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Slow learners: body pedagogics and learning slow ways in sport and physical cultures

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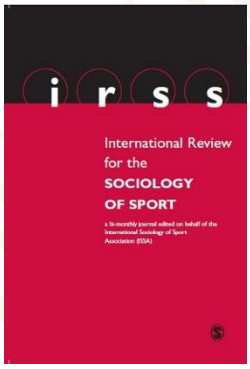

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Dedication
For John, with love – may your running always be light scales…

Slow learners: body pedagogics and learning slow ways in sport and physical cultures

Abstract

This article addresses recent calls for sociological investigation into the embodied incorporation of non-normative cultures, employing the emergent conceptualization of 'slow' in sports and physical cultures. In contrast to sports that valorize quantification and maximization of performance via speed, skill, and/or endurance, the concept of slow helps analytically explore the pleasures and benefits of slower ways of engagement with sport and physical cultures. Drawing on original findings from three auto/ethnographic research projects, here we investigate the sensory dimension of learning slow in two distinctive sports/physical activities that were found to share many sensory pleasures (and some corporeal challenges): countryside walking in England and coastal sea walking (*longe-côte*) in northern France. Employing conceptual insights drawn from Chris Shilling's work on body pedagogics, we highlight the importance of learning to 'do slow', which often requires considerable somatic and sensory (re)learning to reconceptualize and transform our experiences of 'fast' sporting embodiment.

Keywords: slow sports, body pedagogics, countryside walking, sea walking/*longe-côte*, the senses and pleasure, somatic and sensory learning

The conceptualization of 'slow' and the development of the slow movement in many ways constitute responses to the fast-paced ways of living and working endemic within many contemporary societies. As Andrews and colleagues (2024) note, speed is a fundamental constitutive dimension of life and there is only one baseline speed in the world - that of light, all other speeds being relative. As do others, Martínková and colleagues (2022) posit that in a globalized society, speed has generally been understood as a marker of efficiency, productivity and diligence, leading many to live

their lives at a hectic pace. The quest for speed and efficiency is particularly apposite to the world of sport. In contrast to the fast, frenetic, headlong drive for speed, efficiency and greater 'productivity', the slow movement emphasizes the benefits of slowing down, particularly for those who are fortunate enough to enjoy some sporting leisure time (Lebreton and Allen-Collinson, 2025). Drawing on findings from three autoethnographic research projects, here we investigate the sensory dimensions of 'going slow' in two distinctive sports/physical activities that share many sensory pleasures (and challenges): countryside walking in England, and coastal sea walking (*longe-côte*) in northern France. In our analysis, we employ Chris Shilling's (e.g., 2017, 2022) work on body pedagogics, to highlight the importance of *learning* to 'do slow', and address his recent calls for sociological investigation into the embodied incorporation of non-normative cultures, particularly via self-learning. Our purpose is thus to address key lacunae in the extant sport sociological literature, in the domains of 1) body pedagogics and learning *slow* sports/physical cultures; and 2) the sensory pleasures of engagement with two specific forms of walking. We employ the term 'sport' in alignment with Martínková and colleagues (2022: 2), to describe 'recreational movement activities' rather than traditional competitive sports.

Going slow – the literature and conceptual framework

The 'Slow Movement' began in Italy in the mid-1980s with the Slow Food Movement instigated by Carlo Petrini as a reaction to plans to open a McDonald's fast-food outlet in his Italian town (Martínková et al., 2022). The slow 'turn' has developed over the past 30 years, to encompass a plethora of domains, including the slow city and slow urbanism (Pink and Servon, 2013), slow tourism and slow travel (Fullagar, 2012), slow leisure (Lebreton and Allen-Collinson, 2025), and slow homes (Vannini and Taggart 2015). As Martínková and colleagues (2022) argue, most people have not been trained

to cope with prolonged periods of slowness. We must, therefore, learn 'how to' engage with slowness, and slow(er) practices and ways-of-being, including in slow sports and physical cultures.

Participants in slow sports and physical cultures often embrace activities and practices that emphasize body-world connections and intertwining, including via various sensory modalities. Fullagar (2012), for example, in her ethnography of cycle-touring, describes her sensory engagement with the world, imbued with a slow ethos. She describes vividly the enjoyment of riding at her own pace, socializing, and generally engaging with her surroundings. Other research similarly portraying a slow perspective in physical cultures focuses on Ashtanga yoga (Damkjær, 2020), martial arts (Legendre and Dietrich, 2020), and Saharan hiking (Gibout, 2020), as examples. Here, an enriched, deep quality of experience is sought via a slowing down. Where the competitive sportsperson pursues efficiency and enhanced performance, slow sport participants seek a connoisseur/euse-ship of experience - to slow down the movement, to stroll rather than speed walk, as it were.

