

# The Somaesthetics of Rock Climbing

Bálint Veres

## Abstract

How can we develop an artistic practice that is relevant and satisfying in terms of mental challenges and physical intensity alike? How can we reach a state in which *any* human practice can be satisfying in both senses? As John Dewey put it in his *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931), “the integration of mind-body in action is the most practical of all questions that we can ask of our civilisation.” This study approaches the issue from two different directions. Firstly, it takes rock climbing, a physical practice infrequently discussed in philosophical and aesthetic literature, as a possible model that can indicate a way of re-orienting art in its ordinary usage. Secondly, the art-like character of rock climbing, as an example of difficult physical activity and lifestyle sport, is discussed. To do so, the phenomenology of the climbing experience is foregrounded to grasp the specificity of the somatic experience. As a second step, the interdisciplinary study of somaesthetics is invoked to highlight the aesthetic relevance, somaesthetic interest, cognitive values and transformative effects underlying climbing practices. Seeking to fill a gap in current scholarship, this article aims to contribute equally to sports philosophy, somaesthetics and art theory.

## I. Concepts and Contexts

What do I talk about when I talk about climbing?<sup>[1]</sup> Alluding to Haruki Murakami’s influential book on long-distance running, the first thing to clarify, especially for readers less familiar with vertical sports, is to consider the term climbing according to the idea of family resemblance *à la* Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>[2]</sup> Accordingly, the concept of climbing is associated with a range of different sub-disciplines—including mountaineering, rock climbing, bouldering, indoor climbing, speed climbing, ice climbing and solo climbing—to list some. Each of these practices is relevant when thinking in motion is concerned. However, my first-hand experiences, as well as my non-systematic knowledge of the whole spectrum of vertical sports, allow me to focus mainly on rock climbing, which happens to be considered by many the quintessential form within the climbing disciplines.<sup>[3]</sup> To put it more precisely, I take rock climbing here as the core of what I’ve learned about vertical activities to date in my 15+ years of experience.<sup>[4]</sup>

Before moving on, it seems necessary to clarify another question. When we talk about climbing, are we talking about a sports activity or is it something completely different? Given the fact that climbing was included in the last Olympic Games in Tokyo with three of its sub-disciplines, one cannot argue that climbing has nothing to do with sports. However, the recent inclusion of climbing among the wide range of Olympic sports and the associated social and economic dynamics should not obscure climbing’s former status as one of the so-called “extreme sports” practised by outsiders, rebels, eccentrics and lunatics. To make it more complicated, climbing

today provides a range of facilities for many different consumers of lifestyle sports.<sup>[5]</sup> The latter form a growing social backdrop for elite sports—or rather provide a territory of mutual exploitation. However, the fact that climbing has in the last two decades gained a high-profile popularisation through various indoor forms is far from solely explained by their associated marketing and urban investment strategies, nor can it be entirely attributed to local climbing communities institutionalising and stabilising their activities financially in the public eye. Instead, the rapid and widespread popularity of climbing can be better understood from developments that occurred earlier, and in an analogous way, in the arts.

Umberto Eco coined the term “midcult” to describe cultural products created for and consumed by a populous audience lacking specialist knowledge, skills and experience required of high art and elite culture.<sup>[6]</sup> That audience is, however, not against the idea of high culture, indeed, apparent is an eagerness to absorb as much, in the ways that are accessible, as possible, from the time-demanding modes of meaning-making that have been crystallised in art over centuries. However, midcult should not be understood as pretence, because its genuine compensational aspirations are clear: staying close to the challenges of human self-description and experiencing states of being moved—emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, sensually—by intense cultural transactions that go beyond the realms of everyday citizenship, employment and other social norms and expectations. From the perspective of the high arts, midcult is not much more than a cheap imitation. In contrast, from the perspective of mass culture, it still maintains claims for uniqueness, suddenness, unpredictability, relative complexity and challenge. The ambiguous position of midcult prevails to such an extent that the influence from here to there, between high art and midcult, works bi-directionally: artists are keen to create junctions and ramifications between many distinct levels of self-description and meaning production.

Rock climbing’s growth in popularity by way of novel indoor forms can be seen as a similar development. For old-fashioned hardcore rock climbers, climbing walls are nothing more than forgivable compromises, initially established to provide winter-training facilities for the most committed. Only later did climbing walls progress into veritable sports and entertainment venues in their own right, offering everything expected from spectacular sports phenomena. Seen from this “elite” perspective, the audiences that populate the myriad climbing gyms of our planet are alien visitors in a sterilised replica of a realm that stays virtually hidden from them until first-hand experiences are gained in situ, on real rock, on non-human-scale geographical formations and under uncontrollable weather conditions.<sup>[7]</sup> Without getting too ahead of ourselves, it is worth noting that the corporeal dimension of climbing is never just limited to the athletic body and its movements within situations of verticality, but also includes the whole environment the acting body tries to adhere to and blend with. The indoor climbing gym is quite a different environment, in which the experience of climbing on real rock cannot be replicated.<sup>[8]</sup>

However, something still shines through; bits and pieces of authentic climbing experiences gained in the great outdoors are still present. They can imbue the blurred indoor copies and magnify some preserved aspects, complementing them with their specific additions. The latter comprise the inviting spatial atmosphere and its vivid visual effects—ranging from cool-looking painted surfaces to the sight of athletic bodies dressed according to current cutting-edge sportswear styles—the buzzing crowd mingling against carefully curated background music, gastronomic and healthcare services such as yoga sessions and massages, and an all-pervading feeling of heightened safety thanks to the padded floor and pre-installed safety devices. Climbing gyms offer these additions as compensation for the loss of a broader environmental context, which is experienced when rock climbing in nature. It is now time to distinguish between aspects that are preserved indoors and those only available outdoors. At the same time, we can also begin to trace the parallels between forms of climbing and aspects of artistic practice.

