DiVA
http://www.diva-portal.org

This is the published version of a paper published in *Sport, Education and Society*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

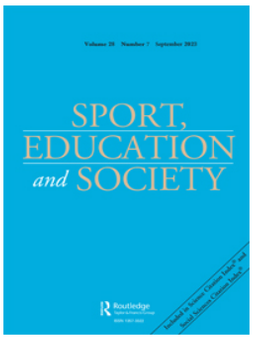
Williams, B., Quennerstedt, M. (2024)
Dining with Michel Serres: physical education and an ethics of the parasite
Sport, Education and Society, 29(8): 997-1008
https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2235612

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:gih:diva-7737



Sport, Education and Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cses20

Dining with Michel Serres: physical education and an ethics of the parasite

Ben Williams & Mikael Quennerstedt

To cite this article: Ben Williams & Mikael Quennerstedt (2023): Dining with Michel Serres: physical education and an ethics of the parasite, Sport, Education and Society, DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2023.2235612

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2235612

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 14 Jul 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 503

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=cses20

SPORT, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY
https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2235612

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Dining with Michel Serres: physical education and an ethics of the parasite

Ben Williams [a,b] and Mikael Quennerstedt [c,d]

[a]Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Australia; [b]Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University, Nathan, Australia; [c]Department of Movement, Culture and Society, Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden; [d]Faculty of Social and Health Sciences, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Elverum, Norway

ABSTRACT

Presented as a six-course meal, this article addresses the ethics of innovations, interruptions, and intrusions in physical education (PE). The central ingredient in this meal is Michel Serres' character-concept of the parasite. We begin by interpreting debates about PE's purposes, futures, beneficiaries, and so on, as offering researchers and practitioners food-for-thought about the status quo in PE and its transformation. We then introduce the tastes and textures of the parasite and explore these flavours further using PE research on outsourcing and the use of healthy lifestyle technologies. In the main course, we propose a situated and symbiotic parasitic ethics grounded in hesitation and discuss what this set of sensitivities offers debates in PE about outsourcing and healthy lifestyle technology-use. Recognising there will never be a PE without parasites, we advocate an attunement to what it is to parasite well in PE and to the role of the parasite in the composition of any PE collective.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 4 March 2023
Accepted 5 July 2023

KEYWORDS
Physical education; Michel serres; The parasite; Ethics; Outsourcing; External providers; Healthy lifestyle technologies; Exergames; Activity trackers

First course

> Parasite. The prefix *para-* means 'near,' 'next to,' measures a distance. The *sitos* is the food. (Serres, 2007, p. 144)

Order! order!

Debates! Oh-so many vibrant, complex, provocative debates in physical education (PE)! Debates about what the subject is and the purposes it serves (e.g. Ní Chróinín et al., 2020). Debates about who benefits from it and who does not (e.g. Evans & Davies, 2015a). Debates about what to teach and how best to teach it (e.g. Casey et al., 2021). Debates about the subject's future (e.g. Kirk, 2010). Debates about its potential (e.g. Thorburn & Gray, 2021). And debates about much more besides (including what to call it – PE? HPE? H/PE? PEH? And these are just the English versions!). Point and counterpoint. Parry and thrust. Pound the table with your fists. How could it be otherwise? There are so many seeking or defending a stake in PE, so many people eager to give to and receive from the subject, and such a dazzling diversity of views (Macdonald, 2013)! Isn't it wonderful?

Such debates are part and parcel of intellectual and professional life in PE. For one thing, they're scenes of struggle over what should be said, done, and written in the subject's name (Kirk, 2010), one

CONTACT Ben Williams williams.b1@unimelb.edu.au
This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

of the many fronts on which battles for status, resources, and territory are fought (Goodson, 1993) – debate-as-conflict, if you will. But these debates can also be a means by which current and aspiring PE stakeholders are better able to understand and explain their own and others' practice, deliberate on the issues affecting these practices, and, on the basis of these deliberations, make conscious decisions and take concrete actions to change or preserve existing states of affair (Capel & Blair, 2020). In other words, debates can also be a way to cultivate a 'critically mindful' PE, as distinct from one that is mindless (Tinning, 2020, p. 987). In contrast to the combative mode of debate-as-conflict, and with a nod to Mol (2021), we might call this more contemplative function, debate-as-food-for-thought. Such work, Mol (2010) elsewhere notes, represents a gift: 'Here it is. Enjoy it or forget it. Eat from it, as much as you like, and digest it – or push your plate away' (p. 266).

Speaking of food, thanks for coming to our little soirée. We're so glad you accepted our invitation. We've some nourishing food-for-thought to share, and a new flavour to introduce you to. It's the character-concept of the parasite. Hopefully, you'll detect in all the dishes tonight. And though it might prove an acquired taste, rather than rushing to judgment, please, sit with it a while, because that's when we think it's at its best – when you resist your initial reaction to the new, novel, nutty, or noxious; when you pay attention to the ways in which interruptions, intrusions, and innovations underpin any get-together such as this and fundamentally shape deliberations about who or what deserves a seat at the table, and why. Which is why we're dishing it up here as part of a conversation about innovations on and interruptions to the status quo in PE.

