime, Schopenhauer claims that it must divorce us from the pull exerted by our will. The will is representative of our driving forces, those 'emptinesses' which as human beings we continually strive to fill:

> All willing arises from need, and therefore from deficiency, and therefore from suffering. The fulfillment of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out.[285]

When an object or experience allows us to become a "pure will-less subject of knowledge,"[286] that object can be called beautiful or sublime. When we are fully involved with surfing the wave or playing the game, we have neither the time nor the inclination to worry about our mortgages or whether we will be getting that promotion at work. There are no emptinesses; gone, albeit temporarily, is the constant cacophony of inner voices vying for our attention. Houts describes this type of sensation as he recalls a memorable pitching performance:

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[285] Schopenhauer, A. The World as Will and Idea, London: Everyman, 1995, pg. 119
[286] Ibid

> It was the third game that I had pitched that day. I did not think I could last through another game, but suddenly I was overcome by a power that rendered me capable of pitching forever. I lost my immediate awareness of the team around me. It was just me, alone on the mound, grasping at a round weightless orb. I became extremely sensitive to the motions of my body. The minute muscles in my fingers were waiting for the signal to release their power and force; I could feel my whole body moving through the air, transcending all barriers; I could feel the initial thrust as all of my body's force was extended with the pitched ball.[287]

Houts also alludes to a connection between his body and the surrounding environment. Pitching, at that time, *just felt right*. The analysis of Kelly Slater below examines what it is about sport that enables it to offer us, perhaps more than any other activity, that feeling of 'connectedness in action'.

Surfing and Kinetic Melody

Surf company Billabong's motto is "Only a surfer knows the feeling". What feeling does this slogan refer to? A *Sports Illustrated* reader describes it thus: "I sought harmony and found it when I joined together with a curling wave."[288] There is indeed something harmonic about gliding across a wave. Other sports, however, also provide an opportunity for this type of harmony, for 'right action', even if they do not provide the stunning settings and intimate connection with nature one gets when one sits on the shoulder of a breaking wave. In what follows surfing, and arguably the greatest surfer of

[287] Houts, J. "Feeling and Perception in the Sport Experience", *Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, Vol 41, Oct 1970, pg. 72
[288] Quinn, C. H. "The Readers Take Over", *Sports Illustrated*, Vol. 23, 1965, pg. 82

all time, Kelly Slater, are the conceptual lenses through which we will examine sport's ability to offer us *that* feeling.

As previously mentioned, watching good athletes perform is often a very pleasurable aesthetic experience. Some athletes, such as gymnasts and divers, are judged, as are surfers, on both their technical and aesthetic merits. The difference between sports that are traditionally judged in this way and surfing is that, whereas the gym floor is always a twelve-by-twelve square and the diving platform is always ten metres above a calm pool, the surfer has to deal with a constantly changing and ever-threatening physical environment. He must dance to the tune of the wave, and when that wave is a rapidly moving three-storey mountain of water, being in-tune with it requires more than the meticulously practiced movements seen on the gym floor or the diving platform. In this terribly dynamic (and terrifying) arena, a surfer is always improvising, and as such his movements take on a whole new aesthetic significance. Here, beauty rides a beast.[289]

In *The Clever Body* Gabor Csepregi draws a distinction between pathic and gnostic experiences.[290] A pathic experience is a pre-conscious physical reaction to a situation which imparts knowledge to us; it is the body's evaluation of a situation. When something about the way your best friend is talking to you alerts you to the fact that she is unhappy or under a lot of stress, when you just know that the politician on the television is lying to you, or when you sense that the person at the bar is amenable to your advances, "We may consider all of these experiences as pathic in the sense that they are

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[289] It is worth noting that for many theorists of the sublime, beauty is intricately linked to monstrosity. For instance, Kant thought the feeling of helplessness before nature inspired by massive mountain peaks and big waves brings home to us the power of our reason and our unique humanness, thus making these sights sublimely beautiful.

[290] Csepregi, G. The Clever Body, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006, pg. 25-26

preconceptual and involve a bodily response. Pathic is the characteristic feature of communication itself: it is a transforming relationship to a situation that affects us in some way."[291] This is how we 'feel' the bloody history of the Colosseum, or sportsmen become intoxicated by the mixture of fear and anticipation produced by Wembley, Twickenham or La Bombonera.

Gnostic experiences, on the other hand, are tied to a rational purpose as we articulate the space around us with our conceptual sense: if I want to jump from over this puddle and land without twisting my ankle, I'm going to have to do it this way. We are conscious directors and evaluators of our actions - which are themselves goal-directed and spatially orientated – because we have the time to be so. If gnostic experiences are temporally mediated, and in that sense more 'rational', "in the pathic, we focus on what we do in the present and enjoy an unmediated union between our milieu and ourselves."[292] Already we can see the connection between the idea of pathic reactions and the for-itself autonomy of sport: in the moment, we react, or at least, have the chance to react, with our physical intuitions; with (and recall de Benedetti) *all of ourselves*.

