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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003317111-10>
EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/12477>

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Awareness, focus and nuance: reflexivity and reflective embodiment in sensory ethnography

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In Phillip Vannini (Ed) Routledge Handbook of Sensory Ethnography

(to be published 2023)

Accepted for publication 21/1/23

Reflexivity and the reflexive process are vital aspects of ethnographic research (Bieler et al., 2021; Buscatto, 2016), including sensory ethnographic studies (Hockey, 2021; McNarry et al., 2019; Sparkes, 2017), and autoethnographic research (Allen-Collinson, 2013). In this chapter, we examine the complexities of sensory reflexivity as it was practised by us in two auto/ethnographic projects. The first involved John's extended participant observation with an operational unit of UK British infantry. The second constituted a collaborative autoethnography on distance running, injury and rehabilitation, and involved both of us (for extended details of the fieldwork, see Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2020; Hockey, 2016). Whilst neither project was initially conceptualized as being a sensory auto/ethnography specifically, given the salience of the body and corporeal processes in both, the sensory dimensions emerged very strongly. We begin the discussion with a consideration of reflexivity itself.

Reflexivity in sensory ethnography

Reflexivity can be defined as the recognition that the researcher herself/himself cannot be detached from the research setting, or entirely independent of the research process, but rather is fundamentally part of these, influencing and being influenced by the setting and its social actors. This perspective challenges naïve, positivist ideas that research can somehow provide a neutral or distanced perspective (McNarry et al., 2019). As academics and researchers, we are socialized into socio-cultural (and gendered, classed, aged, and so on) ways of thinking and of being, and

consequently we subscribe to norms and values as a result of such socialization. Decisions about the research projects we wish to undertake (at least those where we have choice) are shaped by our socialization and biographical experiences, as are our paradigmatic stance, methodology and research approach, and choice of theoretical and/or conceptual framework. Engagement with reflexivity means we need to be aware of our positionality regarding the above factors.

Furthermore, our ideas, assumptions, and pre-suppositions, meanings, and interpretations are always inevitably with us, including in our observations, sensations and experiences of the (auto)ethnographic field, so that these can never be totally “neutral,” or value-free. Indeed, the very language in which we record these observations and sensations, and any subsequent “write-up” documentation, such as articles and reports, is replete with our values and biography (as also of course is any “scientific” laboratory report) . Hence, we agree with Atkinson (2022, p. 146) that: “reflexivity (in that sense of proactively reactive research) and reflective practice imply one another. A recognition that we constitute our phenomena through our methodological interactions with the social and material world enjoins critical reflection on what we are doing and how we are doing it.” Being reflexive means therefore that we need to make best efforts to “stand back” and maintain a critical perspective and analytic distance on our own situatedness in the research. We seek to be critically aware and reflexive, as far as possible, about our social positioning and our impact upon the ethnographic field under investigation. Via a process of “bracketing” we can be self-critical towards our assumptions and preconceptions, which we can seek to identify, address, and challenge (Allen-Collinson, 2011).

In sensory ethnography, as Pink (2009) notes, from the late 1980s onwards, reflexive accounts of the roles played by the senses in anthropological fieldwork began to emerge, along with an increasing academic interest in embodiment generally. This “reflexive turn” was also a response to debates about the limitations of an ethnographic writing culture that Howes (1991) described as being “verbocentric” and limited, as it failed to account for the senses. From this time on, it was acknowledged that there was a need for reflexive engagements with how ethnographic knowledge is

produced, and a recognition of the importance of the body in human experience and also in academic practice (Pink, 2009). The practice of sensory ethnography is thus dependent upon a particular kind of researcher *awareness*, which has a number of levels. First, there is the general level of being cognizant that sensory activity is fundamental to making social interaction possible. Second, there is an alertness to particular contextual features that impact upon sensory practices as they occur. Third, there is a focused vigilance upon the latter practices themselves in a detailed recording of them, what they accomplish, and what they mean for participants.

This kind of researcher awareness is precisely what we seek to portray analytically below, drawing on the two separate projects introduced above. To contextualize these projects, and as part of our engagement with reflexivity, we first explain the predisposing features that propelled us to engage with these research studies. Then, we portray *how* we actually engaged with reflexivity in both projects, drawing on grounded examples emanating from our data. The examples are portrayed under the following themes: Relearning sensory embodiment, Danger and awareness, Alertness and difference, and Encountering the sensory new.

