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Sensing the Run: The Senses and Distance Running

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ABSTRACT To date, there has been little research into the sensuous dimensions of sporting activity. This paper seeks to address this lacuna and to expand the literature via an examination of one specific group: distance runners. Using data from a two-year collaborative autoethnography, the paper portrays the sensuous activity experienced by two runners as they traverse their routine training routes.

Introduction

When surveying the literature on attempts to explain sport at a phenomenological level, Kerry and Armour (2000) found, perhaps surprisingly, a paucity of material. The same state of affairs, with a few exceptions (Kew 1986; Coates 1999) is to be found within ethnomethodology. This paper contributes to the small but growing amount of embodied analysis on the body and sport (Lewis 2000; Rotella 2002; Wacquant 2004; Downey 2005)

by analytically portraying something of the corporeal skills, knowledge and experiences of distance runners as they traverse their training routes.[1] The vast majority of running undertaken by these athletes is done during training runs, which far outweighs their involvement in racing. To achieve its objective the paper focuses upon the sensuous experiences (Rodaway 1994) of this sporting practice. It constitutes a response to Classen's (1997: 410) call for "in-depth" investigations of particular sensory phenomena. The paper examines the sensory practices of this routine activity by making use of autoethnographic data.

Autoethnographic Data and Analysis

While autoethnography has its critics (Coffey 1999) it also has a growing number of proponents within sociology and anthropology who have developed powerful justifications for its use (Allen Collinson and Hockey, 2005). It emphasizes the linkage between themes within the author's experience and broader cultural and subcultural processes. For the author and his co-researcher who wished to portray the relationship between the distance running "mind" (emotions, sensations, knowledge) and its embodied activity, it constituted the best means of accessing and depicting that relationship.

In order for the events to be described to be understood in context, it will be necessary first for me to make visible some "accountable" knowledge in terms of athletic biographies. My female training partner/co-researcher and I both have a background of distance running that ranges over five-mile races to marathons and run together habitually. This has required a commitment to training six or seven days a week, on occasion twice a day, for nineteen years and thirty-eight years respectively. Moreover, we have been training together for the past eighteen years. During the same wind-swept week we both suffered knee injuries occasioned by having to train in the winter dark. It was apparent at the onset of these injuries that they did not constitute the usual small niggles that plague the habitual runner. Consequently, we rapidly arrived at a mutual decision to document our response to these injuries systematically, our principal motive being to achieve something positive out of a negative experience. The process of injury and recovery and its documentation took a full two years (Allen Collinson & Hockey 2001; Allen Collinson 2005; Hockey 2005).

Runners habitually keep logs of their daily training performance so the discipline of daily recording information was already *in situ*. Rather than training logs we constructed logs on the process of injury–rehabilitation so as to document our mutual and individual endeavors to return to the status of fully functioning athletes. Both of us constructed a personal log (indicated at the end of the extracts from field notes as Log 1 or Log 2 respectively) that was individually and jointly interrogated for emerging themes using a form of the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). We then created a third, collaborative log made up of these joint themes.

Micro tape recorders constituted the daily means of recording our experiences, and recordings were transcribed and the collaborative log constructed within a day or two of events occurring.

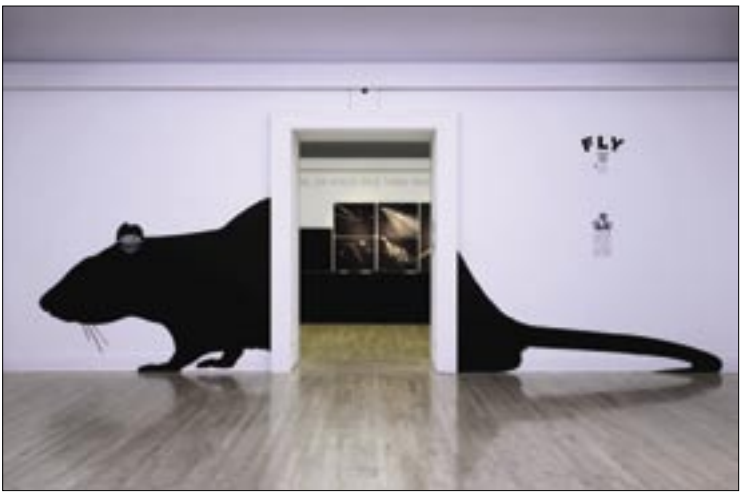
A by-product of our data analysis was that we became aware of a "stock of knowledge" (Benson and Hughes 1983: 52) that we had previously taken for granted when running. The documentation of this was then added to our initial main analytical task, that of recording our response to being injured.