## II. Experience

The absolute prerequisite to experience climbing is the possession of a more-or-less able functioning body that confronts verticality and gravity, where verticality manifests in an identifiable, contoured and solid rock protrusion and gravity in the physically felt heaviness of an upward-moving body. The human body is built in such a way that standing upright and resisting gravity in a motionless state for long periods is unfeasible. This is even more so the case on a vertical plane, where one can stay in the same position only briefly. Humans are heavy-headed creatures, so we need to move to keep our balance. That is, we need to use the force of gravity cunningly, almost reversing it for our benefit—which is quite similar to how artists harness and appropriate the forces of their chosen media for their creative goals. Climbing is no exception to this reversal. Indeed, when climbing, it is even more necessary than in everyday locomotion to convert as much gravitational force as possible into kinetic energy and motion. Otherwise, we must sit or lie down to gather strength for the following movement.

The dramatic core feature of climbing comes from the fact that unlike the default physical condition of human beings, there is no movement in rock formations, cliffs, crags, buttresses, ledges, vertical faces, overhangs, slabs, arêtes or towers—at least on the scale of human perception—except for disasters, earthquakes and occasional rock falls. Human inclination towards an anthropomorphic approach thus provides two alternatives: taking rocks as lying/sitting objects or as standing ones. I suspect the climbing experience starts with the hidden and unconscious belief that vertical rocks are upright entities, standing with noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, unperturbed by the flow of life, the passage of time and the relentlessness of gravity (**Fig. 1**). If there is a symbolic dimension to climbing, and I firmly believe there is, it is that the act of climbing includes a kind of imperfect mimicking of the motionless and daring uprightness that heavy rock formations display. Through gliding and hugging moves, the climber tries to meld into one with the rock.

In this respect, one can rightly speak of a state of “being lost in focused intensity,” but we must add there is some uncertainty of whose intensity we are talking about.<sup>[9]</sup> For it is in the moments of most involved climbing that the body in action forgets itself, so much so that it no longer knows or even perceives itself to be in motion. The dichotomy between Sisyphus and the mountainside is suspended in this moment as the climber merges and unites into the figure of the rolling boulder. It is an ambiguous figure: a huge and heavy stone, an inanimate entity that nevertheless happens to be in motion. Not incidentally, the utopian ambitions of art that are captured in the Pygmalion myth might come to mind here. However, the Sisyphian stone’s path is bi-directional: taking uphill and downhill in an endless repetition. This bi-directionality is also ever-present in climbing: where there is ascension, there is the possibility of a fall.

The sub-disciplines of climbing differ substantially in the frequency and consequences of falling; in solo climbing the risk must be reduced to a strictly theoretical option to avoid facing fatal consequences. Nevertheless, the possibility of a fall is a constantly accompanying shadow and a background noise to any vertical action. Regardless of whether it actually happens or remains a potential, falling elicits a somatic premonition of vulnerability and fragility behind the most triumphant achievements. The possibility of falling manifests both physically and mentally: in an increased heartbeat, goosebumps and sudden waves of a desire to flee. Since there is no universal climbing situation, the only thing that can be stated in general about smaller or bigger falls—the latter called a “whipper” in climbing slang—is that in the moment of the fall the entanglement between wall and athlete ceases, in the blink of an eye, to exist. This cessation is not experienced as a transaction between two separate physical entities but rather as a rupture within an apparently unified situation. This rupture is similar to when the aesthetic experience of an artwork is unexpectedly suspended: rare instances when the

cinema projector stops working or the stage goes dark in the middle of an act. However, while we generally trust the reliability of the physical mediums and institutions of art and approach artworks and art events without expecting sudden interruptions, climbing offers an aesthetic experience whose central medium, the climber's body, is an unreliable key element.<sup>[10]</sup>



Figure 1. Original illustration by Boglárka Boruzs (2023)

### III. Embeddedness, Blending, Adaptation, and the Reconfigured Body

The temporary merger between stone and the body that occurs in an effortless climb may seem like a form of escape and isolation from the outer world. But the experience of climbing is far more dynamic. Climbing shares similarities with that of artworks, which are relatively dissociated from the everyday without breaking away from life entirely as they oscillate between autonomy and heteronomy. While climbing, environmental embeddedness, even from the onlooker's perspective, intensifies to its utmost. **(Fig. 2)**. Rocks are located under the open sky, so the climber is exposed to the particularities of the time of day, light and climatic conditions, air movements, humidity, unexpected sound effects, as well as the presence of local flora and fauna. Many of these translate directly into immediate bodily implications: you squint against the sunlight, you become dehydrated from the heat and spit feathers. At the same time, salty sweat runs into your eyes. Moss- and vegetation-covered holding points slow your climb and make your grip precarious, while unpleasant insects buzz around you, triggering distraction and provoking repulsion. Lizards and snakes can unexpectedly jump out of cracks, causing fright.

At other moments, you can feel as if you are levitating when a gentle breeze empowers you, air currents bring rare forest scents or your eyes wander to colourful solitary flowers in full bloom, then spot the fossilised traces of long-gone eras. You stare and wonder at the spectacular results of rock-formations shaped by ice that can be measured across tens of thousands of years. Your fingertips interact with your visual perception in all possible ways as they touch, hug and caress solid surfaces. A bird's song in the distance blends with the rustling air. It synchronises with your movement, creating a beautifully orchestrated, immersive experience that organically adjusts your body to the environment. What the climber accesses is an eminently positive, harmonious and uplifting environmental aesthetic experience. One that bears resemblance with defining experiences of great artistic works that are not only worthy of hermeneutic exploration but, as Susan Sontag has sensitively suggested, of erotic care as well.<sup>[11]</sup>



Figure 2. Original illustration by Boglárka Boruzs (2023)

More than that, these moments also offer a marked *somaesthetic* experience. This term is meant to indicate the central role of our *soma*—the Greek term for our living, sentient, purposive and cognisant body—being at the core of any aesthetic experience, be it creative or appreciative, art-related, environmental, athletic or other. Somaesthetics, initiated by the pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman, is an umbrella term for studying and bettering “the use of our bodily instruments in perception, cognition, action, aesthetic expression, and ethical self-fashioning.”<sup>[12]</sup> Somaesthetics involves a growing number of co-operations on inter- and post-disciplinary levels that unfold along three main vectors: analysis (*analytic somaesthetics*), critical methodologies (*pragmatic somaesthetics*) and actual practice (*practical somaesthetics*), which engage “in programs of disciplined, reflective, corporeal practice aimed at somatic self-improvement.”<sup>[13]</sup> These improvements can be representational, experiential or performative in nature, depending on if their aims are directed predominantly inward, or outward, or both at once.