Furthermore, as Andrieu and da Nobrega (2020) note vis-à-vis slow sports, 'immersion' in the natural elements via moments of 'sensory communion with the elements' (Gibout, 2020: 8) are often sought. This resonates with other research on slow, immersive and 'emersive' leisure (Lebreton and Andrieu, 2018; Andrieu et al., 2018) where, as humans, we engage deeply, sometimes profoundly with our environment, often through experiences of 'intense embodiment' (Allen-Collinson and Owton, 2015). This generates a feeling of sensory intensification and acute attention to sensory experience, including the pleasures (and displeasures) of engagement. Interestingly, the multisensory pleasures of sport and physical activity in general are surprisingly under-researched (Allen-Collinson, 2023; Day et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2022; Phoenix and Orr, 2014). This is a key lacuna in the research, not least given the

importance of pleasurable experiences in people's sustained involvement in physical activity (Day et al., 2021).

Here, we focus on slow embodiment and the 'body pedagogics' (Shilling, 2017) of both land-based and sea-based slow sports/physical cultures, in the form of countryside walking, and sea walking (walking chest-deep in the sea). Whilst slow sports might resemble their traditional counterparts in the movement itself (e.g., cycling, running, swimming), engagement in the activity is slower, more contemplative, and eschews competitive aspects. Instead of focusing on the result and comparability with other competitors' results, slow sports focus on immersion in one's environment, and the quality of experiencing (Martínková et al., 2022), capturing the importance of bodily movement *per se* and its cultivation. Undertaking sports in slow mode is, however, unfamiliar to most sportspeople, particularly those of us more accustomed to seeking to 'improve' performance via increased speed, skill, or endurance, for example (e.g., Allen-Collinson et al., 2018). It can thus require substantial somatic and sensory learning of how to 'do slow' and develop new bodily ways of knowing. Sometimes such learning is assisted by pedagogical input from an experienced coach or practitioner, whilst other times, self-learning via lived experience is the primary mode of learning, as we discuss below (see also Paechter et al., 2025).

Somatic learning, body pedagogics and slow

In-depth engagement with somatic, sensory learning is often required to transform our more familiar ways of doing (fast) sports. This requires learning how to handle the rather different embodied challenges encountered when slowing down. The work of Chris Shilling (2017, 2018, 2022) on 'body pedagogics' is particularly insightful in this domain. Shilling employs this term to describe an embodied approach to the acquisition and transmission of occupational, sporting, and other culturally structured practices,

and the embodied outcomes of such learning in emergent habits and techniques. Germane to our purpose, Shilling (2017) identifies a sociological need to analyse physical experiences whilst acknowledging the role of cognition and reflexivity in embodied processes (see also Underman, 2022). The nexus of cognitive and somatic learning was clearly identifiable in our findings, as we portray below. As Shilling further notes, drawing on the writings of Dewey (1922/2002; cited in Shilling, 2022), while a literature on body-pedagogic research has explored the *reproduction* of social and cultural forms, few studies focus on the processes of change occurring when body 'crises' result in bodily habits becoming obstructed or challenged. As portrayed below, this notion of a body crisis was found highly applicable in our experiences of disrupted bodily habits engendered by, respectively, a period of sports injury, and by engaging in an unfamiliar aquatic activity.

Following Dewey, Shilling (2017) examines the putative distinction between noetic/conscious and anoetic/pre-conscious knowledge to explore different levels/depths of learning and cultural transmission, identifying the permeability of these ways of knowing. So, whilst 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 2009) is often considered resistant to conscious explication, via body pedagogics, the 'tacit' can be translated into instructions or prompts to teach neophytes. Further of relevance to our research, for Shilling (2017), the body-pedagogical approach reminds us that however carefully and conscientiously we try to embody certain body techniques, success is never guaranteed. Socialization into new body techniques is always *contingent*, as we found in our own physical-cultural learning. Finally, and fundamental to our experiences, the body pedagogics approach highlights how, when we internalize certain body techniques, we might find we are changed in ways that cross over into other aspects of our lives.

Before delineating the research projects undertaken, we briefly portray the specific activities at the heart of our studies: countryside walking and sea walking in a group (*longe-côte* in French[1]).

