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## **(Re-)Thinking Digitised Leisure**

4D ibabyscans, wearable baby gro's/monitors incorporating movement based technologies and provide real-time video on your iPhone while your baby sleeps, speak to a dazzling assemblage of digital technologies, products, commodities, platforms, materialities and virtualities that enculturate, envelop, and are embodied on/in the contemporary corporeality of young people, almost from conception. Play—commodified in the form of soccertots, rugbytots, waterbabies, turtletots, tumbletots, bunnies (gymnastics), musicbugs, and now digitized and quantified (real time ipad feedback during toddler swimming lessons)—is, we are told due to concerns over safety, the loss/privatisation of open space in our communities and multiple other 'risks', not something that can or should be done outside or alone. Tablets, phones, computers, consoles, and touch screens in reception classes have become the new techno-pedagogic (Rich & Miah, 2014) devices through which the educative, leisured, consumptive and play elements of the everyday are filtered and organised. The capacity for mobile connectivity has blurred the boundaries between public/private/digitised leisure spaces. Our every step surveilled, logged, recorded and stored, as we engage in our neoliberal consumptive practices. Going to the cinema, eating out at a restaurant, taking a trip, shopping in themed malls part of a 'surveillant assemblage' (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000) predicated on an aegis of suspicion and a global climate of fear (see Bigo, 2011). Even Christmas is militarized and bought to us by NORAD. (Awkward) physical teenage relationships re-defined by shifting expectations brought about by the ubiquity of online pornography; bedrooms redefined as sexting production studios (see Harvey & Ringrose, 2016) or as amateur porn streaming showrooms. Fitbit, Jawbone, Garmin, Microsoft Band, MiCoach, Strava, MapmyRun, RunKeeper, Runtastic, Nike+ FuelBand, Endomondo, Lose It!, Pokemon Go quantifying, shaping, sharing and augmenting our physical exertions, instructing us as we glide, plod, pedal, trot and chase.

We are living in a digital culture in which personalised data are amassed in great volume and variety and are exchanged with great velocity. Selfies, belfies (bottom or belly selfies), shelfies (of ones bookshelf), lelfies (legs) and even pelfies (female genitalia, with the dic-pic the male equivalent) over-determine (to differing intensities) a digitized and exacerbated visual youth leisure culture on a variety of social media platforms (from Facebook to Snapchat to Twitter to Instagram and everything else in between), in which the body (shaped, sculpted, manicured, governed) is displayed (publically, and not just to [virtual] friends). The leisure practices, experiences, structures and forms of young people (their everyday lives) are digitized and datafied unlike anything we ever experienced. As Deborah Lupton points out in the foreword to this volume, lively devices generate lively data that has considerable implications our understandings of a lively Leisure Studies. The papers in this special issue aim to contribute to such debates, offering nuanced understandings of how various instances, experiences, practices, and structures of digital leisure are embedded in complex inter-connections with the economic and political trajectories of neoliberal consumer capitalism, surveillance, and the unequal power relations extant in all leisure practices (Spracklen, 2015).

### **A Digital Leisure Assemblage**

The 'digital turn' raises important questions, not least about the ways in which digitised 'leisure' practices are inflected with power relations, and shaped by socio-cultural contexts (geographical, familial, spatial, religious, socio-economic, cultural). Popular media outlets amplify the (supposed) exacerbated relationships between the hyper-visibility of digitised

celebrated/demonized bodies with pressing and contemporary social concerns—including, for example, disordered eating, cyberstalking, digital abuse, teen suicide, mental health issues, (classed, raced and gendered) politics of a normalized neoliberal bodily aesthetic, sexual norms and abuse, social and health inequalities (including unequal access to and engagement with social media), and, surveillance of (pathologized) citizens.

Further, our devices are more than digital extensions of our material bodies; the development in the design of mobile techniques means they are increasingly inserted and integrated into our fleshy sinews, disrupting traditional binaries between work/leisure, production/consumption, material/digital, human/non-human. As Gilmore (2015, p.2) suggests it is the capacity to be tethered to the body that produces ‘habitualization’ of particular practices. Integrated, embedded, fleshy/digital ‘lively’ leisure forms, structures, experiences and practices complicate, if not render obsolete, established categories and bodies of work in our field, such as distinctions between serious, project or casual leisure (e.g. Stebbins, 2007), production and consumption. With Van doorn (2010: 538), we simply cannot separate our (leisured) bodies “from the technological networks that give them form and meaning. Conversely, media technologies cannot be apprehended without accounting for the embodied and gendered use cultures that imbue them with significance by mobilizing them within larger everyday networks – both virtual and concrete.”