It is the body's pathic responses that determine more than anything a surfer's movements on a wave, and consequently, the dynamic flow of the ride. We have all at some time tried to perform actions that others do easily, whether it is trying to play the drums, swing a golf club or do a cartwheel. If we have not conditioned the body to produce the necessary motor responses, our movements are rough, uncoordinated and often comical. And even if we have been practicing and are reasonably 'at home' with the

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[291] Ibid
[292] Ibid, pg. 27

required movements, conscious analysis and control of the movement structure often leads to stiffness and awkwardness. 'Right actions', then, will flow naturally; they are more instinctive than calculated.

A good surfer produces these types of movements because, amongst other things, he knows 'instinctively' how to distribute his weight over the board, which part of the wave he needs to be on at any time and what type of maneuver is most appropriate once there. Although these responses require time to develop, their development has much more to do with feeling and intuition than the more 'rational' progression of skills we see in other sports; after all, no two waves are the same. It stands to reason then that those surfers who allow their bodies to be responsive to the changing dynamics of the wave the most, will, over a period of time, come to understand better any given surfing situation pre-conceptually, and will therefore respond in a more appropriate manner. Such a "rationally disinterested" standpoint allows the body the room to move spontaneously, to find solutions to immediate physical problems in its own unique way. When we talk about the body being spontaneous, we are referring to its lack of "reflective control and analysis of the movement."[293]

These thoughts on the spontaneous movements of the body find a parallel in the approach to his sport of another man who holds a record number of championship titles: LA Lakers' coach Phil Jackson, known as the 'Zen Master'. Jackson is known for his emphasis on an holistic approach to basketball which emphasizes team play, selflessness and a clear, aware and responsive mindset. In his part-autobiography *Sacred Hoops* Jackson recalls how, after beginning the practice of *zazen* seated meditation, he became

[293] Ibid, pg. 52

aware of the cacophony of thoughts that would go through his mind as he was playing. Whether congratulating or castigating himself, or making such-and-such resolution about the next play, Jackson found that his thoughts got in the way of playing effectively:

> Sitting zazen I learned to trust the moment – to immerse myself in action as mindfully as possible so that I could react *spontaneously* [emphasis mine] to whatever was taking place. When I played without "putting a head on top of a head", as one Zen teacher puts it, I found that my true nature as an athlete emerged.[294]

Sports philosopher Jesus Ilundain-Agurruza proposes something similar, in his account of running with the bulls in Pamplona. Once he became good enough at it, "there was a dream-like quality to the run soaked in trepidation and exhilaration: I was able to react to the movements of the bull as if I anticipated them, managing to dodge the thrust of the horn at the last moment instinctively yet deliberately."[295]

When the conscious thoughts associated with a particular activity are absent, the body is free to spontaneously take over, and the pathic interchange between the physical body and the surrounding environment determines the most effective course of action. Here, "our movements unfold as a continuing and self-renewing dialogue between our body and the surrounding world."[296]

Moreover, in the case of surfing the correlation between the enormous potential diversity of the wave's form and the wealth of possible combinations of movements a

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[294] Jackson, P. Sacred Hoops, New York: Hyperion, 1995, pg. 51
[295] Ilundain- Aguruzza, J. "Kant Goes Skydiving" in McNamee, M. (ed) Philosophy, Risk and Adventure Sports, London: Routledge, 2007, pg. 164
[296] Csepregi, G. The Clever Body, pg. 52

surfer can perform on them, itself is in a dynamic relation to values. A ride can be good or bad; it can appear smooth or forced. It is when "we do not perceive the swimming pool or the playing field [or the wave] as a space to confront and conquer, but as a support and source of the body's dynamic impulses"[297] that we are likely to produce an aesthetically pleasing result. Paul Christian calls this awareness of the quality of the motor performance "consciousness of value in action."[298] It is this consciousness that enables us to evaluate a surfer's performance on a wave. A good performance might be one that combines a clean take-off with a fluid bottom turn, a conservation of momentum and a smooth use of the wave's potential – in other words, a superlative ride is also a superlative reaction to the wave's form. This form determines the rightness or wrongness of the surfer's movement; the wave presents a unique opportunity for expression, and the good surfer takes his cue from it. As Csepregi puts it:

> A fundamental prerequisite of aesthetic satisfaction is our ability to smoothly and correctly co-ordinate a great number of partial movements. The movement must exhibit an order, a structure in which the different units obtain their unity and cohesion.[299]

Quoting Paul Guillame, Csepregi calls the internal coherence of a series of movements a 'kinetic melody', and when this is combined with authenticity and expressiveness, we have the basis for true aesthetic value. This value is expressed in the 'kinetic harmony' between the surfer's kinetic melody and the wave's dynamic potential.[300]

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[297] Ibid, pg. 99
[298] Ibid, pg. 53
[299] Ibid, pg. 99
[300] Ibid

How then does the body link together the myriad of smaller motor movements that make up an aesthetically successful action? The organising principle behind the cohesion of partial movements is the body's

> propensity to apprehend and produce rhythmic patterns. Rhythm is the pivotal shaping factor that co-ordinates the movement's temporal segments into a harmonious form [and] the elements of a rhythmic sequence are in a reciprocal and complementary relationship.[301]

Rhythm is the smooth interconnectedness of the single movements that together make up a movement sequence from beginning to end. Here Csepregi makes reference to the continuous and repetitive movements performed by rowers, although the same could be said of the movements of a good surfer. An oar 'catching a crab' or a rail caught in a turn throws the sequence out; the rhythm is interrupted and the movement loses it kinetic harmony at the same time as the aesthetic experience is interrupted and diminished. The difference between rowing on the one hand, and surfing on the other, however, is that the surfer's rhythm is one which must stay constant and work consistently through his perpetual improvisation with his partner, the wave. When a surfer is in tune with a wave, his carves and turns display this rhythm; his kinetic melody produces a power both aesthetic and functional.

[301] Ibid, pg. 101

Other ‘Right Actions’ in Sport

What the above shows is that the ‘right action’ for a surfer is determined by the connection between himself (his skill and experience) and the wave. These ‘right actions’ occur when there is nothing standing between the surfer and his interaction with his environment; to paraphrase Csepregi, there is an unmediated union between himself and his milieu, the wave. These ‘right actions’ are what the *Sports Illustrated* reader is describing when he claims to have found harmony; these are the actions which Herrigel talks about, and what we mean when we talk of a surfing harmonic. It is not only in sports like surfing, however, that this type of harmonious action is visible.

Consider the flowing, counter-attacking football of Arsenal, Barcelona or Ajax. Think of the dynamic, defense-splitting running of the French rugby team. The epithet ‘beautiful’ could be applied to all of these examples because these types of movements are indeed beautiful to watch. A lot of the time they are also extremely effective – Arsenal remain in the upper echelons of world football, and the French rugby side are always in the top five of the IRB world rankings. It is simply the case that a game-plan that stresses flair and expression is not as consistently effective as a game-plan that sets out to win at all costs (or not to lose – this amounts to the same thing). These ‘right actions’ also rely on a pathic connection between the athlete and their environment. And this makes them beautiful in the Schopenhauerian sense of the word. The same can very seldom be said of rational, calculated, goal-directed – *gnostic* – movements designed to *win*.

The reason Arsenal's football or France's rugby can be described in this way is that the dynamics of the team's play also displays a rhythm; a rhythm which is conditioned (in much the same way as a surfer conditions her responses to waves over time) on *instinct*. These players are encouraged to play the damn ball without thinking about it too hard, to play what they see in front of them. Thus a flowing, six-pass counter-attack from their own goal area and ending in a score displays a rhythm all its own; when players tap into this rhythm, the results can be remarkable. Rhythm then, as an organizing principle, does not only apply to individual athletes.

Likewise, team play, like riding a wave or a golf swing, itself is also in a relation to values. Often we hear goals and tries (and even movements which do not end in points on the board) being described as 'great' or 'magnificent'; these adjectives are seldom applied to 'pressure scores', where a team has held possession, slowly advanced up the field and then scored with a pushover or a scramble on the goal-line. They are reserved for those plays that inspire us, that get the heart racing, that are expressive of the athlete's and team's instincts.

The examination of creativity and free expression in the previous chapter stressed this point: In sport today we are so caught up with goal-directed actions, in other words, those actions which stand the best chance of achieving victory, that our understanding of what constitutes a 'right action' in sport comes to be defined by whether or not that action helped an athlete or team to win. This is how games become ugly or boring; athletes and teams do not want to lose, so they resort to those actions that are 'safe' in this respect. Sporting *technique* stultifies creation, and something is lost in the process. How many

times do we hear a commentator berating a player for trying something creative with: "That's very pretty, but it's not very effective!"

