

Editorial: Special Issue Sport, Ethics and Philosophy: 'Sport and Psychoanalysis'

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Editorial: Special Issue Sport, Ethics and Philosophy: ‘Sport and Psychoanalysis’

‘Cause of a Lust for Life

I got a Lust for Life

Got a Lust for Life

Oh, a Lust for Life’

Iggy Pop, 1977

Why this Special Issue on Sport & Psychoanalysis, a still relatively little explored approach in contemporary sport science? ‘Cause of a Lust for Life’. Most disciplines in the realm of sport science, such as kinesiology, sport medicine, sport psychology, social sciences and the body of knowledge on Sport Law and Governance, are ruled by a cognitive and positivistic epistemic paradigm. Psychoanalysis is the exact opposite of all this. It addresses our ‘Lust for Life’; the structurally oppressed, intrinsic, libidinous, and wasting qualities of human constructs like politics, science, art, play and sport. Really, sticking to a merely rationalist scientific paradigm is quite challenging in a bodily, ludic and passionate practice as modern sports. This Special Issue aims to explore the potential of a psychoanalytic approach in sport philosophy and—ethics, by presenting a diverse conceptual framework.

Let’s start our journey with a double confession. Up until today, I keep two books under my pillow: the Dutch cycling classic ‘The cyclist’ (Krabbé 1978), and ‘What I talk about when I talk about running’ (Murakami 2007). I need their mesmerizing words, their irony and melancholy to hold on. As a competing athlete, to inspire and fuel my quest for performing. Later in life, to counterpart the many difficulties in policymaking and executive management in sports’ institutions, to keep my ‘Lust for Life’. And even nowadays, I sometimes reread certain passages in both books, merely to hold on while doing embedded, subversive sport philosophical research in sport. Above all that, I even have Iggy Pop’s ‘Lust for Life’ as a ringtone, as an everyday reminder. Honestly, who doesn’t have these guilty secrets in life?

There are many of us who can almost spell the words and language in iconic philosophical books on game-playing, like ‘Homo Ludens’ (Huizinga 1938) and ‘The Grasshopper’ (Suits 1978). Those books are considered to be the unspoken cornerstones, marking the borders of the sport philosophical landscape. We also love sociological or historic books on sport, for instance ‘Those Feet’ (Winner 2005), ‘The Soccer Tribe’ (Morris 1981), ‘Sport in Capitalist Society’ (Collins 2013), Elias and Dunning’s ‘Quest for Excitement’ (Elias and Dunning 1986), or Giulianotti’s ‘Football; a sociology of the global game’ (Giulianotti 1999). Most intriguing are the popular books we keep under our pillows, as these are our favorites. How about the evergreen ‘Tom Brown’s School Days’ (Hughes 1857), Michael Lewis’ ‘Moneyball’ (Lewis 2003), or Zlatan’s autobiography ‘I am Zlatan’

(Ibrahimovic 2013)? A psychoanalytical analysis might shed a different light on these peculiar habits.

In fact, these narratives all together carry our body of knowledge, both explicitly as unconsciously. The archetypal words, myths and images these books contain, mark the accepted, validated discourse and the preferred elements that define modern sports. But if we share the sense of urgency that sport is in crisis, facing many correlated distortions and challenges, a reconsideration of the language and words that define the (in)appropriate, could be worthwhile. Surprisingly, this very thesis contains a psychoanalytic diagnosis: scientific discourse arises from affirming what is considered 'real' and 'appropriate', at the same time cutting off what is seen as 'myth' and 'inappropriate'. Typically, the French philosopher of science Bachelard (1884–1962), inspired by Freud (1856–1939) and Jung (1875–1961), the two architects of psychoanalytical thought, defines science as such: in order to be accepted as the validated path towards knowledge and truth, scientists need to let go of their original fascinations, their entanglement to the topics of research they are dedicated to (Bachelard 1971). Even philosophy might be considered as a way to domesticate intriguing, yet unknown phenomena, like modern sports. The attachment to pre-scientific images will turn into an 'epistemological obstacle', a no-go area for those who represent the dominant discourse in a certain field of knowledge. And yet; do the popular books under our pillows, the ones we cannot do without, precisely not represent this unaccepted, still somehow decisive part of our body of knowledge? Unthought and inappropriate, yet still immanent. What if we were able to recapture this 'Lust for Life' in sport's ethical core?

