

Problem Areas of the Aesthetics of Sport:

An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Sport and a Survey of Literature

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スポーツ美学の問題領域：序論としての問題領域の設定と先行研究の検討（抄録）

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スポーツ哲学の一領域にスポーツ美学がある。これまでイギリスとアメリカを中心に、スポーツの美をめぐるさまざまな問題が個々の論文でそれぞれに論じられているが、その体系的な見通しはこれまで不明瞭である。スポーツ美学とは一体何なのか。この問題に関しては学問論からの検討も必要であろうが、しかし、何よりも銘記すべきは、スポーツ美学はスポーツの美を研究対象とし、それについて考察を展開する「スポーツの美の学」であるということである。したがって、スポーツ美学の問題領域は、スポーツの美の考察を展開するための問題領域でなければならない。本論文の目的は、スポーツの美の体系的な考察を展開するための視点としての問題領域を設定し、それに応じてこれまでの諸研究を検討し、スポーツ美学の研究の展開の様相を洞察することである。(1)スポーツ観戦者の美的体験、(2)スポーツ実践者の美的体験、(3)スポーツにおける美的対象、(4)スポーツにおける美的価値の原理、の4つの問題領域が設定された。

Introduction

The aesthetics of sport is one of the fields of the philosophy of sport. Various problems concerning the beauty or the aesthetic in sport have been discussed in recent works. The system of the aesthetics of sport, however, has not been clarified yet. What is the aesthetics of sport? Although we have to pay attention to *Wissenschaftslehre* concerning this question, we should notice first that the aesthetics of sport is “the study of *the aesthetic in sport*.” So the problem areas of the aesthetics of sport have to be the problem areas for considering the aesthetic in sport. In other words, the areas should be drawn from the aesthetic in sport. The purpose of this paper is to set up the problem areas¹⁾ as *viewpoints* for systematic consideration of the aesthetic in sport, and to have an insight into the aspects of the studies in the aesthetics of sport according to those areas²⁾.

1. Setting Up the Problem Areas

“The aesthetic in sport”, the object of study of the aesthetics of sport, is not a simple “beauty” (in a narrow sense), but “the aesthetic” (in a broad sense), which also means aesthetic *value*. So it is important that we grasp the factor or moment of aesthetic value for setting up the problem areas.

The aesthetic is not a simple objective attribute of things. It is brought forth in relation to the subject, human being. An experience, in which the subject has an aesthetic consciousness, is called “aesthetic experience.” The object of the consciousness observed by the subject is “aesthetic experience.” That is to say, aesthetic value consists of aesthetic experience (*Noesis* in Husserlian phenomenology) and aesthetic object (*Noema*). The former is the subjective aspect of aesthetic value, and the latter is the objective one.

First of all, the spectator has an aesthetic experience when he or she observes the players playing the game. In that case, for example, he or she says, “It’s a beautiful form!” Then there are two aspects: the aesthetic experience of the spectator (1), and the aesthetic object (3). On the other hand, the performer has an aesthetic ex-

perience during playing sports. That is, as M. Nakai or P. J. Arnold asserted, the kinaesthetic, non-objective experience: the aesthetic experience of the performer (2).

As mentioned above, there are three problem areas (1, 2, 3), and as a whole we have to consider the principle or basic character of the aesthetic value in sport. Thus we can set up four problem areas of the aesthetics of sport: the aesthetic experience of the spectator (1), the aesthetic experience of the performer (2), the aesthetic object in sport (3), and the principle of the aesthetic value in sport (4).

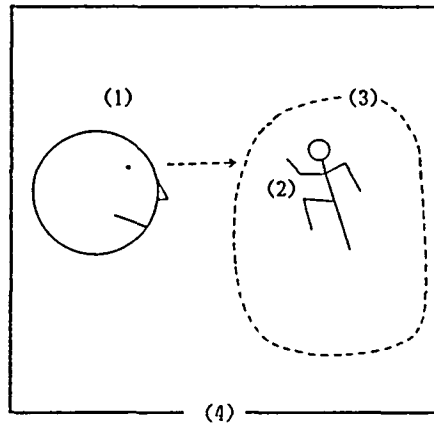


Fig. 1 Moments of the aesthetic value in sport

In the following sections, I will survey the development of study in the aesthetics of sport according to these problem areas.