Motives and meaning

What induces ethnographers to delve into particular social worlds using participant observation, which is arguably the most intensive and all-encompassing of qualitative methods, is always a complex “vocabulary of motives” (Mills, 1940). The ethnography of the British infantry (Hockey, 1986) completed by John, was propelled by two emotionally charged motives. First, completing the study was seen as the end of a 10-year journey to “get educated,” which started with John obtaining his first formal school qualification at the age of 25. Second, the topic constituted an examination of his pre-university life when he had soldiered for a decade as an Army Corporal. The key aim for John was to understand (with the aid of sociological tools) that decade, which at the time of the fieldwork was perceived as “wasted” (Hockey, 1996). The motives then were personal and powerful, and the ethnographic process was conceptualized extremely positively as the means to achieve both objectives.

The distance running project held a similar personal and emotional intensity (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2020). Although non-elite, performance athletes, we were highly committed, “serious” distance runners (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007), and training partners who had, immediately prior to the research, incurred long-term knee injuries in the same week of winter training in an English rural town. Subsequently, we endured almost two years of long, painful, and slow struggle, to recover, rehabilitate and begin to run again. During that time, there was much emotional turmoil, self-questioning, and repeated frustration over our individual and collective lack of progress. The autoethnographic research on that injury-to-recovery process was propelled, soon after suffering the injuries, by the motive of engaging in something positive and productive; securing some sociological, analytic purchase would, we both felt, help us cope with such a negative collective experience.

These highly positive motives for both projects created an intensity of purpose, which fostered an *alertness* to, and subsequently a detailed recording of, the complexities of the social processes at hand; passion then propelled our analytic processes. Thus, there was both a solo (in John’s infantry research) and then later a collective (in our running research) determination to “miss nothing” during fieldwork and data collection. This in turn meant paying attention to small things and the contexts in which they happened. Such concern with this level of analysis of the mundane was also influenced by our sociological backgrounds, our interest in micro-sociological theoretical frameworks and processes, and our individual and collective interest in ethnomethodology (EM) with its focus on the mundane processes of *how* things get done via sequences of commonplace action. These processes Garfinkel (1967, p. 32) has termed “artful practices,” the most basic and arguably fundamental of which are found at the sensory level. It is these processes we aimed to identify and explore in detail. Moreover, by the time the running project commenced, John had published a general paper on the problems of researching familiar settings. So, whilst there was an academic resource (EM) influencing our focus on analysing at the sensory level, there was also another resource (Hockey, 1993) which alerted us to the problems of engaging with normally taken-

for-granted phenomena. This is not to say that either venture was conceived as EM from inception, indeed, both were initially framed as essentially symbolic interactionist in character.

The military project was viewed as a Chicago School style ethnography, and the running project's initial focus was at the level of challenges to our running identity and our engagement in "identity work" (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007). During the data collection phases, we had little familiarity at the time with the conceptual resources offered by the anthropology of the senses/sensory anthropology (Howes, 2019), or phenomenology. Rather, our primary concern was to collect data on mundane, habitual practices, or what Moran (2007, p.3) has termed the "infra-ordinary," as "that part of our lives that is so routine as to become almost invisible, like infrared light." It was only years later that our awareness of sensory anthropology and then social or cultural phenomenology developed. As Rosaldo (1993) has observed, interpretations are inevitably provisional and made by researchers who are located in certain contexts, who possess certain kinds of knowledge but not others. Simply put, at the time of commencing the above projects, we were intent on collecting data on highly embodied processes, and these data inevitably embraced the sensory domain, and indeed were strongly sensorily shaped, and fundamental to the practices of two *sensory communities* (Vannini et al., 2012) with which we were involved.

Embodied habits and everyday routines

As Edensor (2001, p. 61) notes:

The everyday can partly be captured by unreflexive habits, inscribed on the body, a normative unquestioned way of being in the world... These shared habits strengthen affective and cognitive links, constitute a habitus of acquired skills which minimize unnecessary reflection every time a decision is required.

These habits are in effect *practices* that are linked together into daily routines and "coordinated with other activities and organised in a particular serial order" (O'Dell, 2009, p. 85). For their effective completion, both competitive sport and military activities demand huge amounts of training, comprised of routines that are repeated endlessly, day after day, month after month and so on. In

the case of distance running, such routines enhance competitive performance, and in the case of infantry they are designed to increase operational effectiveness when confronting the “enemy.” These habitual routines in both cases embed fundamental sensory perceptions at the somatic level of socio-cultural members’ being. In their own particular ways, they become mundane and taken for granted, and therefore difficult to grasp analytically, particularly for those “insider-members” who have been heavily socialized into them and have practised them for prolonged periods of time (as in our own case).