Our everyday leisured lives are so interconnected—in a series of crabgrass like entanglements—to digital cultural forms, products, services and economies that it has thus become impossible to understand leisure without considering digital culture. Indeed, to understand leisure (the everyday experiences, structures, and forms of bodies in leisure) necessitates grasping the workings of digital cultures; our leisured selves are posthuman digitally mediated cyborgified bodies, hybrid techno-corpi (Haraway, 1991; Braidotti, 2013; Ringrose & Harvey, 2016), our (leisured) bodies are digital cyborg assemblages (Lupton, 2015). We live in a digital society that cannot be understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin, they actively constitute selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions (Lupton, 2015). Leisure is no different, and somewhat modifying Lupton, Leisure Studies needs to make the study of digital cultures central; to explicitly make our point, failure to do so is a failure to understand contemporary leisure practices, experiences, institutions and subjectivities and the place of leisure in understandings of embodiment, power relations, social inequalities, social structures, and social institutions.

And so, where is Leisure Studies as an academic discipline on these issues and developments? How has the field of study responded to such radical structural, material, cultural, and technological shifts that have profoundly altered our everyday lives, our bodies, our leisured experiences? Within a world of fast-moving, interconnected and accelerated digitality, we would tentatively suggest the answer here is, initially at least, slowly.

### **Taking Leisure Seriously: A Slow Response to Accelerated Culture?**

With notable exceptions (see below), digitality has not adequately—if not thoroughly—been conceptualised and theorised within Leisure Studies. This is perhaps of little surprise given the fast paced world of digital cultures, the relative slowness of academic publication, the availability of funding for such work, and, (potentially) the place of gatekeepers and/or editors

who shape the discipline. However, we need to enhance our understandings of what the articulations and inter-connections between/within digital cultures and leisure mean for our scholarship, impact, our pedagogy, and, our understandings of our social worlds. This is not to say that these conversations have not occurred; indeed some of these conversations have occurred outside of the 'traditional' parameters of Leisure Studies. It is not, for example, uncommon to find discussions of the impact of various aspects of digital culture on leisure in allied and affiliated fields, with articles surfacing in outlets such as *Space & Culture*, the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, the *European Journal of Communication*, *Media, Culture & Society*, or, *Television & New Media*, and as the topic of a number of other articles in special issues elsewhere. Further, as pointed out in the foreword to this volume, and as 'leisure' expands into the workplace, healthcare, relationships, and education, are new interdisciplinary areas (such as platform studies, internet studies, critical data studies, critical health studies) going to displace leisure studies as critical space in which to engage with such issues? Or, will Leisure Studies be 'consumed' within newer ('livelier') sub-disciplines such as digital sociology, digital humanities or digital anthropology? The articles in this issue offer a timely and necessary contribution to these essential discussions. For, failure to engage with digital cultures, technologies, experiences and economies might well see the (further) entrenchment of the academic field of leisure into its (un-)comfortable traditional boundaries.

Leisure Studies, at least a relevant (and critical) Leisure Studies, needs to ensure it does not become stuck in an analogue world, one in which our understandings of leisure have been surpassed in other fields by scholars who in no way see themselves as leisure scholars (and perhaps who envision a post-disciplinary world). To avoid such an admittedly bleak and provocative picture suggests a need for the democratisation of leisure and of Leisure Studies, a call to re-invigorate the field, further enhance and utilise a critical and theoretical sophistication, and be attuned to the fast-moving digital world with which leisure articulates. Indeed, with Redhead (2016), as an academic 'discipline' leisure studies needs to 'catch-up' with accelerated culture. This would not only be a discursive/practical space (and one ground in a sophisticated, critical and relevant theoretical basis that perhaps to date has been all too absent) in which leisure—as a field of study—demonstrates its usefulness in relating to social problems, inequalities, issues and justice, but one in which the field is able to be meaningful, to make a difference, and dare we say (whilst revising an established concept!), be taken 'seriously.' The articles in this special issue are one such attempt at so doing.

Whilst perhaps initially slow to react, there has been a (relatively) recent explosion in work in the field, published in leisure journals and by dedicated 'leisure' scholars, that has begun to push the boundaries in (re-)thinking leisure in a digital age. It is certainly the case that we build off these contributions in this article and hope to add to their accomplishments through this issue. Orton-Johnson (2014), for example, has argued that new social media technologies have become a reciprocal and interconnected aspect of knitting as leisure, one in which the distinctions between leisure and technology are increasingly dissolved and which has reshaped the consumption of leisure in rich and dynamic ways. Francombe-Webb (2014) points to how certain leisure activities—reading magazines, digital gaming, shopping for clothes, eating, engaging in physical activity, applying beauty products, makeup and hair styling—highlights a consumptive, embodied body politic not without consequence. In so doing, she begins to understand the digital/'real' worlds of young women by drawing out the ways in which young girls' body practices can shed light on the complex relationship between 'choice', agency, consumption and subjectivity (see also Crawford, 2005 and Delamere & Shaw, 2008 for