Returning to the aesthetics of climbing, only through its emphatically somaesthetic aspect can one understand why it is possible to retain some essential experiential elements of rock climbing indoors, the midcult scene of climbing activities. The vertical challenge invites a situation in which the standard dispositions of body and mind, as background and foreground, are reconfigured. The silent body, which forms the unconscious and unattainable background for most conscious activity, moves to centre stage. However, being the protagonist does not imply becoming talkative. In its upward locomotion, the multimodally alert, hypersensitive, intention-led and purposive body mobilises a range of knowledges and skills that lay beyond, or rather beneath, the discursive.<sup>[14]</sup> On the flipside, the climber’s body and movement may suffer from involuntary reflexes and deeply entrenched somatic habits that rarely disclose themselves to the light of consciousness. Which is why trainers must spend painfully long periods reprogramming those habits, usually through methods of learning by doing. In what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls *flow*, tactics, strategy and plan, the typical manifestations of thinking prior to movement, form only a distantly heard chorus meant to encourage and guide the protagonist on the *proscenium* with varying degrees of success.<sup>[15]</sup> Often, the sound of this chorus is literally audible in a climbing gym where “spotters” support their climbing mates by yelling agreed magic words.<sup>[16]</sup>

Beyond this outer, social/discursive sphere of the climber’s environment, the concrete physical features of the artificial wall provide the immediate circumstances the body has to contend with. Their primary feature is their

objecthood, expressed in the most illuminating way by the German word *Gegenstand* (hard object that “stands against”), which refers to a disobedient, inflexible entity that resists outer forces. To establish any positive connection with this resistant objecthood, the climber should adjust themselves and adapt their means to arrive at an acceptable temporary adjacency. This is an experience not unfamiliar to artists seeking to tame and channel the resistance of their materials, regardless of whether these comprise physical entities, abstract relations or concrete social situations. On the experiential level, this encounter with resistance means for the climber an only semi-controllable oscillation between being isolated in the body that tries to find solutions to emerging vertical challenges and dissolving in successful moves, that is adaptations that lead to temporary unions with the vertical entity. In this latter case, the climber may experience their body as if a marionette moved by the choreography “inscribed” in the given climbing route. When, however, the ease of movements halts and the climber fails, this vertical “dance” proves to be a clumsy performance delivered by an insufficiently coordinated organism. The feet slip and the hands start to sweat, losing their grip, the skin acquires cuts and becomes swollen, muscle pain starts, a joint feels overstressed and a foot begins to tremble involuntarily—the so-called “sewing-machine” or “Elvis” leg—the sense of balance is disturbed by vertigo, the forearm gets pumped<sup>[17]</sup> and breathing becomes irregular. Such instances also belong to the somaesthetics of climbing, and these admittedly unpleasant, negative sensations are also part of its aesthetic spectrum, just like off-key sounds in music, memory lapses in theatrical monologues or being out of rhythm in ballet.

#### IV. Stakes of the Climbing Experience

The body wins and loses at the same time in the ambivalent experience of climbing.<sup>[18]</sup> This has to do with an insight philosophers from such diverse backgrounds as phenomenology, analytic philosophy and pragmatism alike state in accordance: There is a kind of division of labour between our body and our mind, or as Richard Shusterman puts it, within our “body-mind”.<sup>[19]</sup> Our mental states and activities occur against a hidden but structuring and guiding background of somatic dimensions. There is no agreement as to whether these somatic dimensions can be made conscious, modified or refined. However, it seems undeniable that any change of the habitual configuration within our body-mind has consequences. Wittgenstein refers to the experience of pure instrumental music fully detached from discursive language while activating innate somatic skills, sensitivities and knowledges. He writes in a glorifying manner:

Music, with its few notes and rhythms, seems to some people a primitive art. But only its surface is simple, while the body which makes possible the interpretation of this manifest content has all the infinite complexity that is suggested in the external forms of other arts and which music conceals. In a certain sense it is the most sophisticated art of all.<sup>[20]</sup>

The change that occurs within the body-mind configuration while climbing results in experiences that are sometimes light-hearted, solemnly impersonal or ecstatic, while at other times sobering, painful and even humiliating. You might experience physical and psychical self-transcendence that your mind tries to grasp and catch up with in vain, lagging behind your body, leaving your consciousness surprised and remaining in awe and wonder. In turn, the free flow of locomotion may be denied by the inexorable burdens of your own weight and discordant limbs, which are dramatically intensified by gravity and the vertical plane. Along many climbing routes there are several positions in which your eyes desperately seek but do not find catchable holds, so you blindly grope the wall above your head for a suitable grip, even using the pores of your skin to locate the most textured surface. Then there are positions where you find yourself totally stuck, with no way forward or back, feeling literally paralysed.

Our general bodily awareness includes a range of proxemic, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive schema believed to be fully developed, at the latest, by adolescence. While climbing, ingrained and habituated feelings of stability, balance, sense of support, symmetry, spatial reach and lift-power limits may undergo dramatic shifts and re-tunings. It is not unknown for individuals after their first profound climbing experience to find their own body alien, strange, inscrutable, mysterious even. To draw from modernist aesthetics, this experience can be compared to a proper Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). The ordinary, everyday body loses its usual embeddedness in the flux of the climbing experience and finds itself in front of a disoriented consciousness.<sup>[21]</sup> This loss, however, at the same time implies its triumphant opposite. When one progresses, the experience becomes much more than merely better use of limbs, muscles, balance, sensorium and limbic system, because it is felt as a kind of somatic expansion or transformation. The inverse is also a reality: deterioration in one's climbing performance is experienced as a kind of narrowing, lessening and abridgement of the body.<sup>[22]</sup>

All of the above means that in the somaesthetic experience of climbing, one will never find a spatiotemporally fixed entity to be identified as *the* body. Due to changing environmental (social and natural) and temporal (chronological and kairological) factors, what turns out to be the substance of the actual somaesthetic experience of climbing unfolds as a mostly unforeseeable event that happens to and is performed by an underdefined body. This happens beneath the radar of an alert consciousness, which works properly only by the powers of definition—the latter prevails in well-regulated and highly-defined competitive sports. As opposed to rock climbing, such competitive performance sports are practised as staged comparisons of strictly planned, supervised and methodically developed abilities. Compared to the pre-planned progression curves in many competitive sports, the transforming effects of climbing are more contingent and dependent on other contexts, and vertical activities therefore prove to be much closer to lifestyle sports than performance sports.

