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# FROM A CERTAIN POINT OF VIEW: SENSORY PHENOMENOLOGICAL ENVISIONINGS OF RUNNING SPACE AND PLACE

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## **From a certain point of view: sensory phenomenological envisionings of running space and place**

### **Introduction**

The precise ways in which we go shopping, lace our boots, make coffee, drive to work, or take the dog for a walk - all constitute the kind of mundane, repetitive, social actions that are often taken for granted in much social theory, leaving it under-analyzed and under-theorized. In contrast, ethnographers and theorists working within the traditions of the sociology of the mundane and phenomenological sociology have highlighted the importance of subjecting to detailed, rigorous and sustained analysis the taken-for-granted, everyday embodied practices of social life (Schütz 1967). Employing insights derived from sociological phenomenology, this article draws upon recent work in the sociology of the senses, in order to investigate a particular, mundane and embodied social practice, that of training for distance running in specific places, our favoured running routes. As has been highlighted (see for example, Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007; Allen-Collinson 2009), despite a growing body of ethnographic studies of particular sports, relatively little analytic attention has been devoted to the actual, concrete practices of doing sporting activity, although a corpus of phenomenologically inspired research on sport and physical activity embodiment has, in recent years, begun to develop (e.g. Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007, Chisholm 2008, Allen-Collinson 2009, 2011a, 2011b, Crust et al. 2011, Clegg and Butryn 2012, Sparkes and Smith 2012). We are therefore interested in examining in-depth some of the subcultural ways of seeing that runners employ, refined over time and place, and brought into play effectively to accomplish training in the terrain of "running space". Currently, there is scant sociological literature that analyzes in depth the ways in which people engage sensorially in sporting, leisure, and occupational spaces (e.g. Hindmarsh and Heath 2000, Wolkowitz 2006, Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009).

Employing data from a 2-year collaborative autoethnographic project on distance running, we set out to mark the mundane activity of running, primarily in relation to the

visual dimension, but also acknowledging the inter-relatedness and multi-modality of sensory lived experience. Our aim in this article is to subject to analysis a particular subcultural way of looking, a kind of distance-running vision, situated and experienced in specific contexts. Here we focus upon just one of our favored running routes as a sensuous ethnographic site: a run to and around an urban park in a medium-sized English town. This vision, developed and refined over time and specific place, becomes incorporated into our running bodies. One of the great challenges to us as ethnographers (particularly as autoethnographers) and sociological phenomenologists has been the exhortation to make strange and wondrous the taken-for-granted, to see with fresh eyes the mundane things of everyday life. This is what we attempt here, in examining the visual dimension of our everyday training routines for distance running in the particular social space of our training routes. Adopting the phenomenological attitude requires us to engage in *epochē* or bracketing, the temporary suspension of the “natural attitude”, our taken-for-granted assumptions and preconceptions surrounding a particular phenomenon or phenomena. As Husserl (1970, 76) exhorted, we seek to place in question, “hitherto existing convictions, which forbids in advance any judgmental use of them, forbids taking any position as to their validity or invalidity”. As sociologists, and highly cognizant of the importance of social-structural and contextual location, we fully acknowledge the inevitability of the partialness of such bracketing.

In order to address our aim, the article is structured as follows. We first address conceptualizations of space and place, before considering the sociology of the senses generally, and the visual sense specifically. We then portray the research project from which the autoethnographic data are drawn. These data are then presented within our analytical frame, cohering around the three key themes of visualizing space and place: 1) hazardous places; 2) performance places; and 3) the time-space-place nexus.

### **Space and Place**

Theoretically-speaking, it is possible to categorize our training routes as a series of social places. In order for the physical, material “spaces” through which we run to become

"places", they must be filled by events, objects, representations and above all meanings, according to Gieryn (2000). Otherwise, it is argued, spaces remain entities that are solely geometric and abstract (Hilliar and Hanson 1984). Hence, making space into place is a fundamentally cultural and social activity. It therefore follows that places have their own unique location in space, display physical features that are "natural" (e.g. sand, rock, grass, trees) and/or artificial in terms of being human-made (concrete, brick, tarmac, glass) and are invested with specific meanings. What constitutes the "natural" is of course highly debatable and variable. Clayton and Opatow (2003, 6), for example, use the term "natural environment" in relation to: "environments in which the influence of humans is minimal or non-obvious, to living components of that environment (such as trees...), and to non-animate natural environmental features". We would add, however, that what is conceptualized as "natural", "living", and "non-animate" is also highly culture- and context-dependent. For example, in "Western" science, rocks are classed as mineral and deemed to be non-animate, but in Pagan cosmology rocks are living things imbued with spiritual energy. What is deemed to be "natural" by one person, for example, an urban park, for another is highly artificial and "man-made".