Oh! One more thing before we proceed. You see, another guest will be joining us, too. His name is Michel Serres. He's the creator of the flavour we mentioned. We'll introduce you properly when he arrives. But we should warn you, his ideas aren't everyone's cup of tea. Paraphrasing them is a challenge (Connor, 2009). And the source of our key ingredient tonight is his 'most difficult and intractable book' (Connor, 2015, p. 5). But we believe it's worth the struggle, and we think you'll appreciate its complexity. Inventive, inviting, innovative, and integrative, Serres' writing abounds with allusions, metaphors, homophonies, lists, etymologies, stories, myths, anecdotes, subversions of well-known phrases, and a careful attention to textual rhythm and noise (Watkin, 2020). Through this style, Serres attempts to cultivate in his readers 'a way of holding oneself, bodily and intellectually, in the world, a material, imaginative, cognitive, corporeal disposition and a set of sensitivities' (Watkin, 2020, p. 157) that 'makes strange the object in question, causing the reader to notice it in a new way' (Watkin, 2020, p. 169). And so, we've tried to borrow something of his style of writing across the six courses of this feast. If you've ever encountered experimental writing in PE scholarship (e.g. Fitzpatrick, 2018; Lynch & Davies, 2022) or educational research deploying concept-as-method (e.g. Lenz Taguchi & St.Pierre, 2017), Serres' style might feel familiar. For others, though, it might seem bizarre, inexplicable, perhaps even nonsensical. At the very least, we encourage you to be polite. Hopefully, you don't push your plate away. For as Watkin (2020) notes:

> Serres's style reaches out from his texts and extends its hand to the reader as an invitation to dance. Like all such offers it is risky; it can be made to look foolish, ostentatious or presumptuous. Like all such offers, it can be met with folded arms, the avoidance of eye contact and a sullen countenance. But Serres, nevertheless, has made the offer. How it is received, only the reader can determine. (p. 209)

Forewarned is forearmed. Now, to the rest of the menu. In the next course, we introduce you to the tastes and textures of the parasite. Then, we explore these tastes and textures in the context of outsourcing in PE. In the fourth course, we show that the parasite isn't just an intellectual accompaniment for outsourcing, by illustrating what it can do alongside research on healthy lifestyle technologies. 'But why pair the parasite with these two topics in particular?' you wonder. 'Why not either in combination with some other attempt to interrupt business as usual in PE whose piquancy has been hotly contested, like models-based practice or physical literacy?' Why not, indeed! At a mundane level, we've brought together outsourcing and healthy lifestyle technology-use because, as the

third and fourth courses signal, they were ready to hand for us through previous work. Yet availability is no guarantee of edibility, much less an enjoyable dining experience. And so, a better, somewhat oenological answer to this question is that our respective familiarity with outsourcing and the use of healthy lifestyle technologies attuned us to the ways in which they form a congruent pairing, their common flavours and intensities amplifying the strange, shared tastes and textures of the parasite. Thus, having highlighted this congruence through courses three and four, we use our penultimate course to propose an ethics of the parasite and discuss what this ethics might offer debates in PE about innovations and interventions. We conclude, as every good meal should, with some dessert, to celebrate our coming together today. Bon appétit!

Second course

> The theory of relations brings us to the parasite. (Serres, 2007, p. 185)

Ring, ring!

Ah-ha! Here he is, just in time for the next dish. Everyone, this is Michel Serres. Michel Serres, this is everyone. Now, in addition to the tropes we mentioned in the first course, Michel Serres' works are chock-full of 'character-concepts' (Watkin, 2020) – 'figures that help [him] think, the situations, examples, and proto-narratives through which he generates and modulates ideas' (Paulson, 1997, p. 31). We've invited Monsieur Serres and the parasite to this banquet because they've helped us engage with and respond to debates about two interventions or innovations in PE with which we are familiar, and because we think they might help you, too, as you ruminate on different novelties or interruptions in PE research or practice.

Introduced and developed at length in the book of the same name, the parasite belongs to that family of Serresian characters concerned with the topics of communication and federation (Watkin, 2020). An obvious entrée into the parasite, therefore, is Serres' characteristically idiosyncratic understanding of the former. As Webb (2020) explains:

> For Serres, communication is a basic characteristic of all things, from particles to elements, to organisms, human life, society, and on again to stars, planets and the structural features of the universe on the largest scale. Everything exchanges energy and information and is defined by the relations it has and of which it is capable. (p. 104)

Fortunately for us, the success of this gathering doesn't rest on whether you swallow Serres' expanded understanding of communication. We appreciate that conceptualising interactions between quarks or galaxies as communication is largely irrelevant to discussions of PE. But we're confident you'll find thinking about pedagogy in terms of relationality, exchange, information, and energy much more palatable, even if we ultimately want to admit non-/more-than-human entities as participants in these exchanges.

So, how is communication possible between any two entities? From a philosophical point of view, it's a problem with a very long history. Here's the nub of it:

> To establish the identity of A such that A = A, we need to make a contrast with everything that is 'not A', which includes B (and likewise to determine the identity of B). This results in a fundamental asymmetry – from A's perspective, B's message emanates from a world which [is] fundamentally determined by its quality of being 'not A' (with the converse true of B's perspective). We do not have a relation of equal partners, but rather two incommensurable perspectives on the world defined by mutual exclusivity. (Brown, 2013, pp. 86–87)

Serres' solution to this problem is to propose a third entity. Communication, he argues, is only possible because '[t]here is always a mediate, a middle, an intermediary' (Serres, 2007, p. 63), acting as the channel through which exchange can occur. Thus, 'as soon as we are two, we are already three or four' (Serres, 2007, p. 57). Serres terms this third element 'the parasite.'

