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Philosophy

# Technology in Sport: A Serresian Perspective

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**michel serres**  
**œuvres complètes**

cahiers  
de formation

inédit

Le Pommier

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## Philosophy within Sports

- Member of Ethics Committees in Cycling (Dutch Cycling Union) and Dancing (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)
- Ethics in sport associations: integrity management, normative ethics, expelling the devil
- Technological evolution demands (juridical) regulation, not affecting 'pure' sport itself
- Ethics: Human-Centered, Instrumental and Harmless to Current Institutions
- Can Philosophy of Technology offer a different approach to Ethics in Sports?



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# French Philosophy of Science (Simons, 2022)



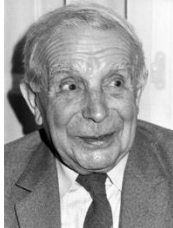
Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962)



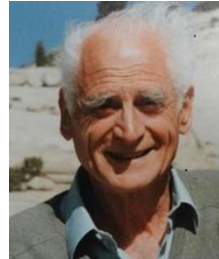
Michel Foucault (1926-1984)



Isabelle Stengers (1949)



Georges Canguilhem (1904-1995)



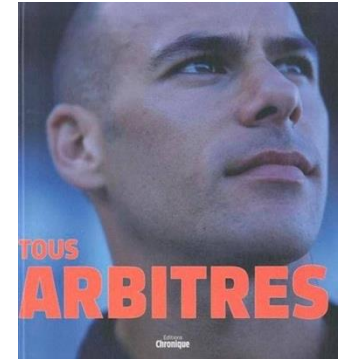
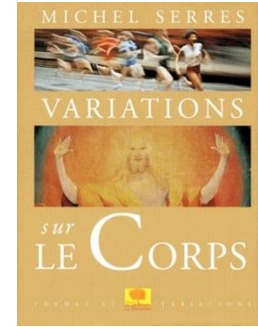
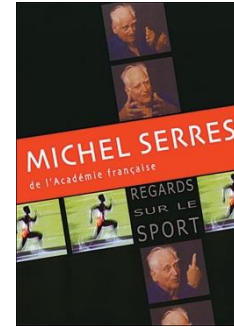
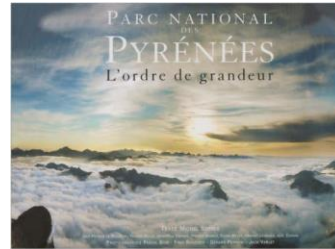
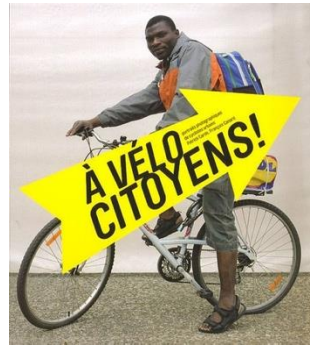
Michel Serres (1930-2019)



Bruno Latour (1947-2022)

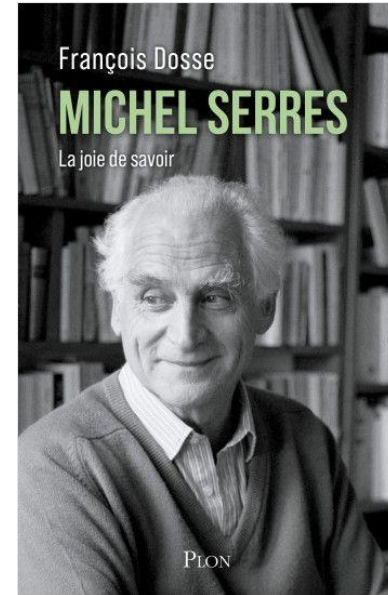
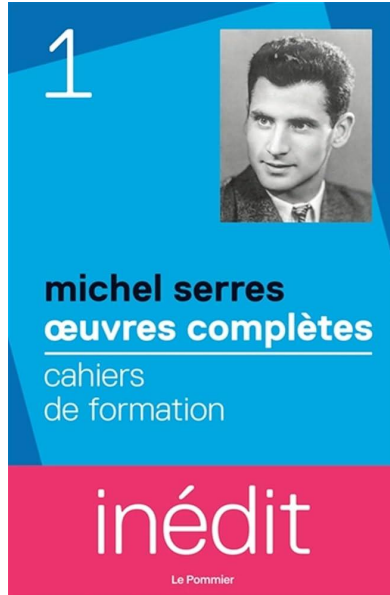
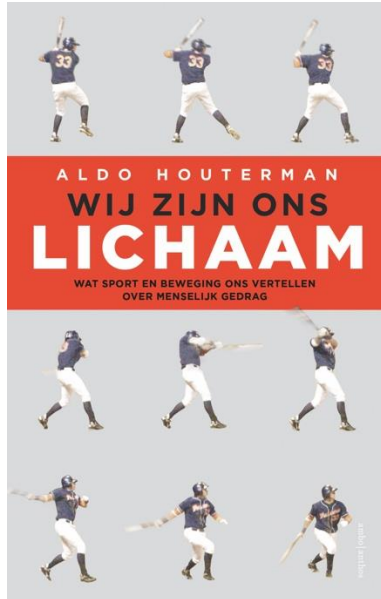
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“I've always felt that when it comes to intuition, invention and adaptation, the body is most often at the forefront.” (Serres 2010)