Once sense-making and meaning-making have occurred, places are also imagined, interpreted, narrated, felt, perceived and understood (Soja 1996). Devoid of these elements, place becomes substantively and analytically destroyed (Thrift 1996) and transformed back into solely geographical space (Gieryn 2000). As Gieryn (2000, 472) further notes of places: "Foremost, perhaps is pragmatic utility: people identify as places those spots they go to for some particular purpose or function". In the case at hand, a combined sequence of both natural and social phenomena constitutes for us a particular running route. Habitually running such training routes has produced in us a strong sense of place, which involves our ascription of certain qualities to the amalgam of material and social features present within "the route" (Gieryn 2000). As Crabtree (2000, 2) notes, "spaces and places consist of intelligible or meaningful material arrangements which are tied to the performance of particular activities"; in our case



linked to the performed activity of distance running. Here, we seek to portray the visual “performance” involved in traversing particular training routes and the interactional communication of that performance between us as training partners. The sensuous elements of place are key for phenomenology, for as Grasseni (2009, 8) highlights, the concept of place: “must be considered not only as a mental or social construct but as the sensuous experience of being in space and time”. Just as the body is the standpoint for perception, as Merleau-Ponty (1960) vividly portrays, the body is a body-in-place. Given the salient role of the sensuous in the experience of lived space, we now turn to consider the emerging field of the sociology of the senses in general, and the visual in particular.

### **The Sociology of the Senses**

In recent years, there has occurred somewhat of a sensory explosion within the social sciences; a “sensorial revolution” as Howes (2006) describes, reflected in the launch of a specialist journal, *Senses and Society*, in 2006. Drawing upon perspectives from anthropology, sociology, geography and other social sciences, this body of work addresses the specificities of sensory experience across a range of cultures, subcultures (including physical cultures) and historical periods (e.g. Howes 1991, 2006; Classen 1993, 2012; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007; Paterson 2007; Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2011; Allen-Collinson and Owton 2012; Vannini *et al.* 2011; Hockey 2013; Low 2012). The role of the senses in society is argued by these researchers to be crucial, in that the senses: “mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object” (Bull *et al.* 2006, 5), operating as both shapers and bearers of culture. Chau (2008) emphasizes the importance of social actors’ work in sensory *production* as well as in sensory interpretation. Furthermore, we wish to underline the salience of the synesthetic (in terms of the senses working in concert)<sup>1</sup>, for singular sensory modality experience is highly uncommon. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty (2001, 221), working from an existential phenomenological position, asserts that: “no sensation is atomic, all sensory

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<sup>1</sup> The term “synaesthesia” is more commonly used to refer to one modality of sensory experience (e.g. the auditory) being experienced via another modality (e.g. the visual), so that for example a person experiences colours when listening to music.

experience presupposes a certain field, hence co-existences...". Such synesthesia and sensory synthesis emerged strongly from our own data analysis, where the visual was experienced as strongly and deeply interwoven with other senses such as the auditory, the olfactory and also proprioception: inward-facing perception of the muscles and tendons, and the dark internal spaces of the body, of visceral corporeal space. Within ethnography and autoethnography, a body of literature is beginning to explore the sensory dimension of sports and physical cultures. This includes, for example, Sparkes' (2009) "sensory ethnographic" evocative vignettes relating to cricket, football and the gym, Downey's (2002) research on capoeira, Sands' (2001) work on collegiate basketball players, footballers and sprinters, Hockey and Allen-Collinson's (2007) exploration of the sensuous sporting body generally, and of the haptic (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2011) specifically. In this article, it is the visual upon which we focus, whilst acknowledging, as noted above, the synesthetic quality of sensory perception and sensory work.