Physicality and enforced sensory awareness

Along with the resources of symbolic interactionism and EM in our collective biographies, there was also a fortuitous coincidence that both the research projects had deeply corporeal, even visceral, elements. Distance running is immensely physically-demanding and corporeally-grounded. Thus, training twice a day, seven days a week, to enhance performance, is a pattern found in our athletic biographies. The physical practices, and also at times the resulting injuries from those practices, had for years sensitized us to the nuances of somatic sensory patterns and enhanced our understandings of those patterns. For example, the nature of the pain originating from an injured Achilles’ tendon was “known” and recognized and could be distinguished from pain originating from a damaged peroneal tendon (these tendons are found close to each other). We also learned over time and with experience which of the two is more difficult to deal with and keep on running (the former!).

As insiders to the distance-running culture, our members’ knowledge and ways of knowing were present, and drawn on routinely and in many cases tacitly. A key challenge therefore was how to uncover and reveal this knowledge, systematically and in detail, to our researcher selves. The serious knee injuries *forced* us both to stop running. After several attempts to engage in reduced training, together with much frustration and anxiety, we were obliged to admit to ourselves and to each other, that we had to stop running (a dire, last-resort decision); the injuries were not responding to all our best efforts to treat them. There was subsequently an initial and very poignant awareness of what we were missing; a core element of “us,” individually and jointly, was disrupted,

if not abrupted. This initial shock was followed by repeated attempts, over a prolonged period, to rehabilitate, recover and run again. In that time span, replete with emotional and corporeal oscillations, effectively we had to re-learn how to run, requiring much thought and also the detailed observation of each other's running performance, along with highly developed "somatic empathy" (Allen-Collinson et al., 2016) and intercorporeal attunement. For us, empathy in general involves seeking temporarily to enter into another's lifeworld; it connotes the ability to *feel* with, rather than *about* a person, and to be sensitive toward their reality. The concept of "somatic empathy" highlights the importance of corporeality in empathy, seeking to imagine another's somatic or bodily experience. So, in the running project, we recorded in detail a gamut of sensory perceptions and experiences, raising to conscious awareness many of our previously taken-for-granted running practices, including regarding empathizing with our co-runner.

In the British Army project, nearly eight years after leaving the Army, John returned to undertake participant observation with the military, living mainly 24/7 with infantry troops for three months of intensive and intense fieldwork. During his time in civilian life post-Army, whilst he remained physically fit, John had not experienced the complete physical assault on the body wrought by routine infantry practices. This shock is immensely sensory, regarding what is felt and habitually enacted, and usually with very little sleep or recovery time. The impact upon John—both corporeal and cognitive—was considerable, with the resulting frequent question-to-self: "Shit, did I actually used to do this?!" There was a forced attention to the sensory domain, which could not be ignored, and thus an alertness to the need to record in detail sensory experience. In both research projects, their fundamentally physical nature, which generated myriad instances of "intense embodiment" (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015), compelled our focused attention, thus aiding analytic reflexivity. Next, we widen the analytic lens to consider reflexivity more generally.

Having set the scene and the wider context, we now portray the key themes that structure our examples of reflexivity in action: Relearning sensory embodiment, Danger and awareness,

Alertness and difference, and Encountering the sensory new. Within these themes, the sensory activities of hearing, moving, touching, seeing and smelling are featured.

Re-learning sensory embodiment

A key means by which reflexivity and heightened awareness came into play was when our everyday ways of being and mundane practices were thrown into stark relief, raising to conscious level what had previously been taken-for-granted. The ability to run was one such practice, which emerged clearly during our running research. For both of us, being able to run had largely been taken-for-granted once we had achieved the necessary levels of fitness. In Jacquelyn's case, this had required a long period of "training" her asthmatic lungs, to be able to dispense with her asthma medication and inhalers, other than in specific situations (for example, when running in polluted air). Even in these circumstances, our ability to, and ways of knowing *how* to run were rarely problematic; it was more a question of knowing we were *able* to run, but temporarily prevented from doing so, for instance when contending with an acute injury. The extended injury period, however, generated a very different challenge to our running body-selves: experientially, it felt as though we had "forgotten" *how* to run. A familiar, taken-for-granted activity had, over weeks and then months of enforced injury time, become unfamiliar to our body-minds, and the relative ease of running had become "dys-ease" as our bodies—and lower limbs in particular—became objects of intentionality in a state of bodily "dys-appearance" (Leder, 1990). As we gradually attempted to return to running, initially just for very short distances, our reflexivity was increased by having to engage in the active, somatic (re)learning of how to run:

We have started to run, which, whilst anxiety-provoking is also energising because we are on the way back. Initially tried some tiny 10-metre trots with rests in between, but to our consternation are like babies! Like drunks we stagger all over the place. No coordination, legs out of kilter with arms, unused to the effort so breathing is ragged, legs do not seem to fit with the torso, and head feels wobbly

and heavy. Even these baby trots tire us, compounding the problem. So much for our veteran runner status, this is a reality-shock because we now truly know we are absolute beginners once again.

The mind-body shock raised to conscious level an activity that previously had, for the most part, been pre-reflective. Knowing “how to” run was contingent, we found. We subsequently came to the realization that our running-bodies were indeed projects to be “worked at and accomplished” (Shilling, 2003, pp. 4-5), but never achieved once and for all. Shilling (2016) also identifies the need for research addressing the cognitive, corporeal and cultural nexus, where thought and reflexivity need to be considered in conjunction with the corporeal.

Analogously, re-learning occurred for John when engaging with infantry practices. The following field note derives from a period of training in Alberta during a hot summer in which repeated marches of 20 miles and over were completed on undulating sandy trails. This is what infantry call a TAB (tactical advance to battle), carrying the standard operational load of an 80lb (36kg+) Bergen (rucksack), plus a weapon:

Bergens get pulled on for another TAB, uuuuuuhhhhh, breath exhaled as load hits the body, spine feeling driven down to earth, feel vertebrae CLUNK! Our faces all screwed up tight, eyes clenched closed initially as the load bites, my mind shouts no! – not more today. Move: yesterday’s blisters say “good morning!”, who’s put a lighted match to shoulders?? (shift load find a better position – there is none), toes, heels (blood in boots not a myth), hips (ammunition pouches) rub rub rub. Bite bite lips it helps... Neck muscles grabbed by a monster who is twisting them tighter, tighter. Biceps and forearms plead “rest” so change weapon to other arm... Tongue huge in mouth, foul dry saltiness, can’t spit, back all wet sweat, and crotch same so SORE, chopper [helicopter] dust in eyes so same SORE. Who’s shooting electricity into knee hinges? 2 (miles) to go, calf muscles zing zing with cramp, thighs same - surges of buzzing, whirring sharpness going through them,

up a rise panting like a lot of cattle... “you know what it’s like now,” the lads say,
“you must be daft to be here!”.

A key lesson drawn from the above experience was how the *enduring* of difficult, unpleasant, stressful and distressful physical sensations can make us somatically and reflexively aware of how we learn and re-learn ways of being a sensory body. ~~back~~.

Danger and awareness

At the sensory level, awareness of danger is often deeply corporeal, even visceral. Such corporeal indicators might include, for example, elevated pulse rate, hammering heart, a tightening of abdomen, a hypersensitivity of skin, and shallow and/or quickened breathing. A field note relating to a solo moorland run by Jacquelyn testifies to heightened situational awareness and the possibility of lurking dangers, via intense sensory focusing:

Decided to take the bracken route down the moor to the track, but as I enter the head-height, dense bracken, I feel hemmed in, trapped, I can’t see what’s around the corner, who might be lurking at the path sides. My breath catches, holds, ears straining for any sound, goose pimples catch the moor breeze, trying to quieten my heartbeat so that I can hear.... I have to walk some of the way, the path is too steep, too friable for running, but I’m light and primed for flight as any moorland creature. (Dartmoor, England)

This field note illustrates the role of prior lived experience in sensory situational perception, along with Jacquelyn’s extensive socialization into gendered constructions of space, where feelings of vulnerability and danger can inform “women’s geography of fear” (Wesely & Gaarder, 2004). Isolated rural spaces are often deemed dangerous and “out of bounds” for women, particularly lone women.

