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Abstract

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Hockey video games highlight the ways in which the video game medium shapes and conditions the experience of producing and/or performing the sport "in real life." Indeed, the accumulation of advanced statistics in and through the constant evaluation, measurement, and surveillance which are inherent to video games—and increasingly seen as foundational for sport—reveals important contradictions not only in the way the embodied sport is played and understood, but also in terms of the proofs of masculinity upon which the sport is built. It then becomes clear that the building of masculinity and the empowerment of the character become one and the same. The ludic function reinforces the cultural imperative and vice versa. Thus, our chapter prizes apart the conflation of masculinity with hockey while showing the ways that video game studies can contribute to existing disciplines.

Keywords

FMasculinity

AQ1

Digital games
Sport
Hockey
Ludicity

At first glance, Eric Nystrom's end of practice, impromptu version of Ned Braden's legendary striptease from the movie *Slapshot,* seems like a playful moment among friends and fans alike. It is a shared joke, insofar as the popularity of *Slapshot* among fans and players remains unquestioned. The film, starring Paul Newman as Reg Dunlop, the coach of a struggling team that turns to "goon hockey" to revive itself, recently received a celebration of the fortieth anniversary of its release during the National Hockey League's signature All-Star weekend, and it remains widely recognized as one of the very best sports films of the last half-century (McDonald 2017). However, as Ouellette (2008) argues, the original striptease comes as a protest against the brawling style, and in this regard, Nystrom's gesture becomes even more significant, and not just because it was also an effort to raise funds for a charitable cause (Cruickshank 2008).

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The movie version features the reversal or parody of the epic warrior's preparation for battle.[1] Braden removes all of his armor as part of his refusal to fight: his protest against the excess of hypermasculine violence. For

Nystrom's part, he is performing a parody *of* a parody within his own biting satire; his performance constitutes a *contra*-masculine gesture so gratuitous it has the opposite effect: Nystrom's masculinity is untouchable. It will never be questioned: He is a tough hockey player and a willing fighter. He is also the son of Bob Nystrom, a Stanley Cup winning hero and a legendarily hardy hockey player. At the time, the younger Nystrom was a member of the National Hockey League's Calgary Flames, an organization known for its historic brawls with the rival Edmonton Oilers—the so-called Battle of Alberta—particularly during the Wayne Gretzky era, when the Oilers were more known for finesse and scoring than for physicality. Indeed, the final scene of *Slapshot* occurs after Dunlop eschews the brawling style for the championship game. As a younger, college-educated player, Braden had protested the fighting throughout the season, providing one of the central conflicts of the movie. However, once informed of the presence of dozens of scouts, Dunlop and the Chiefs return to their brawling ways. The spectacle of a gigantic brawl prompts and forms the backdrop for Braden's performance, highlighting the multiple and contradictory trajectories of masculinity within the game, the sport, and the film.

Yet these are not the only contradictions, for Nystrom's performance highlights the ways in which one media shapes and conditions the experience of producing and/or performing within another. This is most obvious given the contrasts between and among his role in the game, the charitable cause that occasioned his performance, and the inspiration for the film's original. Moreover, the playfulness is shared via social media; indeed, it seems produced with this level of surveillance in mind: a panoptical performance that operates both intertextually (assuming audience recording; knowledge of *Slapshot*) and intratextually, without acknowledging the contradictions within hockey's well-documented hypermasculine environment (~~Allain 2012; Robidoux 2001~~)Allain 2012; Robidoux 2001; Silverwood 2015).

Ironically, hockey has been the sport most resistant to the impact of "new media" and the data-driven surveillance they bring to the game. From the glowing Fox puck to the growing list of statistics being collected to the advanced statistical tools like the (controversial) Corsi score, we would argue that video games are changing the way sports, like hockey, soccer, and so on, are played, consumed, and experienced.[2] They do so not only through the generation of statistics but—more importantly—through the threat posed to hegemonic masculinity by exposing its constructedness as performance, undermining any rhetorical claim to a basis in nature. Quite simply, then, *gender is performed in and through one's body*.