With regard to perception, as Rose (1993, 89) notes, we perceive our environment using broad cultural (and, we would argue, subcultural) codes; we thus "see" in particular ways, drawing upon our cultural, contextual and experiential resources. This can generate specific "ways of seeing", differentiated by age, gender, ethnicity, degree of dis/ability, occupation and other key sociological factors; for example, the ways in which airport workers see planes (Goodwin and Goodwin 1998), and members of the infantry see the terrain they traverse (Hockey 2009). What is actively seen, and importantly, what is interpreted as "seen" is thus dependent upon the stock of knowledge we have accumulated, largely via direct lived experience but also by transmission via others. Ways of seeing are thus structured by specific kinds of knowledge, which are in turn informed by the act of seeing itself. As Emmison and Smith (2000, 185) argue: "Environments are not simply places where we see things in a passive way. They are also locations where we must look in active ways". Furthermore, as Friedman (2012) notes, vision often plays a privileged role in social interaction and the construction of intersubjective reality. We work at seeing, and this visual work forms

part of what Waskul and Vannini (2008) term our “somatic work”, or what we might conceptualize as the ways in which we go about making sense of our senses. As distance runners, we see our training routes in particular subcultural and also idiographic ways. The analysis we present below draws upon data from a two-year collaborative autoethnographic research project on distance running that we undertook some years ago and which we now describe, in order to contextualize the subsequent data sections.

### **The research project**

The research project was a joint research endeavour, a “collaborative autoethnography” (Allen-Collinson 2013), undertaken during a period of two years during which we were recovering and rehabilitating from long-term running injuries. At the time of the research, both authors were (and still are) two non-élite, but “serious” runners with athletic biographies of distance running and racing, requiring a commitment to training 6 or 7 days a week, sometimes twice daily, for 27 years and 45 years respectively. For 17 years we trained together on a regular and frequent basis when living in the same British cities. Our running encompasses two of Bale’s (2004) forms: 1) welfare running, pursued for health and fitness aims; and also 2) performance (but not élite) running, pursued in order to improve and sustain performance. We are thus *serious runners*, those whom Smith (2000, 190) defines as: “regularly [running] further and faster than fitness for health would demand”. Our degree of involvement in running activity mirrors Stebbins’ (2001) concept of “serious leisure”, involving the following elements: perseverance, progressive improvement (at least when we were younger!), significant personal effort based on specially-acquired knowledge and training, durable benefits (such as health and fitness), a unique ethos or idioculture, and a tendency to identify strongly with the chosen pursuit. These dimensions figure prominently in our running biographies. By coincidence, in the same windswept November week of night-time training in the UK, we both encountered knee injuries, for which there proved to be no rapid treatment or cure, as soon became apparent. Consequently we arrived at a decision systematically to document our injury experiences, and so embarked upon the



collaborative research that eventually turned out to constitute a two-year project. We decided that a collaborative autoethnographic approach - sometimes termed "duoethnography" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang 2010) combining our own personal experiences as distance runners, would provide the best research strategy for investigating in-depth our individual and joint lived experiences of the injury process, and providing a degree of researcher "triangulation" (metaphorically if not literally). Collaborative autoethnography is a wide-ranging form of autoethnography (Allen-Collinson 2013), spanning the involvement of two co-researchers/co-authors to construct the narrative, as in this particular case, to the involvement of many co-researchers to produce more of a "community autoethnography" (e.g. Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt and Leathers 2009) incorporating multiple authorial voices.

During the two-year period of the research, we recorded individually, systematically and in as rich detail as we could, our daily engagement with the injury and rehabilitation process via field notebooks and also micro-tape recorders. We also created a joint "analytic log", wherein we generated analytical themes and concepts. Such individual recording was a habit already long familiar to us as a habitual practice amongst serious runners who record daily performance in such training logs. In the joint analytic log we recorded our discussions and emergent salient themes, theoretical ideas and concepts. So for example, we would ask each other questions about specific incidents and experiences, seeking to challenge our individual and collective assumptions as is commensurate with a phenomenological approach, trying to pinpoint the precise composition of any given theme or concept, together with connections to other themes and concepts already generated.

As two sociological ethnographers - one female, one male - with strong, long-standing running identities, we shared many similarities, but inevitably also diverged (at times widely!) in relation to our embodiment, experiences, and ideas. In the joint log, thematic or conceptual differences between our individual accounts were identified and, if possible, "reconciled". Where no analytical reconciliation proved possible or desirable, we were happy to accept and record the differences. We also discussed the reasons for

such divergence and the impact, if any, upon the process of handling our injuries, thus adding to the data collection process in a manner similarly recounted by Ngunjiri *et al.* (2010). Effectively, we acted as the “primary recipient” (Ochs and Capps 1996, 35) of, and sounding board for, each other’s data, discussing events, experiences and interpretations. Journal entries were analyzed and re-analyzed, in order to send ourselves back in time, to recapture vividly as far as possible the often wildly oscillating emotions of the injury and rehabilitative journey. Throughout the research we made great efforts to engage in “embodied reflexivity”, subjecting to question and critical analysis the impact of our bodily experience on the meanings, beliefs and knowledge we used and generated, both as runners and as sociologists. Commensurate with phenomenological attempts to capture (however partially) the core, essential elements of phenomena, we sought to identify which elements within any emergent theme were deemed essential to the experience of a phenomenon. The quotations included in the analysis below are extracted from the individual field logs we kept throughout the two-year research process: John (Log 1), Jacquelyn (Log 2).