Countryside and sea wanderings

Although there is no scope here to address in detail the vast literature on the salutogenic benefits of 'green' and 'blue' physical activity, their benefits are well-established (e.g. Allen-Collinson, 2018; Bell et al., 2017), including for those with varied abilities (Cherrington and Brighton, 2024). Here, we consider briefly some key literature on walking in both green and blue spaces. These spaces are often imbricated in our own lived experience, for example, on estuarine and coastal routes that traverse beaches, saltmarshes, mudflats, riverbanks, lakesides, and so on.

Walking in the British countryside has been researched from an array of social-scientific perspectives. As Edensor (2000) notes, in the Romantic era in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, walking in the countryside evolved into a practice designed to achieve reflexive awareness of the self, the body, and the senses. Such walking provided a slower contrast to new, speedier forms of transport, coinciding with a period of rapid social change (Curry, 1994). Walking as a *technique of the body* pertains to Mauss' (1979) notion of *habitus* and is developed by Bourdieu (1977) in his discussions of *habitus*. More latterly, the historical and socio-cultural aspects of walking have been portrayed in a collection edited by Ingold and Vergunst (2016), generated by a 'walking seminar'. Germane to our interest in the senses and learning, for Le Breton (2020: 16-17), walking in nature constitutes a 'celebration of the body, of the senses, of affectivity'. Also in this vein, Rosa (2018) theorizes walking as a way of reconnecting with our body and with others. Whilst fully cognizant of the importance of the socio-

[1] Often translated as 'sea-wading', here we use the term 'sea walking' to compare and contrast with countryside walking.

economic, social-structural and social interactional aspects of walking, it is the body-pedagogic and sensory dimensions of this slow form of pedestrianism on which we focus here.

The research on sea-based walking was undertaken in northern France and resonates with an enduring tradition in France and Europe, which links seawater bathing and 'seasideness' (Jarratt, 2015) with therapeutic benefits. Indeed, a substantial literature investigates the health and wellbeing benefits of blue spaces generally (e.g. Bell et al., 2017; Britton and Foley, 2020; Olive and Wheaton, 2021). Here, we concentrate on the sensory pleasures and somatic learning in the slow sport of sea walking, also known as *aqua rando* (hiking in water) or *longe-côte* (coastal sea walking in a group): walking immersed in seawater, usually up to the chest or neck, pushed and pulled by waves and currents. The aim is not to resist these forces, but rather to be 'carried along' (safely) by sea currents.

We next delineate the three research projects from which we derive our sensory and somatic learning data. For the purposes of this article, we do not focus specifically on sensory experiences of weather in slow sports, or 'the intimate bodily co-becomings of weather' (Wright, 2025), having already analysed weather experiences elsewhere (e.g. Allen-Collinson, 2018).

Methodology and methods

The methodological approach was primarily autoethnographic, with three separate research studies generating the findings: Study 1: a collaborative autoethnography on rehabilitative walking following sports injuries, undertaken by Jacquelyn and John[2];

[2] Sadly, John passed away in 2024 during the writing of this article, and we write in honour of a dear and treasured friend.

Study 2: autoethnographic research on walking by Jacquelyn; Study 3: an ethnography and autoethnography of sea walking and paddleboard yoga undertaken by Florian. With the latter, we focus on sea walking here; the paddleboard findings having been published previously (Lebreton and Allen-Collinson, 2025). No ethical approval was required by the relevant university ethics committee for autoethnographic research when Jacquelyn and John undertook their collaborative autoethnographic research for Study 1, or for Study 3 undertaken at a French university. Ethical approval was granted for Study 2 by Jacquelyn's university ethics committee. Ethical considerations were nevertheless at the fore of our minds during all three studies. In particular, we considered (and re-considered) with care and caution if/how to include and represent others in our autoethnographic accounts, then discussed and agreed as co-researchers/co-authors what would be included in the write-up.

For Study 1, detailed field notes and audio recordings were made throughout a two-year period of chronic knee injuries that prevented John and Jacquelyn from engaging in their long-term sport of distance running, normally pursued together post-work. Both of us succumbed to acute knee injuries, which then became chronic, eventually lasting for around 18 months. During the injury and rehabilitation period, we commenced a collaborative autoethnogaphy (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2015). For long months, the injuries prevented any running, and during these times we walked around the same routes previously traversed via running, initially with despondency and frustration, followed by an incipient appreciation of this slower movement form.