What follows is part of that distance-running stock of knowledge; attempts have been made to made to portray the data evocatively (Denison and Rinehart 2000), so as to provide the reader with something of the sensations of distance running. For example, the sections on how runners see and touch their routes are written as if one of us is running the route, whereas in reality the data on which it is based come from a shared resource both experiential and as a sociological record. So the "I" in the narrative and the narrative itself is a composite of both our collective knowledge of a particular training route and of our documentation of it. Other parts of the data are highlighted in italics, and use is also made of prolonged emphasis on particular words.

Theorizing Training Routes and the Running Body

Theoretically it is possible to categorize these training routes as a particular kind of "social space" (Lefebvre 1991). It is via the embodied activity of training that this particular kind of space is produced or created (Lefebvre 1991; Stewart 1995). In Lefebvre's (1991) terms, we actually engage with our running in a social space that can be fruitfully examined in a number of distinct analytical ways. The first kind of engagement is that of "socially specific spatial practices" (Stewart 1995: 611), which involves the actual physical running through streets and parks that simultaneously creates the particular social space(s) known to us as training routes. The second kind of engagement involves what Lefebvre calls *representations of space*, which are *conceived* spaces. Thus, our routes are also imaginatively constructed via our thoughts, ideas, narratives and memories, as particular kinds of spaces. The combination of these two forms of engagement produce what Lefebvre calls *spaces of representation* or *lived space*. This lived space then produces specific forms of cognitive and corporeal knowing that are the outcomes of spatial practices. These are socially specific in terms of being linked to particular geographical features but also have their own history (Stewart 1995).

Social interaction permeates the lived space of each route and is manifest in two forms, contrary to fictionalized depictions of distance running as being pervaded by loneliness (Sillitoe 1993). Firstly, when runners train together it constitutes a complex interactional accomplishment in terms of maintaining physical proximity over particular stretches of space, which are liable to be variable in terms



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of terrain, population, climatic conditions and different levels of ability (fitness, agility, current "form" etc) . Training together, like walking together (Ryave and Schenkein 1975), then, demands of runners considerable interactional work. Aural work involves listening to the breathing pattern and utterances (cursing) of training partners to assess their degree of form. Visual work occurs via "the glance" (Sudnow 1972) as facial expressions and bodily posture are similarly scrutinised for indications of how partners are "going" in any particular session. Further visual work is involved in monitoring the particular path partners are taking so as to avoid collision (Ryave and Schenkein 1975). On the basis of such evaluation synchrony of running performance is achieved via mutual anticipation and interpretation. Secondly, social interaction occurs en route with two categories of public. There is the general public, who are mainly viewed as having the potential to disrupt training routines in terms of impairing performance levels or inflicting injury, either accidentally or on purpose; generally runners develop strategies of avoidance when dealing with this public (Smith 1997). In addition to interaction with the general public there is more positive interaction with individuals who have been encountered en route over prolonged periods, and are identified as being "serious runners" (Smith 1998). The result being the routine exchange of greetings, gestures and the occasional brief conversation about running (Hockey 2005).

In theorizing about the sensual running body the work of Merleau-Ponty is of considerable relevance . For his mission was to reveal "underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it by virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body" (1962: 206). From this standpoint the body is not so much an instrument nor an object but rather the *subject* of perception. Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty

this perception is inextricably linked to movement, and all bodily movement is accompanied by intentionality, which is at the core of perception (1962: 110–11). Social life generally demands habituated bodily action (e.g. driving a car), which becomes taken for granted in a pre-reflective sense. Crossley (2001: 123) neatly sums up Merleau-Ponty's position: "The corporeal schema is an incorporated bodily know-how and practical sense; a perspectival grasp upon the world from the 'point of view' of the body." This practical *sense* is built or developed by habit, but habit for Merleau-Ponty is not a mechanical phenomenon. Rather it is, as Crossley (2001: 127) notes, a practical "principle" that emerges into the social world via the formulation of meaning, intention and appropriate action.

So distance runners have an understanding of how to do distance running, but this understanding is not just cognitive but also corporeal, built by the body immersing itself in habitual training practices. As Crossley (1995: 47) has observed, the mind is inseparable from the body; they remain "reversible aspects of a single fabric." This combination of corporeal and cognitive interacts with a particular physical environment to create a particular form of "emplacement" (Howes 2005: 7). The data will demonstrate how runners move over, listen to, smell, see and feel their training routes. These senses are presented separately for analytic purposes whereas in reality they mutually influence each other (Howes 2003: 47).

