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Everyday envisionings: running pleasures and pains

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- **Primary theoretical perspectives of study: Symbolic Interactionism & Ethnomethodology; latter greatly under-utilised**
- Focus on mundane (for us) embodied social practice: training for distance running - in specific places: favoured running routes.
- Seek to "mark" (Brekhus, 1998) the activity - in particular analysing how space & place habitually **seen**, evaluated & experienced on the run.
- Today's focus: 2 key themes in relation to our runners' visualization of running space/place:
  - 1) hazardous places
  - 2) time-space-place nexus (if time)

Ethnomethodology

- Applying Schutzian insights, Harold Garfinkel developed ethnomethodology:
- study of the 'common-sense' reasoning skills, abilities & practices via which members of a social group produce & recognise intelligible courses of action
- processes 'members use to do "going about knowing the world"' (Benson & Hughes 1983: 56).
- Such practices generally taken for granted in the routine, everyday scheme of things
- Based on tacitly held & operationalised assumptions, so –
- 'bracketing' and 'marking' these for analytic attention is key task for phenomenological & ethnomethodological researchers (see Allen-Collinson 2011, for discussion of challenges of epochē/bracketing)

The research

- **Based on: a) 2-year collaborative autoethnography by 2 distance runners &**
- **b) 3-year autophenomenographic study**
- **Authors: 45 & 27 years' experience of running**
- **Formerly running 6-7 days a week, often twice daily**
- **Firmly non-élite! But 'serious', encompassing 2 of Bale's (2004) forms:**
  - **1) welfare running, pursued for health & fitness aims;**
  - **2) performance running, pursued in order to improve & sustain performance (although relative!)**
- **Running as *work* rather than leisure, in interstices of full-time job**

Visual 'work'

- **We 'see' environment using (sub)cultural "ways of seeing" =**
- **differentiated by age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, dis/ability, etc**
- **E.g. police officers see 'the beat' they patrol (Bittner 1967), soldiers see terrain (Hockey 2009); runners see the run (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2014).**
- **We work at seeing - Waskul & Vannini (2008) "somatic work"**
- **ways in which we go about making sense of our senses, within a socio-cultural framework.**
- **As distance runners we see our training routes in particular subcultural and also idiographic ways – experience-dependent**
- **For example, Runners survey route for 'trouble'**
- **Contexts, entities, people which/who may provoke injury – accidental or deliberate - & impede training progress & performance**
- **We survey the route & terrain for hazards…**

Hazardous places

- Boys

- Some of most challenging & potentially threatening navigational problems are dyads/groups of adolescents & teenagers - Smith's (1997: 61) Goffmanesque "idling congregation":
  - **I'm running [alone] in glorious spring sunshine along the old disused railway, headphones on and John Bonham providing the beat. At the last moment, I spot two mid-teenage boys cycling towards me down the track. One of them grins widely with a loud, upward lilting 'Hello!', and then proceeds to lunge at my breasts, narrowly missing me as I swerve my hips to avoid his grasping hand. I run on determinedly without a backwards glance; there's no point in reacting, it only gives them attention and some kind of gratification.**

JAC

- **Some men of adult status (mainly up to late middle age), however, can also exhibit similar tendencies to breach norms of civil inattention when in dyad or group, via gestures, shouting of street remarks, etc**
- **Even lone 'adult' men can feel 'licensed' to make comments to the solo woman runner:**

Early afternoon, we were running down the high street… J diverted off to nip into the gents' toilet, so I jogged around whilst waiting for him. Suddenly felt someone brush against me and comment, quite loudly: "Fantastic arse, Love!". Before I have chance to utter a withering rejoinder, he is vanishing off down the pavement, turning around to smile and nod, presumably in what he considers an appreciative fashion

JAC 8

- Further hazard - Dogs (& owners)

- 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)
- For many seasoned runners, not worth losing momentum of run to engage in prolonged debate

JAC 9

Runners' responses

- **Runners build up a stock of knowledge at hand, or "local knowledge" concerning known route(s) to avoid NB - Contingency of temporality / spatiality**
- **Ironically, *contra* Smith (1997) some - including women – runners may feel safer in some lonely, desolate places than in urban streets**

Preferred response to verbal harassment?

Mainly to ignore, also supported by Brooks Gardner (1980) & Smith (1997) – runners to preserve energy

Display of <u>not</u> listening – benefits of iPod etc!

For some, some contexts - verbal response is empowering

JAC 10

2) time-space-place nexus

- Specific combination of place & space constituting a training route tends to be run cyclically as the competitive seasons change (cross-country, road, track).
- The visual & the haptic senses often inseparable in everyday life. For us strong visual-haptic experience - both visually scanning terrain & environment, and also feeling the touch of terrain & elements.
- Runs, and sections of runs, are corporeally & sensorially experienced as going well, badly or simply just "okay".
- Typifications rooted in shifting nexus of corporeally experienced, "felt" features, such as: one's degree of fluidity in movement, energy levels, muscle texture and breathing patterns
- These influence how route is experienced in terms of "inner time", termed by Schütz (1967) *durée*, the present moment of the lived experience, linked to our emotions, sensations, perceptions

JAC 11

- Some training experiences categorised as "bad", or "duff" – often due to the running body being over-fatigued from work, dehydrated, or suffering from muscle or tendon problems, etc:

- Anxious today as I started to get a stiff left glute (gluteal muscle) after about 2 miles… 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)

JAC 12

- In contrast, & even rarer were training sessions when on "top form", & ground is covered with ease – these are non-mundane, but 'extraordinary' – particularly so, if both of us co-experience:

- 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)

Conclusion

- Need to "mark" (Brekhus, 1998) the everyday, the mundane, incl. training for distance running
- Focused on 2 key themes re runners' visualization of running space/place:
  - 1) hazardous places
  - 2) time-space-place nexus
- Specific ways of seeing, also analogous to other social groups – cyclists, parents with young children, women in 'public' space, etc
- Need for sharp analytic attention to the mundane, everyday, familiar routines that characterise much of social life.
- Why?
- Often tacit, taken for granted, left unproblematised in their use as the basis for theorisation & abstraction – ironically, an 'unsociological' way of proceeding
- A strength of ethnomethodological (& phenomenology) is requirement to make strange the often taken-for-granted, mundane 'realities' of social life
- Encourage a more sociologically imaginative stance towards the traditional sociological concerns of social order and social change (Hemmings *et al* 2002).

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