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Camaraderie Reincorporated: Tough Mudder and the Extended Distribution of the Social

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Abstract

Tough Mudder, a market-leading event in the burgeoning practice and industry of mud running, is a 21 km "military-style" obstacle course with a curiously collaborative ethic. Teams of runners traverse the course in the name of fun, fitness, bravado, and much more besides, galvanized around Tough Mudder's distinctive ethos of togetherness. This essay sets out to reassemble the "camaraderie" for which Tough Mudder is renowned as an element and outcome of material, corporeal, and symbolic enactments, and, with actor-network theory as a guiding sensibility, recasts it as a profoundly shared endeavor, one in which a whole host of actors, human and otherwise, make dramatic and subtle contributions.

Keywords

physical culture, ANT, Latour, nature, endurance, mud running

Introduction

That's me, on the left next to my running buddy Ben, near the culmination of Tough Mudder at Whistler in 2012. In the background are the snowcapped peaks of British Columbia's world-renowned ski resort Whistler Blackcomb; in the foreground, scores of weary runners waiting to take on one of Tough Mudder's signature obstacles, "Everest." Everest, of course, is the world's tallest peak, found in the Himalayas and famously scaled by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953. Theirs remains the modern conquest *par excellence* and, like other mountaineering escapades before and

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since, has come to represent a triumph of human ascendancy over nature. In Tough Mudder, Everest is a quarter-pipe smothered with sweat and soil, located precariously at around the 11-mile mark of this 12-mile, "military-style" obstacle course. Ben and I are about to scurry up the greasy exterior and attempt to haul ourselves atop the wooden deck at its apex.

Figure 1. Tough Mudder's "Everest" at Whistler Olympic Park, British Columbia.

For all the blatant discrepancies between these namesakes, let us push the analogy a little further. The first ascent of Mt. Everest is storied by Hansen (2013) not in the usual triumphalist tone, but as perpetuating the modern myth of human autonomy, from other men and from nature itself. The figure of the lone, victorious mountaineer would "entangle visions of sovereignty, masculinity and modernity throughout the twentieth century" due to his—and our—emphasis on being first, highest, and unaccompanied (Hansen, 2013, p. 2). "The will to be first," he continues, "is said to

distinguish modern men and women from premodern or nonmodern people who cower in front of mountains" (p. 3). Hansen goes on to not only debunk the modern myth of sovereign ascendancy by detailing the collaborative necessity of mountaineering but also to show that it was more than a reflection or expression of modernity: rather, mountaineering "was one of the practices that constructed and redefined multiple modernities during debates over who was first" (p. 3).

Somewhat surprisingly, given the distinctly modern emphasis on "overcoming obstacles" that Tough Mudder events outwardly espouse, the Everest with which Ben and I are confronted does not entertain the same pretensions to autonomy as its fabled counterpart. Take another look at the picture and you will see the hands of those already atop dangling in anticipation of hauling others upward. On the far right-hand side, one runner is suspended midway through this collaborative maneuver. In Tough Mudder's Everest, and contrary to tales weaved around its eponym, teamwork is encouraged: you, the would-be participant, are invited via the company website to "call upon other Mudders to catch you as you run up the quarter-pipe or work together to form a human chain so that you can scale someone's shoulders to finally summit Everest." This encouragement of cooperation in Tough Mudder's "extreme" endurance events appears as a marked contrast to the fantasy of unaccompanied ascendance synonymous with Mt. Everest, and other quintessentially modern (athletic) practices. In fact, Tough Mudder's entwinement of playful collaboration with grit, pain, and dirt is intended to make it as much about fostering the bonds of friendship anew, creating cultural memories and capital, building office morale, and rebuilding bodies and selves following trauma, as it is about athletic achievement or personal glory. As runners are reminded from initial registration through to post-race beers, Tough Mudder is "not a race but a challenge" in which each and all pledge to "put teamwork and camaraderie before my course time" and to "help fellow Mudders complete the course." Tough Mudder trades on a spirit of togetherness—an esprit de corps or camaraderie—that its obstacles (such as Everest) are intended to materialize among participants, teammates, and strangers alike.

My study was initially prompted by a concern with the overtly masculine and militaristic aspects of what is by some measures just another "modernist adventure race" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 103) in which one would expect to find—and can find—a commercial ethos and imperative that readily lends itself to corporate team-building exercises and the accrual of physical and cultural capital (Kay & Laberge, 2002); a form of "extreme" adventure racing that bears a history of exclusion along axes of gender, race, class, and dis/ability (Ray, 2009); and domineering approaches to the body and its worldly surroundings. But there is a curious incongruence between these all-too-familiar and apparent themes, and the sociality that I found to characterize not only the prevailing ethos of the event but also the conglomeration of people, technologies, affects, and more besides, that made it possible. Tough Mudder is a shared enterprise in which the "obstacles" are considered to be either "external" to the course, such as traumas or hardships experienced elsewhere, or the course itself, comprising not just the Everest quarter pipe but hanging bars, icy receptacles, muddied tunnels, and much more besides. Both are plausible in the pursuit of "overcoming" obstacles, whereby the course itself becomes a material-metaphor for social life.

Nevertheless, and crucially for this essay, it follows that individual autonomy is displaced in Tough Mudder only to effect the collective *human* overcoming of Everest and the rest of the course, and to elicit the desired sense of "camaraderie" among participants. Rather than undermining the conceit of human exceptionalism synonymous with its eponym that ordains people as the world's (physically) active subjects that stand above and apart from a world of natural and technological resources, and despite its collaborative ethic, Tough Mudder therefore appears to retain and reproduce the ontological preeminence of heroic, adventurous (mud) runners, overcoming fun and fearsome surroundings.

What if Tough Mudder's Everest and the course of which it is a part were more than a series of tractable obstacles that are simply clambered and overcome by triumphant runners, individual or collective? What if the material, corporeal, and symbolic "camaraderie" for which the event is renowned was a more profoundly shared endeavor, one in which a whole host of objects, affects, and competencies, human and otherwise, make dramatic and subtle contributions? And what is at stake in reincorporating these intra- and supra-human materialities as active players in physical cultural practices? These questions and possibilities emerged over the course of my mud running endeavors during and since Tough Mudder at Whistler in 2012. They are intended to pursue the curious dynamic between Tough Mudder's appeal to the power of individual human will and perseverance, or "grit," its collaborative ethos, or camaraderie, and the importance of the infrastructure of the course and the event itself in materializing, and making possible, these individual and collective efforts toward "overcoming" obstacles. They were also, as I will discuss shortly, informed by a host of philosophies and research practices that take seriously the capacities of matter, or "objects" (such as mud and the various obstacles in Tough Mudder) to partake in and effect social life.