Moving En Route

The paper now turns to this physical process of movement that allows athletes to cover their training terrain and produce optimal performances. Given that runners perceive their environment from a moving vantage point, as Ingold (2000: 166) points out, "[l]ocomotion not cognition must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity." When humans run, the vestibular organs organize the equilibrium of the body dealing with the forces of gravity and their direction (Gibson 1966), so that balance is maintained and locomotion is achieved. The forward movement of running has two principal interrelated components: rhythm and timing. Goodridge (1999: 43) defines rhythm in human physical performance as a "patterned energy-flow of action, marked in the body by varied stress and directional change; also marked by changes in the level of intensity, speed and duration." Rhythm then organizes or shapes the flow of action, while simultaneously being part of that action. There is a general rhythm to doing every distance-running session, and also, within each session the rhythm will change according to how individuals are feeling, the changing terrain and weather. The rhythms of distance running are predominantly cyclical and rooted in the combination of synchronized breathing patterns and lower limb cadence. Moreover, their form is relatively constant when compared to other sports such as soccer, which is characterized by a more intermittent, stop–start form. Achieving rhythm involves, above all, a

coordination of bodily parts as the demands of terrain are negotiated via precise bodily adjustments necessary for the chosen footfall and cadence. To do this effectively requires the development of a particular sense of timing. This Goodridge (1999: 44) defines as: "the act of determining or regulating the order of occurrence of an action or event, to achieve desired results." Running demands a particular kind of embodied timing and the performance of distance running and racing requires a specific variant of this.

This was most apparent during the injury and recovery process of the author and his co-runner/researcher: the two-year period involved a loss and subsequent regaining of a particular kind of timing. Our acute sense of timing had been fractured by protracted injury time. For ten months we were unable even to jog and in that time the grounded, embodied understanding of how to run had been lost, as portrayed in the following fieldnote:

> Initially tried some tiny 10-meter 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 *empty* us, compounding the problem … (Individual Log 1)

Over a period of fourteen months, we gradually learnt again how to distance run. This necessitated educating ourselves once more in how to coordinate the bodies parts and how to synthesize physiological and cognitive elements in order to build a running rhythm. As the health of our knees gradually improved, our sense of athletic timing gradually came back. Previously, when healthy, this athletic temporal sense had been acute. Either of us could, with some precision, identify the pace of our running, using a spectrum of bodily indicators such as respiratory rate and leg cadence. This timing had been routinely articulated during our training runs. Our sense of timing had been developed and refined by thousands of miles and hours of running practice. As a result of prolonged injury time, our embodied timing had been forgotten. Happily, towards the end of the two years of rehabilitation this sense of timing eventually began to return:

> Going well today, and for the first time I acted like a real runner again. I suddenly said to J: "This *feels* like 7s" (7 minutes per mile), and he nodded agreement… Once finished, I checked on the watch and it was indeed approximately the pace I had felt intuitively. That's a big marker for us – on the way back! (Individual Log 2)

Part of this embodied sense of rhythm and timing is made up of a highly developed awareness of sensations emanating from moving

muscles, tendons, ligaments, skin and organs. As Leder (1990: 23) notes, the "body is always a field of immediately lived sensation… Its presence is fleshed out by a ceaseless stream of kinesthesias, cutaneous and visceral sensations…" These sensations provide the individual with information about the choices she/he is making about position, balance and pace: how to stride up- or downhill, how to do "speed work" or to run at a certain pace per mile becomes known via differing assemblages of corporeal sensations that become taken for granted with experience. The angle of the head and torso, placing of the feet, stride length, arm movement and cadence, these constitute the "specific gestures and postures" (Feher 1987: 159) of the distance-running body that are produced via corporeal choices made on the basis of such kinesthetic information. Again, one way of revealing these sensory packages is to depict something of the process of re-learning how to distance run, necessitated by the injury–rehabilitation process previously mentioned, for as Tuan (1993: 36) has observed, "Movement is thus like health, usually taken for granted until there is some lack in it."