But there is no such thing as a free lunch! Serres stresses that this triadic system is never entirely harmonious because the parasite cannot provide a channel for pure, unimpeded communication

between A and B. It always interrupts the exchange to some degree, taking something for itself and adding something of its own. Since it originates in communication's precondition, this interruption is inevitable. The possibility of interruption can never be eliminated from the exchange. Yet, whether this interruption is perceived as signal or noise depends on one's position in the system. A ringing telephone, for instance, might be perceived as noise by the guests at this party, but the party might be perceived as noise by whomever answers the phone and tries to converse with the caller.

Serres' (2007) characterisation of the parasite owes much to the word's three meanings in French. The first is 'someone who lives and/or eats at the expense of another;' the second is 'an organism that lives on or with a host, from which it obtains nutrients, shelter or other benefit and which it may or may not harm;' and the third is noise, static, or 'a break in a message' (Watkin, 2020, p. 300). Serres argues this trio of seemingly divergent meanings are united by the same basic function within a system, namely that of thermal excitation, 'agitating and destabilising the functioning of the system into which it insinuates itself, enabling but also jeopardising communication' (Watkin, 2020, p. 300). In other words, via a 'parasitic logic' (Brown, 2004), the parasite *analyses* (i.e. intercepts the relations and diverts some part of the exchange towards itself), *paralyses* (i.e. induces an interruption as a result of that interception), and *catalyses* (i.e. 'complexifies' the system as it tries more or less successfully to absorb or expel the parasite).

A's and B's. Analysis, paralysis, catalysis. Puns and polysemy. Pretty dense, huh? And what's it got to do with PE anyway? We're getting to that, we promise. In fact, it's coming right up. It's time for our third course. Wait, can anyone else hear that sound? We weren't expecting anyone else, were we?

Third course

> Who, then, is making such a racket at the door? (Serres, 2007, p. 56)

Knock, knock!

The Parasite begins with Serres' rendering of Jean de La Fontaine's retelling of Aesop's fable, *The Town Rat and the Country Rat*. In the fable, the town rat invites his country cousin to dine with him in the tax collector's house, where the former lives. While the tax collector sleeps, the duo feast on his sumptuous leftovers. As they eat, the rats are interrupted by a noise at the door. Frightened, the cousins take flight and hide while they wait for the noise to stop. The tax collector, awakened by the noise of the fleeing rats, drifts back to sleep. Eventually, the town rat invites his cousin back to the scraps, but the latter cannot stomach the possibility of another disturbance and scarpers back to the quiet of the countryside, where the food is plain, but meals are peaceful.

Through this fable, Serres highlights two related complexities of the parasitic relations that pervade life. The first is the cascading parasitic chain and the jostle 'to always come last … [a]nd thus to stand, open mouthed, ready to absorb all of what flows down the chain' (Brown, 2004, pp. 388–389). As Serres puts it, 'the parasited one parasites the parasites' (Serres, 2007, p. 13) in the fable, and in life more generally. The tax collector parasitises the worker, the town rat parasitises the tax collector, the country rat parasitises the town rat, the noise (is it the tax collector or someone new to the story?) parasitises the rats. The second complexity, then, is that within this chain, 'it is now radically impossible to decide who is the parasite and who is the host, who is the subject and who is the object, who is the giver and who is the receiver, and who interrupts whom' (Watkin, 2020, p. 301). Host, guest, parasite: Serres argues these roles are neither fixed nor given, but dynamic, substitutable, and ever evolving.

Few practices in contemporary PE better illustrate parasitism and its complexities than the innovation or interruption of outsourcing. Why, Sperka et al. (2018) even frame their work around an unexpected knock at the door from an uninvited guest! And despite formal definitions of outsourcing being bilaterally oriented (i.e. there is a school that outsources and an external provider to whom it outsources, see Sperka, 2020), from a Serresian perspective, the PE research on outsourcing tells decidedly triangular tales. Typically, such work starts with what is usually considered the

fundamental form of the pedagogic relation: that between a teacher and a student. Intercepting that relation in instances of outsourcing is an external provider, who facilitates particular kinds of pedagogic communication by offering various forms of expertise (e.g. Enright et al., 2020; Powell, 2015), resources and facilities (e.g. Williams et al., 2011), professional learning opportunities (e.g. Powell, 2015), and markers of social distinction (e.g. Williams & Macdonald, 2015). External providers make these novelties available in exchange for the information and energy they need to ensure their own reproduction: opportunities to generate income, promote their brand, recruit participants in their out-of-school hours programmes, and so on (e.g. Sperka et al., 2018; Williams & Macdonald, 2015).

Yet matters don't end there. This triad is not the only parasitic relation evident in the outsourcing literature. Hogan and Stylianou (2018), for instance, illustrate how the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) parasitised the relation between schools and community sports organisations through its *Sporting Schools* initiative. Precipitated by government concerns about rising rates of chronic disease and declining rates of organised sports participation, this initiative aimed, among other things, to recruit young Australians into organised community sport by creating links between schools and local sports clubs. Hogan and Stylianou (2018) also show how commercial operators have parasitised the relation between the ASC and the National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) responsible for implementing the initiative, offering private coaches to deliver *Sporting Schools* programmes on behalf of under-resourced NSOs (see also, Stylianou et al., 2019). And we haven't even noted yet how it is we know all this about outsourcing in the first place: through researchers' interceptions of relations between teachers, students, external providers, and so on, interceptions that divert a flow of information and energy towards researchers so they can put bread on their tables by writing articles like this one. It's parasites all the way down, it seems.