Data were collected via field notes and audio recorders accompanying us during daily 'training' and rehabilitation, and occasionally during visits to physiotherapists and medical practitioners. As co-runners and sociological co-researchers, we constructed individual daily logs and synthesized the emergent concepts and analytic themes in a third collective log. We then immersed ourselves in the data, inductively analysing and

re-analysing journal entries via thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), employing processes of re-memory to send ourselves back in time to recapture the feelings and emotional oscillations.

In Study 2, Jacquelyn commenced a second phase of an autoethnographic project on women's distance running in public spaces (Allen-Collinson, 2023). The new phase commenced when, a year or so after contracting COVID-19, the breathlessness experienced since symptom onset became exacerbated to a point where she could no longer undertake her daily cross-country or trail run. As part of an anticipated improvement and eventual return to running, Jacquelyn began replacing ring-fenced times for running with walking-time. Analogously to experiences in Study 1, what began as the intense frustrations of enforced slower-paced movement gradually developed into a sensory and affective appreciation of the pleasures offered by walking rather than running through her local countryside. Again, detailed field notes and audio recordings were made as soon as practicable after outings and occasionally *en route* and were analysed via thematic analysis.

Study 3 was stimulated by Florian's move from urban living in Brittany, France, to work and live on the northern French coast (La Côte d'Opale). Whilst already familiar with surfing and scuba diving, Florian became increasingly intrigued by watching practitioners of the slow sports of paddleboard yoga and sea walking. He selected an ethnographic project, with a strong autoethnographic element, including participant observation extending over four months, to examine learning processes in these new sports. Data were collected weekly, for two-three hours every weekend. The autoethnographic component of the study (on which we focus exclusively here) charted how Florian gradually learnt how to develop slower marine interaction, rather than seeking the speed and agility he previously valorized in surfing encounters. Having mastered a few basic *techniques of the body* vis-à-vis paddleboard yoga and sea

walking, he then commenced recording detailed field notes. These included his embodied experiences of increasingly frequent sea-walking immersions that were becoming a fundamental component of his lifestyle. Notes were originally written in French and subsequently translated into English by Florian, before being analyzed via thematic analysis (see Lebreton and Allen-Collinson, 2025).

With all three studies, we are in accord with Evers (2006: 231) about the possibility of original insights generated by autoethnography, via 'a researching body that is penetrated by and feels the field it is investigating'. As researchers, we were immersed in the fields under investigation, where learning how to 'do' slow sporting practices required considerable sensory and somatic learning and relearning, and engaging in the body pedagogics (Shilling, 2017, 2018) of these slow movement forms. Like Shilling (2022), we felt a strong sociological need to acknowledge the role of cognition *and* corporeality in these embodied learning processes.

Findings and analysis

We next portray analytically the salient findings cohering around sensory and somatic pedagogics of how to 'do slow' in our walking activities. Our themes are structured into two distinctive sensory modalities for analytic and presentational purposes, cohering around the haptic and the visual. We emphasize, however, that in our lived experience, as with many sensory experiences, the senses are multifold and intermingled (Fijn and Kavesh, 2024; Sparkes, 2017; Vannini, 2024), commensurate with key perspectives on synaesthesia, intersensoriality (Howes, 2006), and the multimodality of the senses, such as in haptic visuality (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Paterson, 2006). First, we consider the role of the haptic in our body-pedagogical experiences of slow sports.

Slow haptics: touching times

For Rodaway (1994: 48), the haptic experience comprises: 'a combination of tactile and locomotive properties [which] provides information about the character of objects, surfaces and whole environments as well as our own bodies'. As Parker and colleagues (2024) further identify, various capacities of sensation related to the human sense of touch span those operating at the dermal level, including perceptions of pressure, vibration, and temperature (e.g., Allen-Collinson and Owton, 2015), body motion (kinaesthesia), internal sensing of bodily position in space (proprioception), and a sense of balance (vestibular sense). Highlighting a research lacuna, Ingold (2011) describes how studies of haptic perception have focused primarily on manual touch, with a resultant lack of attention to 'footwork'. The interplay between body and ground, as sensed by and through the feet, is critical to balance and bodily comportment in many sports, including running (Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022) and cycling (Cook and Hockey, 2023). As distance runners, we were well accustomed to fine-grain assessment of the terrain and routes along which we ran, and their overall 'ground-feel' (Brown, 2017). In contrast, learning to appreciate the slower, more lingering footwork of walking permitted us to consider factors beyond safety and injury avoidance, previously among our uppermost concerns when running. Walking served to enhance the pleasures of encountering different surfaces, as Jacquelyn recorded when out hill-walking in the Howgill Fells, a range of hills in Northern England:

> It's been dry enough recently to allow me to ditch the usual clunky walking boots and opt for my more comfortable trainers, even on the lower fells that are normally far too wet and boggy for such lightweight footwear. Having left the sharp, stony trackway at the base of the fells, I stride off on to the verdant, grass and bracken-covered steeper slopes so beautifully maintained by the sturdy Herdwick and Rough Fell sheep who tend these fells. The short grass is springy to

> my foot-touch, bouncing me back off the ground to energise my grateful feet – infinitely better than tramping pavements and tarmac. On the descent, it's all I can do to stop myself bounding and hurtling joyfully down the friendly, rounded contours of the hillside as the vibrant turf bounces me forward. (Study 2)

Whilst we agree with Spiller (2024) that barefoot walking can generate a particularly intense form of human-nature interaction via 'earthing', nevertheless, even when shod in trainers, at walking pace, the haptic pleasures of human-earth connection were salient, especially when contrasted with the artificial, hard surfaces of road and pavement.

Haptic pleasures were also evident in Study 1. When out training together as running partners, Jacquelyn and John had previously had little spare energy for learning to develop awareness or enjoyment of the surrounding environment, obliged as we were to focus on the demanding 'taskscape' (Ingold, 2000) of running at speed. Ingold (2000: 195) describes the taskscape as 'the entire ensemble of tasks, in their mutual interlocking'. Gradually, during the slower-paced evening walks, we began increasingly to engage in the body pedagogics of seeing and feeling the changing nature of the landscape, the trees, the flowers, the sky, and our very relationship to the world. For decades of pressurized working lives, we had not had the time to appreciate such things. We gradually realized that, despite all the difficulties, something new and valuable might be learnt from *not* being able to run and from slower movement. Developing our heightened haptic engagement with the environment, we found ourselves reaching out to touch the bark of trees and stone walls, and down to touch delicate woodland flowers and soft, springy moss; a form of 'touch walking' as Nätynki et al. (2023) describe. We also learnt to experience more acutely certain elemental haptics (Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022), such as the warm skim of springtime wind against skin newly released

from winter-warm clothing. In this extract, we describe such elemental haptics whilst alternating walking-and-running as part of our rehabilitation efforts:

> Today has been the first day it's just about been warm enough to take the training tights off. Pull on the shorts and the white skin revealed after an autumn and winter hiding. The feel of the air is amazing running down the road, something our skin has not experienced since last year. It's a kind of a caress I guess, the shorts being very short and the breeze moves over the legs, and around the back of the glutes [gluteal muscles]. The skin feels unrestrained, like it's free. 'Running free': the meaning is not lost, especially at the end of long working days at a computer. (Study 1)

The above haptic pleasures required learning and re-learning the sensory delights of slower movement through our environment, for this form of engagement did not come pre-reflectively to us. Our running bodies were accustomed to faster-paced movement through the running taskscape. We had deliberatively to *learn* to refocus sensory attention on the pleasurable sensations of this slower paced environment immersion.

For sea-based sports and physical activities, the elemental touch of water can similarly promote feelings of environment connectedness, with a shift from experiencing water as an external element to feeling continuity with 'lived water' (Peignist, 2011). Particularly apposite to body-water haptics is the French concept of *glisséité* (approximating 'slipperiness' in English), relating to the texture of water. This human-water haptic relationship is notable in swimming, for example, where the temperature, feel, and 'catch' of the water are central to performance (Heath and Carter, 2024; McNarry et al., 2021) and to sensory pleasures and dis-pleasures (Evans et al., 2017; Throsby, 2013). In many sea-based sports, along with properties of water, the element of air is also 'touched', assessed and responded to, for example, in sea walking,

and kitesurfing, where practitioners must engage with learning to attune to water and wind (Campillo and Richard, 2014).