This is how the sensory package involving re-learning how to run fast is depicted in one of our logs:

> Yesterday started speed work again and both noticed the difference immediately, not just in terms of the breathing becoming harder – more *burning*, but in terms of how our bodies' bits moved once more pace was injected: toes push ground *hard*, plantar fascia *moaning* at increased effort, extra *calf bulkin – relaxing,* ham strings getting bigger and smaller rapidly – feel their "*snap*," Achilles tendon *whipping* more. Arms *driving.* All is *whizzing, agitating, humming, drumming*. You can feel all of your body *buzzing* through the effort and extra blood flow… Interestingly today the areas that can be felt most by both of us are the adductors and hip flexors (inner thighs), they feel *sore* and *tight*, having been stretched in that way for the first time for ages. It feels good though, sort of the body remembering, or perhaps awakening itself to something it has done before. (Individual Log 1)

Leder (1990: 30–2) has perceptively depicted the phenomenological processes that make up the learning of corporeal skills, the combination of specific movement, sensation and cognition that he terms "incorporation." In our case, we were not developing a novel skill, but rediscovering an existing one that had been lost, temporarily at least. We had lost what Bourdieu (1990) might have termed our "feel for the game" of running performance. Via the rehabilitative program, we achieved the re-incorporation of our running skills made up of a sense of rhythm, timing and kinesthetic awareness. At this juncture we encounter another dimension of the distance runners' sensuous geography, that of their immediate "soundscape" (Rodaway 1994).

Listening to the Route

As previously noted, runners practice their running for practical purposes, and their concerns focus upon: (a) safety and (b) performance. Rodaway (1994: 95) has noted that "sound is not just sensation: it is information. We do not merely hear, we listen." Hence, hearing and listening are important for traversing ground efficiently. Runners become practiced at making auditory evaluations of the physical and social spaces they run through. Their primary concern is one of safety and, especially in urban areas, vehicles constitute a serious hazard. Crossing roads and junctions demands particular attention from the senses particularly on dark winter evenings:

> At the roundabout we concentrate monitoring traffic coming from three ways, the busiest direction cannot be seen as vehicles accelerate around a corner immediate to us, which is partially obscured by a large tree and hopeless street lighting. Their sound *Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrah!* hits the brain, reverberating down the spine into the feet. When the sound is higher and more *aggressive*, we rock backwards and forwards, toe to heel, heel to toe, waiting for that gap in the traffic (Individual Log 2)

Parks in particular constitute public spaces in which dog-owners let their pets roam with impunity, much to the annoyance of distance runners who become highly attuned to the presence of dogs as they constitute a problematic feature of training runs. While experienced runners look out for dogs they also "listen" for them acutely:

> In my mind I can hear them coming, that Doberman Pinscher with teeth *bared* attack, a puppy causing me to spill over and most recently that Dalmatian *ramming* its shoulder into the back of my right hamstring sending me down on the local park. Always from behind initially, so the ears seem to have grown bigger over the years, attuned to them. I know what they sound like, they come quick, and their four feet are fast, different from humans, *pssshhhhhhhh,pssshhhhh* … over the leaves. Their noise is riveted into my cortex, my synapses, hot- wired into my memory circuits. (Individual Log 1)

Monitoring sounds is important for running safety and also crucial for performance in terms of getting the maximum benefit from training sessions. Runners are concerned with how they are "going" in any particular training session. While the running body is propelled by a skeleton and musculature, it is also propelled by a respiratory system. Breath or respiration provides a constant and almost instantaneous feedback on the state of every training session, as runners listen to and evaluate their own breathing patterns. These patterns of inhalation and exhalation constitute the mechanism via which internal autonomic physiological processes interrelate with socially

mediated or external processes (Lyon 1997). From the runner's point of view training sessions are categorized along a continuum ranging between negative and positive poles. Such categorization is partially enabled by an evaluation of breathing patterns, so respiration is intimately connected with the socially constituted normative order of accomplishing training. These patterns produce particular feeling or emotion states. There is, then, a direct relationship between respiratory patterns, the athlete's subjectivity (Lyon 1997: 96) and the judgments made to categorize sessions.

Distance running training is made up of a combination of aerobic and anaerobic work. The former consists of runs at a particular pace for a particular duration or time, and is designed to produce endurance. The latter is comprised of smaller but much more intense "efforts," which produce the capacity to run at speed. The combination of anaerobic and aerobic work produces effective racing performances. Runners then learn to associate particular kinds of breathing patterns with particular kind of sessions, and such patterns are correlated with individual pace thresholds. The nearer the pace threshold, the quicker and harder the breathing pattern, less effort produces less intense breathing. Once experienced, athletes possess considerable knowledge concerning what they should be able to achieve (in terms of time taken to cover distance) when doing particular sessions. They also develop a kinesthetic memory of how they should feel during those sessions, part of which includes the respiratory pattern. Sessions are always evaluated against these individual embodied standards. In addition, when regularly running particular training routes, individuals become very aware of the habitual patterns of breathing they manifest when encountering particular physical features (hills, ploughed fields etc). *How* they are breathing then becomes a major indicator of how they are "going" in a session. The prime means of evaluating breathing is located in the degree of fluency patterns of inhalation and exhalation exhibit at any particular juncture. Breathing might well be rapid, deep and painful during anaerobic work, but if the session is going well there will be a "flow" to the pattern of respiration. This flow is in effect a particular rhythm of respiration (Goodridge 1999: 43). Where there is no flow, when breathing is "ragged" or disjointed, whether during aerobic or anaerobic work, athletes are alerted to the fact that they are struggling to meet the session's objectives. Whether the going is bad or good produces different emotions ranging from exhilaration to anxiety, which in turn impacts upon the breathing patterns themselves (Tomkins 1962: 48). The following log entry depicts how physiological sensations intimately connect with the production of emotions, in this case those of embarrassment over a poor running performance:

> Nothing fancy, just get out there and run seven miles easy. The problems was it wasn't easy, felt out of sorts right from the start. Normally when going up the first hill I would just click into

> it, shorten the stride, work the arms lean into it, get the rhythm going with the breathing. I couldn't do it though, I was all over the place like some overweight jogger! Uaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah! I could hear myself wheezing and moaning and gasping. It was a struggle all the way round and I *felt* embarrassed. (Individual Log 1)

Hearing and listening to their breathing patterns provides runners with a direct resource with which to evaluate the state of their physical being – embodied evidence upon which to base decisions as they move over their training routes: to increase or decrease the pace; to shorten the session or prolong it. Another auditory resource revealed by analyzing the data, are the sounds the running footfall makes on different kinds of surfaces. For example, the relative softness and smoothness of new tarmac facilitates a rhythmical cadence (Goodridge 1999) that produces a low sssssssssssshhhhh sound. This informs runners that their cadence is flowing, which in turn encourages pace injection. In contrast when the runner hits the concrete of pavement the sound is higher, more abrasive, with a slaaaaaaaaap or thwaaaaaaaaaaaaaack to the ear. The running over this kind of terrain is not so rhythmical or so easy on musculature. The sluuuuuuuuuck sound of slushy snow and the cruuuuuuuuuuuuunch of crisp, firm snow, help inform the runner how to navigate the optimal path for traversing the route safely and effectively. The first surface is difficult to achieve any rhythm on and not good for ankles, while on the second surface it is possible to move with ease and impunity. Thus, the memory store of the experienced distance runner contains a catalog of differing sound patterns co-related with the potential different kinds of surfaces have for performance and safety.

While runners need to be alert to their immediate soundscapes their olfactory receptors provide another embodied resource as they traverse their training terrain.

Smelling the Route

When runners train they produce and engage with immediate "smell-scapes" (Classen et al. 1994: 97) particular to themselves and their routes. These consist of an amalgam of odors or aromas that change according to activity, space, place and atmospheric/seasonal conditions. Those odors relevant to distance runners help individuals substantiate their athletic identity in a number of ways: (a) in an embodied sense (b) in a biographical sense (c) in a space-time sense.

Distance running and racing is an embodied activity that requires systematic, routine, vigorous exercise. The result is that sweat pours from participants, and the body and its equipment become permeated with its odor. As Synnott (1993: 190) has noted, "odour is a natural sign of the self as both a physical and a moral being. The odour is a symbol of the self." Hence while smells are physical sensations they also carry with them moral evaluations. Thus in contemporary

industrial society those who smell fragrant are good and those who smell bad are bad, or at least suspicious! There are exceptions to this general cultural evaluation, including how bodies are evaluated in sporting contexts (Synnott 1993: 273). The pungency that permeates distance running bodies and equipment is symbolic of training and racing effort, and recognized as so by runners:

> The weather has been bad for weeks and I have been wearing a gortex jacket and a thermal top underneath it – and the sweat pours out of me during every session. My crotch, back and armpits give off a kind of gross *ripe* smell and my kit is saturated with it. It's a stink I am used to, that is me when I am out there working hard, putting the miles in . . . (Individual Log 1)