In this essay I revisit my experiences and recollections of Tough Mudder at Whistler through these philosophies and research practices by seeking out, accounting for, and emphasizing the composition and distribution of Tough Mudder's camaraderie: what Bruno Latour (2005) called "reassembling the social" as an extended multiplicity of "actors." Contra the modernist notion of humans simply overcoming natural or technological obstacles, my aim has become to recast the conventional hero figure, the super-human athlete, to afford due attention to the too-often unsung ensemble of intra- and supra-human materialities with which these athletes always share an ecology.

Object Agency: From Oppression and Subversion to Shared Enactments and Entanglements

The notion that objects—intra- and supra-human materialities[1]—exercise some kind of agency can be traced back through Western philosophy to antiquity, at least, when Epicurus and Democritus clashed over whether atoms were always predictable in their patterns of movement or, as Epicurus posited, matter inheres an immanent proclivity to "swerve" from its "natural" or forecasted path (Barad, 2003; Bennett, 2001). Recognition of Epicurus's claim—implicit to many indigenous worldviews (Blaser,

2014; Sundberg, 2013) yet often marginalized in much of Western thought since Democritus prefigured for Descartes and for Newton the inertia of matter (Barad, 2003; Coole & Frost, 2010)—is currently *en vogue* in the social sciences and (post) humanities in a range of "new," renewed, and reinvigorated philosophies and research practices concerned with matter, agency, and nature. These include actor-network theory (ANT; Latour, 2005), posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010), feminist techno-science studies (Haraway, 1991), vital and "new" materialisms (Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der tuin, 2012), agential realism (Barad, 2003, 2007), assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), political ecology (Robbins, 2004), object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2009), as well as less firmly delineated approaches within science studies (Law, 2004), human geography (Whatmore, 2006), and other fields and disciplines. Differences and dovetailings abound, but if there is a shared contention it is that much is at stake in apprehending—and remembering—the various ways in which agency breaches the *anthropos*.

What distinguishes these perspectives is not simply an acknowledgment of the myriad propensities and effects of objects within and for all forms of life but the ontological character and conditions of their capacity to act. Put another way, the agency of matter has not been entirely absent from modern social and cultural theory, but its recognition has often tended to betray humanistic undertones. Marx and neo-Marxisms, for instance, have contended that the splendor of objects enchants and misleads beholders by concealing the whole story of their inequitous conditions of human production. Objects undergo an alchemic metamorphosis through the process of commodification, a process that harbors deleterious, alienating, and exploitative consequences for those who labor to forge them. Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/1972) furthered this line of argument in their seething critique of the culture industry when lamenting that aesthetic commodities (such as Tough Mudder) undermine the touchstone principle of Enlightenment—critical Reason—by subjecting "the masses" to a stupefying stream of hedonistic pleasure (see Lamb and Hillman, 2015, for an account of Tough Mudder producing 'false consciousness' among its participants). The shared contention is that an object wields agency insofar as a fetishized commodity has—to some degree—a life of its own. But this capacity is always already scripted in the logics of the (political-economic) structures that subsume it. That is to say, objects are only agentic in Marx and neo-Marxisms once they have been infused with a capacity to act by capitalist hands and brains, and this process works oppressively, to the detriment of the individual citizen-consumer's critical consciousness and democratic society at large (cf. Bennett, 2001). The irony of these theses is that one demon (capitalism) is struck by the force of critical theory while another (humanism) is strengthened by the blow.

Others have viewed objects as carrying a subversive potential that resists, and yet in some cases hegemonically perpetuates, the social, political, and historical conditions which so concerned Marx and neo-Marxisms. In his cultural studies analysis of British post-war subcultures, Hebdige (1979) contended that "'humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination" (p. 18). What most distinguishes this

perspective on object agency from its neo-Marxist forerunners is that objects are sites of contested rather than foreshadowed significance. Hebdige was interested in how working-class youth—punks, mods, rockers—challenged the conventions they were due to inherit by "symbolically repossessing" artifacts and commodities such as safety pins, chains, and jewelry (see also De Certeau, 1984). A relevant critique often made of Hebdige's work is that he borrowed and retained Barthes's (1972) (then) structuralist assumption that an "authentic," latent meaning underlays these subversive connotations: that arbitrary objects are the harbingers of an essential underlying truth or master code. In this case, and notwithstanding the nuance of his reading of "homologies" between subcultural groups, that truth remained linked to the class-stratified significance of the stylistic expressions inferred by the author, and the agency of objects thereby remained limited to being "endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings, by the very [working class] groups who originally produced them" (p. 16).

Aware of these essentializing shortcomings, post-structuralists have since sought to rupture such efficacious claims to human powers of production and meaning-making practices. By eschewing the starting point that authority always has a culpable author, post-structuralism sought to displace human intentionality as the vanguard of agency and to focus instead on how subjects are constituted and regulated by the social (especially lingual) structures to which they are bound. In this formulation, power and agency are always already invested in the practices of everyday life, including its myriad objects (institutions, documents, images, technologies, and so forth).[2] However, and despite the insights and gains of post-structuralism, the conundrum remains that even when "decentering" the subject insofar as authority over communication is concerned, agency is often deferred into a symbolic domain which remains a human preserve of language, signs, and subjectivity. Among the most influential instances of this is Butler's (1989) positing of sex as a discursively constituted category, one that highlighted the contingency and complexity of sex and its cultural expressions, yet, in doing so, bracketed the materiality of nature, including enfleshed bodies (a shortcoming that Butler would spend some years thereafter seeking to address). Consequently, in these important efforts to temper the hubristic status of human sovereignty in making the modern world, a residual humanism endures insofar as agency and meaning are relocated into a "symbolic realm." In post-structuralism, objects deemed biological and environmental, natural and artifactual, are viewed as active parts of a complex and ambivalent social apparatus, but their significance is nevertheless implied to have origins in discursive practices and effects in a human social order of things (even if subjects surrender some semantic control through the equation). The authorial sovereignty of the human subject is therefore only deferred, rather than eschewed so as to recognize objects as more than just the site of action.