Therefore, we should acknowledge that how one performs masculinity is historically bound up with rituals and techniques targeted towards a male body. Noted Canadian sport sociologist Kristi Allain, whose work focuses on gender in winter sports, finds that the literature and the language about hockey shows that "the bodies of boys and men are not to express beauty and grace, nor are they to be examined" (2012, 364). Scrutiny calls into the question the immanence and the inevitability of masculine performance. As renowned French philosopher of sport Jean-Marie Brohm (1989) ruminates, the type of masculinity expressed through sport is also conducive to late capitalism because sport develops

a standardised image of the body, regulating the way the adolescent relates to his or her own body and seeking to establish the ideology of the body as a sort of automated machine. As a "character school," sport creates authoritarian, aggressive, narcissistic and obedient character types, preparing young people for integration into society and training them to operate as alienated machines on the capitalist market. (1989, 180, italics in original)

In a postindustrial, knowledge economy operating under the aegis of the database, what could be more appropriate to "establishing the ideology of the body as a sort of automated machine" than the essential automated machine of our time, the computer? When the latent relationship between sport and technology becomes manifest, and the athlete becomes cyborg, what happens to our notion of masculinity? How is it challenged, negotiated, and (re)presented? Using Steven Conway's (2010, 2012) threefold typology of hyper-, contra-, and hypo-ludicity, we unpack the paradox of a masculinity discursively situated as both natural and technological—a negotiated understanding of not masculinity but *masculinities* that resists reduction.

Ludus Body

The need to dictate compliant subjectivities for social integration is a central concern of Michel Foucault's. For Foucault there is no such thing as masculinity, simply *masculinities*, that is, a technique/technology for generating a persona conducive to social stability and reproduction. Not surprisingly, then, Gerald Voorhees offers:

[o]nly in sport is the sustained, practical mastery of one's body essential to not only play but play well in a manner that enables winning. Energy must be conserved, muscles expended and relaxed to preserve continued performance, and maximum effect achieved through the exertion of the least requisite force. Despite the appearance of physical excess, the body is restrained, its performance an exemplar of instrumental rationality. (Voorhees 2015, 78)[3]

As Brohm noted above (1989), modern sport is immanently oppressive, demanding acquiescence to a specific enactment of the body: proportion, motility, voice, language, dress, and so on. In enactment, the "player" subjectivity forces one's entire identity to be projected through the narrow prism of "sprinter," "wrestler," "footballer," and so on: the fluidity of identity, so obvious in the paidic mode of play, is made static through the instrumentalization of the ludic (Caillois 2001). Meanwhile autotelic, open, improvised play, or *paideia*, with its qualities of imagination, exploration, and whim have been historically demonized or infantilized as a waste of time: unserious, unproductive for the child (or implicitly, girls). Such play destabilizes the meaning of the phenomenological world; for example, the world of ice hockey, a discursive formation so tightly regulated that any paidic
Paideia
moment, such as Nystrom's striptease, begs the immediate question from the audience: why is he doing that? Luckily for Nystrom, his performance was clearly signified as operating within the bounds of ice hockey culture, as a loving tribute to a well-known film on the sport; therefore, any disciplinary action would have been viewed very dimly by the hockey community.

Ludic Technique

In fact, the dance Nystrom does has become so familiar through the ritual of watching *Slapshot* among hockey players, which has an iconic status among hockey players, but also because of the ritual of (re)enacting the performance by hockey players (Boyle 2014) . Watching the video on social media platforms like *YouTube* and *Twitter* also becomes part of the ritual. As Conway writes (2012), one of the key aspects of video games is their imbrication with ritual and the effects, in work, in effort, of perfecting operations in and through the ritualized play and performance.

The three fold typology Conway develops (2010, 2012)—hyper-ludicity, contra-ludicity, and hypo-ludicity— affords a means of studying both digital games and masculinity, for the ludic processes map onto the development and the construction of masculinity, as Ouellette and Thompson (2017) argue in studying the tenuous merger of masculinity and technology afforded by digital games in the post-9/11 period. According to Conway (2010, 2012), hyper-ludicity is where some actant or actants, within the diverse network that come together as "game," provide for the user supreme agency over the gamestate. For example, broadband can be hyper-ludic if others are on slower, dial-up modems: high-resolution and refresh rate monitors if playing a first-person shooter; traditional "power-ups" such as Mario's mushrooms or Pac-Man's power pellet; advanced knowledges and bodily skills may also enable hyper-ludicity, as evidenced by a Chess Grandmaster, or Zlatan Ibrahimovic's control of the ball playing soccer.