discussions of the gendered nature of digital games). Nimrod and colleagues (e.g. 2014; 2015; Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2016) has pioneered netnography in leisure studies, addressing amongst other things the multiple roles of sex in older adulthood, mobile phone usage amongst older adults, and the relationships between online communities and psychological well-being in elders' leisure use of the internet. Meanwhile, McGillivray (2014) has suggested the emergence of social media forms has profound influence on the production and consumption of sport mega-events, arguing that ubiquitous digital technologies augment accelerated identities and offer alternative narratives to those offered by dominant media frames. These are important, and eclectic (demonstrating the breadth of digital/leisure entanglements), contributions that have begun to set the range of possibilities for a digitally informed leisure studies.

There are, of course, other examples (e.g. Bull, 2006; Lepp, Barkley & Karpinski, 2014; Lincoln, 2012). Yet, perhaps the most telling, important and extensive forays into theorising digital leisure come from the work of Steve Redhead, Sandro Carnicelli and colleagues, Karl Spracklen, and Tara Brabazon. All have embarked, as is the intent of this special issue, on (re-)thinking leisure within an increasingly banal digital moment. Carnicelli, McGillivray and Macpherson's (2016) collection builds from the 2014 Leisure Studies Association conference hosted by the University of West Scotland. They offer a significant contribution to our changing understanding of digital leisure cultures, reflecting on the socio-historical context within which the digital age emerged, while engaging with new debates about the evolving and controversial role of digital platforms in contemporary leisure cultures. They point, as above, to both the promise of the digital sphere as a realm of liberation, and the darker side of digital culture associated with control, surveillance, exclusion and dehumanisation. Importantly, this is not to suggest dichotomous thinking; indeed, we would argue that digitised spaces are many of these things simultaneously.

Spracklen (2015) covers an array of possibilities for (re-)thinking leisure, focusing on the ways in which the digitalization of culture forces us to: reconceptualize our identities and (alternative) subcultural formations; re-think our engagement with, and ownership of, music; reconsider the ways in which we shop, gamble and consume sport content; and, the commodification of pornography/the pornification of popular culture. Indeed, the ubiquity of online pornography (as a leisure practice, see Spracklen, 2015) alters our understandings of the relationship between visceral sexual pleasures and real world social interactions, and perhaps speaks more than anything to a sweaty, performative, affective, lively, orgasming digital/fleshy leisure assemblage. Indeed, with the emergence of virtual reality sex toys (such as Virtuadolls, the Autoblow 2 or FriXion that enables sex over distance using teledildonics combined with computer robotics) these could well be more sophisticated, sensual, pleasurable, and lively leisure experiences than those depicted in Spike Jonze's film *'Her'* (2013). Further, Spracklen points to the compelling concerns related to the access we afford leviathans such as Google and Apple through our digital leisure footprints, an issue we pick up on below.

Redhead (2015; 2016a/b) talks to the digitization of previously analogue spaces (such as online football fandom, the organization of football hooliganism or indeed fan protest online) as illustrative of chronic shifts in disciplines and in the material practices of everyday life. Like Carnicelli et al. (2016), Spracklen (2015) critiques the lack of sustained inter-disciplinarity in understanding digital leisure cultures, suggesting that to be multidisciplinary (while admirable and which has characterised much leisure research over the years) is simply not enough given

the contingencies and complexities of the digital age; “simply put, we have to engage in interdisciplinary studies of digital leisure because that is the most successful way of doing leisure studies” (Spracklen 2015, p.197).

Tara Brabazon (2016) argues the technical shifts to which we have been subject/that we have enabled point to a systemically different digital leisure culture; one qualitatively different from an analogue leisure culture. Brabazon suggests this is characterized by both disintermediation and deterritorialization. For Brabazon disintermediation points to the loss of chains in the production/consumption supply chain. Instead prosumption (Ritzer, 2015)—as opposed to ‘mitigating steps’ such as writers, editors, production editors and so on—at ‘speed’ (e.g. Youtube channels and stars such as, Charli’s crafty kitchen, Hooplakidz, Mother Goose Club, Athenewins or McBarbie07) dominates and re-organizes popular culture. Deterritorialization on the other hand refers to how digitalization has ridden us post-territorial, which in part has rendered material place obsolete given our bonds, affiliations, identities, fandom and so on can be defined in digital as opposed to spatial terms (e.g. the worldwide affiliations to Manchester United FC being lived out in blogs, social media, the net, satellite footprints, see e.g. Silk & Chumley, 2004).