### **The Analysis**

In this article we have chosen to focus upon three key themes that emerged as particularly salient during data analysis. We should explain that the project was not initiated or designed originally as a sensory autoethnographic study, but rather the sensory dimension emerged during subsequent data analysis as being key to our lived experience of running. These themes cohere around visualization of space and place in relation to: 1) hazardous places; 2) performance places; and 3) the time, space and place nexus. These concerns, as the forthcoming analysis will indicate, are closely interwoven and overlapping, but for analytic purposes we have attempted to disentangle their inter-related strands.

## ***Visualizing Hazardous Places***

Serious distance running is, for those unfamiliar with its routines, a highly repetitive and punishing activity, one which demands of its practitioners both high volume and high intensity of training. Our biographies of running stretch over 27 and 45 years respectively, involving training 6 or 7 days a week, sometimes twice daily during our most competitive years. We have backgrounds in competitive athletics involving distances from the marathon to 5 miles. Now in our 50s and 60s respectively, under the UK system we are firmly categorised as “veteran” runners, and our current training regimes are somewhat gentler than in our youth, given the need to protect our bodies from the rigours of joint-pounding that distance running inevitably entails. One of the results of such a demanding physical regime is that, in common with other athletes, runners become sensitised to injury as an ever-present possibility and threat, generated by the heavy, repetitive physical demands on the body. Overuse injury is a constant danger. Compounding this understanding is an awareness that out there in public places lurk other kinds of dangers, also likely to provoke injury, necessitating a vigilant monitoring of the environment in order to identify these and whenever possible take avoidance action.

Whilst we are nowadays primarily off-road runners (preferring to run on grass whenever possible in order to protect ravaged knees) we are nevertheless obliged to run on road on a regular and frequent basis. For runners, nearly all urban road routes contain potentially hazardous and injurious features, such as fast-flowing traffic, major road junctions, roundabouts, and concealed driveways, where hazards from vehicles are considerable, necessitating a high degree of visual (and aural) surveillance as the runner approaches these at relative speed; for example:

J. and I are charging down a relatively steep hill on the pavement, quads (quadriceps muscles) taking the strain as we concentrate on trying to steady our momentum, and also to protect sensitive knees... I’m slightly ahead, looking into the middle distance to gauge how far the downhill section will last... when suddenly, without warning, I’m aware via my runner’s peripheral

vision that out of a concealed drive-way to my right is suddenly appearing the sleek, hard, glistening bonnet of an expensive, family saloon car! I jam on the anchors, flinging my outstretched arms against the body of the car in a desperate attempt to stop my hurtling body, wrenching and jarring my shoulders with the impact of the force... Alarmed by the noise, the driver turns to see me squashed against his passenger side window as he continues to drive out on to the pavement towards the road, and then breaks forcibly. But I don't want to stop to engage in conversation or even to accept what looks about to be a proffered apology ... my momentum – and an adrenalin rush - keeps me hurtling forward, I'm already looking ahead to the next section of pavement, scanning for other precipitous exits from driveways... (Log 2)

Some routes are problematic due not to vehicle hazards, but rather to their usage by human and animal traffic. For example, when training in our urban park, there is an underpass joining two sides of the park, which has steep slopes to either side before descending into a dark, dank and fetid tunnel. Narrow, badly lit and with poor visibility, passing through this underpass demands of the runner constant visual alertness (not to mention olfactory stoicism) and monitoring, so as to avoid collision with speeding cyclists, parents and prams, teetering toddlers, lounging groups of adolescents, and roaming, unpredictable dogs. The latter, particularly when of large size, constitute a perennial hazard for which we watch out, in order to avoid as far as possible the following kind of incident:

The path at the bottom of the park is narrow and I espy a woman (dog-walker) approaching with a narky-looking Jack Russell terrier tugging against its lead. So, based on previous experience I slow right down to barely a shuffle so as not provoke the thing. To no avail, for as I pass the creature with a snarl seizes my left foot in its mouth and proceeds to try to bite! With



barely repressed anger, I tell her to: 'pull it off or I will damage it'. She eventually does so, making the usual bleated excuse that 'he is not normally aggressive', as if somehow it were my fault that her dog has attacked. I give a weary look and run on with sore foot and a hole in a new pair of expensive training flats. (Log 1)