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Contra-ludicity occurs when an actant (or actants) within the game network refuse, push back against, and overall impede the player. Lag in a real-time multiplayer game is contra-ludic; and includes bugs and glitches (which might also be hyper-ludic in the right scenario); "power-downs" in-game such as diseases, faulty items and hostile spells; enemy characters and AI; inadequate knowledges and bodily skills.

AQ5

Finally, hypo-ludicity is the absence of play for the user: somewhere within the network of play, an actant is outright refusing the player's engagement. ~~Computer crashes are hypo-ludic; electricity outages; heavy rain during Tennis or a rigged game of cards~~. Computer crashes are hypo-ludic as are electricity outages, heavy rain during tennis matches or grands prix races, and a rigged game of cards. Simply put, hypo-ludicity often occurs when the rubber band of hyper- or contra-ludicity stretches too far and snaps. As a player pays money to automatically pass a difficult level within a mobile game, this hyper-ludicity becomes hypo; similarly, hacks and cheats used in a multiplayer situation can prove so resistant (contra-ludic) to other users' engagement that they transcend contra into hypo-ludic features.

AQ6

Here, the enhancement of play coincides precisely with the enhancement of masculinity. However, it is the grind of contra-ludicity and hypo-ludicity that contribute the most to the project—of this paper, of the digital games, and of masculinity—through the "gamework" (Ruggill et al. 2004) that goes into producing, performing, and proving masculinity. While the work of the game can be acknowledged and appreciated the work of masculinity cannot.

Simply put, if hypermasculinity is the achievement for competition, then hypo-ludicity and contra-ludicity are the test itself. These are the contests that must be passed on the way to proving what might be understood as *masculinehood*, which is still in Western culture synonymous with *manhood*. Here, we are reminded of Eve Sedgwick's (1996) axiom that masculinity does not always pertain solely to men. Thus, our question becomes one of determining how the experience of the digital informs, influences, and infuses with the experience of the sport. This becomes particularly important given the perceived antagonism between technology and masculinity. We recognize the distinction between the real and the digital as an artificial binary, one which actually serves to mask the mythic imbrication of masculinity *qua* sport, and *vice versa* by reifying its projection as immanent and therefore apart from experience.

This is significant because, like Nystrom's striptease, ludicity speaks to the very contradictions upon which the performance of masculinity rests. It is at once feminizing to be on display and to enact the striptease, as well as emasculating to perform conspicuously outside the limits of rational, goal-oriented play. Yet this overt display of hypo-ludic disarmament is hypermasculine *as provocation*~~;~~, as a confrontational gesture of precisely the kind hockey and other sports associate with masculinity, and yet attempt to resist because it exists as pure contradiction: The hypo-masculine striptease is hypermasculine.

AQ7

Morphic Masculinities

Despite the nearly three decades and scholarship on gender as play and performance, Game Studies remains fixed in its focus on sex role theories and approaches. As Bergstrom et al. offer, "What remains in most of this work is a predominant, indeed, an almost intuitive reflex to crudely attribute difference as demarcated by male/female sex binaries" (2011, 32). These approaches, then, limit the type and scope of performance that can be studied, as well as the analysis itself. They cannot encompass the possibility for play to entail anything but fixed gender roles. Indeed such critiques reinscribe gender roles even as they seek to dismantle by limiting the available subject positions. If the positions are fixed, then alternative constructions and identities are rhetorically excluded as anomalies~~;~~, as the detritus of monolithic formations. Simply put, then, "It takes no intellectual effort (or political will) to simply describe stereotypical patterns and choices, and then to explain them by reference to stereotypes" (Jenson and de Castell 2010, 32). In other words, as Ouellette has argued elsewhere, there exists a plurality of gender formations across a spectrum, as opposed to a binary pairing, and video games provide a platform for playing and performing them.[4]

AQ8

Indeed, this is the key contribution of Australian sociologist R. W. Connell's (1995) landmark study of "masculinities"—in the plural—in which the Australian sociologist adapts the Gramscian conception of hegemony to explain the ways in which masculinities exist in through negotiations. Since the traditional binary

opposition model of gender tends to obscure power relations within genders, Connell employs the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" rather than the loose term "patriarchy." The key distinction arises because hegemonic masculinity:

embodies a "currently accepted" strategy. When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony. The dominance of *any* group of men may be challenged by women. Hegemony, then, is a historically mobile relation. (p. 77)