The point of this selective storying of object agency in modern social and cultural theory is to demonstrate some of the anthropocentic problems to which many of the aforelisted materialist philosophies and research practices are, at least in part, responding.[3] The efficacy and attention granted to human modes of historical, political-economic, and semantic production can obscure and even efface the capacity of objects to share and *make a difference* in enacting agency in socio-natural configurations. And in some cases,

the casting of people as the agents of history, or of the symbolic realm of language and subjectivity as the ontological basis for understanding the world, may well have the ironic, performative effect of perpetuating the hubris of human exceptionalism and the various ecological (social-environmental) problems with which it is associated.

By way of response, Bruno Latour is among those to have pursued a radical disavowal of the humanistic tenets of Enlightenment philosophy to afford all objects their ontological dues.[4] His claim is that "the social" is not a preordained realm, system, or structure composed of rational human subjects but the contingent effect of ongoing conglomerations between a hybrid cast of "actors" (or "actants"); a fluid "network" that is "*simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society*" (Latour, 1993, p. 6, emphasis in original). Latour's materialism confronts a world of hybrid phenomena, as opposed to simply active people and passive things, each of which proves disobedient when faced with normative, disciplinary frameworks inherited from the rarefied categories of nature, culture, and technology. The foremost barrier to comprehending this hybridity is what he has called the Great Divide of subjects and objects, culture and nature, humans and nonhumans, bodies and minds, "us" and the Others, present and past: in other words, the distinctly modern premise of human exceptionalism that has for so long been sacrosanct in the canon of Western philosophy (Latour, 1993). It is this divide that Latour's advocations for doing non-anthropocentric, non-dualistic, and non-reductionist research are intended to eschew. Latour is by no means alone, even less so flawless or complete, in his proposals for a "generalized symmetry" of things and people, but these principles nevertheless offer a compelling point of departure for reconfiguring the social as always already socio-natural.

Human exceptionalism, a broad and diverse school of thought (cf. Foucault, 1984) that champions the primacy, centrality, and exclusivity of "human being" from nature, technology, and other animals, is a spatio-temporally particular construct rather than a timeless, universal affliction. It is therefore important to stress again and from the outset that the reconception of agency that Latour and "new" and renewed materialist philosophies put forward is an exercise in *reanamnesis* (Harman, 2009). That is to say, it is as much about remembering the vitality of objects as it is about their reassembly (cf. Robbins, 2004).[5] The promise of apprehending the collusion of "more-than-human" (Whatmore, 2006) phenomena in enacting agency is, in my reading at least, an invitation to revisit and rework the ontological basis of one's understanding of and orientation to the world under study, including the *reanamnesis* of things gathered under inhibitive and often troublesome dualistic categories (see Plumwood, 1993). The leap of faith needed, one that confounds modernist and anti-modernist thinking (cf. Latour, 1993) about matter, agency, and nature, is to entertain "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett, 2010, viii). In the context of this essay, the ensuing imperative is to recast—quite literally—the scenes in which Tough Mudder participants are said to ascend and overcome "their" worldly surroundings, and to reincorporate Tough Mudder's camaraderie as a "more-than-human" phenomena that is shared, contingent, and radically dependent on a world of colluding things.

With the shared enactment of agency as a guiding sensibility, in what follows, I revisit my first encounter with Tough Mudder and its Everest obstacle through a "reassembly" (Latour, 2005) of the field notes, photos, conversations, and other artifacts gathered in the lead up to, and during, that event. My tools of analysis to this end have been immersion and description, recursively running, reading, writing, and reconfiguring my recollections in an effort to, in Haraway and Goodeve's (2000) words, "redescribe something so that it becomes thicker than it first seems" (p. 108).

Reassembling the Social in Tough Mudder

Since its founding in 2010, Tough Mudder has become the market leading event in an increasingly saturated mud running industry. In 2013, more than 3 million people participated in a mud run worldwide and the industry accrued total revenues of just more than US$290 million, up from US$15.9 million in 2010 (Rodriguez, 2014). There are differences in the distance, intensity, and ethos of leading events such as Spartan Race, Warrior Dash, and Tough Mudder, accentuated by the movement of the former toward the professionalization, standardization, and telebroadcasting of "obstacle course racing" as a fully fledged sport (in fact there is a whole professionalizing scene to obstacle course racing that is moving at great pace, but that I do not focus on in this essay). In any case, each mud running course features a range of "obstacles" that demand wading, crawling, climbing, paddling, and otherwise persevering through mud "trenches," ponds, tubes, and various other hindrances made more playful and perilous by the eponymous soil. Although obstacle course racing and mud running are often used interchangeably, I have come to favor the mud running moniker for its fusion—in name and form—of runner and mud, culture and nature, human and nonhuman, self and other, body and world.

My participation (or in the company parlance "enlistment") in Tough Mudder was prompted by an email alert early in 2012, announcing its impending debut in Canada. The event peaked my research interests due to its self-described billing as a "hardcore 10-12 mile obstacle course designed by British Special Forces to test your all around strength, stamina, mental grit, and camaraderie," one exhibiting an overtly masculine, militaristic, and collaborative ethos. A first viewing of the company website and its promotional video conveyed a some what parodic, surely pain-inducing challenge that is best undertaken with the support of friends and family, and Ben was the first to agree to train and run with me as part of my study. Four months later, the photograph in Figure 1 captured the maturation of a great deal of training, travel, and trepidation.

The Tough Mudder course is mostly more prosaic than is conferred by its more spectacular, promotional renderings. Around 25 "obstacles" are interspersed over 12 miles, meaning that much of the time is spent jogging, taking in the scenery, talking to other participants *en route*, and queuing for obstacles that, due to difficulty, design, or both, produce a "bottle-neck" of runners watching, waiting, recuperating, and encouraging others. These delays affect the rhythm of the run, and help affirm, in concert with the affective efforts of Tough Mudder to this point, that the course is "not a race but a challenge." Nonetheless, some of the obstacles, such as the hanging bars and

12-foot "Berlin" walls, did demand particular kinds of training and technologies, and Ben and I adapted our preparation accordingly. We observed and sometimes heeded practically-oriented discussions on Tough Mudder's internal "Mudder Nation" site, as well as blogs and other forums, ranging from whether gloves with sturdy grip are necessary to avoid splinters and counter greasy surfaces to debates as to the utility of moisture-wicking fabrics to externalize sweat and maintain core body temperature given the need to intermittently submerge in water, leap over fire, crawl across ice, and so forth. Tough Mudder's promotional videos and associated media had promised these sorts of weird and wonderful hindrances, and so, in the weeks and months preceding the run, beach fronts made boggy by the North-Western rain and high tides worked to simulate the marshy consistency of mud. Park trails punctuated by fitness technologies such as pull-up bars and wooden benches, and long, steep stair cases adjoining the University of British Columbia to the West coast peninsula provided us with the chance to intersperse distance running with intermittent, multi-modal exercises, as demanded by the course. Occasional wading into the Georgia Strait, a passage between Vancouver Island and the mainland coast, cooled our body temperatures and cleaned our dirt-laden clothes at the end of training sessions. And we would purchase, mix, and consume protein shakes to recuperate and do it all again in a day or two, making a small ripple in Vancouver's produce economy and its local and global tentacles as a partial consequence of Tough Mudder coming to town.[6]