Unsurprisingly, the process of undergoing a somatic transformation while climbing is not limited to sheer bodily changes, despite the body remaining central because it confines the scope of the doable, of one's reach.<sup>[23]</sup> The body of the climber is not limited to mere mass in pounds, height in feet, ape index<sup>[24]</sup>, tissues in age, nor even the aggregated experiences obtained throughout the years, but also includes the field of action or kinesphere, the *sphaera activitatis* it belongs to.<sup>[25]</sup> "I can, therefore I am", as the architecture theorist Sarah Robinson put it.<sup>[26]</sup> Every experienced climber recognises this individual field of action as something of an *auratic* quality—evoking here the notion of authenticity associated with great art—which includes the specific style of movement by a particular climber and the relative unpredictability of their future moves thanks to the specific improvisation skills that a serious route demands. Climbers recognise those peculiarities not necessarily in themselves but rather in their peers. The experienced eye can easily discern a climbing body's uniqueness in its field of action—its repertoire of moves, motor coherence, endurance, gestural harmonies and disharmonies.

Do the spectacular aspects of climbing provide more of a somaesthetic experience for the beholder or for the performer who can oscillate between the positions of the internal and the external participant? To ponder this question, one should not forget that an experienced spectator is also able to follow the climber's moves with inner, muscular and neural responses, mimicking the feel of the climb that is being undertaken. Like in any form of performing art, a sharp boundary between performer and educated spectator is, in such cases, impossible to draw.<sup>[27]</sup> Although it may be worth following this train of thought, there is another opportunity to consider in the art-like qualities of climbing. As mentioned, a climbing act is performed according to "choreographies" both offered and prescribed by the climbing route. In climbing communities obsessed with the intoxication of performance, the difficulty of routes is their most talked about topic. However, from the perspective of somaesthetics the essence of a route is to be found in a completely different aspect from the point of view of

the actual climbing experience.

There are no two identical climbing routes; each (most) has a unique name given by its original “author” (the performer of the first ascent). Many of them have their own (local and often personal) history, and those that are located on real rocks provide a deep (and haptic) connection with past events, generations and lives, just like ancient stone sculptures, while those in gyms have greater similarity with contemporary ephemeral installations. Climbing routes also resemble musical scores: they contain a variable range of features to be used by different performers. Lanky and athletic figures can jump on their distant but firm features (called jugs and tufas), while the same routes tackled by more corpulent and softer climbers are crawled up like caterpillars balancing on curvy forms, ramps, columns and slopes. Wiry and shredded athletes can crimp on tiny holds smaller than the pads of their fingertips throughout the whole route; the strength of their forearms lets them move as gracefully as a dancer. As a result, a climbing route with a single and irreplaceable choreography is more the exception than the rule. Just like in a music performance, the actual ascents are the various renditions of the route. In his philosophy of music, Vladimir Jankélévitch differentiated between a gnostic (that is knowledge-based) way of interpreting cultural phenomena, and a drastic one, alluding to the Greek etymon of “drama”, that is “action”.<sup>[28]</sup> Climbing a rock route is a pursuit that is as drastic—hence somatic and somaesthetic—as playing a piece of music, or dancing a given choreography.

Dance is not by chance the most common simile to climbing.<sup>[29]</sup> Both imply movements with internal expediency but without an external purpose to changing location. While mountaineering emerged following the general aims of early modernity and the Enlightenment, in line with discoveries and conquests, the attraction of the idea of *terra incognita* plays no part in the mature practices of rock climbing. Its relative autonomy is similar to artistic practices, and as such it is essentially a “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles”.<sup>[30]</sup> Instead, the critical elements in climbing are the quality of movement, their economy, elegance and gracefulness, the pure joy of precision, proprioceptive satisfaction with the sequences of movement—in sum, the pleasures of embodiment on the move.<sup>[31]</sup>

The main reason climbers climb is not to emerge victorious from some kind of competition, gain fame or money, visit breathtaking natural sights or collect impressive results that elicit pride—although these and many more may play a role in the process. Their interest is, I argue, above all, aesthetic, or more precisely, somaesthetic. It includes a deep commitment to discover, cultivate and change the configurations that the body and mind have formed in the everyday. As philosopher and climber C. Thi Nguyen writes:

One might be tempted to say here, if one were caught in a traditional aesthetic paradigm, that the climbing is just a technique, a trick to focus the mind on the really beautiful things—the rock itself, and nature. But I think this ignores what climbers are actually doing, feeling, and appreciating. They’re paying attention to themselves, to their own movements and appreciating how those movements solve the problem of the rock. The aesthetics of climbing is an aesthetics of the climber’s own motion, and an aesthetics of how that motion functions as a solution to a problem. There is, for the climber, a very special experience of harmony available— a harmony between one’s abilities and the challenges they meet.<sup>[32]</sup>

## V. Climbing Viewed Aesthetically, Even as Art

Having made the case that the somaesthetic aspect and aesthetic interests are, in general, at the core of



climbing activities, it does not follow that one could simply approach the aesthetics of climbing from the opposite, theoretical direction similarly unhindered. As Wolfgang Iser has shown, aesthetics has traditionally taken little notice of sports; it has long considered the aesthetic experiences in sports too obvious and the taste associated with them too low to be taken seriously.<sup>[33]</sup> As a result, aesthetics gave up on thinking about aesthetic experiences other than those associated with elite art.<sup>[34]</sup> Iser suggests acknowledging that connoisseurs attending classic dramatic or symphonic performances and the audiences watching sports events may value and experience fairly similar qualities. Sports allow the staging of conditions of human existence in an immediate and symbolic way similar to artworks. Iser makes no reference to rock climbing in his essay on sports considered as forms of art, however, had he done so, he would have been able to list a surprisingly wide range of characteristics that make climbing similar to art, specifically to the performing arts.