During Florian's initial attempts to sea walk, he noted how the group's coach sought to engage participants in the body pedagogics of learning this new aquatic practice, which, for many, diverged considerably from familiar sea sports. In this didactic form of body pedagogics, the coach verbally and visually instructed participants on various body techniques, such as the best bodily position to maintain balance in the seawater, how to adjust the pace of the walk relative to prevailing weather and water conditions. Importantly, too, Florian had to learn, initially via the coach and then via lived experience, how to sense the *glisséité* and resistance of the water:

> As we made our way towards the seashore, the coach talked to us about the different techniques (crawling, paddling and webbing); I had completely underestimated their precise usefulness for walking in the water. I came to understand that 'immersion' here is defined as having the seawater up to a level between the navel and the chest, and this knowledge is in fact a fundamental element of *longe-côte*. I learnt this rapidly because, when forming a *longe* (the walking group in the water), this correct level of immersion must be respected *collectively* to allow propulsion in the water that is efficient for the group, and thus to avoid any undue resistance from the water. Rather, we must take advantage of the 'lift' as a benefit generated by being in a group. At the end of this session, I realise that to 'walk correctly' in the water, you actually have to consider this parameter, which you learn via haptic engagement with the water, between your navel and your chest. It's a visual cue that you then actually *feel* as soon as this sensation of lift becomes almost exhilarating for yourself and others. (Study 3)

This instance resonates with Andrews et al (2024) on how collective action influences speed and reverberates strongly with Shilling's (2017) observations highlighted earlier regarding the cognitive and the corporeal nexus. Shilling (2017) signals the need for cognitive understanding to develop and translate into new body practices and sensory learning, noting how Mauss (1973) portrays this kind of communicative learning of *body techniques* as a process of mimesis via watching and copying others' movements through visual, verbal, and other sensory modes. Here, the coach's tacit knowledge must be translated into instructions for the neophyte sea walkers.

In alignment with sensory scholars such as Classen (2005), Paterson (2006) and Potter (2008), we consider the haptic senses embrace wider forms of perception than are often conceptualized in the traditional 'Western' sensorium. Kinaesthesia, for example, is the sensation of movement of the body and limbs through space (including aquatic space). The vestibular sense is crucial to most sports and physical cultures, as Florian discovered when learning the body technique of sea walking. Here, balance is strongly shaped by immersion in seawater and firmness of footing on the undulating seabed:

> I enter the water. The deeper I go into the sea, the easier it is to move forward... So here I am, walking with the water up to my chest. The important thing is to keep my back submerged, so as not to strain my lower spine. The group is already about ten metres ahead of me. I'm still learning the technique. Swing your right arm forward when you move your left leg forward and vice versa. The beach is relatively uneven. From time to time, I sink into the sort of (seabed) pits we call *bâches* here on the Côte d'Opale. Suddenly, I'm up to my neck in water, I feel too light; I'm almost floating with a feeling of no longer being in control of anything. I must get closer to the edge to get around the *bâche*. 'Put your foot firmly on the sand,' the coach tells me. It's all about finding the right compromise: get deep enough into the water to lighten your weight, but not too deep... There's always a little imbalance, because the water is full of sand and anything but clear; I

> can't see where I'm putting my foot… I'm constantly trying to adapt my body almost instinctively to the unevenness of the ground, which I can't see. (Study 3)

As illustrated above, learning to pay acute attention to the haptics of 'ground-feel' (Brown, 2017) and buoyancy in the aquatic medium are needed, to help develop a refined vestibular sense and new ways of haptic knowing. As Florian notes above, the senses of vision and touch are brought into play in sea walking, and we next focus on the role of vision in the body pedagogics of slow.

Slow motion visuals

As noted earlier, Shilling (2022) argues that whilst much body-pedagogic research has explored the *reproduction* of social and cultural forms, few studies focus on the processes of change occurring when 'body crises' result in bodily habits becoming obstructed or challenged. For Jacquelyn and John, a sporting-body crisis was provoked when incurring long-term running injuries. These injuries meant the temporary suspension of running, to be replaced for a time by the slower walking mode. We thus learnt new ways of walking the countryside previously traversed at higher speed and increasingly came to appreciate the sensory pleasures of this mode of embodied environmental engagement. Our walking mode ranged from initially marching and striding (as best we could) over pre-planned routes, including urban parkland, to incorporating wandering, roaming movements, particularly in more spontaneous, 'unfolding' walks in the wider countryside.