2. The Aesthetic Experience of the Spectator

As "aesthetic experience" means "aesthetic consciousness" as a psychological term, this problem area relates to the spectator's consciousness when he or she observes the performance of sport. How does he or she experience beauty? This area includes such a research: after showing some photographs, in which various sports scenes are taken, to the subjects, we ask their impressions and deal with the data statistically³. Although we cannot discuss the methodology in detail now, such a psychological method seems to be not sufficient for understanding the aesthetic experience. Because the problem area of the aesthetic experience of the spectator was set up from the phenomenological *Noesis* of consciousness.

E. Geblewicz and D. N. Aspin argue mainly from the viewpoint of the spectator. M. Kovich, M. Fisher, and B. Lowe point out the difference between the spectator's experience and the performer's. And we can notice some more specific theses: F. W. Keenan's interpretation of sport through Aristotelian tragedy, and Z. Ghose's criticism of sports journalism. Among the treatises on this area of the spectator's aesthetic experience, we should take up T. J. Roberts' theory, and the problem of sports-art, in which sport is grasped by a distinct spectator "artist."

Roberts attempts to clarify an aesthetic nature which lies in the enthusiasm in sport, applying the aesthetic theory of George Santayana to sport. Santayana relates aesthetic consciousness to pleasure and places the value in the domain of imagination or emotion. Not all values are aesthetic. Santayana separates the aesthetic from the moral. And neither are all pleasures aesthetic; aesthetic pleasures are differentiated from physical pleasure. The organs of aesthetic perception are "transparent" and do not intercept our attention to the external object. Furthermore, Santayana rejects the disinterestedness and universality of aesthetic pleasure; beauty is value positive, in-

and objectified.

On that theory of Santayana, Roberts takes the materials, form, and expression into consideration. What we should notice now is his discussion on the method of unification of the beauty of form through “indeterminate” and “determinate” form. “A variegated object allows itself to be perceived in a variety of orders” and the object is viewed apperceptively. The process is as follows: “First, the mere recognition, the evocation of the ideal, if a pleasant one, will be a pleasant recognition; second, the pleasure aroused will be proportionate to the degree in which the particular impression embodies the form of the evoked apperceived ideal and is thereby an exemplar of its class. To give a sporting example: if while watching a football game one’s apperceived ideal of a football game comes to mind, pleasure may be derived first from the mere evocation of that ideal (if pleasant), and second, from the degree to which the impression of the actual game is exemplificatory of that which is contained in the apperceived ideal” (63: p. 95). Furthermore, Roberts explains our aesthetic experience of a new object by “determinate form” and uses the concept of “expression” to describe the quality of the perceived object. There seems to be room for objection to his theory, but we can profitably regard it as a thoughtful consideration in the problem area of the aesthetic experience of the spectator.

Now, let us take up the problem of sports-art. How is it connected with this problem area? Since some beauty appears in sport, it is natural that artists have a desire to represent it in literature, painting, photograph, and so on. The fact that sport becomes a subject of art interests some scholars⁴. Sports-art is art which represents sport as subject. So it would show us how artists observe sports. In this regard, we can find the relation between sports-art and the aesthetic experience of the spectator. To put it briefly, a kind of imagination is required to discover the aesthetic in sport, and sports-art would be able to make up the aesthetic experience of the spectator, since the aesthetic value in sport is brought out by imagination in sports-art. The significance of sports-art is that it could be a place where we fertilize the “image” of the phenomena in sport and cultivate the “imagination”, which creates the aesthetic experience of the spectator. The problem area of the aesthetic experience of the spectator also has such extent of problem as sport-art relationship.

3. The Aesthetic Experience of the Performer

The aesthetic experience of the performer deviates from the normal form of aesthetic experience, “observe — be observed.” The observed object is absorbed into the experience of agent, so the aesthetic experience of the performer is non-objective. One of the important grounds for this problem area is the relation between *kinaesthetic* and *aesthetic*, that is, we can regard the *kinaesthetic* experience of the performer as *aesthetic* experience.

B. Lowe says that it is difficult to grasp the nature of the aesthetic experience of the performer because it is the subjective aesthetic. Hindered by this difficulty, the researches in this problem area are less substantial than those in other areas despite a possibility of suggesting the intrinsic character of the experience of sport⁵. The important theme is the problem of the kinaesthetic perception which grounds the performer’s experience. T. J. Roberts also refers to it, and there is a yet more detailed consideration by P. J. Arnold.