Highlighting how the outsourcing of PE has been entangled in neoliberalisations of education systems around world, researchers have noted the practice's seeming ubiquity and inevitability (e.g. Evans & Davies, 2015b; Macdonald et al., 2020). Indeed, outsourcing has turned up almost everywhere researchers have looked for it, including in the archives (see citations of Veitch, 1954). Many of the critiques of outsourcing within the literature can be organised according to Serres' parasitic logic. First, there are concerns about the 'analytic' interception itself and the ensuing diversion. Numerous authors have challenged the presence of external providers in school PE when it has diverted time, energy, and resources away from the exchange of official curricular messages between teachers and students (e.g. Dyson et al., 2016). There are also concerns about the 'paralysing' nature of the interruptions caused by these interceptions. Often, these 'paralyses' manifest as tensions and contradictions between participants (e.g. between teachers and external providers, see McCuaig et al., 2020) or as mixed messages (e.g. between external providers and students, see Powell, 2018). Last, there are those concerns raised regarding the changes to PE 'catalysed' by the parasite, principally those arising from the parasite's absorption into everyday practices of PE. Among the changes noted are the replacement of PE teachers by external providers (e.g. Bowles & O'Sullivan, 2020), and re-/devaluations of PE teachers' expertise (Enright et al., 2020; Powell, 2015; Williams & Macdonald, 2015).

'What, then, to do about outsourcing and external providers?' you ask. Please, don't rush. All in good time. Slow down. Enjoy yourself. If you eat too quickly, you'll get indigestion, and we don't want that. Nor would we want you to miss our next dish. Here it comes. It's been a hit lately on social media. Perhaps you've seen it?

Fourth course

> The parasite invents something new. He [*sic*] obtains energy and pays for it in information. (Serres, 2007, p. 36)

Ding, ding!

The tale of the town rat and the country rat is not the only fable Serres uses to develop the character-concept of the parasite. In another such story, Serres describes a poor, starving man loitering outside

a restaurant's kitchen window. As he savours the smell of the food wafting out, the man's hunger is somewhat relieved. A kitchenhand soon discovers him, though, and demands money from him for the smells he has consumed. An argument erupts. Before the disagreement escalates further, a passer-by intervenes, offering to resolve the dispute. Taking a coin from the poor man, the passer-by puts it on the footpath, strikes it with his heel to make it ring, then returns it. His solution is for the poor man and the kitchenhand to exchange the sound of the coin and the smell of the food, a proposal both are willing to accept. With the impasse overcome, all three men go their separate ways.

Through this fable, Serres illustrates how the parasite provokes informational complexity by federating the previously unconnected. As Brown (2013) explains:

> Normally a substance (food) is exchanged with another substance (coin). But here the parasite, the third man, finds a way of crossing this exchange with another. The sound of the coin pays for the smell of the meal. In so doing, … an unexpected channel for communication is opened. (p. 90)

Thus, writes Serres (2007), 'the parasite invents something new, … he [*sic*] builds a new logic' (p. 35) and injects novelty into the system.

One prominent innovation that has recently injected novelty into PE is the use of healthy lifestyle technologies, such as wearable activity trackers and interactive exergames, along with their accompanying digital and material infrastructures. As with outsourcing, the use of such technologies can be understood as creating a triadic relation. In this instance, teachers and students again occupy the stations A and B, while healthy lifestyle technologies play the intercepting role of the parasite. In exchange for the income and data their use generates for their creators, healthy lifestyle technologies are often presented as offering teachers and students a means of reconnecting seemingly dysfunctional or in some way broken pedagogic relations and establishing a new flow of pedagogic communication (Gard, 2014).

There are at least three ways pedagogic relations in PE have been depicted as broken or dysfunctional that are relevant to conceptualising healthy lifestyle technologies as parasitic. An especially dominant one concerns many students' disengagement from the subject and their perceptions of its irrelevance. According to this depiction, healthy lifestyle technologies, particularly in their gamified forms, promise to inject fun into the pedagogic relation and incorporate into PE prominent features of students' lives outside the subject that are seldom included within it (e.g. digital technologies and social media platforms, see Kerner & Goodyear, 2020). A second dominant depiction is that pedagogic relations in PE are failing to encourage young people to be more physically active. Here, the rationale is that healthy lifestyle technologies are highly effective tools for monitoring and motivating movement and for communicating messages that 'may improve young people's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in relation to health and physical exercise' (Papastergiou, 2009, p. 603). A third, more marginal but no less important, depiction pertains to perceived limitations in teachers' capacities. Inserting healthy lifestyle technologies into pedagogic relations in PE, or so this argument goes, permits teachers to delegate to the technologies informational tasks like demonstrating and explaining movements, thereby freeing them for more interactive tasks, like asking questions, providing feedback, and encouraging creativity (see Quennerstedt et al., 2017).

In each of these depictions, healthy lifestyle technologies, like the passer-by in the parable, take a 'normal' exchange and cross it with a 'novel' one. Before the inclusion of activity trackers, exergames, and the like, we had the embodied, co-present exchange of words and movements between teachers and students. After, we have the exchange of embodied words and movements for figures (in the sense of numbers, graphs, and/or avatars) on a digital screen that can track and quantify student bodies faster and further than any flesh and blood teacher can (Goodyear et al., 2019). In the process, channels of pedagogic communication between teachers and students (re)open, adding something new to prevailing practices in PE and generating information to which teachers and students did not previously have access. But does this information satiate?