There is certainly a level of risk involved in playing creatively, playing to express yourself. If one plays expansively, in most sport that type of play gives the opposition more space; a lower percentage shot or movement gives your opponent more room for error. However, this is precisely what Vizinczey is telling us when he says that we can please ourselves while taking our chances, and the point Kipling is making when he asks whether we can 'risk it all on one throw of the dice'. Even though this type of risk is not as significant as the risk inherent in skiing high snow fields, there is still adventure to be had in approaching sport in this way – the adventure of 'seeing what happens if…"

The rise of sporting *technique* helps us to forget that different sports can be seen as simply providing different frameworks for our self-expression; sporting *technique* demands that the framework, and not that which it ultimately serves, is the focus. Therefore, in professional sport today (and, due to sport's visibility, hyper-magnification and undeniably powerful influence, most other types of sport as well) when a team wins a deathly boring football game by one (lucky) goal to nil, the players are always redeemed by phrases like "At least they won, because that's what counts." The What has become more important than the How, when the How is the key to the most valuable aspects of sport. Needing to score more goals than the opposition should be seen for what it is: a way of motivating people to find and express themselves.

There is some truth to the hackneyed phrase 'It's not whether you won or lost, but how you played the game'. Parents and coaches use this phrase to stress to young athletes the value of sportsmanship - being a 'good loser' - but there is a deeper meaning as well. It

might be argued the result does not actually matter if you have gained some form of satisfaction from your performance, if you gave it your all, extended yourself, perhaps scored a brilliant goal or made a last-ditch tackle. If your opponent was simply better than you or fate had other ideas, there is no point in bemoaning a loss. In the final analysis the difference between winning and losing a game played in that manner – what most would consider a 'good game' - is a semantic difference only, unless of course the result means anything to the commercial sporting behemoth.

The idea of the 'good sports contest' being one in which contestants are mutually tested in a manner which is fair to all parties is central to another understanding of 'right actions' in sport. Fraleigh has argued for a moral understanding of the sports contest that defines 'right actions' as those which have a sound ethical basis; he is concerned with producing a normative account of sporting actions.[302] Therefore, ensuring equal opportunity, promoting non-injurious actions and effective preparation, scheduling and contesting, decrying harassment and protecting non-reversible earned advantage are of primary concern. Furthermore, there are supererogatory and secondary guides to right action as well, including such moral considerations as mutual respect and prudent withdrawal from the sports contest.[303] By Fraleigh's schema, actions such as 'professional' fouls are morally indefensible because their perpetrator is ceasing to compete; the foul falls outside the scope of fair and equal competition.

My use of the phrase 'right actions' here does not have any ethical weight at all, although a right action in this sense is more often than not going to fit Fraleigh's criteria

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[302] Fraleigh, W. P. Right Actions in Sport: Ethics for Contestants, Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1984

[303] Ibid, pg. 113-169

as well – this is because ethically problematic actions such as professional fouls or unnecessary roughness tend to disrupt the flow of a contest and often leave a bad taste in the mouth. We are only concerned here with those actions which seem to fit the flow of a contest; actions which promote a sense of greater harmony.

So how do we understand the ultimate significance of 'right action' - those movements that seem to fit naturally into the performance - in the 'surfing sense' of the phrase? We turn now to surfing's eleven-time world champion Kelly Slater to answer that question.

A Life Less Ordinary, or, Kelly Slater's Karma

There is no 'winning line' to cross in the jaws of a snarling, ten-foot Pipeline barrel; as previously mentioned, competition surfing is judged subjectively. Surfing's ten-time World Champion Kelly Slater must outperform his opponents by choosing the right wave, catching it, and then 'tuning-in' to it. His turns must be more powerful, his snaps more explosive; he must float over the lip of the wave like a water-borne Nureyev. Furthermore, he must do it because both he and the wave have decided he will. The magnitude of Slater's achievement in winning ten world titles now begins to become clear: in a sport where both a good ride and winning competitions depends on the surfer's pathic connection to the wave, Slater is the king of the 'right action' in both senses of the phrase. Slater wins, but he does it with *style*.

Spencer Skipper[304] is to body-boarding[305] what Slater is to surfing. Asked to define style, Skipper replied: "The way an individual reacts to their surroundings[306] would be the best way to describe style in my opinion."[307] What about his movements in a wave? Does he have a premeditated idea of what he wants to do? Does he have a goal in mind? "I'll let the wave dictate my actions, even if I'm thinking of doing a certain maneuver before taking off on a wave, the wave will always tell me what to do. As soon as I set my rail and finish my first bottom turn, I will know exactly *what's in store for me* [emphasis mine]."[308]

The key idea contained in the above is the primacy of style – the correct and maximally efficient use of a wave's potential – over any type of premeditated or goal-orientated outcome. A further enquiry into the nature of the connection between style and competition surfing illuminates this idea. "When it comes to body-boarding competitions", writes Skipper,

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[304] Skipper has placed consistently in the world's top ten body-boarders for the last decade. He is also acknowledged as arguably the most stylish.