Arnold uses the term “aesthetic” in the original meaning, perception, and relates it to feelings. He says: “To understand better how kinaesthetic perception can bring on aesthetic experience that is constitutive of an aesthetic attitude it will be necessary to say something further about the nature of the kinaesthetic ‘object’.” The ‘objects’ are the feelings or *kinaesthetic flow patterns* the mover attends to. “There are three ways of considering the kinaesthetic object: (i) As perception of an ongoing and actual pattern of movement; (ii) As a ‘past remembrance’ of an actual pattern of movement feeling, or image; (iii) As an imaginative flow of movement feeling which though not tied to an actual occurrence is grounded in actual experience that has arisen sometime in the past.” The first one is real and the others are imaginary. “Kinaesthetic objects in common with other sensory objects can be experienced from the ‘practical’ or ‘aesthetic’ standpoint... When aesthetically experienced the kinaesthetic object then becomes to the mover *intrinsically valuable*.” And he also says that the practical and aesthetic attitudes with regard to the kinaesthetic object sometimes do co-exist (2: pp. 121 – 123).

Crossing over the distinction between artistic and non-artistic, Arnold distinguishes between the aesthetic experience of the performer and the aesthetic experience of the spectator. The difference is that "the performer is a *participant* and takes his perspective from *inside* the activity upon which he is engaged. The spectator on the other hand looks upon the activity as a *witness* from the *outside*. . . . Kinaesthetic feelings when constituted as aesthetic objects and held valuable are beautiful. . . . For the spectator it is not kinaesthetic feelings that are the focus of attention as they are for the performer, but the configurational body patterns of the mover" (2: pp. 127 – 130). And he emphasizes the individuality and subjectivity of aesthetic meanings, which are sometimes existential in significance.

When we come to the existential significance of the experience, we are faced with the problem of the value of the aesthetic experience of the performer. Arnold's argument also exceeds the problem of the kinaesthetic perception and takes a broader standpoint. The study, however, just started. C. E. Thomas tried to cope with this problem in her dissertation "The Perfect Moment: An Aesthetic Perspective of the Sport Experience."

Thomas says: "Although the sport aesthetic necessarily presupposes an object — the body and its movement — . . . it does so only insofar as it allows facilitation of the athletes' experience." That is, "since it is theoretically apparent that this objectification of the body and its movements [such as the beauty of the human body in motion, the grace, efficiency, and effortlessness of movement achieved in skilled performance] cannot be considered artistic, the necessity arises to look away from the art *object* and toward the artists' *experience*. . . ." (my italics). From this viewpoint, she hypothesizes that engagement in sport is a valid and genuine aesthetic experience. The intent of her dissertation is "to develop criteria in which sport, from the performer's perspective of the experience, may be considered as an aesthetic experience and to provide descriptive examples of the experiential sport aesthetic by means of athletes' self-reports" (67: pp. 1 – 5).

Suggesting the emotionality and subjectivity of the aesthetic experience, she offers the prerequisites for sport to be an aesthetic experience: *authenticity of intent, expertise, involvement and relation, and whole man acting*. And she points out the premises in order that "the totality of the aesthetic experience, i. e. , perfect moment, and the athletes' emotions and feelings following such an experience may be verbally described" (67: p. 8). She also says that the perfect moment in sport is established as being synonymous with the aesthetic experience in art, and the perfect moment is shown to be cognitively unanalyzable but, given the difficulty of language, possible to describe to some extent. She emphasizes the viewpoint of the performer throughout her paper with the claim that the aesthetic concept for sport gains its validity in doing and in the beauty of having experienced the sport rather than viewing.

In the second chapter of her dissertation, Thomas gives in outline a description of the theories of many famous aestheticians or philosophers such as Plato, E. Veron, L. Tolstoy, B. Croce, R. G. Collingwood, C. Ducasse, J. Dewey, E. Cassirer, and S. Langer. Quoting them, she carries the experience of the performer to the philosophic and aesthetic reflection. It might be approved to some extent. But it would be an inappropriate abstraction to regard the experience of artist and that of sportsman in the same way. For example, can we think their feelings the same, both when a pianist plays a piano sonata by Beethoven and when a high jumper clears the bar? Don't they have inherent nature respectively? Anyway, with such questions will be developed the problem area of the aesthetic experience of the performer.