As Ouellette (~~2008~~2008, 2011) argues, the effect of hegemonic masculinity as a "currently accepted strategy" can be seen in the hybrid form of the sports film. As occurs in the earlier cited instance of Nystrom's performance of the final game in *Slapshot*, the forms are not only related, they merge with and/or suture onto each other. Every one of them is coded and ritualized in its relationship to masculinity. Thus, if the elements of a game-derived technique and technology affirms or even bolsters masculinity, then it is embraced. More significantly, Ouellette's work combines the Susan Jeffords' (~~1989~~1989, 1994) classic studies of masculinity in 1980s action films with Varda Burstyn's award-winning study (~~2002~~1999) of masculinity and sport. Burstyn notes that historically sport provides a surrogate for the proof of manhood entailed by war and at present offers an embodied counter to the "soft" masculinities that result from increasing technologization of the work place. Here, she cites Jeffords recognition that popular cultural productions of the post-Vietnam era, technology is overwhelming presented as being antithetical to masculinity. In short, the American (over) reliance on technology rather than on masculinity led to defeat. Intriguingly, neither Burstyn nor Jeffords cites sports films and both overlook video games entirely. Yet the omnipresence of technology, hypermasculinity, and play make video games an important locus for the study of cultural productions that threaten or diminish the coherence of the masculine myths. Most notably, anything that opens masculinity to surveillance and scrutiny, particularly on the basis of statistical analysis and measurements, is dismissed as being the product of non-players, that is, soft masculinities. In this way, the contradiction centers on the emphasis upon performance over result. That is to say, sport is all about achieving a better score than one's opponent, often at all costs; paradoxically, the defense against technologization is founded upon the belief there is something innately masculine that cannot be codified, quantified, scrutinized, and measured.[5]

AQ9

Remediation as R-emasculation in Hockey

In this regard, the *NHL* series of video games of the 1990s began to add and track a wide range of statistics beyond the typical official stats of goals, assists, points, and penalty minutes. Indeed, many of the stats were of little concern to fans of live action hockey and some were invented. Here, the mid-90s introduction of "one-timer," a type of shot, as a tracked statistic and measured ability, stands out for its inclusion and fetishization within the digital games. Employing a one-timer affords video game players a power up on their shot. No such advantage exists on real ice, where the principle advantage of the one-timer occurs if and only if the goalie cannot react quickly enough to the rapidly changing direction from which the puck is coming, as opposed to the rapidity with which the puck is flying. Moreover, the power of the shot can be tracked via a glowing puck. The harder the shot, the redder or glowing the trail becomes.

What becomes interesting is the adoption of this technology in broadcasts of live-action hockey in the 1990s. The league expanded rapidly into the United States, and unfamiliar fans found it difficult to track the puck. Fox added a glowing corona to the puck, similar to the one that appears around the puck-carrier in a video game (Barry 2016). As much as there might be a hyper-ludic effect, there is also a potential for contra-ludic effects: the one-timer might look great, offer the power up, but it might not be the best available play and it might not be the most heroic as understood by the sport-media complex. In other words, the hardest kind of shot, the one that would give the most glow, might not be the best option, in either case. Also, the one-timer means setting up a teammate—supporting another player's hyper-ludicity—as well as being the recipient—that is, receiving help and admitting to effeminate interdependence; not a self but a self-in-relation. In fact, this highlights one of the central contradictions of video games, for the self-in-relation traditionally has been considered a predominantly, if not strictly, feminine mode of identification. While the technology seemingly affirms masculinity via the

glowing puck, it sets up a situation of dependence, as well. The puck provides proof but it also means measuring masculinity.

Concordantly, players of the team-based digital sport games rely and/or depend on the ever-changing non-player characters (NPCs) to support and assist the player.[6] Thus, the learning curve of the sport might not occur but the learning curve of the digital game is taken into account by the ludic formulation. In fact, the in-game action reflects a system in which the whole team, even its stars, exist to support and nurture the player. This is key because it highlights how the ludic processes map onto the production of masculinity, both in the game and in live-action sports. What becomes clear is that the elements of digital games produce, alter, and resist typical understanding of live-action sport, even as they reproduce the original and, more importantly, even as these elements become part of live-action sports, as well.