In a similar fashion and in a life-threatening context, the realisation that sensory awareness was not heightened enough, was hammered home to John by his infantry companions:

I really screwed it up this morning. Patrol out in Indian file and I got the rhythm and thus the spacing wrong, closed up to the lad in front too much. Nobody very

pleased with me, in language not found in seminar rooms! In effect, in their terms, I 'switched off' and put folk in jeopardy from any alert PIRA [Provisional Irish Republican Army] shooter. Basically, thinking too much sociologically when out there and not enough tactically! (Crossmaglen, South Armagh, Northern Ireland)

As noted above, disciplinary socialization into particular theoretical frameworks also served to heighten our reflexivity in specific contexts, making us alert to potential dangers. Jacquelyn's feminist perspective, for example, developed prior to engaging with sociology, served to raise her consciousness of gendered aspects of running, particularly when running solo. A field note testifies to her cognitive and sensory awareness of the gendered nature of running in what is purportedly "public space" and the potential dangers of relatively isolated areas for women runners. Such "theoretical" awareness also combined with her lived experience of analogous encounters in rural places:

Out along the river meadows, quite some way from the city and approaching the weir. Suddenly out of the blue, a red pick-up truck is hurtling its way across the field towards me. Had spotted the truck previously careering across the fields, but within sight and earshot of dog-walkers and others. Now there is no one in sight... Is that a shot gun sticking out of the open passenger window? [It's a farming area where guns are common.] I catch male voices drifting toward me on the evening air. Heart pounding in my ears now. Try to steady breathing, better to concentrate. The truck is still approaching down the grassy track, bumping and swaying. I up the pace, pull down my baseball hat firmly and set my jaw sternly... Not for the first time, I wish my slight, 5'3" (1.6 m) runner's body were somewhat more imposing. Suddenly, breath-catchingly, the truck veers off the track a few metres in front of me. I hear loud male voices and a radio blaring... Just in case, I up the pace to get out of the danger zone.

Alertness and Difference

The nature of habitual sensory routines means they are often taken-for-granted and thus hard to identify. So, seeing difference in such routines and understanding their patterns of evolution are not without challenge. In South Armagh, patrol formations (four-man, eight-man, etc) would be variously: out patrolling, in base guarding it, or in base resting. In the latter periods, troops did “nothing,” or in the words of one Private: “we just totally doss.” So, eating lots, playing music, watching television, reading, and inordinate amounts of sleep were the patterned ways of resting. The tempo of activities during these periods was at most lethargic. There was, however, an exception:

Something is going on and I can't quite figure it out. In the ablutions block, which is just a few yards away from the sleeping/eating block. Even the lads who are off duty do everything really fast; namely, washing, shaving, crapping and showering. There is little talking either, just the odd brief comment. So why is all movement in this context so speedy? I ask, and just get puzzled grunts. But a few days later: he (Corporal B.) looks up to the ceiling, raises his eyebrows, points his right index finger skywards, and says “incoming.” I know what that means... it means enemy mortar rounds descending. So, I say “so?” and then get a look which tells me I am a “dick-head”(pejorative), followed by B. saying “this place is not hardened’ (armoured) and where we kip (sleep) is, got it?” So now I get it and similarly do speedy ablutions and retreat to the relative safety of the sleeping area. (Crossmaglen Base)

On occasion, differences to routine sensory patterns are rather more immediately corporeally *felt*, although the cause of that change is temporarily obscured until visual realization is reached, as in the following field note portraying an early springtime training run:

Routinely we leave the house, run down the road, turn right and then sharp left twice, and straight onto the grassland of the big park. The last week though both of us have been having duff [poor] training runs. Chests, throats, and noses have been accosted: spluttering, coughing and wheezing, but frustratingly we can't figure out why. Relatively

speaking, not a lot of pollution about. Saturday arrives, and the first run in the daylight of the week. Suddenly on the way back... we spy the tops of large blossom trees flowering: ah ha, so that's the reason for all our spluttering and wheezing!

Such experiences highlight how differences in the habitual "sensescape" (Classen & Howes, 2006) can heighten awareness, including corporeal awareness, so that routine bodily "disappearance" shifts abruptly to bodily "dys-appearance" (Leder, 1990). In the above case, heavily pollinated air from the blossoms provoked respiratory challenges that alerted us to a difference in the familiar environment.