Like art, rock climbing is not a form of *agon* (contest) in the sense of competition between competitors.<sup>[35]</sup> At best, we can talk about an *agon* against gravity and mass, against an undifferentiated combination of the physical surroundings and our own limited body.<sup>[36]</sup> Climbing happens in delineated topological situations without immediate correlation to everyday life. It is not about success in life, building character or being victorious. Instead, it is about victory only in the sense one can achieve in art: successfully becoming something that is not prescribed, doing something freely against all odds and challenges and achieving some—perhaps utterly absurd—goals easily and gracefully. In climbing, there is eventfulness, drama, contingency, suddenness, luck, fate, surprise and excitement. Every climbing event is unique, not only potentially but also actually. These are eminently aesthetic features that also prevail in many art traditions.

Some of the aesthetic characteristics of climbing can also be found in other, seemingly less art-like sports: in athletics and gymnastics, for instance. In these sports, the body also focuses on itself and its limitations. Balance and proprioception are utterly important, with strength and flexibility following these two fundamental skills. Novelty and originality, however, are far less central to these sports than to climbing—although Iser convincingly argues against taking novelty and originality as required conditions for something to be art. Endurance sports, like long-distance running or cross-country skiing, also seem appropriate for comparison: they deeply subvert the daily experience of the self and its world and call upon the athlete to adapt to the changed circumstances in self-surpassing or self-denying ways. As such, they are highly abstract pursuits, despite being intimately connected to the basic elements where the boundaries between the body and the environment risk losing their contours and disintegrate in chaos. Climbing is not intended to verge so close to chaos; however, its tendency towards environmental abstraction through its imperative to adaptation shares qualities found in endurance sports.

The sports that are seemingly the least similar to rock climbing are those that are game-like: football, soccer, tennis. These are the least corporeal at their essence—using the body only as a means to fulfil specific goals—in turn, they are the most political because they are undertaken as highly regulated contests. At the same time, they show important similarities to the arts, above all, performing ones.<sup>[37]</sup> These resemblances and dissemblances can be demonstrated when climbing is compared to dance, circus and theatre formats. However, as Bernard Suits puts it, games are “voluntary attempt[s] to overcome unnecessary obstacles.”<sup>[38]</sup> From this perspective, one cannot deny that rock climbing too contains a game-like element, as the starting point of a climbing route and its intended endpoint can usually be connected far less arduously by way of an easy walk than by climbing.

Having arrived at the conviction that rock climbing, as a highly intense aesthetic pursuit and artistic practice, shows similarities across various aspects, one might consider the potential benefits of acknowledging such an

analogy. Sports theory and art theory can both benefit from this comparison, for which somaesthetics provides a valuable means. Let us start with sports theory. A question was raised at the beginning: when we talk about climbing are we talking about a sports activity or is it something else? This question is still in the process of being answered, admittedly without any ontological ambition.<sup>[39]</sup> In a comprehensive paper on long-distance running and somaesthetics, artist and sports researcher Matti Tainio argues that lifestyle sports (as opposed to elite sports) and the so-called post-sports<sup>[40]</sup> (as opposed to competitive sports) need analytic approaches that are different from those utilised in mainstream sports theory.<sup>[41]</sup> What he refers to as *contemporary physical activities*, are (often powerful) physical actions executed for the sake of acquiring specific aesthetic experiences. Rock climbing proves to be exemplary in this regard.

However, climbing can also be conceived as a prime example of a lifestyle sport that renders the physical and the natural as continuous with the communal, entertaining, ordinary, festive and trendy. At the same time, rock climbing can be perceived as a post-sport that emphasises individually experiential aspects over competitive, social and political ones. Furthermore, the aim of acquiring specific aesthetic experiences through intensified somatic actions is not exclusively characteristic of contemporary physical activities—including lifestyle sports and post-sports, like long-distance running or rock climbing—but may also be relevant when it comes to art. This aspect, that is the meaningfulness of bodily intensity in cultural practice, should be kept in mind when pondering John Dewey's guiding insight in his *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931): "the integration of mind-body in action is the most practical of all questions that we can ask of our civilisation."<sup>[42]</sup> Beyond the arts, sports or other difficult physical activities, this requirement is also central to erotic experience, for instance, as Richard Shusterman explicated.<sup>[43]</sup> Tainio emphasises that the performers of the contemporary physical activities he refers to are performing their actions specifically for the *aesthetic experiences* they offer. Consequently, one can no longer adequately describe these activities through the traditional conceptual system of sports theory, which was developed on the basis of considerations other than those of aesthetics.

What the experiences of contemporary physical activities have in common—together with many arts experiences—is that they exceed the dimensions of the ordinary and may include the intense experience of personal limitations. In lifestyle sports and post-sports, quantification plays little or no role. Performance, execution and precision are pursued only for the sake of attaining a self-rewarding *areté* (excellence), which is a quality that is much more experiential than representational.<sup>[44]</sup> In contrast, representation has been a defining factor in many competitive physical activities since ancient Greek and Roman life.<sup>[45]</sup> Unlike Olympic sports, discipline, modelling of moral values or power relations, setting records and professionalisation are absent from post-sports. Instead, the action itself is attributed central value and is capable of triggering sublime experiences and self-transcendence. In fact, lifestyle sports are broader than traditional sports, as they belong to a larger cultural field. That is why the cultivation of lifestyle sports can be linked to a greater range of differing motives than those of traditional sports. In this regard, one can recognise in Tainio's analysis a distant echo of the idea once put forward by Theodor Adorno about the *erosion* of arts,<sup>[46]</sup> stating that in post-sports, "the boundaries between practices are porous and fluctuating."<sup>[47]</sup> Another distinguishing mark of post-sports is the priority of training over competitions and the gamification of all competitive situations, which results in feast-like events rightly described as "experience machines"<sup>[48]</sup> rather than races.<sup>[49]</sup> Post-sports seek experiential value, instead of professional sporting value. When cultivating these activities, practitioners act either in varied forms of co-operation—with rock climbers usually moving in pairs or in small groups—or all alone. The former has no priority over the latter, indeed in my experience, climbing solo is the most transformative experience a climber can access.<sup>[50]</sup>



Figure 3. Antal Lakner, Climbing the ERNST—High on Art, Ernst Museum, Budapest, 2010, photo of the grand opening taken by the artist