Other sections of our favored route harbor dangers that become activated only when traversed repeatedly and habitually, and a form of retrospective vision is required to identify these:

I've been getting soreness in my shins. I guess the start of what is usually called "shin splints". We are trying to identify why this might be happening, thinking about how we have been training lately. As we mentally rehearse some of our recent routes, we realise that we've been using one road route to P... park a lot and it's got a big camber on it for a large section, which seems to impact adversely upon my gait. We've made a decision to knock that route in the head for a bit and review whether over a week the soreness disappears. It's a nice route, but not one to run a lot. (Log 1).

Other potentially problematic features for which we keep open a scanning, monitoring eye *en route* include, for example: tree roots bulging out on to the parkland paths, holes and divots slyly disguised by grass or snow, slippery surfaces (mud, frost- or dew-laden grass), and the occasional potentially lethal hazard:

Either ascending or descending the slope with railings down one side, we always try to remember to be cautious. The slope ends with a lead-in to a very small path between the railings and bushes; it's a really tight squeeze much of the year, in order to wriggle even a runner's slight body through. Once on the path itself, about a foot out stands a jagged, broken-off piece of



railing, jutting up. We have tried on several occasions to extract it, but to no avail, it will not shift. It's a danger point every time we run that way, in both directions of traversing the route, but more so going down. So it's become a habitual practice when running solo to mutter internally "mind the spike", and when running together the lead person will shout "spike!" on espying the offending thing. (Log 2)

Some hazards are visible differentially according to season or time of day. There are "natural" features such as pine cones (perfectly configured for twisting ankles) or deep ruts caused by cyclists or by ice and rain. Other human-produced hazards include the dubious use of certain more secluded areas of our park for the (non-safe) disposal of needles by local drug users. Additionally, the spring and summer months bring golfers out in force on to "our" park, as part of the grassed parkland is devoted to a small-scale, pay-as-you-play golf course, which harbors its own hazards, particularly when groups of teenagers head out on to the course in spring and summer:

On the park in the spring and golf is in "full swing"! Most of the time that's fine as it's families or adults participating. Sometimes though, like yesterday, you get groups of teenagers playing. What they do, when the mood takes them, is to hit the ball directly at us or very near, often calling out "fore" [meaning "watch out afore"] at the last minute and then breaking into collective sniggers if they detect any reaction at all from us, the more anxious we look, the better, it seems! So we watch, we monitor, we periodically look ahead when out training, particular along certain routes. It's like a film unfolding, watching what's building up; often you've seen the same scenario play in front of you countless times before, so you know what action is likely to occur... Whichever of us sees that kind of troublesome group first will then mutter: "idiots/dickheads to left/right/over there!", indicating to the other that it's definitely advisable to follow a different trajectory. Avoidance is the usual favoured strategy as there is no point in confronting the kids if they

start that kind of rubbish. Anyway, confrontation requires stopping the training and the momentum of the run, and also, more seriously, might mean being hit by a stinging hard golf ball in the quads or somewhere even more vulnerable, with consequent time off training if the bruising is very severe. In sum: not worth the hassle! (Log 2)

Examining the data, it became evident that some of the most challenging and potentially threatening navigational problems envisaged were groups of adolescents and teenagers. These groups fit neatly with Smith's (1997, 61) Goffmanesque category of an "idling congregation", often "hanging out" at certain times of day in the environs of particular pubs or bars. Such groups are notoriously difficult to navigate when out running, and thus we keep a careful watch out, and avoid them if at all practicable. Training in public space, however, there was inevitably the possibility that such groups would be encountered unexpectedly, despite our visual vigilance:

He's about 15, and much bigger than me, coming at me down a little park slope with increasing momentum. He's heading precipitously over in my direction from his former lounging position with a harem of giggling teenage girls... I note with a swift check that he's brandishing a cricket stump in his right hand, shouting something I can't quite make out, probably just as well. Snaking my hips in the opposite direction to his strike hand, I deftly avoid his bulking frame, adrenalin flooding my system. Is this just showing off for the girls or is it "serious"? A few yards later and with a furtive glance behind me, it becomes apparent it's the former thankfully, and the admiring posse of teenage girls is now laughing at his antics. Who needs this on a nice summer's evening training run though...? (Log 2)