For example, Marc Bergevin, the General Manager of the Montréal Canadiens, was disparaged by fans and media for his comment, "My reality, it might not be the same as the PlayStation that I play at night" (as cited in Gordon 2015). Bergevin followed that with a joke about the ease of swapping players on his console as compared to the actual requirements of making a trade. Yet fans and media reacted with incredulity. Montréal sportscaster, Brian Wilde (2016), for one, taunted Bergevin on Twitter after other teams made a trade, tweeting, "Well, it appears Bergevin was wrong. The NHL does make PlayStation trades." His post was re-tweeted over 150 times, including several by other journalists. Underlying Bergevin's comments and Wilde's taunts is the tension between the proven, bodily masculinity of the hockey player and the soft, technologically subservient masculinity of the player. In particular, it lays bare the threat to masculinity posed by the increased statistical study afforded by video games and the concurrent, and as we will show, concomitant rise of advanced statistical Statistics
measurements. In the mind of fans and journalists, at least, the line between their knowledge (and expectations) and that of management no longer exists, in large part because of the statistical measures provided in and through video games.

Thus, nowhere is the conflation of the digital emulation's elements (and outcomes) with the physical sport's aspects more apparent than in the contradictory reception and deployment of game-derived features and statistics. In this regard, the role of the sport star and the user-as-star becomes particularly intriguing. In keeping with the masculine myth, celebrity in sport is codified within the digital game as hyper-ludicity: the more famous, the more ludicity, *ipso facto* the more masculine. This runs counter to the myth of hard work, endurance, and commitment to training so often espoused as essential to sporting accomplishment, highlighted by Conway (2014):

We are therefore confronted by a paradoxical state of affairs within the digital interpretation of sport: without hyperludicity, the celebrity avatar would not be famous, and without fame, the celebrity avatar would not be hyperludic. The extraordinary ability and charisma of the sport celebrity as perpetuated by the cultural industries are thus translated into a model comprehensible within the information economy, a form of legal-rational authority defined and encoded through finite rules, categories, and the solidity of numbers. (pp. 146–147)

Appropriate to the emphatic visibility of the star, the "net-cam" has been embraced for revealing heroic saves by goalies and magical goals by players, but the "helmet-cam" on officials has been dismissed as too revelatory or intrusive, despite its ice-level, first-person point of view. The contrast becomes more salient given responses like that of Kurtis Larson, in *The Toronto Sun* (2013). In an interactive online article, Larson recounts instances when "ice girls," hockey's equivalent of cheerleaders, "went above and beyond the call of entertainment duty" and revealed a bit too much in front of one of the net-cams. While the NHL removed the video, *The Toronto Sun* has not, to the delight of dozens of commenters.
AQ10

Where it is alright to further objectify an always already objectified "ice girl," anything that might lead to an interrogation of masculinity is too threatening to the culture. Like net-cam, "ref-cam" can be considered a product of the development of video games and the contingent effort by broadcasters to mimic the infinite

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possible camera angles available in digital games[1]: From sports games to action-adventure blockbusters such as *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerilla Games 2017), the remediation (Bolter and Grusin ~~1999~~2000) of the camera, as apparatus for the innately masculine practice of voyeurism, is more than ever apparent within the medium.

Yet, the *Globe and Mail* 's Eric Duhatschek (2014) bemoans the elimination of ref-cam after just "one month." In claiming the technology was too intrusive, the league was acknowledging it demystifies the players by showing their fouls and failures—that is, the things the referee sees—quite conclusively. Even so, the Fox Puck was dismissed as a silly gimmick, yet its basic premise is no different than the halo/corona or color change used to designate the puck-carrier in the digital game (Hartley 2010). Moreover, the velocity of any shot becomes a celebrated topic and proof of manhood, as metonymic of virility. These are key features of highlight packages and "analysis," as well as the video games. Even so, the technology was dismissed as silly, gimmicky, and inauthentic, the creation of marketing executives, geeks, and those who did not understand the game.