For Martínková and colleagues (2022), slow movement highlights new aspects of experiencing, including our relationship with the environment, as 'slow' often involves *immersion* in an activity. This observation was apposite for we runners, who usually had

to focus visual attention firmly frontwards and downwards to the terrain we traversed, to run as safely as possible by avoiding obstacles and hazards. With walking, we incrementally learnt to permit our visual attention to wander more freely, to shift upwards and outward, immersing ourselves in a broader environment. We also learnt over time, as the injury process lengthened, how to appreciate the visual compensations of walking. Once the pervasive gloom of winter abated and the evenings began to lengthen, our post-work walks took us around local parks and countryside, and we began to learn to *see* and appreciate the surroundings. In some cases, we even slowed down to a standstill to immerse ourselves in these newly found visual pleasures:

> I suppose running is primarily about movement and here we are this evening, *not* moving, but standing stock still. We were walking around the park doing our circuits as usual when we came through the trees and there was this brilliant sky, with all sorts of wonderful cloud formations and colours. So, we just stood there and watched it for five minutes, watched it change, saying, 'look at that bit' and 'do you see that orange?' And when we finished looking, and plodded on again, we felt we gained from it. (Study 1)

Learning to allow ourselves to slow down, to stop and gaze, did not come easily to two disciplined, committed, long-term runners, however. When first commencing the walking, it was initially conceptualized as a poor, attenuated form of exercise in contrast to running, and we tended to march briskly, head down, monitoring footfall. Our running had never been undertaken for pleasure, relaxation, or even primarily for health and wellbeing. Rather, it was for training purposes, to produce a disciplined running-body that could be relied upon to 'endure' and perform at a certain level, albeit one declining with age and the demands of sedentary, academic work (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2016). Therefore, the idea of taking pleasure in running was most strange,

even anathema. Only as the weeks then months went by and we grew accustomed to the idea of a slow, long-term rehabilitation process, did we learn to embrace 'slowness'. A 'body-crisis' (Shilling, 2022) similarly accosted Jacquelyn, when she had to give up her five-days-weekly running due to the aftermath of COVID-19. Suffering the respiratory challenges provoked by Long COVID, she opted to take up countryside walking. Gradually, she began to engage in self-learning and re-learning how to move more slowly and with appreciation through the countryside.

For Florian, a neophyte practitioner of sea walking, an analogous body-crisis (Shilling, 2022) was engendered when first attempting a sea-based activity completely unfamiliar to him. In alignment with body-pedagogical perspectives, this demanded cognitive and corporeal learning:

> Usually, surfing has taught me to control the space where the waves break by lying on my board in the open sea. With *longe-côte*, the approach is more complex. We walk on the sand towards the sea, which is descending at the time of today's session... At ebb tide, the current flows from east to west along this beach. And today, the wind is typically north-easterly… We're at mid-tide, when the currents are strongest… Here I'm reliving my first surfing lessons, when I had to learn above all to master the 'discipline of the wave'. This involves understanding a wave space where the swell from the open sea meets the continental shelf, transforming these waves into breaking waves. So, it's the space between the edge of the beach and the breaking wave furthest from the foreshore that I now have to [visually] reconfigure in my brain, because I'm much closer to the edge than when surfing... This in-between area has no fixed limits and the elements, whether water or wind, are in constant motion… This requires us to understand the swell and adapt our movements to the breaking waves. As in surfing previously, today I've been learning praxis skills linked to anticipating the swell so that I can walk in the water: assessing the lines of force on the beach, mentally mapping the precise areas where the waves will break. (Study 3)

Here, Florian is learning new ways of visually evaluating (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2006) the seascape, differing markedly from his familiar ways of visually assessing key marine elements, such as the direction of wind, tide, and currents, wave types and distancing. Rather than visualising the 'affordance' (Gibson, 1977; Toner et al., 2025) of waves for surfing opportunities, Florian is visualising the same factors, but for their very different affordances vis-à-vis the slower movement of sea walking.

Discussion

'Going slow' in sports, physical cultures, and exercise, is less about the actual speed of 'doing' and more about practitioners' attitudes, intentions, and meaning-making about the person-environment nexus. To employ Purser's (2018) evocative phrase about embodied learning, it is about 'getting into the body' slowness and slow ways of being. This slowing provides the opportunity to experience the ecological interconnection (Andrieu et al., 2018; Lebreton and Andrieu, 2018) celebrated by slow sports practitioners who seek resonance with nature (or at least with a less 'man-made' world). 'Going slow' also requires considerable sensory learning about how aesthetically to appreciate and immerse ourselves in our environments. Drawing on Shilling's (2017, 2018, 2022) work on body pedagogics, here we have explored experiences of cognitive-corporeal learning (both experiential and taught) in the socio-culturally structured practices of walking. In this, we respond directly to Shilling's (2017) call for sociologists to analyse physical experiences in conjunction with the role of cognition in embodied learning processes.