[305] Although surfing and body-boarding are vastly different in terms of the respective boards used, they share many similarities, not least of which is their need to deal with an ever-changing wave. Although aerial maneuvers are more prevalent in body-boarding, the basics, such as cutbacks, stalls, bottom-turns, positioning on the powerful parts of the wave etc remain constant. For the purposes of this thesis (as any surfer or body-boarder would tell you), the differences are insignificant.

[306] A simlar idea can also be found in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, London: Vintage, 2004, Pg.236. "Quality is the response of an organism to its environment." The reader may find pause that such an idea comes to be found in the correspondence of a professional athlete and in a treatise on Technology and Humanity.

[307] Skipper, S. Email correspondence with the author, August 2009

[308] Ibid

> I personally think that style is overlooked 80% of the time; there seems to be a serious void between competitive body-boarding and style… Most of the time in [body-boarding] competitions the judges will score you higher for packing in as many moves as you can on a wave, regardless of the quality [of those moves].[309]

Note Skipper's use of the term 'quality.' In this context it refers to whether or not that particular move 'belonged' on that wave, whether or not the relationship between surfer and wave demanded it or not. Note as well what is implied when Skipper says he "will know what's in store for him." It is as if he registers what is going to happen on this wave – what he is going to be doing – but that those movements are a consensus.

The movements of a surfer, then, are unconscious in the sense their flow and rhythm is dictated by their relationship to the wave and any movements produced by that relationship cannot be said to have been decided beforehand. Therefore, the best way of riding a wave is dictated by the connection of the surfer to that wave. This would imply – and many surfers would agree – that some rides that display a deep understanding of a wave's potential but a lack of difficult maneuvers are 'better' than those that contain a lot of spectacular but awkward-looking and forced moves. To truly judge a surfer, one must be aware of the aesthetic produced by the surfer's pathic connection to the wave, not merely of any particular movements themselves seen in isolation and their ability to score points by virtue of being such-and-such maneuver. As Skipper implies, there is a difference between scoring highly in competition surfing (or achieving the premeditated goal of winning a point) and doing so *with style*.

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[309] Ibid

It is Slater's ability to flawlessly link together the basic elements of surfing into a superlative athletic and aesthetic combination (and, more often than not, winning whatever competition along the way) that stands him, and a small group of his peers in the world of sport, apart. It is part of Slater's greatness that he so often leaves *judges and spectators alike* with the impression that no other person could possibly have exploited that particular wave's power and potential so masterfully; surfer and wave are a beautiful, thrilling symbiosis, a perfect synergy.

It would seem a truism that our sporting performances display something of ourselves in them: Christiano Ronaldo's mazy skills and showmanship on the football pitch give an indication of his personality in much the same way as his meticulous hairstyling and Ferrari sports car. However, following Csepregi, it might also be the case that our 'deeper selves' manifest themselves through our instinctual physical movements. The fact Kelly Slater did not come from surfing stock and grew up in a place where the waves are mediocre at best seems to put pay to nature or nurture as possible answers to the question of just why he is so incredibly good. Could it be that Slater has simply allowed his body's instinctual understanding of and pathic connection to the sea to realize themselves in their entirety? Spencer Skipper reinforces this idea: "There are some surfers that have such a deep connection with the waves they ride. This I think is inherited, and not acquired over a period of time. This harmonious bond between man and nature is what sets certain individuals apart from the rest when it comes to style."[310]

Slater's movements in the water belie his attitude towards life. A more than competent guitarist, he counts amongst his good friends musicians Jack Johnson, Ben Harper and

[310] Ibid

Eddie Vedder, all of them artistes with an ability to stir the soul in a similar manner to the world champion's surfing. Slater is passionate about protecting the environment in which he thrives, and he works with the ocean and reef protection organization Reef Check with this aim in mind; he is *fiercely* competitive. These aspects of his personality: his drive, his musical inclinations and his passion for the sea are all indicative of a certain type of soul - a soul so evident in the smooth and sweeping harmonic which predominates his surfing; a soul doing what it does best, doing what it *must*; a soul in harmony.