Similarly, the in-game version of the measures corresponds with a perception and sometimes a practice of increasing a player's power. The key failure of hyper-ludicity is that it builds masculinity as it builds progress through the game, most notably by adding to the prowess and mastery, as opposed to power, of the player/avatar combination. Thus, the (previously mentioned) work of the game is the production of masculinity in and through its algorithm and its operations. Hyper-ludicity produces and even blends with masculinity, particularly through the aspects that relate to performance and performativity.

Producing Masculinity

However, it should be noted that the presumed aggressive or dominant versions of hegemonic masculinity are not the only versions of masculinity that correspond with masculine forms. Yet, it is precisely at the intersection of algorithm and performance that the cracks and ruptures are revealed. The very instant masculinity must be rehearsed, practiced, or drilled; it cannot be anything but a production. The relationship, or imbrication, with an algorithm reveals that masculinity operates according to rules; henceforth, masculinity can be measured and assessed. It can also be simulated and reproduced, giving access to those who might otherwise not be able to participate in the sport.

Few elements of the games embody the contradictory depictions of masculinity like the fight mechanic. Controversially, hockey is the one major sport that allows (and even tacitly condones) fighting, with NHL vice-president Colin Campbell calling safety advocates, including the head of the trainers' association "Greenpeace pukes" and "tree huggers" (as cited in AP 2016).[8] Yet, in any version of hockey, either in live action or in a digital game, fighting constitutes a hypermasculine display that is at once hypo- or contra-ludic. Fights occur because of and through the very real performances of hegemonic masculinity and offer a reminder of sport as a surrogate for combat. In short, masculinity becomes its own worst enemy.

The earliest game to feature fighting was Adventure Artworx's *International Hockey* for the Commodore 64, released in 1985 (preceded by the company's 1984 *Slapshot Hockey*, which did not feature fighting). Even in this primitive, cartoonish form, the outcome remains the same: the game stops, the player loses agency to change the game, and there is a penalty assessed. While *Pro Sport Hockey* (TOSE 1993) and *NHL94* (EA Sports 1993) offer "real" players and teams, any player, including a star, could receive a major penalty. In the older game, the instigator of the fight had to face a penalty shot, that is, a direct attempt to score. A similar mechanic appears in *Face-Off* (Mindspan 1989). In the contemporary versions, the player's team loses one in-game asset for five minutes of game play (or more). In short, the action takes place entirely outside the scope of the content. The game stops. The fight exists only for its own sake and it is arguable whether it has any impact on the game at all; as with the camera and the gameworld, the spectacle is its own reward.

In its *NHL* series, EA Sports attempts to make the fighting mechanic into a mini-game. Starting with its *NHL14* revision, EA Sports adapted the mechanic of its *Fight Night* boxing series for this purpose. Amazingly, EA's own designer hails the new mechanic as less intrusive than the previous one, which was shipped starting with *NHL10* (Hartley 2013). This is only the latest such "mashup." One of the first simulation style hockey games,

Actua Ice Hockey (Gremlin Interactive, 1998) used the soccer engine from *Actua Soccer* (1995) and elements of *Virtua Fighter* (1993) since all were produced by the same studio. In the physical sport, fighting is a pointless intrusion that has little to do with the outcome but has everything to do with masculinity. The video game version only confirms the necessity of protecting masculinity.

Moreover, the punishment includes losing the fight and losing a player for at least five minutes; there can only ever be a contra-ludic, sometimes hypo-ludic outcome. The point becomes more significant given that the game engine upon which the *NHL* simulation is built is borrowed from the successful *FIFA* series (ibid.). As Rory Smith (~~2016~~2014) recounts in the *New York Times*, soccer players and managers have embraced the development of video games because they reveal tendencies and patterns based on measurable, translatable data and algorithms. Duncan Alexander, head of a leading British data provider, draws a direct link between the rise of video games, starting with *Football Manager*, and the rise of statistics in the sport: "The chronology between the popularity of the game and the use of numbers in soccer [...] is broadly similar" (as cited in Smith 201~~4~~6); Alexander's firm provides data to professional soccer teams. Despite the obvious intersections, including the *FIFA* physics engine and the player data required to run it, hockey clings to mythic "codes" of masculinity, in the video game and in the sport. The contradictions become even more pronounced given the need to add an otherwise extraneous element, the fighting mechanism, to a purely statistically driven game algorithm: The avatars' fists serve as capricious shield to protect the masculine myth.