Encountering the sensory new

During both projects, there were occasions when we encountered sensory patterns new to us, and with which we had to contend in situ and rapidly. The reflexivity involved in these processes was facilitated because the patterns were initially novel; there was immediate focused attention to the tasks at hand, which held their own sensory intricacies. The challenge for us was that we encountered a "tipping point" beyond which familiarity with the processes fostered a more taken-for-granted perspective, as these activities became habitual:

We have been given by various physiotherapists remedial exercises for our knee injuries. These we have been doing (patiently and boringly) for months and months. We both have the same exercises to strengthen the muscles around the knee and keep the knees as stable as possible. Each exercise has its own sequence of actions. One exercise is designed to strengthen the Vastus Medialis, which extends the knee, and has a three-action sequence. It has taken us some time to learn this sequence properly: pulling, pushing, and tightening the muscle. When we are good, and do it "right," there is a particular tight, blocky feel to it. But the problem is that over time we suspect there has been "slippage" in performing the exercise. We both have a strong feeling that when we fall into doing the exercise half-heartedly or without full concentration, there is no sense of "full whack" tightening. We've come to recognize the danger of losing the correct

feeling over time, to the point where we accept the inferior practice as “OK.” We also recognize a certain feeling-thinking: we’ve been doing the same, boring old exercises for ages and can’t seem to make any real headway; there’s no glimmer of a sign of the knees getting better, and we resent all the time and energy spent in “following orders” to no apparent avail.

This kind of initial, acute and specific sensory awareness, followed by its dilution and diffusion, was also experienced by John in the infantry context, along with an intimation of potential serious and highly deleterious consequences should awareness decline:

The boys have been firing the ‘Charlie G’, which is an 84mm weapon with a lot of punch, used on bunkers, vehicles, armoured personnel carriers and the like. Firing involves two—one firing, and the other loading the projectile. I have been doing the latter. We did it initially in Alberta. The weapon was new to me. Its problem is it has huge back blast which can kill folk immediately at the rear. So, the loader fiercely ‘cuddles’ the firer as firing happens—to be safe and to stabilize the firer. Even then there is a tremendous back blast and one’s whole body vibrates hugely, including what feels like one’s lungs. Later we continued firing here in Warcop and I was surprised how familiarity breeds contempt so quickly. At the end of the session’s firing Sergeant D. told me “Next time John be more careful—you were not getting in tight enough with the firer, we don’t want a dead researcher, think of the paperwork!” (Warcop, UK, Training Area)

Concluding thoughts

As has been signalled by ethnographers generally, reflexivity and the reflexive process are vital aspects of ethnographic research (e.g., Bieler et al., 2021; Buscatto, 2016), and this certainly applies to sensory ethnographies and autoethnographies (Allen-Collinson & Jackman, 2022; Hockey, 2021; McNarry et al., 2019). In this chapter, we have explored some of the complexities of engaging in corporeal and sensory reflexivity during two auto/ethnographic projects on the British Army, and

distance running, respectively. Whilst very different in topic area, both projects shared a focus on sensory embodiment, including “intense embodiment” (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015) experiences.

As Leder (1990, p. 15) appositely notes, unless in pain or discomfort, human corporeality routinely has a “self-effacing transitivity” whereby the body “disappears” from the forefront of our conscious minds and is not an object of our intentionality. During such routine, everyday life, sensory activity operates in the background or at the fringes of our consciousness (Csordas, 2004).

Phenomenologically speaking, the “natural attitude” of our habitual, everyday activity “obscures itself and remains unknown to itself” (Moran, 2011, p. 69). The natural attitude, it is posited, can only be exposed by the adoption of a “radical alteration of attitude” (Moran, 2011, p. 69), via engagement in the phenomenological *epochē* or a form of *bracketing* (Allen-Collinson, 2011). For us as sociologists, who have more latterly sought to bring a phenomenological sensitivity to our research endeavours, “bracketing” involves identifying, acknowledging and bringing to analytic attention (as far as possible) our assumptions and presuppositions regarding the social groups, activities and cultural contexts that we study. This is no mean feat, and not for the faint-hearted! We would never claim to have totally achieved such a demanding task, one which even the renowned existential phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty (1962/2001), viewed as problematic. But through the daily building of a sociological “somatic mode of attention” (Csordas, 1993, p. 138) via participant observation and other sensory modes, we have sought to be alert to the sensory dimension, and the sensuousness of ourselves and others when in the field (and outside of it, during our analytic discussions and musings), in the face of the numerous sensory challenges that our research presents to us, including in the two specific projects described in this chapter. Our experience in the field has led us to agree with Atkinson’s (2022, p. 131) assertion that: “the phenomenological reduction, rendering phenomena strange and hence available for self-conscious scrutiny, is not an instantaneous event... It is something we have to work at, if only to get beyond immediately superficial experiences and responses.” Such a challenge required the development of an individual and collective habit of attending to the sensory level of being and happening; a habit that necessitated much disciplining of

perceptions—and, interestingly, a disposition fundamental to both the distance running and infantry lifeworlds.

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