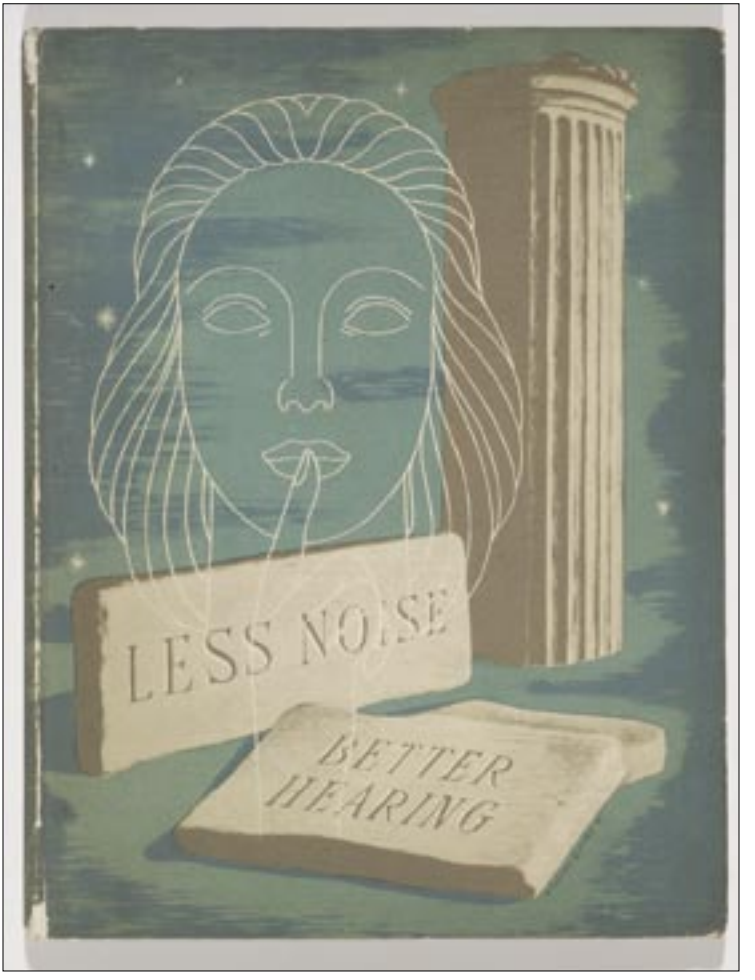
This pungency acts to substantiate the salience of athletes distance-running identities (Stryker 1987), helping to define who they are to themselves (Classen et al. 1994: 113).

Tuan (1993: 57) has pointed out the capacity of smells to invoke memories: "Odour has this power to restore the past because, unlike the visual image, it is an encapsulated experience that has been left largely uninterpreted and underdeveloped." The aromas that permeate training smellscapes have the capacity to link runners with past elements in their athletic biographies. The smell of newly cut grass on parkland always invokes in me a period of several months training on South Wales parks in preparation for a marathon in which I won a prize thirty years ago. The whiff of dog excrement invokes in my training partner/co-researcher a more recent memory, of a rage-filled jettisoning of new training shoes in the aftermath of treading in the offending material during a dark winter evening, six-mile session. For me, the slightest hint of lilac tree aroma necessitates a training route detour and conjures up a memory of suffering a violent coughing fit resulting in aborting a training session. Other smells evoke mutual athletic memories as in the following example:

> Today we were running in the local park underneath the row of pines, to find some shade . It was the hottest day of the summer so far, and we could actually smell the pine scent, we both simultaneously grunted: "N.D." These are the initials of our favorite training location in western France; a perfect place, all flat, soft, smooth, pine needle covered tracks, in a forest backing onto a huge quiet beach. Out of nowhere the smell conjured up the same response, the same favourite memory of running there. (Individual Log 2)

These smells bring forth into the conscious mind past athletic memories that help to substantiate the distance-running identity in the running present.

The final feature of the running smellscape is concerned with the part odors play in marking the passage of the routes over which runners train. Psathas (1979: 224) has identified how maps are read as a "set of sequential particulars," physical markers such as hills, valleys etc. In a similar fashion, interrogation of the data indicated that our habitual training routes contained sets of smelt sequential particulars. What is smelt acts to locate us at particular points in the route(s), it marks where we are and how far we have to go. So, on one particular route the curry aroma emanating from an Asian restaurant tells us we are a mere 300 meters from finishing the session. The flood of vehicle pollution from a busy traffic interchange designates that we are barely at the start of a route, and that the relatively clean air of a park will soon be inhaled. The stink from algae rotting on a lake denotes the halfway point of a particular six mile run. Some routes contain more smelt markers than others, and differences are also



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evident if runs are primarily street based – as with the aroma of starch blown from the extractor fan of a laundry. In addition, seasons impact upon these olfactory markers: the pungency of rotting tree mulch is a winter marker, while the sweetness of cut grass on particular park avenues is a summer one. The presence of these aromatic markers *en route* signals to us in a direct way where we are on the route, and we use them to "order the experience and understanding of space" (Classen et al. 1994: 98).