This is just one of the possible pathways to explore the hidden potential of the field of sport philosophy and ethics, when following a psychoanalytic approach. The aim of this Special Issue is to open up to the opportunities a psychoanalytic analysis offers. We did not pretend to be exhaustive, merely curious and explorative, as there are many different roots and schools in the field of psychoanalysis. But before we present an overview of psychoanalytic thought in general, let's take into account the objections psychoanalysis had to face over the years. After all, psychoanalysis as a scientific method is by no means uncontroversial. Illustrative of this criticism is 'Le Livre Noir de Psychanalyse' (The Black Book on Psychoanalysis), a collection of fundamental objections to the Freudian roots of psychoanalysis, from various fields of study (Meyer 2005). Naturally, this critical issue was followed by another rejoinder from the field of psychoanalysis itself: 'L'Anti-Livre Noir de la Psychanalyse' (The Anti Black Book on Psychoanalysis) appeared (Miller 2006). Those who do not wish to accept the psychoanalytic premise of the unconscious, seem to stick persistently to the existence of a single, factual truth. One could also argue that the ongoing debate about the scientific value of psychoanalysis, precisely confirms its vitality and significance in the here and now.

So what does this controversial approach essentially say? Psychoanalysis states that 'reality' is only accessible through the impasses of subjective imagination. As such, this paradigm of knowledge differs significantly from the accepted positivistic scientific paradigm, starting from the 'facts'. And yet, the peculiarity of psychoanalysis as a young scientific discipline was its self-reflexive capacity. Psychoanalysis has always also been aware of its own 'subjective' content; of the fact that its views and axioms also came from imagination. Even at its introduction, the Freudian notion of 'the unconscious' encountered fierce opposition, not only within medicine and psychology, but also within

continental philosophy. The dominant naturalistic view in philosophy in the early twentieth century, that anything beyond consciousness and inexplicable (such as *hysteria*) must have an organic cause, is totally at odds with the Freudian view that our psyche may be largely unconscious. The emergence of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice belongs emphatically to the twentieth century, with its numerous disruptive technological developments, accompanied by two world wars and rising international tensions. From a philosophical point of view, psychoanalytic concepts can be used to clarify philosophical issues. And that is precisely where this Special Issue also grapples, with the *philosophical* value of psychoanalysis.

But what then is this philosophical value? First, that the human concept implied by psychoanalysis rests on specific ontological roots, as it presupposes a discontinuity between man-as- subject versus the world as matter to be symbolized. Furthermore, thanks to psychoanalysis, we have become aware that an undetermined part of our actions might originate from an unconscious part of our psyche. This unconscious is not reducible to (a physical part of) the brain but covers our whole being. Although the truth about myself is contained somewhere within me, it remains out of reach, so to speak, even for me. The truth about myself is determined (at a minimum also) by my unconscious. A disturbing thesis, as it implies that I, as a thinking and acting human being, in the end do not form a logically structured unity. In other words, psychoanalysis has made us realize that as a 'subject' – as we know an ambiguous term since Kant—human beings are internally split. To put it differently: my 'Lust for Life' is somewhere present in my psyche, despite education and discipline, but I'm not able to control when this urge will manifest itself. This provocative insight, which ignores the cartesian separation of subject and object, is why psychoanalysis stands alone in the realm of the human sciences. Typically, psychoanalysis is reviled because it brings this intriguing and uncomfortable truth. Yet how did this all started?

At the risk of being gratuitous and superficial, we now share a short genealogy of psychoanalysis, for those who are not deeply familiar with it. At the same time, this genealogy will render a taxonomy to assess the following articles. Of course, our wrap up starts with Sigmund Freud as the undisputed founder of psychoanalysis, with many successors, children, and grandchildren. During his education and practice as a medical doctor and neurologist, Freud developed an experimental therapeutical method for those who suffer from 'hysteria', neuroses, and other mental pathologies. Freud found out that merely speaking out, talking freely and without interruption about what these patients experience, fear, and desire, and by which childhood secrets and parental prohibitions they are driven, in itself is a healing relief, discharging their frozen tensions. Despite fierce criticism, Freudian concepts like the unconscious, the Oedipal triangle, the reciprocity between Id—Ego - Super Ego, transference, sublimation, and Eros & Thanatos as the two driving cultural forces, have become world famous, even outside psychology. Eventually, some of Freud's colleagues and first pupils, like Alfred Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, Melanie Klein and Wilhelm Reich, often after several openly exposed fights, left Freud's inner circle and started their own research and practices. In this first generation, Freud's daughter Anna and Melanie Klein became famous female psychoanalysts. Melanie Klein ended up in the UK. The Kleinian influences are still present in nowadays child play therapy. The Reich branch reached deep into the United States, inspiring an entire generation to apply

psychoanalytical concepts in the social sciences and humanities, yet without a proper psychoanalytical education. Amongst those are Eric Berne and Norman O. Brown, unexpectedly shaping Bernard Suits' utopian philosophy of games in *The Grasshopper* (López Frías 2021).

