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## Running Order: Urban Public Space, Everyday Citizenship and Sporting Subjectivities

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## **Running Order: Urban Public Space, Everyday Citizenship and Sporting Subjectivities**

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### **Introduction**

“Virtually all sports are, in essence, struggles over space.” (Bale 2003:11).

In his seminal text *Sport Geography*, John Bale underscores the power-laden relationship between sport and space. This chapter probes this relationship of struggle and the complex interplays between sport, space and power through the sport of running. We focus on sporting bodies themselves, their *in situ* struggles for space in the shared urban realm, and their implications for how citizenship is practiced and understood. This is a case study of running in Plymouth and specifically the mundane micro-movements involved in passing pedestrians in the street. We have already presented some of this work elsewhere (Cook et al. 2015) but here we further unpack the conceptual ideas involved in analyzing such everyday encounters to shed light on sport’s place in contemporary cities and how sporting bodies fit into public spaces in England.

Admittedly, this is not the context Bale had in mind when he penned the opening statement. Rather, he is referring to the struggle to master space: to neutralize, specialize and rationalize space in order to establish the spatial limitations and spatial rules of sports (Bale 2003). This was the foundation of his pioneering arguments about the critical relationship between sport and space, and the need for a sport geography prepared to study it. Sporting spatialities, he argued, govern and define. A game of doubles lawn tennis, for example, is not a game of tennis unless the ground is flat; a court of 23.77m long and 10.97m wide is demarcated; halves, services boxes, center-marks, baselines, side-lines, and centerlines are marked in the proper width (AELTCC 2014). Sport requires a permissible geography to take place and this, in turn, requires a particular mastery of space.

Our appropriation of Bale’s statement may then seem a little awry, but at their core, his arguments demonstrate how space is involved in the production and organization of sport and how, likewise, sport is involved in the production and organization of space. For him, sport geography is about the symbiotic relationship between the spaces of sport and those who participate in it, and the socio-political significance of such sport-spaces. These are our interests too, which we extend beyond achievement sport to everyday sport, from dedicated sport-spaces to appropriated shared spaces, and from macro-politics to micro-politics. Ultimately, though, this chapter is concerned with the same co-constitutive entanglement of sport, space and power laid out in Bale’s vision of sport geography. Taking these themes out of specialized sport-spaces and into the “wild” running spaces of public streets raises new questions about this entanglement in terms not only of where runners fit spatially and socially into the streetscape, but also with regard to the wider notion of their citizenship.

### **Sport, Space and Everyday Citizenship**

Rather than a mastery of space, the struggle for urban runners is finding and belonging in space. As Wood and Wait (2011:201) explain, “belonging is a dynamic emotional attachment that relates people to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience. It is about feeling “at home” and “secure” but it is equally about being recognized and understood.” There exists then a dialogical nature to belonging (Antonsich 2010). The pressing questions for urban runners are whether they feel they

belong while running on the streets, and to what degree those they encounter concur. Differing perceptions about this “belongingness” (or sense of belonging) in such encounters can translate into runners having their right to space denied or withheld in practice by those they pass on the streets. Probing this further brings into focus questions of transgression - to have broken the social norms of a place (Cidell 2014; Cresswell 1996): Is running on the city streets a transgressive act? Is the runner a deviant urban subject? These questions tie into to a wider notion of citizenship (Yarwood 2013).

Citizenship has typically been conceived as place-bound. As organized through the state system, the status of being a citizen (Chouinard 2009) conventionally denotes a set of political, civil and social rights and obligations for members of a particular, territorially-delineated political community (Painter and Philo 1995; Fannin 2006; Anderson et al. 2008). Recently, however, scholars have argued that citizenship need not be bound to a particular place, treating it instead as a flexible practice pertaining to an individual or group’s ability to partake fully in society at a range of scales (Cheshire and Woods 2009; Painter and Philo 1995; Smith 2000). Citizenship establishes the social order of everyday life, entwining legal statuses with mundane doings. It is enacted in daily life with personal rationalities, politics, perceptions, emotions and values all agents in its production: “The geography of ordinary citizenship ... is really the geography of sociospatial relationships” (Staeheli et al. 2012:641). Viewed in this manner, a runner’s (in)ability to run on the city streets is a question of citizenship regarding his or her access to public space, rights to health and desired forms of movement, convivial social relations, mobile hierarchies (i.e. the relative status of different mobile forms in particular spaces), and more.