The day before the run, Ben drove us North to Whistler with an excited entourage of friends and family, as well as an array of food, apparel, and technology for fueling, undertaking, and recording our endeavors. Our journey necessitated the Sea to Sky Highway, a South-North artery that stems from the U.S. border to British Columbia's Southern interior via Vancouver and its international airport. Departing from just south of Vancouver's downtown core, we followed the coastline over, through and alongside a variety of bays, trails, parks, bridges, beach fronts, communities, habitats, and heritage sites *en route* to the resort municipality of Whistler. Driving along the Sea to Sky Highway means touching these various histories, geographies, communities, and habitats, for the route has roots long preceding the colonization of British Columbia, the highway's construction in 1942, and the subsequent and consequential demand for skiing and sports tourism in the region. For example, we passed through Squamish (Sḵwx̱wú7mesh), ancestral home to First Nations people who also reside in neighboring areas in Southern British Columbia, and on whose unceded territory our excursion takes place. The Sea to Sky highway winds through a trade pathway trodden centuries before its construction by First Nations groups, and its upgrading to meet the demands of (sports) tourism has been contested by these groups, alongside environmentalists concerned by its encroachment into wildlife habitats in a region teeming with biodiversity (Stoddart, 2012). The highway is also in part a response to geophysical developments and Arctic weather patterns that make Whistler such an appealing sport for ski, sports, and adventure tourism. The point is that Tough Mudder touches historical, geophysical, and socio-political roots far deeper than its own fledgling past before and lateral to reaching a particular place. We played our part, of course, and I wouldn't want to understate my gratitude to Ben for driving us all on this 250 km round trip. But

Figure 2. The start-line enclosure.

it is a narrow lens that misses the bountiful entanglements that these events touch on any given weekend.

The next morning we were transported by buses from our accommodation at Whistler Village to the precise location for the event, Whistler Olympic Park in Callaghan Valley. These were raucous journeys brimming with excitement, bravado, and no shortage of trepidation, exhibiting the full range of colors, costumes, and other fanciful attire that people had ironically donned for the self-described "toughest event on the planet." The scene that greeted us upon disembarking the bus resembled a festival as much as an endurance event. The expected rows of portacabins, bag-drop facilities, and looming start-line signage were complemented by chin-up and keg-throwing competitions, "best costume" parades, tattooing stands, protein bar and beer stalls run by major sponsors, and blaring rock music, making it easy to forget that a half-marathon obstacle course lies in wait. With hindsight, Ben and I took training rather seriously, in large part to assuage the consternation prompted by Tough Mudder's promotional materials, and also because of my wanting to immerse in the whole experience for research purposes. We were certainly far less orderly in our preparations for a second Tough Mudder just a few months later in Seattle, and this was no doubt due to finding the Whistler event more eclectic and irreverent than we had been led to believe hitherto.

The run itself begins in earnest when Tough Mudder participants vault a tall wooden fence to enter the start-line enclosure (colloquially, "the bullpen"; see Figure 2). This has the feel of a rite of passage: the wall demarcates participants from spectators and climbing it seems a kind of ritualistic precursor to the course. In the 15 min before each heat of the run is set on its way from the enclosure, the event emcee (on this

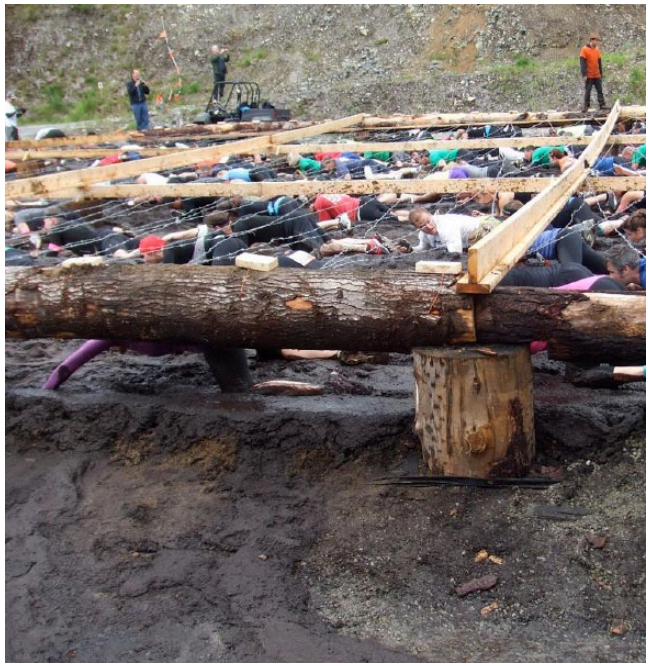

Figure 3. The "kiss of mud" obstacle.

occasion mud running's cult hero Sean Corvelle) riffs a variety of motivational, comic, and galvanizing tropes and techniques for those assembled therein. He insists unambiguously that teamwork is not a choice, but a requisite for completing the run: " . . . that Mudder to your right, that Mudder to your left, that is your teammate, that is your comrade, that is how you're gonna make it through this course, trust me that is the only way to do it!" We're also encouraged at this stage to echo Tough Mudder's motivational pledge: "I understand that Tough Mudder is not a race but a challenge . . . I put teamwork and camaraderie before my course time . . . I help my fellow mudders complete the course." For the vast majority who arrive at the event with teammates, this moment solicits a material, corporeal widening of their preestablished social enclave; huddles, hugs, and high fives with friends and strangers are encouraged by the emcee and foreshadow the near-necessity of intercorporeal contact and collaboration in what is to come. The scene also witnesses the maturation of a concerted effort on Tough Mudder's part to effect a sense of camaraderie among participants since their initial registration.