Just as the outsourcing of PE has been increasing, so too has the use of healthy lifestyle technologies in PE 'grown exponentially in recent years' (Casey et al., 2017, p. 288). And, again, as with outsourcing, critical engagements with the use of healthy lifestyle technologies in PE can be organised according to the logic of analysis, paralysis, and catalysis. First, in terms of analysis, one of the key diversions that has attracted critique is the flow of user data generated by students and teachers through their now technology-mediated relation towards the technologies' creators and the wider parasitic chains in which they are enmeshed (e.g. Gard, 2014; Lupton, 2015; Williamson, 2015). Then, there are critiques of healthy lifestyle technologies' paralysing effects within PE. The positional concept of noise is particularly useful for rendering these concerns into a Serresian register, for as Thompson explains, '*noise is an affect with effects* … insomuch that it works to modulate bodily states' (Thompson, 2012, p. 20, original emphasis). Thus, researchers have perceived the use of exergames in PE as generating noise in the form of narrow, simplistic, and heavily gendered messages about what counts as healthy bodies and behaviours (e.g. Öhman et al., 2014; Vander Schee & Boyles, 2010) and the use of activity trackers in PE as encouraging unhealthy self-monitoring behaviours (e.g. Lupton, 2016). Similarly, students have reported the use of activity trackers in PE as demotivating, guilt-inducing, and as of little educational value (Goodyear et al., 2019; Kerner & Goodyear, 2017). And teachers have described how the competitive aspects of exergame formats can distract students from the educational objectives of the tasks in which they are used (Quennerstedt et al., 2017). Alongside these paralysing perceptions of noise, Wallace et al. (2022), among others, report that many PE teachers find the pedagogic use of such technologies challenging because they believe they do not have the knowledge necessary. Finally, there are accounts of the parasite's catalytic rejection or incorporation into pedagogic relations. Goodyear et al. (2019), for example, report student resistance to activity tracking practices in PE and their associated pedagogic messages, despite initial enthusiasm – a change that indicates a complexification of the pedagogic system. Conversely, Swedish researchers have illustrated the complexifications of teaching methods and subject matter that emerged from the enthusiastic integration of a dance exergame into the relations between one PE teacher and her students (Quennerstedt et al., 2017, see above).

Goodness! You devoured that course so quickly we were worried you might choke. You really must slow down. There's no need to hurry. But we can tell you want to know what we think should be done about healthy lifestyle technologies in PE. And we can tell you want to weigh in on whether the communications they facilitate are heavenly, or whether they stink. To help us with that and to revisit some flavours from our third dish, here is our main course. Et voila!

Fifth course

> The Devil or the Good Lord? Exclusion, inclusion? Thesis or antithesis? The answer is a spectrum, a band, a continuum. (Serres, 2007, p. 57)

Burp!

As promised, it's time for something rich and meaty, something to really sink our teeth into. Because if debate can offer food-for-thought, what specifically should we think about when it comes to outsourcing and healthy lifestyle technologies? Our rationale for inviting Serres to this table and for thinking with his work is that we believe we can use the character-concept of the parasite to productively contribute to debates about whether, when and how teachers *ought* to outsource PE or use healthy lifestyle technologies in their PE lessons.

To use the verb, 'ought,' is to signal moral and ethical concerns. So, what sort of morality, what sort of ethics, underpins Serres' work on the parasite? And how might it productively contribute to debates about the rights and wrongs of outsourcing and healthy lifestyle technologies? In short, a parasitic ethics of the Serresian kind is situational (Burton & Tam, 2016). Should teachers outsource? Should they incorporate healthy lifestyle technologies? Thinking with Serres, we argue, it depends.

But on what then does it depend? In our version of a parasitic ethics, we must mull over at least five things.

First, we must appreciate that there can be no pedagogic communication without parasites. Thus, it's not a question of PE without parasites. Parasitism is everywhere; 'there is no system without parasites' (Serres, 2007, p. 12), so there can be no PE without them either. Many authors have commented on the ubiquity of technology in the lives of contemporary young people and championed or critiqued the incorporation of these technologies into PE classrooms and lessons. Furthermore, noting the prevalence of outsourcing in PE has become a focus for more than a few researchers (e.g. Spittle et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2011). Through the parasite, Serres is teaching us that such 'incursions' are the norm, not the exception, and that pure, faithful, uninterrupted communication between teachers and students ought not be our goal. So, we must rid ourselves of the question of whether 'tis nobler to parasite or not to parasite in general.

Second, having accepted the inevitability of parasitism in PE, Serres teaches us to stop and hesitate when we recognise a parasite and to resist the tendency to immediately see it as inherently bad. Nevertheless, we should not see the parasite as intrinsically good either. In this regard, there is a resonance between Serres' writing and Derrida's:

> The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, … but since *one must* eat in any case, … *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well*? (Derrida, 1995, p. 282, original emphasis).

If, as Serres argues, parasitism is the fundamental human relation, we must reserve our immediate impulses to cast out and expel the parasite in every instance. Hesitation is crucial because it offers time for reflection and deliberation. Outsourcing and healthy lifestyle technologies are neither Beelzebub nor Yahweh. There are a range of different kinds of outsourcing that have been observed and a multitude of different ways healthy lifestyle technologies have been put to work in PE. And many more are at least thinkable. To engage with the particular and the situational in any given instance of outsourcing or healthy lifestyle technology-use should be our goal. This way lies nourishment, in our opinion. But to what particulars and specifics should one attend?