In this chapter, we explore the complex negotiation of citizenship between different agents in everyday life. What insights into citizenship practices can we gain by exploring an incredibly commonplace and mundane act in the practice of urban running - that of passing pedestrians? What implications do these fleeting moments of encounter hold for understanding rights of way, mobile hierarchies, the belongingness of sporting bodies and street citizenship? Our emphasis on the mundane is crucial: the moments discussed here are inevitable occurrences in running practices, but are seldom thought about or discussed explicitly. It is difficult to overstate the importance of taking seriously the “background stuff” of practices and places. There is much at stake in the everyday, for our micro-social lives are co-constitutive of wider social, cultural, economic and political processes/practices (Castree et al. 2013; Neal and Murji 2015). The everyday speaks about how we live and what makes our lives livable (Back 2015).

### **Methods**

The broad study on which this chapter is based examined some geographies of running by considering the ways in which the abstract movements are pervaded by a range of embodied experiences, social interactions and co-constituted meanings that come together to produce running as a mobile practice (for a full methods discussion, see Cook et al. 2015). The study was based in Plymouth, England and engaged 14 runners in two different forms of mobile interview. Firstly, six participants were joined on one of their runs for a “go-along” (GA) interview. Participants were asked to suggest a convenient time, location and route for a joint run of between 30 to 90 minutes to take place. The run was then completed at “conversational” pace and dialogue was very loosely-structured to allow for the adaptation of topics to changing situations, and for questions to evolve from spontaneous exchanges or encounters on the run. Going the “extra mile” (Vettenniemi 2012) like this, scholars have argued, can generate richer data as participants are prompted by meanings, connections and memories relating to the surrounding environment and passing events, as well as building deep rapport with the researcher (Anderson 2004; Evans and Jones 2011).

Secondly, eight participants undertook mobile-video-ethnography elicitation interviews (MVE). This method has been utilized in research on cycling, on the basis of its ability to “capture the moment” (if only partially) and reveal the humdrum and banal aspects of mobile practices. A major advantage of employing mobile-video-ethnography, Simpson (2014) has argued, is the ability to retain the context and detail of practices to allow researchers to scrutinize them in a more comprehensive fashion. In this project, encounters with pedestrians were the center of analysis, and such an approach allowed participants to relive the encounters and talk through them on the minute scale. The mobile-video-ethnography interviews were based on unaccompanied runs recorded via a head camera (see Brown et al. 2008). The unedited footage was watched separately by both participant and researcher, the latter drawing up a specific interview schedule for each participant. The interviews then involved re-watching the video whilst working through the interview schedule. Through these methods, as well as our emphasis on running in public spaces, this chapter marks a break from traditional sport geography which has tended to focus on more formal methodologies and more serious “achievement” sports and their associated spaces (Bale 2004). Since there are important differences between such sports and spaces, the analytical and methodological refocusing go together to shed light on the mundane encounters experienced by runners and their implications for citizenship.

### **Running Spaces and Encounters**

As a space of achievement sport, the British running track is subject to rigorously enforced spatial parameters as set out in the UK Athletics' *Rules for Competition* (UKA 2014). Ever since the first cinder athletics track was laid in London in 1837, the track has become increasingly rationalized, artificial and homogeneous. It is a synthetic, technological and predictable monoculture designed to produce near laboratory setting, offering controlled conditions and neutralization from some of the vagaries of nature. It is designed to be replicable anywhere in the world. The encounters had on the athletics track are also highly controlled. Runners are kept separate from spectators and often from other runners, via lanes. During longer races when lanes are not in use, interactions are only unidirectional (mostly parallel and anticlockwise) and are governed by the rules laid out by the UKA (the governing body for athletics in the UK). The track is an unmistakable sportscape, dedicated to the competitive runner and set outside of the everyday happenings of social life (Bale 1994; 2000a; 2003).