4. The Aesthetic Object in Sport

The spectator observes and discovers the aesthetic in sport. Then the observed *object* is called "the aesthetic *object*," and it has particular aesthetic qualities. A discussion on the beauty of sport is often understood through such questions as: What qualities are common to the beautiful forms? What makes a movement beautiful? Or, What is the difference between a skilled player and a non-skilled? To be precise, those questions are related to the aesthetic object. So, for example, a biomechanical study on the difference of the running forms between trained and untrained subjects *can* be included in this problem area from the aesthetic viewpoint. Of course a scientific study cannot be aesthetics directly; however, the easiest image, in relation to science, of the aesthetic

in sport arises from this problem area of the aesthetic object.

Because of facility of the visible objectivity, the studies are developed easier in this area than in others⁶⁾. Now we have a look at R. Carlisle's view. He thinks that winning is aesthetically irrelevant and the more important thing is to have a good game. He points out four main features of great sport: *expressive and evocative elements, intellectual beauty, drama, and unity*. And he says: "It is these qualities which the players and spectators of sport seek, which give to sport its primary focus and its true meaning. If this is the case, then sport is a form of art" (12: p. 27).

Although there seems to be room for doubt whether sport is a form of art, we might be able to understand the ontological consideration of the aesthetic object in sport offered by P. Frayssinet. According to him, artist and athlete alike are concerned to create an "oeuvre." Following the aesthetic theories of Souriau and Dufrenne, Frayssinet distinguishes four levels of existence in the 'oeuvre': *material* existence, *sensitive* existence, *ontic* existence, and *transcendental* existence (45: pp. 39–40)⁷⁾.

B. Lowe deals with the aesthetic object in sport in his comprehensive work *The Beauty of Sport*. He regards the beauty of the human body as the epitome of natural beauty and points out symmetry as an important factor of the beauty. The symmetry includes not only a static one, but also a schematic one based on weight distribution about the center of gravity, although presenting an asymmetrical visual configuration. That becomes rhythms of movement. He states further that great athletes have good form because they save energy and they are recognized by their individual style which reflects a personal beauty. "Style is the product of anthropometric qualities (which are hereditary) and the training required for the mastery of technique." That is the reason why superstars look beautiful in action (47: pp. 2–22).

Concerning the notion of style, V. Hohler argues as follows: "I interpret the problem of Beauty as an axiological problem. . . The beauty of human motion as a dialectical unit of technique and style. . . becomes one of the basic assumptions of the self-realisation of man. . . Beauty. . . is the foundation leading to. . . higher forms of aesthetic and artistic communication. This means that man as a creator uses in his physical creation movements, absorbed in technique and style with their various qualities, as signs of his personality" (26: pp. 49–50). First, on the technique of movement, he regards the *technique* as the common quality which the performers of any type of movement have in spite of certain individual deviations. It is a collective, social product. Second, on three aspects of style; (i) Style is symptomatic of inborn qualities, (ii) *Expression* and *Grace* form a further, secondary aspect of style, (iii) Style appears as a synthesis of two opposites: reason and feeling, knowledge and relationships, intellect and emotion. "The pattern of style is . . . formed by an immediate absorption of reality and is shaped by the accumulated experience of the individual. . . As the outer aspect, *style* testifies to the motoric, as well as the mental culture of the personality. . . The beauty of human physical performance is based on the style in a mastered technique — in the dialectic unity of technique and style" (26: pp. 53–55). According to him, beauty is the basis of culture in movement and becomes one of the basic human desires.

As we have seen, there are various arguments in the problem area of the aesthetic object, but we could point out their relation to the fundamental structure of the aesthetic object: the *material, form, and content*. Some scientific laws of beauty are almost *formal* laws of beauty. The balance or rhythm of movement is the problem of the *form* of movement. With regard to the form, style is discussed. When we think of the value of the aesthetic object, the problem centers on the content. Furthermore, the problem of the type of beauty is most adequately concerned with this problem area because of the objectivity of the aesthetic object. That question is, for example, "Is the aesthetic in sport natural, artistic, or technical?"

5. The Principle of the Aesthetic Value in Sport

We more or less face the problem of value, whether in the problem area of the aesthetic experiences, or of the aesthetic object. It is because the aesthetic in sport exists as a unity and as an aesthetic value. The differentiation of the areas just comes from the viewpoint for consideration. In the problem area of "the principle of the *aesthetic value* in sport," the questions are collectively asked as follows: "What can be the reason why the

aesthetic in sport is *aesthetic*?" and also "What can be the reason why the aesthetic in sport is a *value*?" when the reasons are considered, the principle might be established first relying on the principle of the aesthetic value in art.