Once the run itself was underway, within the first kilometer of this and any given Tough Mudder event (see Figure 3), everyone is caked in soil. More than simply a transmissive intermediary of human relations, the mud materializes the expressive gestures of the emcee's start-line ritual, the Pledge, and all the mutual efforts toward

sociality that have led to this encounter. Exceeding its conventional status as *only* a material aggregation of earth, water, and minerals, this viscous substance aids in producing the desired sense of camaraderie among runners through the shared visual and tactile experience of "being muddy." The adhesive quality of the soil homogenizes participants, breeds familiarity, weighs you down, and adds to the irreverence of our shared undertaking. Those who may have approached Tough Mudder with great trepidation, and those who carried with them a competitive, individually oriented approach over from other endurance events, and indeed those of all prior persuasions, each encounter a substance which makes an impression, leaves its mark, and affects their experience. The neologism "Mudder" itself implies—inadvertently or not—that participants are no longer only runners, but hybrid mudrunners, bound together in their athletic endeavors by an adhesive that is in equal force social and environmental, to the point where this distinction no longer holds. The material weight of mud, its adhesive capacity to form socio-natural bonds among diverse beings, human and otherwise, establishes it as a constitutive actor in Tough Mudder's characteristic ethos of togetherness.

This sticky sociality is sustained and oftentimes strengthened through our ensuing encounters with hanging bars, soiled tunnels, icy receptacles, and other obstacles during the course, at the near-culmination of which we arrive, weary and mud-laden, at "Everest." As described in my epigraph, due to its height, shape, slippery surface, and precarious location near the end of the run, those who have already ascended Everest are often needed to haul others to its summit through any possible means. Because runners tend to need more than one attempt to reach the top, the lineup swells with every slide back down toward those awaiting their turns. Apprehension and fatigue are palpable, hence my ashen-faced glance toward the camera in Figure 1, but there is also no shortage of encouragement and (sometimes ironic) cheering from the assembled crowd.

Conventionally conceived, participants are the active subjects in this scene, as well as volunteers, effervescent spectators, and course designers and constructors. The obstacle itself is a static object to overcome. Yet, as depicted in Figure 4, humans also act as objects under these circumstances, as "levers" pulling each other up, and "ladders" when participants lie vertically against the surface to form a mountable structure for others to utilize.

And this reversal of conventional subject–object relations works both ways. Contributing to these lively scenes are the materials that compose and cover Everest that each and together display "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2010, p. 6). Consider the conglomeration of mud, water, and plywood that forms the material surface of the Everest quarter-pipe. The mud alone is an organic substance for giving life, made up of various minerals, gases, and water; an abundantly fertile organism in its own right. A similar, perhaps even more self-evident argument can be made for the vitality of water, sweat included, both of which are mixed with lubricants such as soap and vegetable oil by volunteers so as the exterior remains perilous for the event's duration. And the fiber reinforced plywood is itself a concoction of natural, cultural, and technological

Figure 4. Tough Mudder's "Everest" in action.

heritage, chosen for its capacity to effect a smooth, glossy, and hazardous surface. Mud, sodden with liquids, splattered against Everest's plywood exterior, meets with the velocity and materiality of human participants, resulting in slipping and sliding en masse and a host of creative, collaborative efforts to construct more amenable conditions in their pursuit.

These collaborative efforts, moreover, are made possible not simply by the burly bodies assembled at Everest but by the straining muscles, ligaments, tendons, proteins, and more besides, that are put to work by the infrastructure of the obstacle and the course. Proteins, for example, strive within themselves to restore and enhance muscle fibers through their constitutive physico-chemical properties, carrying with them various cultural processes and material capacities. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) language, proteins might be thought of as *territorializing* in and through Tough Mudder assemblages, reaching into bodies upon consumption as immanent enfoldings of meaning and materiality—amino acids and health discourses, masculinity and creatine (see Atkinson, 2007)—and manifesting their effects as a seemingly endless stream of participants leap and lunge, grope and grab, laugh and wince, crash and fall, with all manner of contortions befalling those caught and held mid-maneuver at the upper edge of the quarter-pipe.

There are of course no guarantees. Some people display the extent of their training habits by pulling themselves atop the quarter-pipe in spite of the sticky exterior and without the need for the outstretched hands of others; some seem mostly interested in posing for photos and video footage and so play to the nearby cameras in outlandish

and now filthy attire; others simply walk around Everest to resume the run, probably exhausted and perhaps distracted by the impending finish line, and beer tent, now visible in the distance.

Exteriorizing Competency⇔Reincorporating Camaraderie

The camaraderie on show at Tough Mudder's Everest obstacle is not simply a spontaneous display of togetherness or a benevolent human nature, nor solely a feat of human strength and perseverance. It is, as I have sought to glimpse in this vignette, the commingling and the consequence of material-discursive enactments mobilized toward sociality. Each of those who reach the top of Everest and continue through to the end of the Tough Mudder course incarnate an entanglement of materials, affects, and competencies that folds into this encounter, this moment of triumph. "We" manifest the strength gained from metabolizing proteins, carbohydrates, and other food stuff as we make our way through an obstacle course; "we" come to embody the entwined historical, socio-technical, and geophysical developments that make reaching and hosting an event such as Tough Mudder possible; "we" enfold and emit affects, adorn sports apparel, and are photographed, caked in soil, at the victorious end of a grueling course. But "we" only do this insofar as human subjects are afforded center stage in the analysis. For the subject is always a spokesperson for an association of actors (cf. Mialet, 2012), and once placed under study, all actors are shown to materialize—to become active—as an entangled enactment of complex collaborations.

This, at least, is the contention borne from the reconfiguring of my mud running experiences and recollections with and through ANT: a sensibility to research that insists on treating taken-for-granted ontological categories (especially those gathered under the rarefied groupings of nature, society, and technology) as the relational effects of material-discursive processes (Law, 2004). ANT posits that all actors—whatever their designation as human or nonhuman, biological or environmental, subjects or objects, and so forth—are mobilized within and through networks that, in turn, help to constitute and give form to their singularity. And, crucially, this is as true for microbes, iPods, nation-states, and mud, as it is for chief executives, scientists, politicians, and runners. The ANT moniker is a little misleading insofar as a network

> does not designate a thing out there that would have roughly the shape of interconnected points, much like a telephone, a freeway, or a sewage "network." It is nothing more than *an indicator of the quality of a text* about the topics at hand. It qualifies its objectivity, that is, the ability of each actor to *make* other actors *do* unexpected things. (Latour, 2005, p. 129, emphasis in original)[7]

A network is a tool and a kind of criteria for tracing connections between actors of whatever kind or vintage. The connections they draw are never immutable structures, more like dynamic and fragile webs that give form to everyday life, but some sustain and are sustained in stronger alliances than others. A horizontal or

"flattened" ontology, democratic in its scope, precedes and informs the ethnographic labor of tracing who and what is active, and to what consequence. This means insisting on the radical distribution of agency as the effect of collaborations, as opposed to being set forth from human intentions: everything is active in cultural-natural-technological collectives, and anything present is therefore potentially agentic.