Running in the street might be considered the track's absolute antithesis. Everything offered by the track is lacking when running in the urban environment. Public streets are not monocultures, but shared arenas in which runners must appropriate space for their own purposes. No sporting-spatial parameters are enforced on running in the urban environment – a space more open to nature's “noise” and one often lacking predictability. In contrast to the track, streets can be irrational, unspecialized and heterogeneous spaces, better understood as ephemeral running “tasksapes” than sportsapes (Howe and Morris 2009; Ingold 1993). Due to these characteristics, some commentators have conceptualized running in public as transgressive. Bale (2000b; 2004; 2008), for example, underscores how urban running transgresses the norms of modern achievement sport by literally stepping outside its territorial confines in the synthetic, Fordist running track, and by performing anti-sport gestures through embodying motivations beyond just performance enhancement. Winters (1980) also positions running in the streets as a reaction to, and an attempt to fit into, a landscape designed for the automobile. From this perspective, running can be a way to reclaim the street for human locomotion, contesting the dominance of motorized mobility, and re-inhabiting urban space (Bale 2003; 2004; 2011).

Street running's transgressions are not ubiquitous however, and they have a temporality. Drawing particularly on road-races as a form of sanctioned transgression, Cidell (2014) demonstrates how mass participation events can temporarily appropriate spaces that are usually off-limit, allowing people to run

without the usual risks involved with transgression. Here, the activities and subjectivities that otherwise prevail must cede primacy in certain spaces for a period of time. Yet once such events are over, the normal order of things returns; the temporarily-sanctioned transgressions again risk the social and physical repercussions of deviance. The degree to which these resistances are deliberate or simply a by-product of everyday running practices is very much up for debate and very much a question of an individual's positionality.

Most crucially for the purposes of this chapter, urban running also involves different encounters from those of the track. Rather than being set apart from everyday life, running on the street is in the thick of it – it involves intermingling with others and the rhythms of a city. Runners face an onslaught of social and physical encounters with pedestrians, cyclists, loiterers, children, cars, dogs, etc., and must negotiate this shared space on the move. In analyzing their own running practices, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2013) suggest that there is no consensus among runners about how best to negotiate such encounters. There is no code or UKA *Rules for Competition* to govern this space. Examining the encounters between runners and pedestrians, then, can offer insights into how and why shared space is negotiated in the ways that it is. Focusing on these socio-spatial encounters, we ask what forms of everyday citizenship emerge from them, and how a micro-political order develops through such fleeting experiences.

### **Encountering Pedestrians**

Within geography and related fields, *the encounter* has been established as a critical site for understanding the social, cultural and political processes of everyday life (Amin 2002; Jensen 2013; Leitner 2012; Valentine 2008). Encounters are not simply micro-sociologies of face-to-face contact but acts of citizenship relating to the capacity of groups/individuals of difference to live together harmoniously. Encounters are bound up in distinct histories and geographies, and are guided by uncodified regulatory frameworks. These frameworks are influenced by statutory laws and social norms, as well as social expectations (Cresswell 1996; Waldron 2006). This analytical approach stresses identities as citizens above those of individuals because encounters are at the frontline of belonging: it is in these micro-meetings that someone's at-homeness is both displayed and affirmed or rebutted. The encounter has also opened new research inquiries about how urban public space is shared amidst diversity (Amin 2002). Scholars have largely studied difference through traditional delineations of identity – gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, age, and (dis)ability. Yet recent work on the messiness and intersectionality of identities has opened up the scope of research on geographies of difference (Noble 2009; Valentine 2007).