Many writers are trying to regard sport as art⁸⁾. Let us see Aaken's statement. The aim of Aaken's paper "Die sportliche Höchstleistung als Kunstwerk und absoluter Wert" is to find out the *nature* of sport in the aesthetic value, as the subtitle "Ein Ansatz zu einer Philosophie des Sports" shows. He states that sport is a cultural value in life and is as important as a form of expression of higher performance as well as the spiritual experience of being human. The common ground of sport and art is a vigorous emotionality and creative activities, which create something that has never been presented, namely, a record and an artwork. As they are exactly alike in that respect, he regards the sportsman as artist. The strength of a sporting artwork is determined by two factors, one is *Vollkommenheit der Gestaltung*, i. e., the strength of the performance, and the other is the height of the aesthetic values, i. e., the "how" of the performance. "Die sportliche Höchstleistung ist etwas objektiv Schönes, ein gestalteter Wert, und dieses Schöne finden wir auch im Weltenbau realisiert. Der Mensch aber erweist sich in der sportlichen Höchstleistung als Ganzheit von Leib und Seele und als Geist, der teilhat an der Weltvernunft, die hinter allem Dasein steht... Das Wesen... dieser Leistung liegt im Seelischen, im Annähern an das Absolute" (1: pp. 9–10).

Considering the spirituality, absoluteness, and eternity of art, *if* we manage to regard sport as art, it might be necessary for us to come to what Aaken insists. As another exemplar of this kind of argument, we can take up R. G. Osterhoudt's "An Hegelian Interpretation of Art, Sport, and Athletics." According to Osterhoudt, there is a unity between the sensuous and the spiritual in sport and athletics, and "sport and athletic performance is guided primarily by a rational, self-conscious, intellectual intent to embody itself in a particular fashion in a particular medium; and not by a mere sensuous, or material, impulse. This account permits us to regard sport and athletics, not as a mindless sort of activity... , but as a manifestation of artistic intent to employ natural (material) objects in a unique representation of the Ideal" (57: p. 350). He concludes that as sport and athletics have, in the same sense as the arts, permanent enduring, universal, infinite value, they are regarded as an art form.

In the arguments in which sport is regarded as art, we find emphasis on the fact that both sport and art have aesthetic value. Sport is considered art due to their similarity, and it is concluded that the aesthetic value in sport has the same significance as in art. That is to say, to a question such as "What is the value of the aesthetic in sport that has an intrinsic form of competition?", it would be answered that the key to the problem is that there is a connection between sport and art through the aesthetic. *If sport is art*, we will be able to demand the solution from the aesthetics of *art*, because the reason for the value of the aesthetic in *sport* equals that in *art*. The aesthetic in sport, and also sport itself, would be given a great value, for example, by the authoritative aesthetics of Hegel. In short, "What can be the reason why the aesthetic in sport is of value?"; "because it is the aesthetic value in art." *We* could reject further question such as "Why is it valuable, if it is the aesthetic value in art?", because such question asks the reason for the aesthetic value in art and the solution will be also given by the aesthetics of Hegel.

Can we accept such an argument? Although the sport-as-art theory seems to have reached the climax by the Osterhoudt's argument, we cannot help but doubt if sport is an art, when we think that we strongly experience the difference between the two. P. G. Kuntz and B. Lowe hesitate to regard sport as art, and L. A. Reid, P. J. Arnold, J. Kupfer, and D. Best insist that sport is not art⁹⁾.

Of course this problem area of the principle of the aesthetic value in sport is not the only place where the question of sport as art is discussed. It is surely helpful to compare sport with art, since art has been given a good deal of study in the general aesthetics. Whether sport is regarded as art or not, whether the principle is based on a specific ideology¹⁰⁾ or not, the focus of this problem area should be the reason for "aesthetic" and "value" of the aesthetic value in sport.