Seeing the Route

For most of us, the context that surrounds us as social actors is evaluated and interpreted using broad cultural codes (Rose 1993): we see in a particular way, using cultural resources. Furthermore, specific social groups employ distinctive "ways of seeing," for example, the ways in which women see public places (Brooks Gardner 1980), or how different occupational groups view their work situations (Bittner 1967). What is actually seen in these situations is dependent upon the knowledge that has been accumulated via previous experience of the activities themselves. Ways of seeing are structured by specific kinds of knowledge, which are in turn informed by the act of seeing itself, in a complex circular process. This active looking is necessary in order to accomplish the particular task(s) at hand. Through the embodied running of particular sequences of social space, training routes are constructed (Carr et al. 1992), and are dependent upon a specific, active way of seeing; each route forming part of a store of memory. In order to portray the kinds of visual practices distance runners use in order to accomplish training in an effective manner, the following section consists of a narrative depiction of one part of a favorite training route, and is based upon our field notes. The narrative itself portrays knowledge about that route, for runners often build up extensive and detailed knowledge of their training routes (Smith 1997). This knowledge also constructs *how* the route is seen in the process of running. Runners concerns when seeing are focused upon issues of safety and issues of performance. To carry out these activities runners are attentive to routes that allow them to maximize their training. They then accumulate knowledge of, and follow, particular routes while pursuing the latter objective. So, for example, a stretch of flat road may be prized for doing 100–400 meter efforts. It will also be prized if its surface is smooth, allowing fast cadence to flow. There is then a concern with the nature of the terrain one is training on, and what it will, or will not facilitate in terms of training performance. The term "going" is often used by runners to describe the terrain's capability, so for example "good going" or "lousy going" for particular stretches of terrain.

Another practical concern of runners in relation to training is safety. (Smith (1997) has perceptively identified the strategies runners use to deal with harassment, and on rare occasions assault, while training in public places.) Runners thus become attentative to particular

locations (bars, pubs etc) on their routes where the risk of potential verbal/physical attack arises. This paper will depict some of these kinds of concern, and it will also depict a more encompassing and prevalent threat to safety that emanates from a combination of the physical features of the terrain and other human traffic, such as vehicle drivers and bicyclists and also (as forementioned) dogs, all of whom use the routes along with runners. From the runner's perspective, this combination routinely harbors features that can cause athletic injury, and resultant cessation of training and racing. These concerns of performance and safety are illustrated in the following narrative sections derived from both our individual logs:

> In a few yards I move off the grass on to a path, feeling its newly laid bitumen easy on my feet, heading for some ornamental gates. Cautiously, I slow down, knowing that with the narrowing of the path as it reaches the gates I am liable to encounter some combination of: parents with prams, mountain bikers with attitude, psychotic pets and deranged children, all with the capacity to shoot into my path and do me damage!
>
> . . . Into the other park and up a little pitch, shortening the stride, working the quadriceps harder, hamstrings contracting sharply and grumbling, moving right all the time to avoid a marshy patch there for six months of the year, work the arms, murmuring "come on dig in a bit." A bigger slope is before me, up the grass past the tennis courts, smooth all over now, any line taken will do. Good for doing hill repeats here . . . Along the park-top, going good, summer hazard arises due to mini golf – be aware! Reach a big clump of trees around which in winter is a boggy morass, producing freezing, sodden shoes, and sore Achilles' tendons as one's heels get sucked down too far in the mud. In summer there are great hardened ruts which do nothing for shin muscles which can get inflamed all too easily.

As Emmison and Smith (2000: 185) note, "environments are not simply places where we see things in a passive way. They are also locations where we must look in active ways." Runners see in active ways so as to make sense of the places of their training. Moreover, as Ingold (2000: 226, 230) has asserted "people see as they move" and "our knowledge of the environment undergoes continuous formation in the very course of [our] moving about in it." Hopefully, the preceding narrative passage has conveyed something of the runner's vision in movement. The paper now turns to examining how athletes touch their training terrain.