Transludic Man

It is not surprising, then, that the fighting mechanic has been hailed by reviewers (and some players) as a kind of reward, that is, spectacle, as noted earlier. On ESPN's *Grantland* site, hockey columnist Sean McIndoe (~~January 21,~~ 2014b) notes the role of the fighting mechanic and its contradictory heritage: "Look, you don't have to like the continued existence of fighting in real hockey. But fighting in hockey video games is freaking fun, especially when it's done well. Nobody has ever done it as well as *NHLPA '93*." More interesting is the fact that ESPN created *Grantland* as a medium for covering the intersections of sports and pop culture. In his column the previous week, the "NHL Dictionary," McIndoe (~~January 14,~~ 2014a) mocks hockey fighting, hockey statistics, and hockey video games fans. In this last regard, he cites the "one-timer" as a statistic invented for and by video games, along with the concomitant belief that this is the only way to score in the (actual) NHL. Similarly, the NHL only began counting "hits" after the work stoppage of 2005–2006. *NHL94* (EA Sports 1993) and its successors have counted hits, while the *NHL Hitz* (Midway, 2003) series is built around the violence. If sport is a surrogate of war, through the fighting mechanism and its questionable utility, video games then become a kind of meta-surrogate, offering a commentary on the construction of masculinity not only in the sport but in the wider culture as well.

AQ11

Like fights, hits exist primarily within the transludic space, which is defined as the space among and between the players and the game, whether players are competing against one another or an AI opponent (Ouellette and Ouellette 2013, 2015). In both cases, the act exists as a part of but also apart from the game. Even so, the importance placed on fight mechanics in game reviews, in game engines and in *Let's Play* videos are mirrored in popular fan sites dropyourgloves.com and hockeyfights.com, among others. On these sites, fights from live-action games are scored and charted as might occur for a boxing match, as well as in a video game. In fact, some players have uploaded nothing but in-game fights from their video games as their contribution to the intertextual web of masculine endeavors. Not only do these resemble a brawling game like *Streetfighter* or *Mortal Kombat* more than they do a sports game, they are encumbered by the added weight of the fight mechanic. What becomes clear, then, is that the production of masculinity in and through play remains at the forefront of the game's ostensible scoring system. While a statistic like Corsi or Fenwick might signal domination, a fight and a game have an obvious winner and obvious loser, irrespective of the process. Thus, the ludic masculinity favors ends over means.

The contradictions become more pronounced given the ways that Conway's third entry in his typology, hypo-ludicity, contributes to the production of masculinity insofar as and because it represents a diminishment or a loss of agency. This is no mere emasculation, though that could be entailed in the process. It is not surprising,

then, that Conway writes, "as the game removes the very essence of control and agency so necessary to the experience of not only winning and losing, but playing a game. [...] hypo-ludicity offers nothing but absence: of empowerment, of resistance, of agency" (2012, 38). Although Conway offers Bethesda Softwork's *Elder* Scrolls series as an exemplar because of its requirement that players search interminably for resources, he could also have included any drill and practice regime in any sports game. This is an important reminder that masculinity is routinized as part of a regime.

The Ouroboros

Nevertheless, this is not the extent of the functions of hypo-ludicity within a given game. Quite the contrary, hypo-ludicity can actually have positive effects, even through the mindlessness of drill and practice routines. This is their very contingency and the statistical tracking, at least since *NHL 94* (EA Sports 1993), bears this out. Thus, hypo and contra-ludicity are as much about means as they are about ends. This stands in stark contrast to the presumption that masculinity inherently or naturally produces and demands a winner-takes-all or win-at-all-costs approach. Nowhere is this more pointed and controversial than in the ongoing debate surrounding advanced statistics in hockey. These advanced statistics are necessarily similar to the algorithms used to produce the video games, vehicles for the celebration of masculinity.

This is not an assumption or a projection. Since *NHL 94*, the games have charted a wide variety of each player's skills: puck handling, skating, shot, hitting, fighting, "one-timers," and so on.