Third, then, as we hesitate and resist our initial impulses, the parasite teaches us to consider those who come last in the parasitic chain. As we think our way through the parasitic logic, we find it hard to stomach instances of outsourcing or healthy lifestyle technology-use where students don't come last, where young people and the future society they should live in are not the ones at the end of the chain, to whom everything ultimately flows. It is not the presence of healthy lifestyle technologies or external providers in PE classes per se that is necessarily problematic, but their position at the end of the parasitic chain, gobbling up all energy and information flowing down the line. To parasite well in pedagogic exchanges is to supplant the position of external providers and technology companies at the end of the cascade. This last place is a position of power, since the one who is placed there 'has the right to eat the others' (Serres, 2007, p. 26). Power, from this perspective, 'depends less on authority than it does upon the invention of technical means to come downstream, to be in last place in a parasitic chain' (Brown, 2013, p. 93). So, when the table is set for PE, when the guests arrive for educational sustenance, we believe it's the young people in our care and their futures in a democratic and socially just society that should sit at the foot of the table and be the last to leave.

Fourth, to parasite well is to consider the distinction between signal and noise from each position in the system: teacher, student, external provider, and healthy lifestyle technology alike. If there can be no PE without parasites, there can be no pedagogy without noise. Indeed, to parasite well is to embrace the pedagogic possibilities of noise and of the unanticipated delight or disgust arising from the appearance of an unexpected dish or diner. After all, one person's noise is another's 'teachable moment,' one person's 'key message' is another's self-serving load of baloney (Powell, 2018), and one person's innovative educational tool is another's loss of educative purpose (Goodyear et al., 2019).

As Sperka and Enright (2018) note, researchers still have much to do on this front when it comes to outsourcing. We still have very little student voice data on this topic. The same goes for healthy

lifestyle technologies, at least when viewed from an educational point of view. However, the point of a parasitic ethics of such practices is not to privilege students' perceptions of signal and noise to the exclusion of all others, nor is it to prioritise what students desire in the here and now. Let's not lose our heads. Our message is not 'let them eat cake!' Rather, it is to weigh students' perceptions and desires in relation to signal–noise perceptions from all other positions, as well as the pedagogic intentions that helped form the parasitic triad in the first place (i.e. the intentions of teacher, student, and parasite). And it is to be open to the possibility that those initial pedagogic intentions can shift and change in educationally worthwhile ways through pedagogic encounters facilitated by all manner of parasites, including healthy lifestyle technologies and external providers.

Last, as we accept the necessity of parasitism to pedagogy and hesitate to consider what it might mean to parasite well in PE, we must also reflect on the role of the parasite in the composition of what we term our many 'PE collectives.' After all, *The Parasite* is ultimately a book about: 'the collective as such. What relations do we really have with each other? How do we live together?' (Serres, 2007, p. 51). Such questions can be interpreted as descriptive and normative, and we argue that both orientations should be attended to in deliberations about the composition of a given PE collective. According to the logic of the parasite, the collective 'is not a preestablished harmony' (Serres, 2007, p. 177). Instead, it is system experiencing constant cycles of redirection (analysis), disturbance (paralysis), and transformation (catalysis) as the parasite insinuates itself into a collective and is subsequently incorporated or cast out (only to inevitably return in a different guise, potentially as a kind of highly resistant superbug). To parasite the words of Watkin (2020), if we start with the assumption that there is no possible place for external providers or healthy lifestyle technologies in our PE collectives, and never can be, we condemn the members of these collectives 'to fight an interminable running battle down the generations' (p. 371).

Serres' alternative to this constant war footing, is a 'paradigm of parasitic symbiosis' (Watkin, 2020, p. 372), the kind of paradigm that signals our proximity this evening's final course:

> Bacteria cannot be exterminated, but they can be used for cheese: milk can be fertilised with this pestilence to create the gods' ambrosia. (Serres, 2007, p. 139)

The task of teachers, students, external providers, healthy lifestyle technologies and their creators, and researchers too, is, in an educational sense, to work at becoming 'a symbiote or the partner in a balanced or equitable exchange'(Serres, translated and quoted in Watkin, 2020, p. 309). Achieving such a state, explains Watkin (2020), 'requires a contract, not of course in the sense of a written agreement but in the sense of a modification of behaviour that promotes symbiotic existence' (p. 309). This signals a new mode of being-together in PE and a new politics. It is not a system in which each looks after their own interests at the expense of others. Decisions to include or exclude should not be made on that zero-sum basis: 'Symbiosis is not a laissez-faire policy of 'live and let live', but an intricate, high-stakes game of diplomacy which must serve the interests of both parties' (Watkin, 2020, p. 375). Sperka's (2020) emphasis on 'strategic bilaterality' provides an initial sketch of what this diplomatic striving towards symbiosis might look like in relation to outsourcing (though trilaterality would be even better!). So too does Rossi and Kirk's (2020) effort to grapple with the messy ambiguities of outsourcing in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden programme. Working with, rather than against, these ambiguities and this mess is, or so we suggest, key to such diplomatic, deliberative work. To be sure, this symbiosis won't be conflict-free. Symbiosis isn't consensus. Instead, it's about PE collectives inventing and reinventing themselves through modest, 'critically mindful' (Tinning, 2020) parasitisms. It's about a dinner party of guests, invited and otherwise, constantly jostling to flatter the host, get a word in edgeways, install themselves next to the food, and perhaps never leave.

Sixth course

> *Para* measures a distance between a reception and, on the contrary, an expansion. (Serres, 2007, p. 144)

Clink, clink!