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# Serres as a Philosopher of Sport (Houterman 2019; Serres 2022; Dosse 2024)



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## A Philosophy of Technology via Sports (Serres 1960 (2022))

“Where the tool and the model turn towards the world, for my action or contemplation, the object of the game is turned towards me and my training.” (32)

“The more abstract the object, the more interesting it is to us: sport is linked to technology, in that a ball is a useless artifactum.” (Id.)



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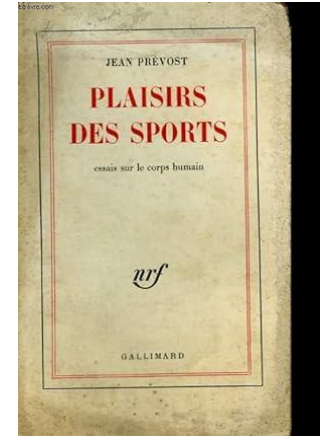
# An Independent Philosophy of Sport (Serres 1962 (2022))

- Serres disagrees with Prévost (1925): Sport is solitary, aristocratic, serves a moral, introspective
- Serres agrees with Prévost (1925): Sport involves an original perception of the body, differing from arts or erotics

A non-classical, independent philosophy of sport involves:

1. A notion of the double operation of *Technics*: “Sport is in essence technics: it is technicized (*technicisé*) and technicizing (*technisant*): it technicizes the body and nature.” (554)
  - a) Replacement of nature by technical objects (ball, stadium, camera)
  - b) Adaptation of the body to technical objects (training, selection, nutrition)
2. A notion of *Collectivization*: sport invents micro-societies (teams, clubs, crowds, associations)

**Hypothesis: solitary athlete (subject) is dependent on a more primary relation between technical objects and collectives**



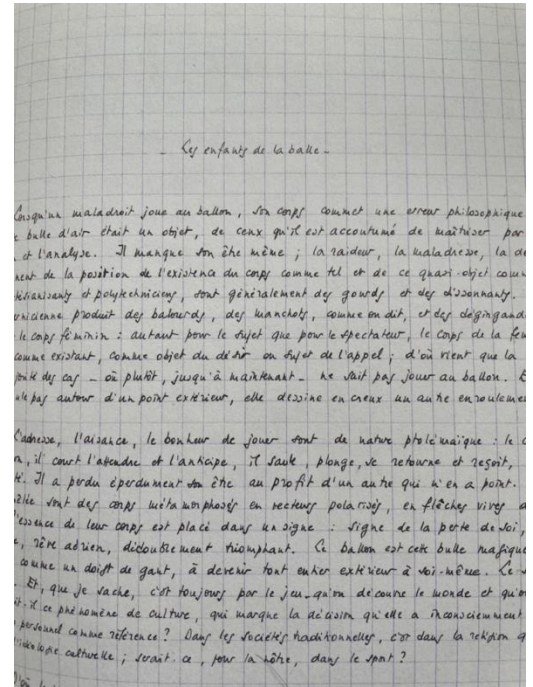
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# Children of the ball (Serres 1966 (2022))

“The whole body revolves around the ball, it runs to wait for it and anticipates it, it jumps, dives, turns around and receives it, accompanies it, it is haunted by it.” (1041)

“This goalkeeper, this scrum-half are bodies metamorphosed into polarized vectors, into sharp arrows whose pole is outside of them.” (Id.)

“Could sport be this phenomenon of culture, which marks the decision it unconsciously made to no longer have the personal cogito as a reference?” (Id.)