All the above aspects not only highlight the difference between modern competitive sports, on the one hand, and the more art-like lifestyle sports on the other. They can also shed light on how institutionalised contemporary artistic practices would potentially be able to refresh and enhance their own scope in the Deweyan sense, should they take rock climbing and other contemporary physical activities as models. Recognising the *artistic* nature in the highly somaesthetic activity of rock climbing can help us to see why established arts would also benefit from the emphatic return of the somatic dimension, and what wider cultural and social interests can be served by the spread of an art concept that includes somatic sophistication as an integral factor. Here is a general claim maintained by scholars such as Welsch, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Ludwig Pfeiffer: sports offer aesthetic experiences to a wide audience that are no longer available in traditional arts, although they were available earlier in the arts.<sup>[51]</sup> This claim, which owes much to Friedrich Nietzsche, is mirrored in the practice of a post-conceptual artist like the Hungarian Antal Lakner. Lakner has suggested that the aesthetic experience available in the museum space should be preceded by an adventure in which visitors tackle the vertical heights of the museum facade, executing their climbing as a simultaneously symbolic and deeply physical act (**Fig. 3**).

The ramifications of the aesthetic potentialities of sports, however, may not only lead to artistic interpretations, like those demonstrated by Lakner, but can also involve historical and philosophical questions. These include cultural ruptures—already expressed by the dichotomy between the Apollonian and the Dionysian<sup>[52]</sup>—the problems of the compensational nature of modernity,<sup>[53]</sup> and the issues of its media dynamics.<sup>[54]</sup> Rather than summarising those, it is sufficient here to recall the guidance Welsch provided and comment on it with an additional thought. Welsch maintains a substantial difference between arts that offer somatic commitment, heightened vitality, immersion and deep symbolic relevance without becoming too intricate, and arts that delve into experimentation, question the social structure, speculate with new worldviews and produce truly complex meaning that is open to endless interpretation. As shown above, rock climbing cannot be simply classified in the first type: it experiments with body, mass and gravity; it questions ontological structures, of rock and living body, of stasis and dynamics; it disintegrates the everyday perception of the world and our body within it; and it places us in an endless, and mostly non-discursive, dialogue with environmental and somatic agents.

At the same time, rock climbing engages us in a difficult physical activity, excels at the production of presence,

drives us to a focused intensity, immerses us in a total environment and hints at deep existential truths.<sup>[55]</sup> If a climber does not have to choose between the two types of art that Welsch puts forward, why should practitioners of institutionalised art forms (from theatre to visual arts, from architecture to film) not endeavour to encompass both in their creative practices? Such an interconnection seems to be a compromise in Welsch's eyes—the problem of midcult returns here<sup>[56]</sup>—as he thinks high arts would lose their essence that way. Furthermore, high arts today have low chance of competing with the entertainment industry, global design culture and the aesthetisation of the everyday, in which everything is offered up to an experience society.<sup>[57]</sup>

I do not believe that the above division is healthy or necessary to maintain: elite arts experiment and produce heavy critique, while engaging and somaesthetic arts like climbing, rock music or dance entertain and refresh without aversion to heavy corporeal effects. There is no need to give one-of-a-kind assignments to specific art practices as if they were to fulfil an assumed essentiality by living up to the task. They can be either, they can be both, or neither. Avoiding essentialism, I propose recognising the cultural dearth and dormant opportunities and consider what is desired, what is necessary and what is doable—all questions familiar to climbers. Agreeing with Welsch, established art practices are still relevant in pursuing discoveries and risky social, mental or existential speculations. Nevertheless, they are also able to produce widely available, somatically relevant transformative experiences that can be found, for instance, in the works of the artist Antal Lakner that combine sports gestures with domestic chores, intense physical efforts with unnoticed routines in office life, or exhibitionist gestures with ordinary commuting. **(Fig. 4)**.<sup>[58]</sup> Furthermore, there is no need to seek the somaesthetically intense and transformative experience only in contemporary or recent art. It can be found in more traditional genres too. Opera production, for instance, especially the use of the operatic voice<sup>[59]</sup> that requires daily maintenance and cultivation not unlike elite athletes' training regimes<sup>[60]</sup>—is exemplary, as it is almost as close to practices seen as “sports” as those called “arts”. This comparison, however, goes beyond the scope of the present writing.<sup>[61]</sup>

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The somaesthetics of rock climbing includes more than one approach with regard to the practices of vertical activities. As demonstrated in the present study, it may comprise, first, an analytical and phenomenological approach to the various forms of climbing as they occur in different locations and circumstances, and as they are experienced both from the perspectives of the practitioner and the onlooker with kinaesthetic empathy. In such an analysis, by going beyond the exploration of the outer pre-conditions of climbing disciplines, their inherent ethical and psychological aspects, historical and technical developments, emerging institutional contours, social dynamics and economic backgrounds, somaesthetics may provide a more complete account of their experiential dimensions than any earlier sports and lifestyle studies offered. Within the framework of somaesthetics, all those aspects and ingredients are referred back to the living, sentient, intentional, yearning and suffering body, along with its inner, experiential dynamics and opportunities for transformation.

This leads to the second aspect that somaesthetics can offer for rock climbing: a mindful training and practice regime. With a more refined and thought-through bodily methodology, the vertical dance I referred to earlier can be realised in a smoother, more graceful and more delightful way, mitigating, or moderating at least, unnecessary hindrances of the upward movement. That said, people new to climbing or further removed from it due to not possessing the typical physical features attributed to rock climbers, could be invited into climbing too through the body consciousness that somaesthetics propagates and educates. For the activity opens itself up from the inside and becomes available through its specific, genuinely somatic, experiential spectrum that has less to do with rules, regulations, compliance and rivalry—as most of classical sports activities do—than with an attitude and behaviour that is both adaptive and introspective.

However, the ultimate and perhaps most rewarding contribution somaesthetics can give to the culture of climbing is the transference of an embodied experience in the field for the sake of greater ease, more intense pleasure and deeper self-awareness. It involves proxemics, balance, proprioception, callisthenic knowledge, psychical insights, attention control, physiological expertise, somatic self-awareness and the ability to let the body step out from the background while also allowing gravity and the natural elements to take centre stage. The result may not only be an efficient vertical dance but also an enlightening ontological one: a mingling of distant entities overstepping the boundaries of the self, and a restructuring of existing relationalities between us and the world. A dynamics and a promise that has been familiar and sought after for so long by admirers of the arts.