Tough Mudder, somewhat predictably, puts forward a different view on how camaraderie is mobilized at Everest, throughout the course, and indeed its whole event. An interview with head course designer Eli Hutchinson in *Men's Fitness* magazine suggests that

> obstacles are dreamed up on a white board inside a Brooklyn conference room, where course designer Eli Hutchison leads brainstorms, which he turns into sketches, which turn into full builds, which turn into the selfies and stories spread by more than a million finishers since the race started in 2010. (Fox, 2014)

Tough Mudder does indeed invest greatly in course designers and constructors, as well as volunteers to help manage the course infrastructure during an event. And likewise, the Tough Mudder brand does the work of reaching into the lives and social relations of participants through the spectacular renderings and photo-opportunities that its course and promotional materials elicit (cf. Aronczyk & Powers, 2010).

Nevertheless, this "dreaming up" of obstacles (including quarter pipes) not only belies the genealogy of obstacle courses as technologies that have acted on bodies and minds since long before Tough Mudder's 2010 founding but also foregrounds the rational, creative, and efficacious capacities of a designer whose mental aptitude sets all this sociality in motion. This perspective chimes with the modern thesis of human distinctiveness from and sovereignty over a world of tractable "nonhuman" things, through which Tough Mudder becomes the sole consequence of human design in which organizers and participants recruit and manipulate the materials at their disposal toward preferred economic, cultural, physical, or social ends. This conceitful view of agency as a human preserve not only denies the "more-than-human" (Whatmore, 2006) world its vitality but also enacts a Cartesian fallacy in suggesting that the act of rational thought is what constitutes meaningful, agentic existence. It thereby underplays or misses entirely the capacities of things, such as the adhesive consistency of mud, to become affective components in the mobilization of the social.

And yet, Tough Mudder obstacles appear to act more or less in accordance with the aims of Tough Mudder and its designers, as hours spent watching the scenes at Everest unfold will attest. What's more, participants tend to recognize and embrace its ethos of camaraderie. So how to explain its predictability; how is it that the course and the event work? In Latour's (1988, 2005) terms, the Everest obstacle appears as an *intermediary* of human intentions and relations, doing the will of Tough Mudder and its participants in producing dramas, successes, and tribulations *en route* to the completion of the course. An intermediary is an actor through which action seems to pass through consistently, as expected, and without controversy. But once placed under study, intermediaries almost always show themselves to be made durable by

mediators: other actors that exercise their proclivities to create, sustain, or perhaps compromise particular effects. We might expect intermediaries to populate the world in abundance as so much of social life appears predictable and orderly. But Latour (2005) held instead that there exist an endless number of mediators in every social configuration whose outputs are not predicated entirely on their inputs, and who therefore make a difference by *changing or making durable* the behaviors and responses of other actors. And "[w]hen those [mediators] are transformed into faithful intermediaries," such as bridges, nationalisms, smart phones, discourses on health, or obstacle courses, "it is not the rule, but a rare exception that has to be accounted for by some extra work—usually by the mobilization of even more mediators!" (p. 40).

Everest, then, becomes an intermediary due to an extended distribution of actors exceeding their common-sensical status as "mere" objects and manifesting "traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience" (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi). And Everest's efficacy can be extended to include not only runners, volunteers, constructors, and designers but also outdoor, ad hoc, and portable fitness equipment such as chin up bars, stair cases and cones; fears, motivations, and expectations; proteins; gloves and apparel; blogs, forums, and other forms of media; trails, trees, benches, straits, music, cameras, elements, and countless other actors, each of which play leading and supporting roles in constituting the singularity of individual athletic efforts *and* forming the emergent sociality in which those efforts unfold and are made possible. The role of a designer is of course important, but the outcome, as with the practice of mud running and its attendant camaraderie, is always a shared endeavor.

Mud<>Runner Entanglements

ANT's "generalized symmetry" that apprehends objects as active and not passive in socio-natural configurations also means that, even when heavily mediated to produce particular outcomes (such as "camaraderie"), objects might not behave as expected. Let's take mud as our example, the elemental co-star in Tough Mudder and constant companion in this essay so far. The modern thesis on nature, and mud is no exception here, is one of domination and control. Even if we might contest this in pointing out the ubiquitous modalities of mud in the ecological fabric of different cultures and societies, mud is "purified' (Latour, 1993) in Tough Mudder as something ruggedly natural, to foster not only a shared social experience of which mud becomes a part, but the characteristic "toughness" and associated virility synonymous with its brand identity. In a sense, then, Tough Mudder seems to engage successfully in the commodification of nature by bringing the mud at Whistler into line with its brand identity, course interface, and consumer experience (there is much evidence that cultural and economic capital can be derived from purifying nature, and trading on its capacities and semantic significance; see Stoddart, 2012). But, as described earlier, we might also recognize mud as playing an active part in fostering the company's brand identity through exercising its proclivities, that is, by materializing the desired sense of camaraderie among human participants through its role as an evocative and adhesive

substance. In Latour's (1993) well-traveled thesis on modernity, *We Have Never Been Modern*; that is, we have never been separate from nature. But the effort to purify mud as a primordial substance does work to proliferate its socio-natural hybridity in mud running events, as well as playing a part cultivating a thriving mud running culture and industry. Mud is not autonomous in mud running, just as Tough Mudder cannot conjure its distinct brand of "toughness" without it; its meaning and materiality are irrevocably entangled and continually co-constituted in and through the practice.

What's more, if mud is an actor in its own right, then it will not always follow a human script; it can always carry a twist and alter proceedings, for better and worse. In May 2014, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned that Tough Mudder participants "might be exposed to fecally contaminated water or slurry, [and] that potentially serious diarrheal disease can result if ingested, even inadvertently" (Hamblin, 2014). This followed a Tough Mudder event in Nevada, in 2012, after which 22 cases of *Campylobacter coli* infection were confirmed by a Nellis public health investigation. The CDC (2014) reported that this "case-control study using data provided by patients and healthy persons who also had participated in the race showed a statistically significant association between inadvertent swallowing of muddy surface water during the race and *Campylobacter* infection". Risk, and the opportunity to exhibit risk, are part of the camaraderie in Tough Mudder, and the satirized yet legally binding signing of "death waivers" before the run is generally treated as a further indicator of the event's ludic and ludicrous appeal. But on occasion, unexpected and grim incidents serve as a reminder that mud is not "just" a commodity in slick and seamless circulations of capital, or "just" an intermediary for preordained social relations. Mud is not at the whim of human mastery, and although none of the instances of campylobacter transmission proved fatal, the possibility of dysentery syndrome can't be good for business. Put another way, and for all its ills, Tough Mudder is not bestowed with the supreme efficacy to convey the desired logic of capital; there is surely "always something that flows or flees, that escapes . . . the overcoding machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, pp. 216, 226; see also Bennett, 2001).