These contributions are clearly re-shaping Leisure Studies; yet that shape (and we would expect it not to be static) is, as yet, undefined. Are we, as indicated by Redhead (2016a), moving away from ‘fields’ of study towards a post-disciplinary world; is this a scholarly world where we would expect a fragmented ‘leisure’ to be dispersed amongst a variety of scholarly areas and journals and one without perhaps a home or association? Or, especially given the recent and relative ‘explosion’ of scholarship, are we seeing the emergence of a ‘digital leisure studies’ (Redhead, 2016b) characterised by new (and older) critical theory, that re-shapes leisure as a discipline, bringing it up to ‘speed’ with the profound societal / technological changes that have come to characterise our present conjunctural moment? Indeed, is this a moment in which we become fully attuned to, and as a multi-disciplinary field are well positioned to take advantage of, the ‘return of leisure’ that a digital culture seems to suggest; one in which digitized popular cultural forms and experience can andragogically lead us—along with critical, sophisticated leisure theorising—forward (Brabazon, 2016). Such contestations are yet to fully materialize, nonetheless this is an exciting moment for ‘Leisure Studies’ in whatever form that may take in the future. For while we suggest that the ‘field’ has been initially slow to address an accelerated digital culture, this does seem like a moment in which there is clear trajectory and traction, with the emergence of a number of recent contributions attuned to (re-)thinking leisure in a digital age (and for more on this, see the Afterword to this special issue provided by Steve Redhead).

This special issue aims to contribute to these emergent debates, suggesting that to draw out the nuances, contradictions, complexities, tensions and possibilities of digital leisure necessitates a fluid interdisciplinary, theoretical and multi-methodological approach. This will enable us, as a field, to tease out the important constraints and possibilities enabled and suppressed through a digital leisure culture that can only be understood as relational to contemporary social formations and extant power relations.

These initial forays into theorising and conceptualising an increasingly accelerated and intensified everyday digital leisure experience—especially, although not exclusively, for young people who have been born into a digital society—have paved the way for a number of exciting avenues of future scholarship, research and thinking. Given the nature of the nascent academic

study of digital leisure cultures, there are a multitude of avenues that are worthy of critical exploration; some of which are explored through this special issue and others for which we propose are important in realizing a critically engaged, theoretical, and impact oriented leisure studies that can ‘make a difference’ (Grossberg, 1996; cf. Silk & Andrews, 2011). Within this introduction and indeed the special issue as a whole, we will not be able to address, or provide a sophisticated and nuanced agenda; what we hope to achieve however is to draw together important articles, point towards certain trajectories, engage with work from allied disciplines, and begin to comprehend the challenging task at hand for Leisure Studies, so as to contribute towards important and critical conversations about the impact of digital cultures on understandings that have heretofore been taken for granted/unchallenged. In this regard, we hope, through the special issue, when held together as a cohesive entity, to be able to contribute to an understanding of leisure as digitally reconstituted in a number of ways and raise some key questions for future research agendas of Leisure Studies. The task at hand is, perhaps, to think carefully about the contributions and understandings that Leisure Studies can provide, the ‘solutions’ to pressing social problems, concerns and issues embedded within the convergence of digital culture/our leisured lives, the impact on policy, practice and everyday life such theorising and critical engagement might prosper, and, given the intensification of an accelerated and seemingly ubiquitous digital world, the ways in which Leisure Studies can position itself as central—as opposed to on the scholarly peripheries—to understandings of contemporary/everyday life.

### **Our Leisured Data Doubles**

One such ‘touching point’ concerns thinking about the intensified political and economic interests in digitising leisure, and indeed the turn to theorising such interests. Said another way, and recognising that technology use has long had leisurely dimensions, and vice versa, there is much at stake for companies ranging from Nike, adidas, and Under Armour to Apple, Nintendo, Microsoft and Facebook in remaking leisure activities as necessarily ‘digitised’ activities. In this sense, it is essential for such companies to ensure the consumer’s Sunday morning run, once an ephemeral feat aside from its health, is ‘datafied’, archived, and most of all shared. The same is true of book purchases on Amazon, downloads on iTunes, film selections on Netflix, and statements of one kind or another on Facebook. Our ‘real’ selves have always been valuable to industry for our capacity to spend – whether on televisions, video games, magazines, books, bicycles, trainers, swimming costumes, gym memberships, or other goods and services. Our leisured ‘data doubles’ (Deleuze, 1995) are now highly valued as commodities as well.