To celebrate this gathering and help us all absorb this meal, let's have some of that cheese we mentioned before, maybe some cake, too, and a little *digestif* for good measure. Thanks so much for coming tonight. You've been such good sports. It's been a pleasure hosting you. Yet, given you've persisted in reading this far, should we actually be thanking *you* for hosting *us*? Ah! Who is host? Who is guest? As Serres said, it can be hard to tell.

Speaking of telling, at this point in proceedings, it's customary to recapitulate (and hopefully not regurgitate) the evening's highlights. Our rather ambitious goal was to expand your theoretical palate by introducing you to the character-concept of the parasite and then advancing a parasitic ethics of innovations and interruptions in PE. In so doing, we have, as all authors must, practiced parasitism ourselves, combining the words of PE researchers with those of Michel Serres and scholars who have studied his work. Through this mixing, we've exchanged information and energy to create something novel, something that might give us at least a moment of complexifying hesitation when we debate what a worthwhile PE might be, how it might be brought into being, and who we want to collectively become in the process. Recognising there will never be a PE without parasites and that parasitisms can be productive, we have advocated attuning ourselves in a Serresian fashion to what it is to parasite well; that is, to consider who comes last in the parasitic chain, to attend to the signal–noise distinction from each position in the parasitised pedagogic relation, to value the function of the parasite in the transformation of any PE collective, and to appreciate the importance of making situated ethical judgments in cases of PE-related parasitism.

What happens next? It's hard to say. The proof is in the pudding and in what you, dear reader, do with that pudding. It's our gift to you. Parasite it as you see fit. Perhaps you find it nutritious. Maybe you think it's nonsense. We hope it's the former. But, if for you it's the latter, we find the irony delicious that in Greek, *sitos* is not always the food; it 'sometimes means excrement,' too (Serres, 2007, p. 145). And so, on that note, a toast: to the parasite! Cheers! Skål! And santé!

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Ben Williams http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8083-7876
Mikael Quennerstedt http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8748-8843

References

Bowles, R., & O'Sullivan, M. (2020). Opportunity knocks: The intersection between schools, their teachers and external providers of physical education and school sport. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 251–267. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722428

Brown, S. D. (2004). Parasitic logic. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *17*(4), 383–395. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810410545137

Brown, S. D. (2013). In praise of the parasite: The dark organisational theory of Michel Serres. *Informática na Educação: Teoria & Prática*, *16*(1), 83–100. https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-1654.36928

Burton, J., & Tam, D. (2016). Towards a parasitic ethics. *Theory, Culture and Society*, *33*(4), 103–125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415600224

Capel, S., & Blair, R. (2020). Introduction. In S. Capel, & R. Blair (Eds.), *Debates in physical education* (pp. xv–xvii). Routledge.

Casey, A., Goodyear, V. A., & Armour, K. M. (2017). Rethinking the relationship between pedagogy, technology and learning in health and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, *22*(2), 288–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1226792

Casey, A., MacPhail, A., Larsson, H., & Quennerstedt, M. (2021). Between hope and happening: Problematizing the M and the P in models-based practice. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *26*(2), 111–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2020.1789576

Connor, S. (2009). *Michel Serres: The hard and the soft*. Retrieved June 6, 2022, from http://stevenconnor.com/hardsoft/hardsoft.pdf.

Connor, S. (2015, 14 May 2015). *Parables of the para-* Parasites, Cambridge French Graduate Conference, Emmanuel College, Cambridge. http://stevenconnor.com/para.html.

Derrida, J. (1995). "Eating well," or the calculation of the subject. In E. Weber (Ed.), *Points … Interviews, 1974–1994* (pp. 255–287). Stanford University Press.

Dyson, B., Gordon, B., Cowan, J., & McKenzie, A. (2016). External providers and their impact on primary physical education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, *7*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/18377122.2016.1145426

Enright, E., Kirk, D., & Macdonald, D. (2020). Expertise, neoliberal governmentality and the outsourcing of health and physical education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722424

Evans, J., & Davies, B. (2015a). Neoliberal freedoms, privatisation and the future of physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 10–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.918878

Evans, J., & Davies, B. (2015b). Physical education, privatisation and social justice. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.942624

Fitzpatrick, K. (2018). Poetry in motion: In search of the poetic in health and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, *23*(2), 123–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1155149

Gard, M. (2014). eHPE: A history of the future. *Sport, Education and Society*, *19*(6), 827–845. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.938036

Goodson, I. (1993). *School subjects and curriculum change* (3rd ed). The Falmer Press.

Goodyear, V. A., Kerner, C., & Quennerstedt, M. (2019). Young people's uses of wearable healthy lifestyle technologies: Surveillance, self-surveillance and resistance. *Sport, Education and Society*, *24*(3), 212–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1375907

Hogan, A., & Stylianou, M. (2018). School-based sports development and the role of NSOs as 'boundary spanners': Benefits, disbenefits and unintended consequences of the sporting schools policy initiative. *Sport, Education and Society*, *23*(4), 367–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1184638

Kerner, C., & Goodyear, V. A. (2017). The motivational impact of wearable healthy lifestyle technologies: A self-determination perspective on Fitbits With adolescents. *American Journal of Health Education*, *48*(5), 287–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/19325037.2017.1343161

Kerner, C., & Goodyear, V. A. (2020). Technology, pedagogy and physical education. In S. Capel, & R. Blair (Eds.), *Debates in physical education (2nd ed.)* (pp. 295–309). Routledge.

Kirk, D. (2010). *Physical education futures*. Routledge.