While considerable experiential learning (often via trial and error) was apparent in all three research projects, two of the studies evidenced the social transmission of tacit body knowledge – a didactic form of body pedagogics. In Study 1, for example,

Jacquelyn was an experienced fell walker, who had, prior to taking up distance running, long experience of walking in the high fells. An 'enforced' return to walking, whilst initially frustrating, thus represented a rekindling of walking challenges and pleasures. In contrast, for her partner, John, walking held no attraction whatsoever but instead reverberated strongly with negatively charged sensory memories of enforced marches in the British Army (Hockey, 1986). Thus, Jacquelyn had initially to engage in considerable body-pedagogical work to translate her tacit knowledge and 'teach' her partner how to appreciate walking and recognize its sensory pleasures. Such targeted encouragement resonates with Shilling's (2017) argument that even tacit knowledge can be translated into prompts to teach others new ways of knowing and acting.

Similarly, in Study 3, Florian was initially verbally, visually and haptically instructed by an experienced coach on the techniques of the body involved in sea walking; for example, how to adjust bodily position and the pace of his walking to factor in aquatic conditions. In these more taught interactional encounters, the role of cognition and reflexivity in learning new bodily skills and embodied processes was rendered clear; a role that Shilling (2017) exhorts us to investigate as sociologists (see also Underman, 2022). As Heath and Carter (2024) highlight, verbal expression is often inadequate to capture and convey embodied knowledge, with such transmission (and reception) necessitating a 'haptic grammar' through physical demonstration. Thus, in Study 3, alongside verbal instructions, the coach would, with permission, physically position novice practitioners, to demonstrate and give a 'feel for' a precise body position.

Concluding thoughts

These original findings take forward Chris Shilling's (2017) sociological *oeuvre* on body pedagogics, by investigating forms of somatic, sensory learning involved in a new

and under-examined domain, that of slow sports and physical cultures. Saliently, the findings also emphasize the role of both corporeal *and* cognitive processes in such learning, a nexus Shilling (2017, 2022) identifies as in need of sociological attention. We thereby address his calls for investigation into embodied incorporation of non-normative cultures, particularly via self-learning rather than more didactic processes.

As with any autoethnographic research, from a more traditional methodological and/or positivist position, the focus on the researchers' own experiences (albeit socio-culturally framed and analyzed) would constitute a limitation. There are, of course, well-trodden counter-critiques of such traditionalist perspectives, and a vast literature that underscores the imperialism of applying inappropriate criteria to evaluate rigorous autoethnographic research (e.g., Grant, 2024; Smith, 2018). While our projects were never designed to fulfil positivist criteria of representativeness and generalizability, the theoretical generalizability (Smith, 2018) of our research is perhaps best illustrated via insights garnered from the body-pedagogical framework employed. The power of autoethnography lies *inter alia* in its rendering accessible the innermost, 'lived', embodied experiences of participants, situated within socio-cultural contexts (Allen-Collinson, 2012). We fully acknowledge that we have focused on 'going slow' in just two sports/physical cultures and much research remains to be done in investigating other sporting domains, including the social-structural aspects, such as influences of gender, age, class, degree of dis/ability and so on. The practitioners of the French sea-walking group, for example, were relatively heterogeneous vis-à-vis gender, age and socio-professional background, but all were white Europeans.

One of Shilling's key body-pedagogical questions (discussed earlier) perhaps remains: whether embodied changes were wrought by engagement in our newly acquired slow practices? For us, the ethos of slow, initially introduced via walking, gradually entered our general ways of being-in-the-world, extending into other parts of

our lives. When we internalize techniques associated with body pedagogics, argues Shilling (2017), our deliberative patterns and sensory reactions can be altered in fundamental ways, which might cross over into other aspects of our lives. Thus, learning how to 'do slow' in countryside- and sea-based walking filtered into other domains, such as fell-climbing, trail-walking, surfing, paddleboarding, and gardening.

A body-pedagogical approach reminds us that however carefully and thoroughly we try to embody new body techniques, success is never guaranteed. As Shilling (2017) notes, socialization into new body techniques is always *contingent*. As with many somatic and sensory learning experiences, our slower embodied practices were not learnt once-and-for-all, but were subject to challenge and attrition, not least under the pressure of intense work demands. Slow ways must be learnt, developed and refined, cognitively and corporeally, requiring substantial work. Even the most experienced, long-term practitioners of a (slow) sport or physical culture cannot guarantee that somatic learning will remain securely sedimented in sporting embodiment.

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