The point here is not that some sinister motive necessarily underpins the digitising of leisure. Certainly, there exists a profit-oriented desire to improve product performance and thus consumer experience. The need to innovate in perpetual fashion is a key theme in Brad Millington’s article in this special issue. Millington examines the political and cultural economies of Nintendo’s recent adoption of health and fitness motifs, and the company’s growing interest in appealing to older consumers. These are deemed parts of Nintendo’s quest for a ‘blue ocean’—which is to say an environment free from competition. So, rather than byzantine motives (although perhaps at the extremes of consumer capital’s propensity to consume, well, itself, such motives exist), the point instead pertains to the fact that digitising leisure activities—from one’s choice of reading material to one’s changing heart rate in navigating that Sunday morning run—creates economic value out of leisure, and is thus a trend unlikely to reverse course anytime soon. Indeed, the very notion of production/consumption is

blurred in contemporary leisure practices. As Ritzer (2015) observes, consumption and production have never been mutually exclusive. We are in an age marked by the increasing interpenetration of the digital and the material” (Ritzer, 2015, p. 4) in which active prosumers digitally (re-)produce the fabric of everyday life (from the creation/production of images of a terror attack to the news media, reviews of a holiday destination, instruction on the latest kettleball or battle ropes workout, through to social media campaigns for terror groups and transnational corporations). In this special issue, focusing on the prevalence of the everyday use of these technologies, Stephanie Merchant provides insight into the ways in which commodified digital technologies are literally editing out ‘memories’ of tourist place and leisure practice, reconceptualising understandings of alternative leisure realities, and points to the ways in which post-tourists are increasingly the auteurs—or prosumers—of their leisure experiences. Prosumption, datafication, archiving and sharing dominate our everyday leisured lives, and create valuable data doubles. Jogging whilst wearing a fitness tracker or having sex whilst logging calories (using devices such as the Sex Calculator or the penis pedometer ‘SexFit’), for example, create data (all designed for optimal sharing on social media) that might be sold onto third party advertisers and attest to Ritzer’s point. Such political/economic considerations offer but one important point of departure for a ‘lively’ digitized Leisure Studies.

Further, leisure is increasingly tied to the wider Big Data movement whereby data is generated on a greater scale (volume) and scope (variety) and are exchanged at greater speed (velocity) than ever before. This raises pressing questions about surveillance and privacy in leisure cultures. Indeed, whereas in the mid-2000s, Wakefield (2004) described a process of ‘people watching people’ in sites like leisure complexes by means of foot patrol and closed circuit television (CCTV), surveillance in leisure cultures increasingly takes the form of ‘people watching people’s data’ as well. At the same time, the question here is of leisure fuelling, and not simply reflecting, a wider culture of Big Data and surveillance. For example, Ellerbrok (2011) highlights the ‘function creep’ of face recognition (surveillance) technology from militarised uses to consumer uses via photo organising software. For Ellerbrok (2011), in this transition, play—so central to many leisure pursuits—holds the capacity to obfuscate and/or normalise otherwise controversial technological functionalities.

For leisure participants, then, the digitising of leisure in the first instance presents new responsibilities – for example, to know how one’s data is collected and used. Given that data prosumption and surveillance are matters of consumer rights and protection, the political economic side of digital leisure puts the role of governments in the spotlight as well. For example, the notion that companies can extract value out of ever-expanding forms of data collection (in leisure contexts and beyond) sits uncomfortably against the principle of ‘data minimisation’, which stresses that only ‘necessary’ data should be collected (and in North America is part of the Federal Trade Commission’s Fair Information Practice Principles). Balancing consumer protection and industry innovation/growth is no doubt challenging in neoliberal contexts where governments face pressure to create conditions for the latter to thrive in particular; yet, we would aver, this is an important consideration for an increasingly engaged and democratic digital Leisure Studies.

### **A Celebrated/Pathologized Digital Leisure Body Politic**

Production, consumption, prosumption and surveillance are of course more than just about data protection and consumer rights; they speak to the reproduction of extant power relations and



the possibility that power relations might be challenged as well. That is, a contextually based understanding of digitized leisure practices is inseparable from comprehension of the corporeal practices, discourses, and subjectivities through which active bodies become organized, represented, and experienced in relation to the operations of social power. As scholars, and following Silk & Andrews (2011), we thus need to be attuned to the role that digitized leisure cultures can play in reproducing, and sometimes challenging, particular class, ethnic, gender, ability, generational, national, racial, and/or sexual norms and differences. Indeed, we would suggest that this in and of itself is not enough for a burgeoning, critical and politically relevant Leisure Studies in a digital age. Rather, through the development and strategic dissemination of potentially empowering forms of knowledge and understanding, as a field we can work to illuminate, and intervene into, sites of injustice and inequity engrained within digital leisure cultures.