In France, a second generation, inspired by the controversial psychiatrist Lacan (1901–1981), evolved Freudian psychoanalysis into a critical continental philosophical approach, also known as 'structuralism'. Lacan actualizes Freud's thought in a very particular way, introducing and correlating the *imaginary* dimension of images (ethology) and the *symbolizing* potential of language (linguistics). As he states, we need to enter the symbolic order (using the words we are taught as a child) to overcome an intermediated life, trying to embrace reality, yet being ruled by primal instincts, visual stimuli and mere images. According to Lacan, the unconscious contains the engine of our desire: that is existential lack, the unfulfilled, that which cannot be addressed within an adapted form of life. Lacanism is founded on translating repression into lack and desire, determining our behavior and all symbolizing practices mankind inhabits: science, society, religion, art and—not to forget—games and sport. This argument implicates the *structural* dimension, which Lacan adds to the problem of prohibition in Freudian psychoanalysis. His psychoanalytic thought resonates the structuralism presented by contemporary linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, and anthropologists like Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Contemporary French intellectuals are—amongst others—George Bataille, Luce Irigaray, Roland Barthes, and Louis Althusser.

The other French philosophical maestro in these years, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, was attacked by Lacan for not being able (and willing) to acknowledge the mere existence of an unconscious a-priori, driving bodily experience. There is no perception but a shattered, vanishing subject, linked to an unreachable 'signifier' (object of desire), Lacan would say. The epistemological differences between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Lacanian thought will stay unbridgeable. Even though Lacan's In Memoriam after the passing of Merleau-Ponty refers to his turn towards the 'invisible', as it shows '... that Maurice Merleau-Ponty moves forward here to a field different from that of perception' (Lacan 1961).

Amongst Lacan's pupils are many famous French psychoanalysts, for instance Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva and Jacques-Alain Miller. One might even state that the complete Post-War generation of French philosophers are deeply indebted to Lacanian thought. Even Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, certainly not Lacan-followers, related their critical 'post-structural' approach more or less openly to Lacanian psychoanalytic thought. The most famous manifestation is 'Anti-Oedipus', the first of two related publications on capitalism by Deleuze and Guattari, in which they fiercely reject the structural, unfulfillable lack as the Lacanian *major* of human desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1972). They stress that the supposition that desire equals lack imprisons all of us in our Oedipal tragedy (fictional or otherwise) and as such sabotages the creative, productive *Deleuzian* concept of desire.

To summarize for now, in applying psychoanalytic concepts into sport philosophy and ethics, we should carefully distinguish between a 'traditional' Freudian German/Anglo Saxion school, and an antithetical 'structuralist' Lacanian French school. All articles in this Special Issue refer to either the first or the latter root. What do they unveil? In general, that

psychoanalytic thought represents a secret but no less influential discourse on the roots of modern sport; a discourse that focuses on the libidinous origins of sport. An impossible turn within the formal field-of-knowledge about sport.

For sure, there have been several earlier attempts to unlock the potentiality of psychoanalytic thought for sport in general, more in particular for kinesiology and physical education. During the ‘post-lacanian’ decades in France, Marie- Hélène Brousse and Françoise Labridy edited ‘Sport, Psychanalyse et Science’ (Brousse and Labridy 1997), a collection of psychoanalytic insights about sport as a bodily practice and optional applications into sport science. In 2014, ‘Hors-Corps. Actes sportifs et logique de l’inconscient’ (Trans-bodied. Sporting activities and the logic of the unconsciousness) was published (Labridy 2014). This book conceptualizes the influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the newly developed mixed method in French sport science: ‘Sciences et Techniques des Activités Physiques et Sportives’ (Scientific and technological approaches in Physical and Sporting Activities). Both publications address the repressed and excluded, yet vital aspects of bodily practices, aiming to debunk and revitalize the cartesian discourse on sport. As both books were written in French, they did not reach an international audience.

In a parallel world, Yunus Tuncel continues to elaborate his Nietzschean thought on play and sports. Several crossovers with Freudian psychoanalysis can be found in his work on sport and emotions (Tuncel 2019). We might also refer to a Butlerian thread in the sport philosophical debate on gender dysphoria. Feminist theorist Judith Butler applied psychoanalytic thought to critically debunk a dominantly masculine regime, producing the so-called heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). It seems we’re only at the dawn of a transformative era, fostering a new generation of sport philosophers, transferring psychoanalytic concepts into a fascinating and synthetic sport ethical paradigm.

To conclude, this Special Issue aims to build a bridge between all these earlier attempts and current discontinuities in modern sports, more in particular the position of sport philosophy and ethics as their clinical partners. Last but not least, following a psychoanalytic track is in line with the more popular view that sport would actually be the sublimation of our repressed vitalist drives, of our libido or ‘surplus’. In fact, by insiders, players and coaches, be it on the pitch, in the locker room, or at the bar, the sporting discourse is first and foremost sexualized. ‘Of course it’s all about sex...’ they smile enigmatically, inviting you into an invisible alliance. The popular conception of sport as a sublimation of sexual urges is commonplace in sport itself, although no one flaunts it. It remains a secret. Isn’t it time to break open this ‘omerta’?

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