In addition to inciting media coverage that even Tough Mudder's risk and pain-oriented brand identity struggled to favorably appropriate, these incidents and reports are fissures in the hubris of human exceptionalism that render conspicuous, and palpable, the agentic capacities of mud. First, they affirm that mud, like all matter, does not need to first be commodified or invested with meanings to impress upon social life. It is always already, in Barad's (2003) Deleuzian terms, an immanent enfolding of meaning and materiality that colludes in its own economy, history, and cultural politics. Second, they are a cautionary and darkly comic reminder that mud, earth, and land, are shared with other animals, as well as bearing deep-rooted histories that far breach the modern "purified" storying of nature and humanity. Upon arrival at Whistler Olympic Park, we encountered mud in the form of land and earth that has an immanent history, ongoing and complex, that is enacted within it. We found ourselves in the Madely Creek basin in Callaghan Valley ('Whistler Olympic Park' since Vancouver's hosting of the 2010 Winter Games). The valley itself formed through many thousands of years of avalanche formation, seismic activity, and

glacial action, all of which was later attested for at the midway point of the Tough Mudder course as we participants slid feet-first into a freezing glacier-fed lake in the lower reaches of the basin. We also found ourselves on the unceded territory of the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations, on land which has been host to sacred streams, cedar forests, burial sites, and hunting grounds for centuries. It is also a region teeming with biodiversity. It does not necessitate critique to recognize this soil as contested or contingent; it bears that historicity, carries and colludes in it, and forms a sociality in which Tough Mudder participants ephemerally share. And Whistler of course is not unique in this regard: each mud running event is situated in a particular locale, and therefore made possible and compromised by the commingling of, for instance, civic and environmental policies, land disputes, digital communications and industrial transport systems, political struggles, habitat conservation, untold earth histories, and more besides. The ongoing historicity of mud at Callaghan Valley will bear the imprinted memory of Tough Mudder for years to come, not simply as the passive victim of athletes and organizers with conquering or collaborative mentalities but as generative, intelligent matter.

Third, reports of dysentery also affirm that the human body does not hold strictly demarcated boundaries that raise it above or apart from its natural heritage, or from those premodern Others who are deemed to lack behind. Rather, the composition of the body is itself an entangled ecology of lively substances of the same kind that it encounters constantly (water, fungi, bacteria, etc.). It is for this reason that, for Haraway (2008), "entities with fully secured boundaries called possessive individuals (imagined as human or animal) are the wrong units for considering what is going on" (p. 70) in socio-natural-technical encounters. The claim is not that human bodies are simply homogeneous with nature and other animals but that it is rarely prudent to strictly demarcate people, animals, elements, or objects on the basis of their ostensibly human or nonhuman, natural or artifactual essences. Mud and runners, as elemental "objects" and embodied "subjects," exist in a constant recursive loop that is so mundane as to escape attention until, as in this instance, something exercises a proclivity—not necessarily a conscious will but a striving or tendency (cf. Bennett, 2010)—that produces an unpredictable, perhaps unwanted reaction. Through these biophysical and socio-cultural exchanges, mud—and mud running—materially and symbolically contribute to forming who "we" are.

Ontological Politics

What is at stake in extending the horizons of the social to incorporate a wider cast of actors in studies of sport and physical culture? Or, to paraphrase, what are the politics of an ANT reassembly? There are certainly valid questions and concerns about the politics of Tough Mudder, where the commingling of mud and runner produces, and is produced through, a corporate, masculine event based around a technology most readily associated with military training. As with any physical cultural practice, the cultural politics of these and other mud running events reach across historical and intersectional axes of class, race, and gender, and otherwise act as sites for the

contestation and reproduction of particular meanings, ideas, values, identities, and norms. But politics is also a matter of apprehending who and what counts as an active subject in a given social configuration, and I have sought to develop an account that adheres to and advocates for an ontological politics: that is, an account that sets out to apprehend who and what counts, and how their conglomerations constitute, sustain, and compromise mundane and extraordinary (physical cultural) practices.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake—and at odds with the principles of ANT—to invoke the camaraderie in Tough Mudder as a foundational, prediscursive materiality. This would risk echoing the kind of mechanistic materialism so often crudely inferred from *The German Ideology*, in which Marx and Engels (1932/1970) declared that "[i]n direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven"; that is, from real things "on the ground" and their material social relations (p. 164). In this often-exaggerated inversion of idealism, meaning plays second fiddle to the primacy of matter; metaphysics arises from the certainty of substance; and camaraderie might be thought of as deriving from a material base.[8] But this is exactly the kind of dualistic thought, polarizing meaning and materiality, culture and nature that ANT and "new" materialist philosophies and research practices are intended to eschew. What I have hoped to show in discussing Everest as a composition of objects, and in affording mud special attention, is that these materialities are entangled with their symbolic significance. Mud in Tough Mudder, as we have seen, is capable of stoking the bonds of friendship and kindling new affinities between people and places, of causing illnesses and injuries, of colluding in brand identities, conjuring primordial imaginaries that exclude and romanticize its own rich and diverse ancestry, of reproducing identity politics, and of carrying histories, geophysical and socio-political, that might otherwise not register in a humanistic order of things. The question should not be which came first, meaning or matter, as this futile inquiry only serves to reproduce the Great Divide (Latour, 1993) of social constructivist versus natural determinist perspectives which continues to beset fields such as kinesiology (Andrews, 2008; Vertinsky, 2009). Instead, following Haraway (2008), it seems more prudent to ask of and pursue entanglements, in and through which "diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another" (p. 4).