Such an approach assumes that digital leisure cultures are uneven and imbued with power relations; it assumes that power can be “limiting and productive: producing differences, shaping relations, structuring identities and hierarchies, but also enabling practices and empowering social subjects” (Grossberg, 1989). We believe our approaches to digital leisure cultures need to explore, understand and address how (and why) various dimensions of leisure in a digital age represent moments at which such social divisions are imposed, experienced, and at times contested. Such a motivation also enforces an unequivocal “commitment to progressive social change” (Miller, 2001, p. 1), and points us towards the production of the type of knowledge that can intervene into the broader social world, make a difference, engage in social transformation, and thereby further reinforce the import of the discipline of Leisure Studies.

As our leisure becomes both, at one and same, fleshy and digital (Francombe-Webb, 2010; 2014; 2016; Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2015; Jones, 2008), as it becomes impossible to separate the monitoring and sculpting of our digitized bodies and footprints (as leisure) from the surveillance and monitoring of the physical self, we need to understand how digital leisure cultures control, govern and regulate citizens and their bodies. Obsessive self-surveillance, policing, monitoring and re-shaping of the body via social media sites, dating, and rendezvous apps (e.g. Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tinder, Tumblr, Down [formerly Bang with Friends], Grindr, 3ndr), sexting, the ubiquitous presence and accessibility of online pornography (some produced, some ‘prosumed’), fitspiration, thinspiration, ‘Neknominate’ (binge-drinking) suggest a *hypervisibility*, like never before, of the (normally, but not exclusively, hyper-feminine) digital/fleshy body, signalling norms, excesses, compartmentalization, sexualization, competitiveness (measured in ‘likes’) individualization and post-humanism. How do such leisure practices celebrate or pathologize? Which bodies matter (and which do not) to a hyper- or uber-sexual, digital culture? And what are the physical health, well-being and social wellness implications of such digital leisure cultures and the impact they have on the everyday lives, social interactions, and relationships of young people? These processes are clearly evident in the contributions to this special issue from Megan Chawansky and from Emma Kavanagh, Ian Jones and Lucy Sheppard-Marks, who to differing degrees and intensities unpack the ‘accepted’ and normalised body politic (via celebrities as emblematic subjectivities of such politics) inherent in contemporary digital cultures, Stephanie Jong and Murray Drummond (this issue) add knowledge here, exploring the biopedagogies of fitness information on social networking sites (and trends such as thinspiration and ‘pro-ana’) with respect to the entrenchment of neoliberal responsibility, the promotion of idealised images

of emaciation, and, the governance and control of the body related to weight loss 'health' behaviours of young women.

### **Leisure, Digitality & Public Pedagogy**

As is clear in our discussion above of the political economy of digital leisure and in the reproduction of social inequality, conceptual definitions of 'leisure', of 'public' and of 'bodies' are undergoing radical transformations through the development of digital technologies in and through virtual public spaces. It is becoming of evident importance to consider not only what needs to be investigated in these contexts, but also to consider which theoretical lenses might be able to best capture the complexity of new digital leisure practices. It is likely here that a messy, oft contradictory, assemblage of theoretical sensibilities will be best able to conceptualise, contextualise and explain any given moment of 'leisure' in a digital age (see also Redhead, 2016a). Indeed, the papers in this issue speak to some of these complexities, deploying differing theoretical approaches and perspectives to understand digital leisure cultures to explicate, for example: the conflation of public/private spaces; the recognition of digital leisure practices as resistance/activism; and, the relationship between digital practices and everyday social contexts.

Furthermore, as the digitization of leisure questions the presumed, taken for granted, boundaries between 'public' and 'private'; it reveals how "politics and leisure are historically and dialectically tied" (Arora, 2015: 56). Thus, whilst blogging, social media and other digital sites and platforms are considered to be active sites of leisure practices, at the same time they are emerging as territories of resistance and protest (see Arora, 2015, also Lamond & Spracklen, 2014). Most obviously, through new digital networks of communication, political mobilization can occur through virtual protests and cyberactivism focused on global issues such as the environment, economy, conflict, and terrorism (one has to think, for example, of how Facebook users have changed their profile pictures to the Tricolore in the context of the Paris terror attacks in November 2015 or of the LGBT rainbow flag relational to the attack on Orlando's Pulse Nightclub in June 2016, or the role digital technologies played in the Arab Spring uprisings).