A person's mobility is exemplary of how intersectional identities and urban space come together to produce political geographies of difference. As Patton argues (2004:21), people adopt particular subject positions, which are "mediated by their habitual activities in moving about the city," and facilitate the construction of mobile subjects (Jensen 2013). This creates room for running to become a significant part of someone's identity and the status of being a "runner" to come to the fore at particular moments (Ronkainen et al. 2014; Skinner 2015). When on the run, a passing encounter with someone of a different subjectivity/mobility/activity becomes an important window into the profound everyday processes which establish social order on the street. In such encounters, two or more actors have to pass by each other in public space, often requiring someone (or everyone) to change their course or halt their passage. As acts of citizenship, they can either legitimize or delegitimize a person's right to movement – ultimately producing a form of mobile hierarchy founded on perceived or actual claims to space. Scholars have examined such encounters between cyclists and drivers (Aldred and Jungnickel

2012), mountain bikers and walkers (Brown 2012), and snowboarders and skiers (Edensor and Richards 2007), and this section now brings such analysis to the encounters between runners and pedestrians.

### *Perspectives on Encounters*

Many runners are accustomed to running in public spaces, and with the challenges of managing the wide range of obstacles and momentary meetings with pedestrians routinely generated in shared space. As one participant in this study put it, the intensity of such interactions are commonplace to the extent that they become an integral experience of running:

I don't really like it when it comes to running on the pavements... and sharing it with other people because you have to get out of their way and they have to get out of your way and they don't see you and crossing the road rather too frequently. It is quite dangerous because I think drivers expect runners to get out the way, not to be there. (MVE)

For this participant, street running is unpleasant because of the absence of rules or codes of conduct for negotiating encounters with others. So while runners make not have a consensus about how best to approach sharing space with differently mobile subjects, out of this ongoing competition for/over space, a mobile order is established (Binnie et al. 2007). Most of these struggles are resolved in split-second decisions taken to negotiate the encounter.

Due to their higher speed (and momentum) than other pedestrians, as well as public notions about the "normal" use of a pavement, runners are typically deemed the ones responsible for avoiding pedestrians (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2013). However, the runners interviewed here suggested a more complex situation, expressing contrasting views on how runners should pass pedestrians in shared spaces. Many runners felt that responsibility to pass others safely should rest with themselves. These individuals argued that, since they are a minority with regard to how they use the streets, this carries with it a responsibility to ensure passing encounters are handled successfully. For them, it is just more practical and convenient for runners, as the minority, to make the effort to avoid pedestrians rather than expect the majority to avoid them:

No, I see it as my responsibility. I think everybody else is trying to use the environment in a relaxing way and there is me trying to use it in a more, probably, productive but personal way. So I think it is my job to not interrupt their free time in the way that because... I can do that but I wouldn't expect a hundred people to move out of their way to avoid me and my free time... I think that would be selfish because clearly there aren't as many runners as there are dog walkers for example... We are probably inconveniencing their space. (GA)

Here, streets are understood as predominantly a space for walking and the general rhythms and tempos that characterize it. Movements and paces straying from this "norm" are thus seen as out of place. Although some of the respondents were happy to assume responsibility for avoiding collisions with others in shared spaces, based on their minority status, none would have gone so far as to conceive of themselves as engaging in a deviant act. As one participant argued, albeit with regard to park pathways rather than city streets, running may not have been the originally preferred or anticipated activity, but it is now a pervasive fact of urban space:

I think these places were built for it! I think these days, perhaps not originally, obviously this is a manor house park, but at some point somebody went, “we'll turn that into a public park” and they must have known that people that want to go for a run are gonna use that. And if they didn't, they weren't thinking. (GA)

In the UK these days, the runner is, or at least should be, an expected urban subject (Latham 2015).

The principal line of disagreement among respondents about who is most responsible for avoiding collisions centered on the issue of speed. Those who stressed runners' obligations claimed that the speed at which they are moving, which is probably greater than might be anticipated by many on the streets, makes it incumbent on them to bear the responsibility: “I think I would take responsibility because I'm the one moving faster” (GA). Or in the words of another participant: “It is my responsibility to make sure we don't hit each other because I'm going faster” (MVE). Other respondents, however, used an identical argument – that runners are moving more quickly than other pedestrians – to impose this responsibility upon pedestrians. As one noted: “Because they're walking and I'm running, they can get out of my way” (MVE). Differences in speed here form the basis of two antithetical arguments: on the one hand, runners learn to be more attuned to the chances of a collision and are thus more likely to be vigilant against such occurrences. On the other hand, pedestrians' relative slowness means they are more agile than runners, able to stop or hastily change direction than runners in the event that they are surprised by a potential collision.