Lenz Taguchi, H., & St.Pierre, E. A. (2017). Using concept as method in educational and social science inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *23*(9), 643–648. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417732634

Lupton, D. (2015). Data assemblages, sentient schools and digitised health and physical education (response to Gard). *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 122–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.962496

Lupton, D. (2016). The diverse domains of quantified selves: Self-tracking modes and dataveillance. *Economy and Society*, *45*(1), 101–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2016.1143726

Lynch, S., & Davies, L. (2022). The WonderBread factory: Re-Reading transformative data through poetic eyes as early career researchers, a poetic representation. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, https://doi.org/10.1080/25742981.2022.2080567

Macdonald, D. (2013). The new Australian health and physical education curriculum: A case of/for gradualism in curriculum reform? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, *4*(2), 95–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/18377122.2013.801104

Macdonald, D., Johnson, R., & Lingard, B. (2020). Globalisation, neoliberalisation, and network governance: An international study of outsourcing in health and physical education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 169–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722422

McCuaig, L., Woolcock, L., Stylianou, M., Ng, J. Y. Y., & Ha, A. S. (2020). Prophets, pastors and profiteering: Exploring external providers' enactment of pastoral power in school wellbeing programs. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 223–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722425

Mol, A. (2010). Actor-network theory: Sensitive terms and enduring tensions. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *50*(1), 253–269.

Mol, A. (2021). *Eating in theory*. Duke University Press.

Ní Chróinín, D., Fletcher, T., Jess, M., & Corr, M. (2020). A major review of stakeholder perspectives on the purposes of primary physical education. *European Physical Education Review*, *26*(2), 322–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X19856381

Öhman, M., Almqvist, J., Meckbach, J., & Quennerstedt, M. (2014). Competing for ideal bodies: A study of exergames used as teaching aids in schools. *Critical Public Health*, *24*(2), 196–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2013.872771

Papastergiou, M. (2009). Exploring the potential of computer and video games for health and physical education: A literature review. *Computers and Education*, *53*(3), 603–622. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2009.04.001

Paulson, W. (1997). Writing that matters. *SubStance*, *26*(2), 22–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/3684694

Powell, D. (2015). Assembling the privatisation of physical education and the 'inexpert' teacher. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 73–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.941796

Powell, D. (2018). Governing the (un)healthy child-consumer in the age of the childhood obesity crisis. *Sport, Education and Society*, *23*(4), 297–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1192530

Quennerstedt, M., Gibbs, B., Almqvist, J., Nilsson, J., & Winther, H. (2017). Béatrice: Dance video games as a resource for teaching dance. In A. Casey, V. A. Goodyear, & K. M. Armour (Eds.), *Digital technologies and learning in physical education: Pedagogical cases* (pp. 69–85). Routledge.

Rossi, T., & Kirk, D. (2020). The pedagogisation of health knowledge and outsourcing of curriculum development: The case of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden initiative. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 281–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722430

Serres, M. (2007). *The parasite* (L. R. Schehr, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Sperka, L. (2020). (Re)defining outsourcing in education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *41*(2), 268–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1722429

Sperka, L., & Enright, E. (2018). The outsourcing of health and physical education: A scoping review. *European Physical Education Review*, *24*(3), 349–371. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X17699430

Sperka, L., Enright, E., & McCuaig, L. (2018). Brokering and bridging knowledge in health and physical education: A critical discourse analysis of one external provider's curriculum. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *23*(3), 328–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2017.1406465

Spittle, S., Spittle, M., & Itoh, S. (2022). Outsourcing physical education in schools: What and why do schools outsource to external providers? *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, *4*, 1–20. Article 854617. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2022.854617

Stylianou, M., Hogan, A., & Enright, E. (2019). Youth sport policy: The enactment and possibilities of 'soft policy' in schools. *Sport, Education and Society*, *24*(2), 182–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1339685

Thompson, M. (2012). Productive parasites: Thinking of noise as affect. *Cultural Studies Review*, *18*(3), 13–35. https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v18i3.2860

Thorburn, M., & Gray, S. (2021). Potentialities in health and physical education: Professional boundaries and change agendas. *The Curriculum Journal*, *32*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.96

Tinning, R. (2020). Troubled thoughts on critical pedagogy for PETE. *Sport, Education and Society*, *25*(9), 978–989. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1679105

Vander Schee, C. J., & Boyles, D. (2010). 'Exergaming,' corporate interests and the crisis discourse of childhood obesity. *Sport, Education and Society*, *15*(2), 169–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573321003683828

Veitch, M. (1954). The organisation of winter sport in an Australian junior technical school. *Physical Education Journal*, *2*, 16–19.

Wallace, J., Scanlon, D., & Calderón, A. (2022). Digital technology and teacher digital competency in physical education: A holistic view of teacher and student perspectives. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/25742981.2022.2106881

Watkin, C. (2020). *Michel Serres: Figures of thought*. Edinburgh University Press.

Webb, D. (2020). Michel Serres on virtue. In R. Clausjürgens, & K. Röttgers (Eds.), *Michel Serres: Das vielfältige Denken* (pp. 103–115). Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Williams, B., Hay, P., & Macdonald, D. (2011). The outsourcing of health, sport and physical educational work: A state of play. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *16*(4), 399–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2011.582492

Williams, B., & Macdonald, D. (2015). Explaining outsourcing in health, sport and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 57–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.914902

Williamson, B. (2015). Algorithmic skin: Health-tracking technologies, personal analytics and the biopedagogies of digitized health and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, *20*(1), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.962494