### ***Visualizing Performance Places***

The training schedules of serious distance runners are constructed with the aim of enhancing performance, and normally include combinations of different types of running, designed in order to enhance endurance, strength and speed. Long duration, steady-state running builds endurance, whilst speed is facilitated by shorter sessions of high-intensity running, and strength-endurance can be built by running hills, for example. With this performative concern in mind, runners look to locate and use different kinds of terrain, which will facilitate these different kinds of training. Moreover, as Smith (1997, 60) has observed, the vast majority of UK distance runners' training is undertaken not in purpose-built athletic stadia or training routes, but in public space. The subcultural phrase for training terrain is "the going". Hence, runners will evaluate the going by careful visual checking and identifying of terrain types and the possibilities for carrying out particular kinds of running on these. So, for example, speed sessions (usually termed "intervals") need to be performed on terrain permitting a very swift leg cadence. The optimum surfaces for this kind of running are usually flat roads with surfaces devoid of pot-holes, or for example cricket pitches or golf courses (if one can gain access – "legally" or "illegally"!), parkland or canal towpaths:

This week, we have started to put in some longer interval sessions. This begs the questions: 1) where are we doing them? and 2) why? We have carefully selected a section along the whole length of the park, at its Northern edge. It's not exactly flat but the gradient isn't severe, so we can happily maintain the same pace throughout. The grass is also mowed quite frequently so that relatively speaking underfoot it's pretty smooth and the legs cycle flows – it can feel a bit encumbered and uneven when the grass grows longer. The latter is important when we're trying to keep the pace consistent for the whole interval. We are really working the body hard and the last thing you want is that kind of irritant. (Log 1)

Whilst terrain is sought out visually for its smoothness, it may also be located for its arduousness, depending upon what is required in the particular session, for example, a gradient may be needed in combination with a smooth surface:

After looking at a number of locations we have found an ideal slope for doing hill repeats. We needed something that was long enough and steep enough to build muscular power and anaerobic capacity, but not too extreme in terms of its demands on us. Underfoot it's good with the turf being even and just short of 100 metres in length, so we can drive up with a high knee lift and jog down doing repeats. (Log 1)

As indicated above, the terrain is carefully visually scrutinised for its surface and form, and for what that allows runners to do within certain physiological parameters. Once those parameters are exceeded, training becomes problematic, as physiological demand goes into overload and injury may then threaten. Another salient feature when visually interrogating ground is what in subcultural parlance is termed its "technical difficulty". Particular kinds of competition (cross-country, trail and fell races, for example) demand of runners a high degree of bodily coordination, necessary to traverse at speed routes where the ground is broken or uneven. Whilst there are inevitable natural differences in individuals' coordination abilities, much of this embodied competency is learnt gradually by repeatedly running routes which contain rough, uneven ground and downhill sections. So, especially when specific competitive seasons are approaching (e.g. cross-country) athletes will visually check out and identify routes which incorporate these kinds of terrain.

What constitutes good going for training is, however, highly variable and context-dependent, for the going will change depending upon a number of features. So, for example, canal towpaths, if flat and relatively smooth (and not overcrowded with pedestrians), are ideal for running fast sessions, but not so in the winter when they can become boggy, muddy and water-logged and thus give rise to Achilles' tendon problems.



Flat, smooth roads are similarly sought out for the same kind of sessions, but only at particular times of the day when traffic flow is likely not to be too heavy. The above examples also point to another key element which structures runners' relationship to training in public places: temporality.

### ***Visualizing and Feeling Time, Space and Place***

The particular combination of place and space that constitutes a training route tends to be run cyclically as the competitive seasons change (cross-country, road, track, and so on). Within these runs, the relationship between the visual and the going is an endlessly shifting one, for as Ingold (2000 226, 230) notes: "people see as they move" and, "our knowledge of the environment undergoes a continuous formulation in the very course of our moving". Moreover, as the existentialist phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty (2008), pointed out, the visual and the haptic senses are often inseparable in much of daily life. What this means for distance runners is that there is a strong visual-haptic interactional experience as runners cover their routes, both visually scanning the terrain and environment, and also feeling the touch of terrain, and of the elements. Runs, and sections of runs, are corporeally and sensorially experienced as going well, or badly or simply just "okay". These categorisations are rooted in a shifting nexus of corporeally experienced, "felt" features, such as: one's degree of fluidity in movement, energy levels, muscle texture and breathing patterns (see Hockey 2013). These corporeal features influence how the route is seen in terms of a particular kind of temporality, that of "inner time", termed by Schütz (1967) *durée*, the present moment of the lived experience, which is intimately linked to an individual's emotions, sensations and perceptions (Melucci 1996). Interrogation of our data revealed that most training runs were characterised as "okay", when covering the ground was seen and felt as "normal", in that our inner time perception mirrored what has been termed "linear" or "clock-based" time (Adam 1990):



