

1. Runners & The City

The total amount of runners moving through any space seem to be an independent flow from the rest of city's circulation. This is true in the sense that green spaces are mainly designed for leisure and as out-of-traffic zones. On another hand, yet, it is not quite true that runners are independent from other flows because car-traffic and other types of non-running traffic intercept the runners way and, hence, make them stop: breaking runners' momentum¹. Runners, just as all others, depend on getting path available as they go. This has two major implications:

- To move through the city there needs to be paths to begin with

The need for paths to circulate in

This has a huge dimension in which nonhumans get into play. For each space that is used in the city one could follow a science studies method: to determinate all the objects and people that came into action to deliver a single object. The generic city as a civilized construction has always a set of layers upon which it has been built: be it an arid, or rocky, or damp or even forest-like, or any kind of environment there are ways of setting in. Humans have customized spaces for millennia. Only the past couple of centuries, at the most, have taken into account the use of delimited areas of public space for new purposes such as leisure.

- No two objects/people can be at the same in the same place

The need to share space

Truism as it may be, this last point seems to be overseen in today's flawed automobility system²: not only do cars (and drivers) burn fuels, and leave a durable carbon footprint, also private vehicles can get quite impractical with the normalcy and abundance of traffic jams. LeCorbusier, in his Athens Letter (1933), settled the four main modern uses of urban space: living-inhabiting, working, circulating and recreating. Granted that this view has a somewhat non-layering of functionalities, and a oversimplification of uses; however, it was intended to

¹Ettema, Dick. "Runnable Cities. How Does the Running Environment Influence Perceived Attractiveness, Restorativeness, and Running Frequency?" *Environment and Behaviour*. Pp. 1-21. 2015. P. 17.

²Sheller & Urry.

take into account the liveability for human beings, hence prioritizing the housing and green parts on urban planning. Also, communication/transportation was the lesser considered element, in a period where automobile overpopulation had only just recently began. It now seems, in the XXIst century, to be a much more a critical time, where these old proposed functions are, at least generally speaking, collapsed. How do runners find non-occupied paths in such a overflowed system?

The need to share times of use

The physical environment is not used at all times in the same way. Social space has areas in which one acts among other people and others in which this *presentation* is left aside: this is what has for long been called the front and back regions of human conduct, also well known as frontstage and backstage³. So attention is shifted in one situation and into the other. It could be arguable that of the classic functions presented by LeCorbusier, three of them are to be pursued as part of social and even animal life: working, sleeping and *horseing-around*. Transportation, even if exaggerating and stretching a bit too far the argument, as a means to an end has no general actual function. It seems that all time lost in traffic is time in the backstage with no actual point. However, runners do seek to transport, but with a whole other meaning, closer to leisure in free time (even *serious leisure*), or even the mental-rest aspect of sleep time.

2. Autoethnography

The plan of work proposed here sets axis on which to develop future ideas, these axis being: materiality, affect and the body. These *sensitizing concepts* (rather than restrictive prescriptions) shall be guiding points to suggest directions where to look at, as germs of analysis on how and where to collect information. Data finding also relies on the researcher's agenda: "What sorts of pattern one is looking for depends, of course, on research focus and theoretical orientation". Benefits of in field immersion include natural conversations in which "[unusual participant terms] may mark theoretically important or interesting phenomena". In the same coin concepts may also be, alternitavely, "observer-identified"⁴.

However, these axis-concepts shall not be used as fixed tautologies to give a taken-for-granted understanding of behaviours. The approach here is first *exploratory*, before than explanatory. This other point shall come later, during research. The

³Goffman in Hannerz, Ulf. "The City as Theater: Tales of Goffmann". In *Exploring the city: inquiries toward an urban anthropology*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980. P. 206.

⁴Hammersley and Atkinson. *Ethnography: principles in practice*. 3rd ed. London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2007. P. 164 ("Sensitizing concepts" is Blumer's), 163.

intention is first to gather data, concepts, and a series of insights from in-field work.

The *in situ* work is intended to be at least two fold, that is, in two areas/timings of ultrarunning: 1st, during training; and 2nd, during specific ultrarunning events. The first, is to be tackled through autoethnography, not as an biographical account, but as means to grasp the main topics that are dealt with. The second, there is very little research in academic research on events from a qualitative approach (in scarce occasions, and when so, only through surveys or measurement based), hence the importance to move forward. Some of the key features of an *ethnographic approach* are taken into account in the present approach: to prioritize the insider perspective highlighting the experiential, an active immersion in the field during a reasonable amount of time, minimal interference to gather data to be triangulated⁵.

Ultrarunning may well be one of the most *outdoor* activities or sports ever. It involves several hours, even days sometimes “out in the blue”, amongst the almost untouched nature and wild green spaces afar from city in country-side races. And in training season, even in city context: the silent early night-to-dawn moment (from 4 to 6 am) is when nearly no normal person is going about, and birds have not even began to chirp. In the same coin with lonely spaces, running has many many solitary moments in which runners get to collect themselves and revolve in their thoughts, the bareness of the surroundings, and at many flowing times: to just not think in anything and be in the moment.

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⁵Holloway, Imma; Brown, Lorraine; and Shipway, Richard. “Meaning not measurement: Using ethnography to bring a deeper understanding to the participant experience of festivals and events”. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*. Vol. 1 N° 1, 2010. Pp. 75-76. _____

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