Thus, it should be surprising that Corsi and similar measures of player prowess have been shunned and worse by hockey commentators, journalists, and others. In calling statistical analysis a fad, Jack Todd of the *Montréal Gazette* (2014) claims hockey is built on "emotion and chaos," which cannot be quantified. The *Toronto Sun*'s Steve Simmons (2014) echoes this belief that the game cannot be "naturally or easily analyzed with math." Yet, the statistics and their relation to hockey as masculinity become quite clear: the games extract, condense, crystallize, and package the very same routines and criteria used to otherwise celebrate masculinity. In short, the only kind of unpacking of masculinity is precisely the hypo-ludicity performed by Nystrom, as cited earlier. He is never under threat, even as he protests the contrived spectacle. The strip does not suggest vulnerability; rather, it states implicitly that his masculinity is beyond question. It just is.

Thus it becomes clear that the building of masculinity and the empowerment of the character become one and the same. The ludic function reinforces the cultural imperative and vice versa. Obviously, this begs the question of correlation vs. causation, as well as which came first. Ultimately, if we recognize the shift in the portrayal of manhood, it does not really matter which was first because one conditions the other as an (overtly phallic) ouroboros. Regardless, the rituals and codes of masculinity are not present or are shifted so that games have become one of the central places and venues for men to learn to be men, especially when the bodily sense of masculinity no longer matters. Thus, games become a ritual of traditional masculinity, in which the player, coached by a hegemonic masculine figure reclaims manhood. Moreover, this process is built right into the kernel of the algorithm. Whereas the world of soccer openly embraces the imbrication of advanced statistics, video game and sport, the world of hockey clings to a regressive past. Indeed, in remediating *Fight Night* as an integral part of the game, it denies its very premises. Here, it is well worth noting that the popular film *Money Ball* (2011), based on the success of the Oakland A's baseball team through the adoption of advanced statistics, features a fit Brad Pitt and portly Jonah Hill as the player turned General Manager and the statistical wizard, respectively. The contrast in their appearances is not an accident. Even as it affirms the figure of the nerd, popular culture makes it clear which formation of masculinity is preferred: Pitt gets top billing and Hill's character works for Pitt's. The important question, then, is whether the determinism of technology will continue to be viewed as incompatible with certain kinds of masculinities, privileging as it does the cyborgian Cyborg
self-in-relation, rather than the supremely hypermasculine, natural self.

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[1] Satire includes parody, not the other way around; hence, the specificity.

[2] The Corsi rating is a relatively simple of measure of the shot attempt differential that occurs when a given player is on the ice. The intent of those developing the statistic was to provide a means of measuring of puck possession and therefore dominance in a given game. However, it fails to account for the benefit or debit of teammates or the level of competition faced, among other criticisms.

[3] The Foucauldian definition of technology is very much rooted in the Heideggerian tradition, where technology (*techné*) is an epistemic tool—a standardised model for knowledge production, distribution, and reception.

[4]

[4] Indeed, it was the present authors' previous works, particularly in the areas of gender, technology and video games that drew them to this topic and to contribute to a growing body of work that does examine gender as fluid rather than fixed. The volume to which this chapter contributes should be included in that process.

[5] Here it is worth noting one of the biggest trades in recent memory, that of Shea Weber going from Nashville to Montréal in return for P. K. Subban, The trade was controversial not only because of Subban's popularity in Montréal, it also resulted in the firing of the Canadiens' statistical analyst, who disagreed with the trade on the basis of the numbers (Engels 2016).

[6] Even early baseball simulations, on machines as primitive as a Commodore C64, included the option of having the computer play as both sides. Hockey games did not include this feature until recently. Early hockey games were simple adaptations of *Pong* styled games, and more closely resembled digital versions of air hockey.

[7] For example, in a photo essay celebrating *New York Times* photographer Barton Silverman's pioneering techniques for capturing sporting events, Silverman reveals that his first attempts required wires frozen under the ice and large wooden boxes in the net (MacDonald 2012).

[8] Emails among NHL executives on the topic of player safety, including fighting, were subpoenaed as part of a lawsuit by former players. The former players allege that the league has disregarded player safety in favour of profits. The emails reveal executives not only referring to injured players as "soft," but also saying that injured players should have been penalized for putting themselves in positions where they could be hurt—by illegal hits (AP 2016).