Most participants in the study took a more diplomatic stance, however, advancing the view that the task is a shared one. In one interview, the participant commented simply: “I always think it is our responsibility as much as anyone else's” (GA). Another remarked: “It [the responsibility] would be both of ours” (MVE) and “I think it's a joint effort” (MVE). Although never offering a lengthier analysis of the matter, these runners felt that since both parties have equal claim to space, both they and pedestrians should take responsibility in negotiating their fleeting but important encounters.

### *Passing Pedestrians*

The differing views about who should assume responsibility for avoiding conflict when pedestrians are passed raises the question of how passing-by is actually accomplished. Although a number of approaches was demonstrated by our participants, they were all in some way or another related to three in particular – choosing a side, stepping down, and slaloming. Each of these three approaches are aided by particular ‘tools’ of encounter. Runners' subjective desires to maintain flow, speed and momentum (basically, not to stop running) are aided primarily by the body as a tool for signaling intent and actualizing movements. At the same time, runners' attunements to the potential of, and potential solution to, encounters are facilitated by a wider arsenal of bodily senses and a distinct micro-geographical sensibilities – enrolling feeling, rhythm, speed, sight, hearing, memory, spatial calculations, and intuition into the negotiation of encounters.

The tactic of choosing a side is predicated on the assumption that both runners and pedestrians share some responsibility for preventing a collision from occurring and thus are equals in the mobility hierarchy. Here, runners use bodily movements to signify their intention but rely on pedestrians responding appropriately (or at least as the approaching runner expects them to). As one participant explained: “My strategy is I pick a side I am going on first... I choose a side of the pavement first so they can see that I am on that side of the pavement” (MVE). Another more stridently reported that they used overt bodily gestures to show their planned movements: “I kind of like duck to one side as an indication saying, ‘I'm leaving you space to get past this side – kind of take the hint or I will run into you!’” (MVE).

Although the action of physically moving is a strong indication of the way a runner would like to negotiate the situation, it is generally at its most effective in relatively straightforward scenarios, where the direction of the pedestrian being passed is evident and does not run in parallel to the direction of the runner.

More complex situations – such as when space is narrow, there are large groups of pedestrians, or the runner is approaching from behind – frequently rely not only on the runner taking more (and often complete) responsibility for avoiding collision, but also on using the body far more actively than simply indicating intent and following a pre-determined course. To navigate these complexities, participants used two further tactics – stepping down and slaloming. Stepping down refers to when a runner steps off the sidewalk, choosing to run in the separated space of the road to avoid conflict with pedestrians. This can be seen in **Figure 1** where the runner, in approaching the dog walker, takes a very wide berth, including moving onto the road (*image c*), despite there appearing to be enough space on the pavement. The unpredictable nature of the dog and the risk of tripping over it or becoming entangled with its leash resulted in this precaution. To some, this notion of “stepping down” is unfathomable given the risks involved in entering the roadway. Yet to others, the danger from potentially erratic or perhaps encumbered space-sharers is greater than that from cars, whose movements somehow “flow” more reliably, or who might have more room for maneuver. As one respondent pointed out, if the momentary meeting of runner and pedestrian occurs in limited space, inevitably something must give:

I would much rather be the person who got in the road than move somebody else into the road because I would feel like that would be my responsibility. I mean they are not going to die but say if something happened in that second, that would be my fault. (GA)

Others came from a slightly different perspective, revealing a sense of duty toward fellow space-sharers in the sense of not wishing to endanger them as a result of being on a run:

Yesterday there was a guy walking his dog up towards Plymstock [an area of Plymouth] and he went to go in the road and I went “no no, I'll go in the road, mate” and I think he appreciated that. But I appreciated his gesture but he had two little dogs on a lead and it's easier for me to stay narrowly in the road than it is for two dogs. (GA)

#### FIGURE 1-2 HERE

The final tactic is the slalom, which involves weaving the body around and past other space-sharers, and indeed space-sharing objects, often in response to unexpected obstacles or movements made by others. As with stepping down, slaloming requires runners to take responsibility for creating their own route through a shared space. As one participant noted in explaining the sequence of events in **Figure 2**:

*Researcher:* So here you are just about to overtake some people but you do so in quite a strange fashion. You seem to be going to the left and then all of a sudden change your mind?