In many cases the connection between an athlete and his environment has been the catalyst for magnificent performances. Climber Dean Potter grew up surrounded by the magnificent Utah desert and its enormous rock formations. In completing the first free-climbing ascent of the spectacular Tombstone, an obsession lasting for years, Potter remarked: "If I'm in the most beautiful place or the most beautiful situation, it brings more out of me. I try harder because I am inspired."[311]

In a similar vein Richard Askwith, in his book *Feet in the Clouds*, recounts the legend of "Iron" Joss Naylor, the most respected man in fell-running.[312] Naylor was a Lake District sheep farmer who

> spent most daylight hours outdoors, without human company…by day he worked much as his father and grandfather had worked, alone, immersed in the lives of the animals around him and the passage of the seasons over the hills. Everything he has done should, I believe, be considered in the context of his *relationship with his environment* [emphasis mine].[313]

[311] Potter, D. in *First Ascent*, Sender Films, Pete Mortimer (Director/Producer), 2006
[312] High-altitude ultra-running, often in appalling conditions and on extremely rough terrain.
[313] Askwith, R. Feet in the Clouds: A Tale of Fell-Running and Obsession, London: Aurum, 2004, pg. 180

A complete list of Naylor's achievements would take many pages, but one in particular is worth mentioning. In 1975 at age 39, Naylor raised the Lake District 24-hour record to a scarcely believable 72 peaks: "What Joss did that day was the equivalent of climbing Everest, and then climbing Ben Nevis, and then climbing Snowdon, and then climbing Kinder Scout, and coming down them all again – all in blistering heat, all within twenty-four hours. Or, to be precise: 23 hours and 11 minutes."[314] Csepregi could well have had Slater and Naylor in mind when he states that the type of actions that stem from our bodies and their reaction to their surroundings "are deeply personal and authentic, in the sense that they express subjective sensations, impulses, intuitions and inventions. Because they are prompted only in part by external influences, they can be considered as the true manifestation of our 'inward life'."[315]

Now recall Chomsky's point in the previous chapter: "A fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work, for creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effect of coercive institutions."[316] It might seem, to those watching Kelly Slater's surfing, Arsenal's dynamic football or scintillating French rugby, that this is only half of the truth. Perhaps a more fundamental and oft hidden aspect of human nature is in evidence as we disengage from a rational pursuit of athletic form and success (and for that matter, form and success in life more generally) and let our bodies 'find the answer'. This, in part, is the basis of the Taoist concept of *wu wei*, which requires that we

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[314] Ibid
[315] Csepregi, G. The Clever Body, pg. 60
[316] Comsky, N. "Justice and Power", 1971 <http://www.chomsky.info/debates/1971xxxx.htm> [accessed12/11/08]

"heed the intelligence of our whole body, not only our brain;"[317] unsurprisingly, *wu wei* also implies actions which are "spontaneous, natural and effortless."[318]

In the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu writes that the Tao "imposes no action, yet it leaves nothing undone. Were governments to embrace it, everything would develop naturally… When the ego interferes in the rhythms of process, there is so much doing! But nothing is done." Further on, Lao Tzu implores us to "Act without acting on. Work without working at."[319] The harmony between surfer and wave - and athlete and life - is a good illustration of these principles:

> As with the Tao, this behavior simply flows through us because it is the right action, appropriate to its time and place, and serving the purpose of greater harmony and balance…. From a Taoist point of view it is our cherished beliefs - *that we exist as separate beings, that we can exercise willful control over all situations, and that our role is to conquer our environment - that lead to a state of disharmony and imbalance* [emphasis mine throughout].[320]

In light of the above, it might be said that in moments of "unexpected virtuosity"[321] from our bodies we provide less of an indication of our physical, rational, conscious selves and more an indication of our spiritual, instinctive or affective selves: *our*selves. And more than this, we give an indication of a relationship to something greater than ourselves, a greater harmony and balance. Perhaps, if we are lucky, we find a way to live our lives, to borrow from Csepregi, Sartre and Vizinczey, *freely* and *authentically*. In any event, it

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[317] Kardash, T. "Taoism – The Wu Wei Principle",
< http://www.jadedragon.com/archives/june98/tao.html> [accessed 05/07/2009]
[318] Ibid
[319] Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Dale, R. A. (trans.) London: Watkins, 2007, Ch. 38, 48, 63
[320] Kardash, T. "Taoism – The Wu Wei Principle"
[321] Csepregi, G. The Clever Body, pg. 56

seems that if it is true of any athletic performance that it can be both a window and a connection to 'right actions', it is true of Kelly Slater's surfing.