In this regard, given the potential for subversion and activism, digital leisure spaces might be read as sites of resistance that are now recognized as forms of public pedagogy (see Rich & Miah, 2014). As Burdick, Sandlin and O'Malley (2014: 2) observe, "public pedagogy has been largely constructed as a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond or outside of formal schooling". This lens offers leisure researchers an opportunity to examine public pedagogies as spaces for resistance and identify enactments of public pedagogy that are capable of mobilizing resistance and creating productive spaces within which to question and disrupt (Sandlin, Burdick & Rich, 2016). Yet, despite the growth in scholarship exploring these enactments there has been a limited body of work exploring the public pedagogies of technologically mediated spaces (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010). The digitizing of leisure can be considered part of a complex assemblage of institutions, bodies, and discourses through which differing meanings come to be constituted but so too resisted; and a relevant Leisure Studies should be active within these spaces.

We are only beginning to understand how the introduction of digital technologies within, or as, leisure/Leisure Studies can bring about possibilities for social transformation. Rose and Spencer in this special issue offer one such example, considering ways in which Facebook can

be politicised and can counter various problematic hegemonic global structures, and can foster a form of resistance and ‘publicness’ (Biesta, 2012) against global neoliberal capitalism. In so doing, they partially define their roles as ‘leisure scholars as reshaping (or partially demolishing and rebuilding and alternative to) individuals’ social media leisure experiences.’ Chawansky (this issue) suggests that the image-based mobile social networking platform, Instagram, provides opportunities for unique forms of ‘digital activism that challenges the intersectional invisibility of black lesbian sporting celebrities’ and which opens up all too invisible discussions about domestic abuse within LGN relationships. McGillivray et al. (also in this special issue) point to the ways in which major sporting events can, in part, impact upon the digital literacies of young people within a complex, digitally mediated world and provide spaces for cultivating pedagogies that can disrupt established institutional practices and facilitate opportunities for young people to develop critical digital citizenship.

Building on these contributions in very different spaces and contexts, many online video games, virtual communities and social media present differing opportunities for the perpetuation of extant power relations, yet they also provide opportunities for users to form alliances and networks that can also foster negotiation and resistance. For example, the real time involvement of audiences at leisure events (e.g. virtual reality streamed court or pitch side seats or augmented tourism realities) or in gaming environments can influence those very events and their discursive framing and may complicate assumed boundaries between public and private leisure spaces in ways that can challenge inequalities. Furthermore, we might examine how gaming and social media environments act as ‘sites of resistant public pedagogy’ where young people engage in ‘critical learning experiences’ (Sandlin, Wright and Clark, 2011). Further, digital technologies present the possibility of ‘sousveillance’ as well - that is, ‘inverse’ surveillance whereby those in traditionally powerful roles are watched ‘from below’ (e.g. citizens recording encounters with police via mobile phones - Mann, Nolan & Wellman, 2003). If ‘surveillance of the surveillers’ is now affecting the dynamics of social control in general, it is certainly relevant to leisure contexts in particular, such as sporting mega-events (see for example the work of the collective of academics and activists at [gamesmonitor.org.uk](http://gamesmonitor.org.uk)).

This relationship between leisure spaces and resistance is not new (e.g. Wearing, 1998); Arora (2015: 56) draws similarities between digital networks as sites of political mobilization and “publics parks as a spaces, that in a similar fashion, were designed for leisure and consumption but also appropriated as sites of resistance, extending the spatial history of digital politics”. However, given the trends towards prosumption, digital leisure practices raise interesting questions about the negotiation between different sites and values sets, such as the ‘negotiation between commercial and community interests’ (Barta and Neff, 2016). In (re-)thinking a Leisure Studies that embraces the ethos and practices of public pedagogy, we raise possibilities for ‘enacting political and cultural questions’ (Sandlin, Burdick & Rich, 2016). In the interests of critical public intervention, we need more nuanced understandings of the critical potential of emerging digital leisure assemblages.

If the ‘field’ of Leisure Studies is to understand these practices and insights, then novel digital tools for research will increasingly feature in future studies, and if we are to retain the ‘critical promise of the pedagogical’ this may mean moving beyond the ‘lenses, tools and languages of institutionally based frameworks and methodologies’ (Sandlin, Burdick & Rich, 2016). With Thorpe (2016, p.22), we believe there are ‘valuable opportunities’ to include social media and digital technologies (e.g. drones, ‘go-pro’ cameras) as part of our methods. Indeed, across