Concluding Summary

a) The problem areas of the aesthetics of sport are as follows:

- (1) The aesthetic experience of the spectator: Problems of the aesthetic consciousness of the spectator. What is the mechanism? On the spectator's feeling, emotion, sympathy, and so on. They are related to psychology.
- (2) The aesthetic experience of the performer: Problems of the performer's experience in movement, practice, or game of sport. On the kinaesthetic perception, the meaning of the performer's experience of sport, and so on.
- (3) The aesthetic object in sport: Problems of the aesthetic quality and structure of the observed object. On the structure of the object (material, form, content), form and style of movement (rhythm, fluidness, harmony, etc.), the type of the beauty (natural, artistic, technical, etc.), and so on. They are related to the scientific method.
- (4) The principle of the aesthetic value in sport: Problems of the reason for the *aesthetic value* in sport. What is the reason for being *aesthetic* of the aesthetic value in sport? (In what sense is it 'aesthetic'?) What is the reason for being a *value* of it? The reasoning should be founded on the considerations in the above three problem areas.

b) These problem areas are the viewpoints for consideration on the aesthetic in sport, not a simple classification of problems. By being aware of them, we can more clearly and logically understand the way and method of consideration on the aesthetic in sport.

c) The question of whether sport is art or not arises in all of the problem areas¹¹⁾.

d) If it is the main subject of the philosophy of sport to inquire into the significance and *value* of sport, the aesthetics of sport connects with the philosophy of sport by means of aesthetic *value*. Consequently the problem of playfulness or physicalness of sport, which seem to be the essential characteristics of sport, will be worked out in the problem areas of the aesthetics of sport¹²⁾¹³⁾.

Notes

1) These "problem areas" are viewpoints or framework for considering the whole phenomenon of the aesthetic in sport. They are not a simple classification of problems.

2) Although there are various problems concerning the beauty or the aesthetic in sport, we *can* think the positions of the respective problems by considering "the problem areas." In this paper, the problem areas are set up and the positions and aspects of many problems in the literature so far are considered according to them. But we do not discuss the concrete problems in the literature in detail here.

3) cf. Katsube, A. *The Aesthetics of Sport*. Tokyo: Kyorin Shoin, 1972.

4) M. C. Brown, E. Metzl, G. L. Hough, B. Lowe, D. M. Miller, K. R. E. Russell, D. W. Masterson, G. Gaskin, E. Höhne, M. Ewald, and G. Witt.

5) There are some papers by B. Lowe, P. E. Dubois, M. Kovich, and from the viewpoint of axiology E. v. Aaken, M. Fisher, G. Gaskin and D. W. Masterson, H. Keller, and C. E. Thomas argue in this problem area.

6) We notice many a philosophical background, key concept, and way of argument just in the papers by R. K. Elliott, E. F. Kaelin, N. G. Wulk, and G. Witt.

7) This description depends on the introduction by H. Lenk et al.

8) For example, D. M. Miller, K. R. E. Russell, L. Toynbee, M. Fisher, M. Kovich, E. Jokl, R. Carlisle, H. A. Pendergast, E. v. Aaken, and others.

9) D. Best and S. K. Wertz et al., are having a hot discussion on this subject in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* and others. I also argued it. I think that sport is a distinct aesthetic domain, but *not* art in the strict meaning of word.

10) For example, socialistic ideology by G. Witt in DDR.

11) That is: (1) Do spectators have the same experience in observing sport and art? (2) Can we regard sportsman

as an artist? (3) Is a performance of sport a work of art? and (4) Can we understand both sport and art by the same principle of aesthetic value?

- 12) I have published a book under the title *The Aesthetics of Sport* (in Japanese) on the basis of these problem areas and the survey of literature. This is the first comprehensive and systematic work in the study of the aesthetics of sport.
- 13) I had an opportunity to get some comments on this paper from some American scholars while staying at the University of Tennessee in 1988 through 1989. Some of them pointed out that I had taken on far too much for a short paper. As I indicated in the note 2, I did not discuss the concrete problems in the literature in detail in this paper. That is not the purpose of this paper. Very important point of this paper is the suggestion of the "problem areas." I would like to note that I had already finished too much work mentioned in this paper in my book *The Aesthetics of Sport*. Furthermore, some do not understand the conception of the problem areas as phenomenological viewpoints. Certainly, every noesis has its noematic correlate. So the character of the aesthetic experience of the performer is different from the ordinary optic experience. We should take up such character as a special quality of the performer's experience. It is inadequate that some scholars think of formal objective noematic correlate. cf. Higuchi, *The Aesthetics of Sport*.

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