Reflections on "Overcoming-With" Obstacles

In the "postanthropocentric" spirit of those materialist philosophies that espouse the premise of object agency, and in response to the resiliency of human exceptionalism and modern dualisms (cf. Plumwood, 1993), the story of mud running told in this essay has sought to recast the conventional hero figures, super-human athletes, to afford due attention to the too-often unsung ensemble of intra- and supra-human materialities with which these athletes share an ecology. There is no shortage of angles for critiquing Tough Mudder on account of its cultural politics, and the figure of the triumphant mud runner is often marked by many layers of privilege that are, to critically trained social scientists, glaring invitations for deconstruction. But what I have attempted in this essay is a *reconstruction* of the practice as a profoundly shared

endeavor, one in which a whole host of actors, human and otherwise, make dramatic and subtle contributions. Perhaps the myth of ascendant and unencumbered singularity and human social exclusivity can be ruptured with an affirmative reassembly at least as well as through a destructive disassembly of its militaristic and masculine ethos. These are just as much a part of the camaraderie for which Tough Mudder is renowned, but they are recast through recourse to objects with which our (physical cultural) endeavors are profoundly shared, and even shaped by.

Some might feel that "reassembling the social" in this way entails a disenchanting process of making visible things that help constitute otherwise wondrous individual feats, such as technological advancements, scientific discoveries, creative design, or athletic achievements. Such tasks are better left to phenomenologists to theorize "from the body" and its sensory perception of the world, or to the evocative prose of poets, or not subject to analysis at all. But it could equally be seen as profoundly enchanting to, in Latour's (1988) words, see the world set free and able to act despite—or at the very least alongside—the fanciful conceit of human exceptionalism (see also Bennett, 2001). By the same logic, attempts to radically exteriorize the endeavors of mud runners might be seen as an effort to undermine their achievements or somehow expose their lack of understanding of the "bigger picture" lying "behind' their endeavors. The notion of "overcoming" is, after all, complex and meaningful in endurance sports, ranging from altruistic running to personal recovery from trauma, and in this essay, matters of subjectivity have gotten short thrift to emphasize the extended distribution of the social. But it is my hope that the opposite is true in the account and reflections given in this essay. Rather, it is through exteriorizing competency—that is, through tracing material-discursive enactments that constitute both sociality and individuality—that the conditions that materialize and fold into athletic triumphs or failures can be made both *visible and accountable*. There is strength in dependency, in fostering alliances, as well as the potentially ethical recognition of precarity and responsibility. If this remains an "overcoming" of sorts, then it is an "overcoming-with" one's worldly surroundings, even in practices such as Tough Mudder that appear to harbor a conquering ethos, masculine and militaristic character, and capitalist imperative. As Latour (2005) might put it, striving for social justice through foreclosing critique might not always do justice to "the social" in its fullest sense.

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Notes

1. In referencing one side of a troublesome dualism, "object agency" is somewhat problematic language. I nonetheless retain this turn of phrase as a sensitizing concept to the possibility of agency being more than the preserve of the (human) subject. But in doing so, and as noted throughout the essay, I am referring not simply to "nonhumans" but to the intra- and supra-human materialities which make up our biology and with which we share an ecology. Karen Barad's (2003, 2007) non-essentialist writing on phenomena as always already the performative enactment of "intra-actions" is an ontological premise that refuses dualistic thought, and informs and supports mylater claims to the entanglement of mud and runners.
2. Althusser (1971), in his impassioned defense of Marxism, and Foucault in his ironically post-Marxist uptake of Althusser's ideas, are key figures in this displacement of agency into the "ideological state apparatus" or "disciplinary regimes of truth."
3. A great deal of theory is necessarily rendered absent from this account, from Spinoza and Deleuze to Zizek on the sublime object of ideology, as well as indigenous knowledges and natural scientific renderings of objects. My choices were partly made to align with some prevailing theoretical trends in the socio-cultural study of sport and physical culture, but also, as mentioned, to highlight particular merits, limits, and lineages of how objects have been theorized.
4. Latour (1993) recognized that this disavowal in his own philosophy could only be partial and ambivalent: "We want the meticulous sorting of quasi-objects to become possible—no longer unofficially and under the table, but officially and in broad daylight. In this desire to bring to light, to incorporate into language, to make public, we continue to identify with the intuition of the Enlightenment." But, in carving the world up into people and things, "this intuition has never had the anthropology it deserved" (p. 142). This is also the intuition with which Foucault (1984) sought to reconcile his project in one of his final essays, on Enlightenment, humanism, and modernity.
5. Sundberg (2013) voices a concern with posthumanist theory and research that, in declaring the anthropocentrism of all knowledge hitherto as part of its underlying rationale for rethinking what it means to be human, often efface—and so recolonize—indigenous ontologies that never made such fateful distinctions between nature and humanity.
6. Atkinson (2007) found in his study of sport supplements in Canada that consuming these products has become a routine practice among those undertaking regular intensive exercise, especially young, White, middle-class males. For Ben and I, protein supplements became part of our routine due partly to not only frequent advocations on the various mud running blogs, forums, and websites that I visited as runner-researcher in preparing for Tough Mudder but also a cultural trend that meant creatine supplements were widely available and, in a fitness context, mundane. We certainly gave scant attention to their effects beyond their apparent propensity to make us more confident and competent in advance of what was to come, less still to how they contributed to forming who we are, materially and symbolically. But nonetheless, our changed and changing bodies—their entwined biophysical and socio-cultural properties and capacities—were part of the complex ecology that mobilizes around and commingles within events such as Tough Mudder.

7. At a 1997 workshop at Keele University titled "ANT and After," Latour famously "recalled" actor-network theory (ANT), claiming that "[t]here are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory, and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin." The awkward, misleading, and at times ill-fitting terminology was abandoned by Latour and others for several years thereafter. In his 2005 introduction to ANT, Latour quips that he returned to and retained that same terminology partly on account of the acronym ANT being "perfectly fit for a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveler" (p. 9). It nevertheless remains the case that ANT, at least for Latour, is less a theory, or a method, or a designator of networks in common-sense terms, and more a travel guide or sensibility for places unknown.
8. A wealth of theories, including materialist philosophies, have sought to get away from an often crudely perceived reductionism in Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history. But Marx's doctoral dissertation was on Epicurus, with whom he came to *reject* precisely the kind of mechanistic materialism that is often held to inhibit his own method. Something remained of Epicurean metaphysics in Marx's analysis of commodities, even if he did eventually come to see matter as something from which humans extracted to create artifacts for subsistence, pleasure, and profit (see Williams, 1977, on the complexity of determinism in Marx). This "something" is pursued by Bennett (2001) in what would later become her vitalist materialism (Bennett, 2010), and its presence in Marx exemplifies the rhymes and recuperations—rather than teleological progress—in materialist philosophy.

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