We went out and did eight [miles] this evening just ticked off the miles, at seven minutes per mile, nothing special, and nothing exceptional, everything felt ok, the body not grumbling too much, just held the pace up the slopes, down the slopes etc. On reflection, a lot of runs correspond with this running-state. It's like you are sitting on the front of a train or something, you pass through the landscape at a particular tempo and that tempo is something you can handle relatively comfortably, without duress, but without any particular "flow" and so that's what it feels like, and that's what it looks like. (Log 1)

Less frequently (fortunately) were training experiences we categorised as "bad", "duff" or in the second author's succinct phrase: "crap". This was primarily due to the running body being over-fatigued (often from demanding professional occupations), dehydrated, or suffering from muscle or tendon problems, or similar:

Anxious today as I started to get a stiff left glute (gluteal muscle) after about 2 miles, so there I am thinking 'any minute it will run through the whole kinetic chain - IT (iliotibial) band and the hamstring'. Everything starts to tighten to harden up and the running has no fluidity. It feels like screws tightening. You are judging all the time whether you are on the verge of actually pulling a muscle. The least it becomes is an uncomfortable run... Runs like that seem to go on and on and you want to get them over with, but just seem to be creeping around slowly, slowly, and the run passes in something like slow motion with every part of it seeming to take an age to complete. I know non-runner friends would say, "Well, why not cut the run short then?!" (Log 1)

In contrast, and even rarer (and therefore very precious) were training sessions when individually and sometimes collectively we were on "top form", and the ground was covered with ease, being perceived in a very special way:

Just occasionally you get training runs which are simply extraordinary, sweet. We went and did a 6 and everything felt wonderful, almost ethereal in a way, it was like running in reduced gravity. As if I passed almost above the ground effortlessly, just lightness personified... the unbearable lightness of being? No, the very bearable lightness of being! I could have gone on and on...The strange thing is when you get them like that, it's as if parts of the route go missing and you suddenly find yourself at some marker half way along, thinking: how have I got here? The other thing about these kind of sessions is you seem go through the route extraordinarily fast, faster than you know you are actually physically running and then the wonderful experience is, suddenly, over! (Log 2)

As Schütz and Luckmann (1973, 47) indicate: "The structure of the life-worldly time is built up where the subjective time of the stream of consciousness (of inner duration) intersects with the rhythm of the body..." and in the athletic case at hand, that intersection produces a particular felt, but also simultaneously visual, perception of how training routes are traversed. Interestingly, such perceptions cohere with Flaherty's (1999, 43-83) theoretical formulations of temporal "synchronicity", where inner time is synchronous with clock time; "protracted duration" where time appears to extend, and "temporal compression" where time flies by. Further, Flaherty (1999) links these temporal perceptions with the respective conditions of: average environmental intensity, various forms of suffering, and tasks that are challenging but not overloading. Examining the data, these theoretical formulations appear to fit well with our recorded experiences of passing through the space/place/time matrix of training routes, where our lived experience of time seems to shift along with our visual (and other sensory) perceptions of passing through and over the designated route.

## Reflections

In this article, we seek to contribute to the developing field of the sociology of the senses and of sensory ethnographic work, by focusing on the visual dimension of our engagement in what is for us the mundane activity of running through space and place, employing data from a two-year collaborative autoethnographic project on distance running. Utilising a phenomenologically-inspired approach, we have investigated a particular, subcultural way of seeing, our distance-running vision, situated and experienced in specific spaces and places encountered on one of our favoured running routes to and around an urban park in a provincial English town. This is a route which we have run together on many occasions stretching over almost two decades. Our analytic attention focused on three key themes in relation to the visual; our runners' vision of: 1) hazardous places; 2) performance places; 3) the time, space and place nexus. This vision, developed, deployed and refined over time and specific context has now become incorporated and sedimented into our running bodies, and is practised via what Sudnow (1972) has termed "the glance", a ceaseless scanning of terrain as it is traversed.