Today's culture is that of *technique*: efficiency and profit are its core values. Sport has followed suit: percentages and winning are its keywords. Creation, self-expression and instinctive play are sacrificed, but the main casualty is joy. Activities which should, through the use of our bodies and minds together promote a confidence in and a celebration of our existence as embodied beings become at best a way to claim bragging rights, and at worst a chore we perform because we are good at it. This fighting, battling for victory all the time can only draw us away from those actions and feelings which are so central to feeling a sense of harmony, a sense of calm. Sport played in the manner we have been championing has the ability not only to promote our sense of freedom, to help us affirm and express ourselves, but also to show us a balanced way to live. Always trying to win, in sport, as in life, continually pits us against the flow and flux of the universe. As Vizinczey makes clear, life pays no attention to our will; we try to hedge our bets at our own peril. Kelly Slater's good friend and fellow professional sportsman, big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton, has a take on life may just as well have been written by Lao Tzu. It seems an appropriate way to end:

> Water always finds the path of least resistance. It flows…. I think life's like that too. It has a natural curve, an arc. I think it's our job to trust in that…. As long as you think you're somehow in control of everything, you're always going to be struggling and striving. That's the opposite of letting things flow. Ask any martial arts master: the power isn't found in resistance. Strength comes from yielding to what is. Counter-intuitive though it may be, fighting puts you in a weaker position.[322]

[322] Hamilton, L. Force of Nature, New York: Rodale, 2008, pg. 142

Chapter Seven: Final Remarks

The latter chapters of this thesis explored the terrain of metaphysical sporting value, delving into those intensely personal movement meanings that fall outside of the typically discussed internal and external sporting goods (such as fitness, friendship or monetary rewards).[323] In this sense, the ideas of freedom, self-affirmation and harmonious or beautiful action discussed above make reference to an existential physical being – these ideas reveal how physical activity can inform beliefs about *the way human beings exist* physically, mentally and spiritually.

In the chapter on Freedom we examined briefly the philosophical movement of existentialism and its relation to physical activity. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are synonymous with this existentialist movement, but despite their names often being mentioned in the same breath in discussions on that topic, they disagreed fundamentally on some issues. To illustrate a key point of departure for the two thinkers, one can examine their attitudes to the sporting activities they pursued: skiing for Sartre, and swimming for Camus.[324]

Sartre saw skiing as replicating the notion of struggle; it was him against the mountain, with the snowfield representing something to be dominated. Sartre was the conscious skier, the 'for-itself', while the mountain represented simply a thing, an 'in-itself'. For Sartre, skiing represented a temptation towards believing in the possibility of becoming

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[323] Although it is ironic that Kelly Slater is both the apotheosis of right action in sport and also the most awarded and lionized surfer of all-time. Clearly, and I have stated this explicitly, *technique* and metaphysical sporting value are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[324] Martin, A. "Swimming and Skiing: Two modes of existential consciousness", in *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, Vol. 4 No. 1 April 2010, pp. 42-51

one with the mountain, both a thing in-itself and for-itself. At the same time however, skiing was a constant reminder that switching ontological categories in this way is impossible; the relationship between skier and mountain is therefore necessarily one of antagonism.

Camus, on the other hand, went swimming because it allowed him access to the type of 'peak experience' discussed by Arnold:

> I've always been torn between my appetite for people, the vanity and the agitation, and the desire to make myself the equal of these seas of forgetfulness, these unlimited silences that are like the enchantment of death... I have a taste for worldy vanities, other people, faces, but, out of step with this century, I have an example in myself which is the sea and anything else in this world that resembles it.[325]

Camus found in swimming a way to transcend an illusion of individuality; swimming allowed his psyche to "fade away into the Brownian motion of liquid and photons... merging with the immaterial and oblivion.... Camus at his most Buddhist."[326]

Despite the difference in their interpretations of their sporting experiences, both offer insights into the way that physical activity can work on a level that brings home to the athlete their personal existential geography: how the totality of their selves interacts with, and is separated (or not) from the world.

In the initial chapters of this thesis we examined the essentialist critique of technology and argued that the broader technological problem as presented by Ellul, Heidegger and

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[325] Camus, A. in Martin, A. "Swimming and Skiing: Two modes of existential consciousness", *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, Vol. 4 No. 1 April 2010, pg. 46

[326] Martin, A. "Swimming and Skiing: Two modes of existential consciousness", pg. 46-47

Winner *et al* illustrates the way contemporary technologicalised culture works at separating individuals from this feeling of connected, holistic existence. We have become used to efficiency, defined as the shortest and easiest way to achieve a desired result, and are therefore unable to see that value might reside elsewhere. Today, the question "What is the best way to do this?" means "What is the most efficient way to do this?"

Thus the essentialist critique also offers a critical perspective on some of the problems sport currently faces. We are so concerned with sporting efficiency, with performance and winning that we not only make it difficult to enjoy the values and benefits of sport in their totality, but we create problems which admit of no easy solution.