Figure 4. Antal Lakner, INERS, the power exercise room in his solo exhibition, “Workstation”, Ludwig Museum, Budapest, 2012. Image courtesy Antal Lakne

## Footnotes

1. Murakami, Haruki. *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. London: Harvill Secker. 2007.
2. The concepts of family resemblance and art alike play pivotal roles in the writing that follows. There is no place here, however, to provide a definition of art or to ponder how closely it is related to the idea of a family resemblance. For an earlier elaboration on these, see Veres, Bálint. “Rethinking Aesthetics through Architecture?” In *Aesthetic Experience and Somaesthetics*. Edited by Richard Shusterman. Boston: Brill. 2018. pp. 87–100.
3. Historically speaking, rock climbing is preceded only by mountaineering, from which it emancipated itself in the nineteenth century. See Frison-Roche, Roger. *A History of Mountain Climbing*. Paris: Flammarion. 1996.
4. In this paper I approach a highly specific but for me very familiar physical practice that is embedded in my everyday lifestyle so much so that it proved to be a challenge to address from a theoretical perspective. This effort could not have been implemented without the incentive from Jessica

Hemmings and the highly valuable comments and suggestions given by Matti Tainio and Botond Csuka. I would like to express my acknowledgements to them here, and my thanks to Gerrie van Noord and Jessica Hemmings for making the manuscript more fluent and streamlined.

5. Wheaton, Belinda. *Understanding Lifestyle Sport: Consumption, Identity and Difference*. London: Routledge. 2004.
6. Eco, Umberto. "The Structure of Bad Taste". In *The Open Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1989. pp. 180–216.
7. It is worth mentioning some obvious objections here, ranging from socioeconomic issues ("authentic" natural experiences for the privileged who have the time for pursuing such activities) to romanticised ideologies of wilderness, prowess, and moral superiority. Righteous critique from the outside, however, does not make the analysis of the inside experience irrelevant. See Tainio, Matti. "Difficult Activities—Difficult Experiences". In *Somaesthetics and Sport*. Edited by Andrew Elgar. Boston: Brill. 2022. pp. 210–31.
8. Here, the urgent issues of sustainability might be raised. Isn't it great to have an artificial option that can easily tolerate the growing masses who practise climbing? Well, the answer, at best, is yes and no. The original rock formations would not tolerate all aspiring climbers, but there would not be so many newcomers to the field without the attractions of the stylish gyms and the associated global media representation of climbing—countless examples of which exist in the advertising industry.
9. The phrasing is derived from a quote by the world-class swimmer Pablo Morales in Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. "Lost in Focused Intensity': Spectator Sports and Strategies of Re-Enchantment", in *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2014. pp. 39–48.
10. Even in the case of the regular falls experienced by climbers, the vast majority falls do not cause any trauma beyond their sobering message to the climber.
11. Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1966.
12. Shusterman, Richard. "Thinking through the Body: Educating for the Humanities". In *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012. p. 41.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
14. See Hemmings, Jessica. "Can That Be Taught? Lessons in Embodied Knowledge from Memoir Writing for Craft and Design Education". In *Somaesthetics and Design Culture*. Edited by Richard Shusterman and Bálint Veres. Leiden: Brill. 2023. pp. 77–106.
15. While "flow" is conceived by Csikszentmihalyi as the performer's experience, its parallel, that of the beholder is addressed as "epiphany" by Gumbrecht. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial. 1990; Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. 2006.
16. In these climbing gym scenes, another side of somaesthetics is also emphasised: representational somaesthetics, which appreciates the enhanced appearance of the athlete's body and the beauty and coherence of its movement. See Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*, pp. 25–46.
17. <https://hardclimbs.info/forearm-pump/> (accessed 2024-01-21)
18. There are stakes not only in the experience of climbing but also in its execution. Besides personal physical integrity, the partnership—"belaytationship" in the climbing lingo—is the most important among them. For methodological reasons, this paper is restricted to the individual experiential level and only fleetingly touches upon the collective aspects of climbing, although those are admittedly constitutive elements of the climbing activity and its experience. For "belaytationship" see: <https://www.commonclimber.com/belaytationships-edition.html> (accessed 2024-01-21)
19. Shusterman, Richard. "The Body as Background: Pragmatism and Somaesthetics". In *Knowing Without Thinking: New Directions in Philosophy and Cognitive Science*. Edited by Zdravko Radman. London:

- Palgrave Macmillan. 2012. pp. 206–223. See also Shusterman, Richard. *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2008. I agree with Dewey’s view that body and mind form a continuum, a unity, but I also find David Howes’s objection valid, arguing that humans have diverse cultural and historical backgrounds that are hugely in line with how they see themselves as bipartite (body/mind), tripartite (body/mind/soul) or quadripartite, etc. beings. These perceptions change based on varying beliefs about sensory abilities and capabilities and should be taken into account when specificities of historically defined human experiences are at stake. See Howes, David. *The Sensory Studies Manifesto: Tracking the Sensorial Revolution in the Arts and Human Sciences*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2022. p. 4.
20. Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Revised Edition. Edited by G.H. von Wright. Oxford: Blackwell. 1998 [1977]. p. 11.
  21. Shusterman defines staging as a substantial requirement for something to be art. See Schusterman, Richard. “Art as Dramatization”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 59. No. 4. 2001. pp. 363–72.
  22. This topic is perhaps the most engaging and memorable layer of Murakami’s running book.
  23. See Seregi, Tamás. “Philosophy of Triathlon”. *Pragmatism Today*. Vol. 5. No. 2. 2014. pp. 101–06.
  24. The correlation between a climber’s height and arm span is known as the ape index.
  25. Bo—hme, Gernot. *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*. London: Routledge. 2017. p. 117.
  26. Robinson, Sarah. *Architecture is a Verb*. New York: Routledge. 2021. p. 3.
  27. “No one can avoid playing along with the game”, a comment made about a tennis match in comparison to the way art involves its audience. See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1986. p. 24. In this respect, one can also allude to Jaana Parviainen’s concept of *kinaesthetic empathy*. See Parviainen, Jaana. “Kinaesthetic Empathy”. *Dialogue and Universalism*. Vol. 13. Nos. 11–12. 2003. pp. 151–62.
  28. Jankélévitch, Vladimir. *Music and the Ineffable*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2003.
  29. See Nguyen, C. Thi. “The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing”. *The Philosopher’s Magazine*. Vol. 78. 2017. pp. 37–43.
  30. Bernard Suits defines such formulation in his concept of the games. See *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Peterborough: Broadview Press. 2005. p. 55. Hans-Georg Gadamer combines the concept of play and art in “The Relevance of the Beautiful. Art as Play, Symbol, and Festival”. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1986, pp. 3–53.
  31. See Montero, Barbara. *Thought in Action: Expertise and the Conscious Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2016. pp. 192–209.
  32. Nguyen, “The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing”.
  33. The hows and whys are explained in detail in Welsch, Wolfgang. “Sport Viewed Aesthetically and Even As Art?”. In *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. Edited by Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith. New York: Columbia University Press. 2005. pp. 135–55. However, his paper, just like Gumbrecht’s *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, approaches the aesthetics of sports only from the beholder’s side.
  34. The sports philosopher Lev Kreft calls this the “historical process of [the] reduction [of] aesthetics [into] artistics.” See Kreft, Lev. “Sport as Drama”. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. Vol. 39. No. 2. 2012. p. 221.
  35. Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, p. 70.
  36. Concerning the somatic sports experience, the Hungarian philosopher Tamás Seregi refers to the body becoming an interface between material media and physical forces, in this case between protruding mass and gravity. And it undergoes transubstantiation: from being ground-like to becoming aerial and