Feeling the Route

Runners traverse their training grounds, they touch that ground and in turn are touched by it, so there is a reciprocal haptic relationship between the runner and the world in terms of the route. Rodaway

(1994: 48) defines the haptic experience as "a combination of tactile and locomotive properties [that] provides information about the character of objects, surfaces and whole environments as well as our own bodies." The runner's touch is mainly an active one, combining pressure between the athletic body and the ground and a kinesthetic awareness of the body as it moves. "Touch is therefore, about both an awareness of presence and of locomotion" (Rodaway, 1994: 42). In addition, humans touch, as Hetherington (2003: 7) notes, "to confirm it: that it is there, that it feels like this… Touch is a way of removing doubt – of confirming." It is a directly embodied way of f*eelin*g the world and understanding its properties. Interestingly, as Ingold (2004: 330-331) points out, "studies of haptic perception have focused almost exclusively on manual touch" and he calls for the development of studies that examine the relationships between the environment and "techniques of footwork." The following is a narrative sequence derived from both individual logs that depicts the response of our feet to feeling differing kinds of terrain:

> *Zinnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnng* goes my plantar fascia as I ouch! Hitting the ridges of malformed pavement, onto a less odious section, but the feet still resonate with slaaaaaaaaaaping and *burn* from the concrete – it gives you nothing.
>
> Down through the field feeling my way, summer grass is long and I move my toes searching out the contours of the hidden bumps of dry earth, careful and slow as some are big and the ankles roll, roll, rolling off them – ligaments strainiiing to compenseate, feel them m-o-a-n-l-n-g…
>
> I am running on air, six miles of *plush*, my feet bits are relaaaaaaaxed, no tension, every ligament, tendon and muscle *flowing* – smooooooooooothly down the level pine needle caressed forest path. The ground giving me back *bounce* it's so cushioned.

The feet, while admittedly clad in running shoes, still feel the ground, perceiving its shape, size, texture and temperature, in effect its response to being trodden on. The slap of concrete resonates through the sole, the shape of items strode over are felt as the toes and forefoot grasp them, the feet swell and get hot as the temperature rises, and the tendons at the bottom of the ankle stretch more as boggy terrain is traversed. It is the running feet that feel, and that make constant, small, improvised adjustments to footfall, "tuning" (Ingold 2004: 332) in to the constantly changing properties (chosen path, climatic conditions etc) of training routes. Evaluating the route is, then, not just a visual process but also a haptic one, because feeling the ground provides athletes with information with which to categorize routes, and sections of routes, in terms of how conducive they are to safety, performance – and of course pleasure (Bale 2004: 74).

The running feet are not the only tactile part to *feel* the route, for the skin does also, exposed as it is to the varying weather conditions that form part of the particular training routes. As Montagu (1971) has shown, the skin provides the largest area of touch in the human body. Thus, runners are touched perennially by heat, wet, cold and air as the elements bombard them. This passive process of being touched tends to be greater in the late spring and the summer as runners exchange hats, gloves and track suits for shorts and vests. However, even in the depths of winter, swaddled in layers, runners feel the elements, which often make the traversing of routes more arduous:

> Tonight into the poorly lit streets like gladiators all swathed in waterproof gear against wet snow. Our hands still *freeze* despite two pairs of gloves, they *a-c-h-e* sooooo much, it's like having foreign objects at the end of oneself! The only exposed bits are our faces. It's not so bad down the streets but alongside the exposed side of the park the wind drives the snow directly at us and it *feels* like gravel being rubbbbbbbbed into you, like your skin is burrrrrrrrrrning, and when we get indoors our cheeks are bright red like circus clowns! (Individual Log 2)

Runners touch and are touched by the ground they traverse and this two way process builds an embodied relationship with their training terrain. Where they perceive themselves as belonging to and being part of their habitual routes, part of those particular combinations of space, place, time and distance (Rodaway 1994: 54).

Conclusion

This paper has portrayed how the senses are experienced and used by distance runners in the particular social space (Lefebvre 1991) of their habitual training routes. Using data from a two-year collaborative autoethnographic project the paper has portrayed how the central concerns of safety and performance are assessed and acted upon by runners, using cognitive and corporeal information accrued by their senses. These sensory patterns do not work in isolation (Merleau-Ponty 1962) but are interlocking and mutually influential. The substance of the body, its very flesh, interacts with the fabric of the social world. Runners' physical engagement with the world is via a subcultural stock of learnt practical techniques and meanings. These are enacted in the particular sections of space and time that are corporeally known and cognitively categorized as "training routes." How distance runners see a hill as it approaches them, what the ground feels like as they ascend it, how their cadence changes as they engage with it, what the odor of their own sweat means to them as they labor up it and what their lungs tell them at the top of it – these cognitive and corporeal ways of knowing unfold as the route does itself.

It is hoped that this account gives some indication of the particular sensory complexity of "sensing the run." Given there is little phenomenological or ethnomethodological literature on physical activity or sport, there would be seem to be fertile grounds for charting and analyzing the sensory dimensions of these areas of social life.

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Note

1. There have of course been autobiographical (Bannister 2004) and fictional (Sillitoe 1993) depictions of distance running that, while not analytic, have been evocative of embodied experience.

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