Sport and play in a digital world

Call for papers in *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*

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Digital technology plays an important role in the everyday lives of people. The increasing popularity and attraction of gaming has often been framed as a problematic and disquieting development, because the time spent with digital media is supposed to be at the expense of 'real' playing and exercising time. In the last decade however, new games emerged on the market that do not conform anymore to the standard idea that gaming contradicts with playing 'real sports'. 'Sport games' are gaining in significance all over the world and are even challenging the modern and hegemonic concept of sport (Taylor, 2012). As some researchers argue, new technologies allow for entirely 'new forms of play that we've only just begun to imagine' (Pesce, 2000, p. 213; Sydnor, 2001).

There is still a lot of confusion about some of the concepts that are being used to describe this development towards the digitalization of play and sport culture. Concepts like sport gaming, virtual sports and exergaming are often used in a rather loose manner and may refer to a variety of manifestations of 'digital play', such as the simulation of real sports, cybersport and e-sports on either traditional or motion-controlled game consoles. With the term cybersport, Hemphill (2005: 199) refers to 'alternative sport realities, that is, to electronically extended athletes in digitally represented sporting worlds'. Whereas Hemphill speaks of 'alternative sport realities', other definitions imply that e-sports is simply a new subset of the family of sports.

Besides the conceptual confusion, the 'sport-status' of e-sports and cybersports itself are still contested. Currently, e-sport is officially accepted as sport in about sixty countries (Witkowski, 2009; 2012). Examples of e-sport games with official competition leagues are *FIFA Football*, *Dance Dance Revolution*, and *World of Warcraft* played at the World Cyber Games (cf. Hutchins 2008).

In several countries, the status of e-sports is being discussed by sport authorities and e-sport organizations. In terms of organization, institutionalization and globalization, e-sport has a strong claim to be considered a real sport. According to estimations there are more than 22 million participants in e-sports and around 500 professional gamers. More than a million gamers enter national preliminary rounds for the World Cyber Games, which attract participants from seventy countries (Hutchins, 2008; Wimmer 2012). This development calls for fundamental knowledge about e- sport and how governing bodies should deal with its broad variety of appearances (Thiborg, 2009).

It is no surprise that the main arguments against the acceptance of digital sports within the current definition of sport, circle around the supposed absence of physical activity. For sport organizations this often implies that gaming does not contribute to the stimulation of healthy behaviour either. For several reasons, these argument are increasingly problematic. To mention one: a new generation of e-sport and 'exergames' are able to simulate generally accepted sports (such as golf, rowing, bowling, skating) and to stimulate movement behaviour that can hardly be considered 'less physical' than already existing sports or fitness.

Given the speed by which digital developments are proceeding and given the diversity of digital sport opportunities, there is a need, first of all, for conceptual clarification and a need for clear argumentation about the status of these activities, and the implication it has for sport organizations, as well as for sport education and physical education. iPads, camera's, video feedback and all kinds of new apps emerge on the market, with possible (and sometimes unforeseen) applications for sport, such as video analysis-software to view and compare images in slow motion (Ubersense, iMotion HD), tagging software to categorize and analyze specific game situations (Dartfish Easy Tag, Sportalyzer) or biomechanical analysis (Video Physics). As these technologies are increasingly used in traditional sports and PE as well, it is crucial that knowledge will be gained about how this possibly affects the development and learning of children.

This special issue of *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* is dedicated to the main conceptual, philosophical and moral questions that are being raised by these digital developments in the context of sport and physical education. We invite scholars to submit papers for this special issue. The following topics and question could be addressed in more detail:

The Sport status of e-sport and cybersport

Can e-sport and cybersport officially be considered real sports, and if yes/no, based upon what arguments? Papers may deal with fundamental questions about the definition of sport, including a discussion on rules, (pre-)lusory goals (cf. Suits) and the role of cheating in sport.

Why are criteria of physicality and physical prowess that are supposed to demarcate sport form non-sport these problematic criteria? (cf. Merleau-Ponty). How useful is the distinction between fine and gross motor skills when demarcating sport from e-sport (Meier, Hemphill 2005)? If it is accepted that these criteria are unfit to distinguish between sport and e-sport, what implications does this have, for example for educating contexts?

The moving body in a virtual environment

What are the differences between the body in a virtual, an augmented or a real life environment? How can we interpret the differences in the notions of embodiment, immersion, interactivity and presence in a virtual or non-virtual environment? Can the body incorporate digital technology, the same as it does with the use of equipment in sports, such as handling a hockey stick as if it is or becomes part of your body? Are we 'semi-embodied' in a virtual environment (cf. Morie 2007)? How do digital technologies shape the views and experiences of bodies and bodily capacities?

If there is neuroscientific (and phenomenological) evidence that perception and embodiment in a virtual environment is similar to that in a real environment, what does that mean for the perceived abilities and competences? How does the virtual embodiment play a role in the shaping of experiences outside the virtual world?

Moral implications of exchanging the real for the virtual sport

Virtual environments 'allow experiments and exploration in a symbolic context without taking real risks' (Fromme & Unger, 2012, p.13). What does this imply for our understanding of sport, for example for risk and adventure sports? Especially role-playing games (such as playing 'as' a famous athlete) can offer a pedagogical and developmental space in which certain capacities of an individual are stimulated or ignored. It also offers possibilities of experiencing new sports that where unknown or impossible before. For example, virtual reality enables disabled children to experience what it means to go skiing for the first time. In some cases, such as in rehabilitation, a virtual environment can stimulate the process of fostering trust in one's body (cf. Moraal et al. 2013)

We invite authors to submit papers on the moral implications of exchanging the real for the virtual sport. Virtual spaces might be able to mimic real sport actions. There are however crucial differences when it comes down to the symbolic meanings of sport (reified by the social context) and to the virtues that are being enforced and reproduced within the social context of sport. What virtues, generally associated with sports, are stimulated or neglected in a virtual environment?

We welcome all papers that deal with philosophical and ethical questions that are raised by the impact and increasing influence of digital technologies on sport. This may also relate to broader topics that are not described here, such as sport and social media (How is the content and experience of sport being influenced by social media?) and the ideology of *quantified self* (what kind of a *self* is the *quantified self*?)

Planning

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