high-rising, then returns to the initial stage. Along with the transforming body, its surrounding world is also transmuted into a “new arrangement of the same components”. See Seregi, Tamás. “A Philosophy of Triathlon”. *Pragmatism Today*. Vol. 5. No. 2. 2014. p. 105.

37. For a detailed elaboration of the aesthetic similarities and differences between sports, game, play and arts, see Kreft’s “Sport as Drama”.
38. See Suits, *The Grasshopper*, pp. 85–87.
39. Terms and labels denoting various physical activities are not meant as fixed categorisations but rather perspectives or lenses one can employ effectively to analyse given practices. Any practice can be seen as belonging to various categories.
40. Pronger, Brian. “Post-sport: transgressing boundaries in physical culture”. In *Sport and Postmodern Times: Culture, Gender, Sexuality, the Body and Sport*. Edited by Genevieve Rail. New York: State University of New York Press. 1998. pp. 277–98.
41. Tainio, “Difficult Activities—Difficult Experiences”.
42. Dewey, John. *Philosophy and Civilisation*. New York: Minton Balch. 1931. p. 304.
43. Shusterman, Richard. “Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 64. No. 2. 2006. pp. 217–29. See also Shusterman, Richard. *Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2021.
44. Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*, p. 70.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 85 and further.
46. Adorno, Theodor. “Art and the Arts”. In *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. 2003. pp. 368–390.
47. Tainio, “Difficult Activities—Difficult Experiences”, p. 212. Tainio’s view, however, does not rely directly on Adorno but rather on his compatriot, the aesthetician Yrjö Sepänmaa. See Sepänmaa, Yrjö. “Flows, Vortices, and Counterflows: Artification and Aesthetization in Chiasmatic Motion on a Mobius Ring”. *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Vol. 0. Special Issue 4, 2012.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.spec.403>
48. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
49. In climbing, party-like competitions are much more typical and widespread than in the highly regulated new formats of competitive (although with its becoming an Olympic sport the situation is under change). However, competitiveness has acquired a central position in official climbing sports organisations: speed climbing works as the athletic format of climbing, boulder climbing functions as its gymnastics counterpart, only lead climbing can retain much of its original specificities even in competition situations.
50. For this very reason, I, too, opted for solo climbing before sitting down to write this essay. Even if it was a challenge relatively modest in terms of expert climbing, it was something I had to consider at least twice. I must remind the reader that climbing is dangerous and requires experience before one engages in such an enterprise.
51. Welsch, “Sport Viewed Aesthetically and Even as Art?”; Gumbrecht, *In Praise of Athletic Beauty*; Pfeiffer, K. Ludwig. *The Protoliterary: Steps Toward an Anthropology of Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2002.
52. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999.
53. Marquard, Odo. *Farewell to Matters of Principle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1989.
54. See Veres, Bálint. “Intermedia and Intermittency”. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae. Film and Media Studies*. Vol. 9. 2014. pp. 155–69; Bálint Veres. “The Operatic Principle”. In *The Routledge Handbook of Music Signification*. Edited by Esti Sheinberg and William Dougherty. New York: Routledge. 2020. pp.



323–32.

55. Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2004.
56. “After all the efforts of modern art to escape its golden cage of autonomy, to turn to life and to acknowledge and make us appreciate the aesthetic outside of art—a tendency that obviously furthers aestheticization of the everyday and that provides strong arguments for my assessment of sport as art—it might be time to reinforce the distinction between art in the proper sense and aestheticization of the everyday.” Welsch, “Sport Viewed Aesthetically and Even as Art?”. p. 150.
57. Schulze, Gerhard. *The Experience Society*. London: Sage. 2008.
58. See his “INERS” series and the accompanying catalogue. Lakner, Antal. *Workstation*. Budapest: Ludwig Museum. 2013. The pieces of the INERS series are tools appropriated from everyday activities but deprived of their original context. They are mutated versions that call the visitor for somatically intensified quasi-autonomous interactions. These interactions render the passiveness of these tools into not only physically, but intellectually subversive, *live acts* staged in front of the museum audience.
59. See Barthes, Roland. “The Grain of The Voice”. In *Image—Music—Text*. London: Fontana Press. 1977 [1972]. pp. 179–89.
60. Research studies and methodological guidance abound. One example stresses that “the complex mind-body coordination required of solo vocal performers may be compared to the intricate performances exemplified by Olympic-level athletes.” See Ware, Clifton. “High Notes: The Singer as Vocal Athlete”. *Opera Journal*. Vol. 32. No. 2. 1999. pp. 33–37.
61. See Veres, “The Operatic Principle”.