the papers in this special issue, newer (innovative), forms of research methodology combined with critical theorising have been deployed—ranging from netnography, through articulation, critical readings of body texts, the conceptual development of typographies, and the synthesis of digital leisure cultures with, for example Hardt & Negri’s multitude as a form of hopeful resistance, or critical political economy to explore the technology enhanced reconceptualisation of health as a consumption based experience. Leisure Studies requires a sophisticated and nuanced methodological and conceptual bricolage—incorporating the types of approaches inherent in these articles as well as a further array of visual, digital and narrative methodologies—in order to keep apace of the intensification of digital leisure cultures and their impact upon everyday lives. Indeed, there will be increasing need to capture and understand online conversations around leisure practices oriented for examples towards activism (e.g. Knitivism or Slutwalk). Likewise, there might well be a need for us, as Leisure Studies scholars, to cross borders (Giroux, 2001) between the cossetted world of the academic and that of the artist, activist and yet to be imagined (and maybe, strange) alliances. With Giroux (2001), this might be a space for Leisure Studies scholars to break down the artificial barriers, the separate spaces, and the different audiences that are supported through the infrastructure of disciplinary and institutional borders that “atomize, insulate and prevent diverse cultural workers from collaborating across such boundaries” (p. 7). The irony that such meetings, interventions and spaces are increasingly manifest (e.g. blogs) or organised in digital spaces is not lost upon us; indeed, it may be that by inhabiting (or indeed, reclaiming) digital cultures, Leisure Studies might be in a position to make its most productive social change, impact and further develop a praxis-orientation.

Finally, it is necessary also to be vigilant of the populations that are still absent from these digital environments and the inequalities and disparities (Castells et al., 2007) of leisure opportunities; much as we are aware of our white, middle-class positionalities that shape our discussions within this article. In this sense, it is unlikely that *our* (historical and present) leisure practices and experiences really matter, and that we should (as a field) be far more attentive to the lives, leisure and patterns of inclusion/exclusion of those in far less privileged positions (e.g. of migrants, of those demonised and marginalised by contemporary neoliberal trajectories, of those in states torn apart by internal conflict and simply unable to connect, or indeed of those who choose not to connect/engage in (ephemeral) digital detox. At this juncture, we do not yet know enough about how different social groups access, negotiate and incorporate (digitised) leisure practices into their everyday lives, nor specifically how they might resist the neoliberal systems of dataveillance described above. Some emerging work is beginning to signpost some of the complexities. For example, Barta and Neff (2016, p.528) identify the quantified self movement (using self-tracking data to improve the self/everyday life) as a site for ‘soft resistance’ to big data practices “allowing the community to be aligned with commercial purposes at times and to the individual control and autonomy over data at others”. Elsewhere, Jethani (2015, p.39) argues that there is “creative and political energy within practices of self-tracking” within the “latencies” of the technological production of self-knowledge. As such, our work needs to be attuned to exploring how different geographical, familial, socioeconomic, spatial, and cultural factors shape, limit or provide opportunity for the digital leisure practices.

## **Coda**

And so, by way of brief, temporary closure, we feel it important to reiterate both the concerns and possibilities for the academic study of leisure. As indicated above, our current conjunctural

moment is a digital moment. To understand leisure in this moment necessitates understanding digital culture and the ways in which digital forms, structures and platforms have seismically shifted leisure practices, cultures and experiences. Yet, as a ‘field’/‘discipline’/loose amalgamation of scholars, the academic study (and we would aver, our research led-pedagogies) of a ‘lively leisure’ is not apace—at least not in traditional scholarly outlets—with an accelerated, consumerized, digitized, datafied, technologized, lively world. For ‘leisure’ scholarship to speak in an informed manner, to the complexities, nuances and contradictions of everyday leasured lives, and, to be relevant, meaningful and to contribute to policy, academic and public debates, necessitates a turn to the digital (and it might be that we populate digital spaces, such as [existing] academic blogs, to do so). Failure to do so would most likely be a failure of the possibilities of leisure scholarship. It would decry the possibilities for ‘leisure scholars’ to feature more fully in the debates about digitality currently led by cognate disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, critical health studies (and so on), to make a difference and to inform debate—leisure would (continue to) exist on the academic peripheries engaged in insular conversations with ever dwindling advocates and subscribers.

We do not wish to be overly pessimistic, in fact and whilst it might not seem like it, we are increasingly optimistic that the digital turn can bring leisure back to the centre of academic life (see also Redhead, 2016a) and that the nexus between digital leisure research and (it follows, we hope) research led-teaching can (re-)assert the importance of the field in an increasingly difficult, and often brutal, Higher Education system that sees ‘leisure’ as a soft-target. A relative and recent explosion of work on digital leisure (cf. Carnicelli et. al., 2016; Redhead 2016a/b; Spracklen, 2015) speaks to the potential of an engaged, critical, interdisciplinary and crucial ‘field’ of study, a field perhaps poised to pounce and (re-)assert its import. We offer but one tentative contribution to these exciting debates and have pleasure in introducing the papers in this special issue, all of which, to differing degrees, develop the types of argument we have presented herein. Our hope, our intent, is that this will foster further debate and proffer a resurgence of a meaningful, relevant, ‘lively’, and socially just ‘leisure studies’.

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