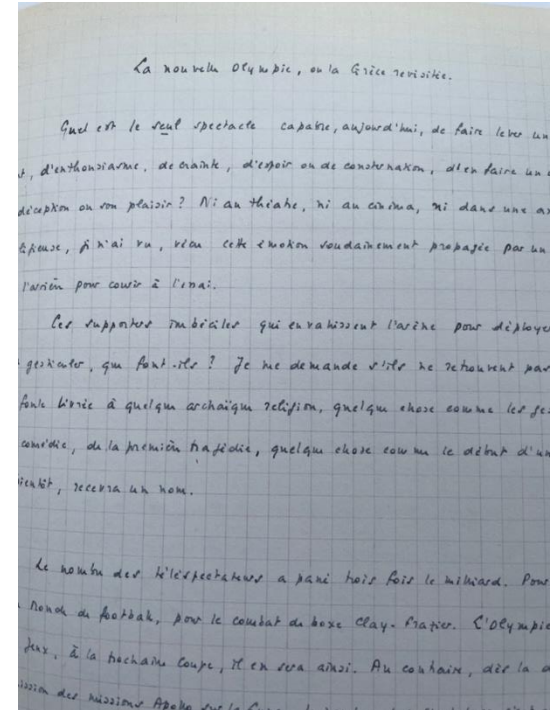


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# The novel Olympics, or revisited Greece (Serres 1971 (2022))

- “Neither at the theater, nor in the cinema, nor in a political or religious assembly, have I seen, experienced this emotion suddenly propagated by a three-quarter wing passing the back to run at the try.” (1486)
- “Bringing time and destiny back into play: the sacred, the return.” (1487)
- “Can we conceive of a more monumental slap in the face at those in power?” (1487)



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# Contemporary Technological Advances in Elite Sport

(*Journal of Applied Physiology* 137, 2024)



High-performance suits



Advanced Footwear Technology



Personalized Nutrition

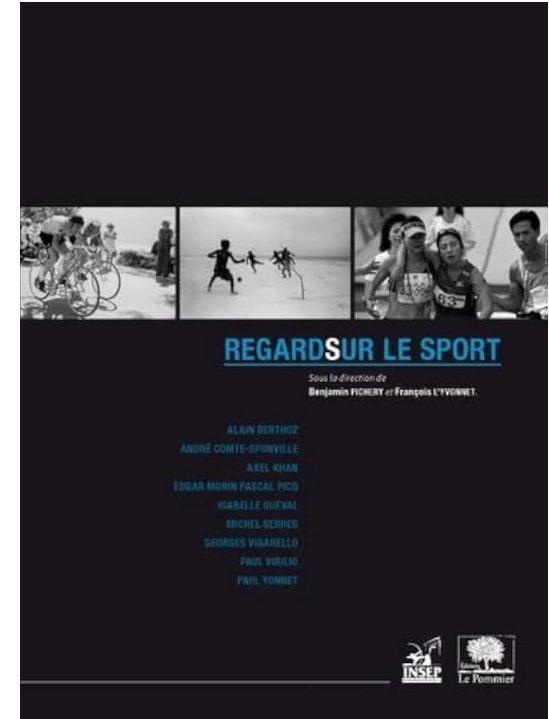


Pacing Technology

*Ezafun*

## Serres on Technological Development in Sport (2010)

- “Organic functions that have become external or externalized return to the body in the form of prostheses, bones, limbs, joints or organs. Man-made objects can **return to mimic the original organ**, such as a heart. [...] This doesn't scare me, insofar as humanity's or society's reaction to the flood of technical objects is to **go back to hiking, back to nature**. I believe that this year, more hiking boots were sold than any other sporting or commercial object. There's a kind of **rebalancing** going on, which I think will always happen.” (22)
- “There are two kinds of sport [...], **spectacle sport**, the kind you practice in stadiums after paying an entrance fee; and the kind you and I practice as mountaineers, walkers or joggers, for health, hygiene, maintenance and the dignity of our own bodies.” (33)



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# Loop of Technologies in Sport

	Prévost	Serres 1960-70s	Later Serres (1985, 1999, 2001, 2020)
Main dynamics	Human - Nature	Collective – Technology	Global Intuition (Rebalancing body-world)
	Aristocratic, solitary	Collective: Crowd, Club, Team, Peloton	Connective: Bifurcation from the collective
Technology	Techniques of the body: Running, throwing, boxing	Ball, Pole Vault, Yard Lines, Stadium, Camera	Biomimetic, Personalized, Precision Technology
	Local body (Concrete)	Quasi-object (Abstract)	World-body: Health, Maintenance, Dignity



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# Thank you!

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