The problem of – and response to – the doping epidemic was characterised as exemplifying Ellul's existential bet: we wager our ability to solve the technological problem of steroids and other performance enhancing drugs against the ability of drug cheats to invent ever more technologically clever ways of evading capture. Similarly, the imminent application of genetic technologies is foreshadowed by Heidegger's warning concerning *bestand*: we risk turning human beings into athletic standing reserve, the performance machines and mortal engines of our future sporting entertainment. Moreover, we seem to be sleepwalking through this process of creating these problems, as intent as we are on sticking at all costs to the dictates of technique.

Thus the idea at the core of this thesis is that sport and physical activity provides ample evidence for the truth of the essentialist's claims. Sporting technique necessarily moves us away from the type of metaphysical and existential movement meanings detailed by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Mestre Russo, Eugene Herrigel, Bill Briggs, Stefano de Benedetti, Kelly Slater, Laird Hamilton and all the other 'athletic philosophers' who

appear herein. The solution to the technological problem in sport is therefore to reemphasise the value of those interpretations of the physical and sporting experience.

Instead of concerning ourselves with efficiency, with winning and performance, perhaps we can view sport more as a framework which provides the opportunity for self-expression and affirmation, for beauty and harmony; a way to free ourselves from the straightjacket of goal orientation and the dictates of efficiency.

However, we should neither offer up metaphysical values or existential movement meanings as the ultimate answer to the technological problems of sport, nor cast them as the best, 'proper' or only way to conceive of sport. This is because the real problem, the root of the technological problem as conceived by Feenberg, is one of balance. We should be sceptical of humanity's talent for moderation in anything, which is evidenced by our easy capitulation to technology's driving forces. We have a tendency to let new ideas run away with us: we start with Speedo briefs and end up with an LZR Racer. The idea behind trumpeting metaphysical and existential meanings in sport and physical activity is therefore not to replace ideas of performance or technological improvement but to gesture at a conception of sport that may help to achieve a balance between ideals of performance and competition and those values that best juxtapose them. Sport offers us so much that the dominance of any particular conception of its value is bound to be detrimental.

Appendix: A Narrative Conclusion

Where the Kennet River meets the sea on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia, there is a small campsite, a coffee shop and not much else. Camping there in spring one can hike amongst the glow-worms at night, and swim into perfect four-foot right hand point-breaks during the day.

The water is cold on the Southern coast of Australia. The chilly, reflective clarity of the sea makes one think of mercury. There are never any crowds. The swim out at Kennet is easy, and the sets come regularly. If the sun is rising or setting there is a dreamy quality to the whole experience that makes movement unforced. From the sea, one cannot hear the cars on the road.

I swim out with Bryan and we sit on the shoulder of the breaking waves for a while, just rising and falling with them. Then we trade off on waves, one of us perching on the shoulder hooting like a grommet as the other pulls into a barrel and either goes over the falls or rides the foam all the way to the beach. This is the first time we have bodysurfed here; the thrill of the pickup mingles with the adventurer's taste for the unknown. Sometimes we get inside the waves and surf like dolphins, underwater, getting pulled along by the hydraulic action. The feeling of liquid speed is exhilarating.

As we wait for the sets, discussions about life and stupid jokes are interspersed with irreverent banter: "My grandmother with no arms would have got closer to the beach on that one." "I'm a mer-man!"

We stay out for a long time, our 5mm wetsuits providing both warmth and extra buoyancy, our fins making it easier to swim into the waves.

In those moments when I am alone out the back I reflect on the beliefs about sport that I have held unquestioningly since I was old enough to stand up and hold a wooden stick. In twenty years of competitive hockey I have made many friends; I have experienced joy and sorrow; I have come to know my body and be comfortable in it. But, to a greater or lesser extent, I have always concerned myself with winning. I have always played for the team, made the responsible passes, done what the coach told me to do. Here, as I float over glassy, rolling power, my muscles and sinews are singing; despite the rubber and plastic on our bodies my friend and I feel connected to the nervous system of the world. Even though we compete for waves, winning and losing do not make sense here.

I wonder about defining 'achievement'. Medals and titles indicate superiority; rankings determine rewards. There are billions of us on earth, and although we are social animals, we are not built like ants. Badges of distinction, those marks that set us apart, come in many shapes and sizes – and we are avid collectors. If we are offered a way to stand out we are always keen to take it, and those that would profit from this natural urge have long exploited it. Our curiosity for the new and the possible and our need to distinguish ourselves means that we try to run faster in any way that we can. There always seems to be a way to live better, *and at an absolute steal. Optimise or die.*

As we swim back in, slowly, I'm thinking of how evolution brought the cheetah its speed and humanity this state of competitive hypertension, and I'm smiling because I don't feel its effect out here.

"That was great," says Bryan.

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