As noted above, in order for the physical, material spaces through which we run to become "places", they must be given meanings. As Gieryn (2000) highlights, making space into place is fundamentally a social activity, and in the particular case described above, "our running-route" is an interactional and intersubjective co-production. Various physical and social features are encountered – both visually and also via other elements of the sensorium – when running the urban route described. Above, we highlighted some of the visualizations, interpretations, feelings, perceptions, intersubjective understandings, and (co)narrations of our running route. The route for us does indeed have a functional, pragmatic utility, commensurate with Gieryn's (2000, 472) analysis of places as: "those spots [people] go to for some particular purpose or function". In its entirety it constitutes a training route with the purpose of providing the space/place in which to undertake our training. Further, and as highlighted above, particular sections of the route have specific functions, dependent amongst other things upon the

purpose(s) of any given training session and the time (diurnal and/or seasonal) at which the session is taking place. We ascribe certain qualities to both individual features, and also to the amalgam of material and social features present within the route. The ways in which we “see” sections of the route, and the route *in toto* are structured by our runners’ vision, socialized into us as members of the distance running subculture, but also arising from our own unique biographical and lived-body experiences as runners. Beyond the functional purpose of the route, however, it also has symbolic salience: it is a remembered place, replete with memories of our lived running experiences, of the times we have shared together, of injury times when we were, individually and also collectively, unable to traverse its pathways, sad, frustrated and angry, of emotional and turbulent times, and also of happy, joyful runs, the laughter between us, and the shared intersubjective experience of a passionate and deep commitment to running, which has often bemused and perplexed our non-running significant others.

What our running space-places mean to us and the knowledge we have of them is thus the result of our athletic embodied practices within them. In very particular ways we inhabit or dwell in these places via the “active, practical and perceptual engagement” (Ingold 2000, 42) practices portrayed above. Whilst this habitual, direct and deeply sensory engagement was shared between us intersubjectively as training partners, the practice of collective corporeal “inhabiting” also occurs more widely, between circles of distance runners, such as, for example, those who are members of a particular athletic club or who train within a particular location. Within such subcultural social networks, particular running space-places become known and named. For example, from our past engagement with various athletic clubs we have come to know intimately: the “Lido 10”, the “Stepping Stones”, “Cats Ash”, “The Pig”, “Twm Barlum”, and many more, whose names over the years have come to hold deep meaning. Such knowing and naming also invokes particular catalogues of sensory knowledge of the kind portrayed above. Hence, when “The Pig” is mentioned amongst members of a certain athletic club, the subcultural audience knows and can envisage just how that space-place is encountered and



traversed corporeally, including its temporal specificities varying over seasons, months, days and times of the day. That space-place is particular and can be created for some of the specific training purposes we have described. The sense of sharing and belonging to space-place is also particular (see Olwig, 2008 on the relationship between movement, sight and the sense of belonging). Through such practices, sociality and subcultural community are constructed on lived-body sensory foundations, not just via symbolic or discursive means.

As ethnographers and theorists working within the long-standing tradition of the sociology of the mundane have highlighted, there is important work to be done in turning our sharp ethnographic attention to the often taken-for-granted, everyday, familiar routines that characterise and structure so much of social life. The sensorial dimension is similarly often taken for granted, and currently there is scant sociological literature that analyzes in depth the ways in which people engage sensorially in their everyday worlds of work and leisure (Wolkowitz 2006, Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009). In this article, we have thus tried to focus the auto/ethnographic gaze upon the sensory dimensions of engaging in what is for us, as two everyday, ordinary (run of the mill) runners, the routine mundane practice of training for distance running. For us this running practice straddles the worlds of work and leisure, constituting neither purely one nor the other; it is both hard work – physically and psychologically – but also “play” of a certain kind (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2013) in that it is precious time out from our busy (paid) work schedules.

With regard to the “so what?” question, with which sociologists and particularly ethnographers addressing the mundane so often have to contend, we would argue that the ways in which individuals and social groups go about doing the things of everyday life, are all too often taken for granted in much “grand” social theorizing, leaving such accomplishments as unproblematic, under-analyzed and under-theorized. Yet, as Giddens (1984, 60) asserts, the stable continuity of both individual selves and of social institutions is dependent upon the continuous reproduction of mundane routine events.



Thus, as Lynch (2001) highlights, what is really at stake is not so much the theoretical problem of order but the substantive production of order on singular occasions, which is routinely and mundanely accomplished in everyday life. It is only when these taken-for-granted processes of everyday are disrupted or abrupted, for example by illness or injury or natural/human-made disaster, that their importance becomes so poignantly manifest.

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