*Participant:* Yeah, because that guy, he didn't seem to be too aware of me and started to move further to the left, so I thought if he is moving further across, I don't want him to just step into the path I was going so I thought I would just take that out of the equation completely. (MVE)

Although it is the most difficult and potentially disruptive means of passing, there are occasions when it may be a preferred option. In such situations, runners find it useful to have some opportunity to survey a situation before actually deciding what to do. One respondent chose a slalom because, “I saw it from a

while off. I just squeezed through. It would take less time to squeeze through than go around to the left and I won't have to go back on myself" (MVE). For another:

Well, I knew what pace I was going at and what pace they were going at and I worked out that instead of going in the road and around the car, that if I just waited for half a second I could just squeeze through a gap between them. (MVE)

It is clear from these passages that decisions about whether to choose a side, step down or slalom have to be made in an instant. This does not necessarily mean they are random or that they are straightforwardly habitual or mindless. Rather, urban runners become adept at making quick and calculated judgments to inform them about which spatial tactic would be the best, most appropriate and plausible in any given encounter. Such an attunement brings to light differences not only in terms of how participants believe encounters should be negotiated, but also how they actually happen. While most participants suggested some shared responsibility with pedestrians, the burden of negotiating such encounters generally falls solely upon the runners. The urban runners in this study felt that they belong in public space, claiming an equal right as pedestrians and overwhelmingly agreeing that the negotiation of space should be a shared task. Despite this, the physical movements of both runners and pedestrians would suggest that walkers top the mobile hierarchy, with runners most often breaking their passage, changing their route, and conceding their mobile/sporting subjectivities

### **Toward a Running Order**

Understanding the actual taking place of sport is necessarily a question for critical geographers of sport. It is at the level of the everyday that geographies happen, get made and remade – that speed, space, power, and difference play out on any city's street. Yet the everyday is also a level that has tended to fall outside of sport geography's purview and the methodological tools used here, including go-along and mobile-video-ethnography interviews, suggest one solution for capturing these mundane and momentary experiences, and for visualizing runners' situational subjectivities on the streets.

This chapter thus underscores the need for more research into the everyday of sporting practices and the wider socio-political perspectives on the place of sport they reveal. The case study demonstrates how an analytical focus on fleeting encounters can enrich our understanding of how social order is created and everyday citizenship is produced on the go (Brown 2012). Here, citizenship is a deeply embodied and physical practice; it is something done not just given/received from the state. The unscripted encounter choreographies enlist the bodily capacities, sensory receptors, subjective desires, and communicative mediations of those involved, pitting them against one another until a solution is reached. If taken as emblematic, this study suggests that sporting practices and subjectivities are more widely subordinate in urban public spaces than other mobile practices..

Of course, the research for this chapter focused on particular individuals, in one particular city, in one particular country. As an everyday sport enjoyed by many people around the world, there are undoubtedly plural running cultures and norms between countries and cities, with implications for how people understand and negotiate personal encounters with pedestrians. The thoughts of pedestrians are sorely lacking here also. Considering the way in which non-runners encounter runners in the shared spaces of the city has the potential to add significantly to the analysis of the place of sport in urban public space.

Many sports have clear territories – a purpose built site for it to take place. Moving these sports into a city's shared spaces introduces new questions about primacy of use. Perhaps it is precisely because

sports are imagined to have a dedicated territory – the field, the track, the stadium – that sports and sporting bodies become marginalized as “out of place” (see Nelson, this volume). Whatever the reasons, what is clear is that such subordination is certainly tolerable – and in cases, actively embraced – by those engaged in everyday urban sports. Whilst many participants enthused in sharing their opinions on pedestrians, none were too irate or emasculated by the outcome of encounters to have changed their practices radically (barring the avoidance of particular pedestrian black spots). These are, after all, moments in the background.

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Figure 1: Stepping down. Source: [Authors].



Figure 2: The slalom. Source: [Authors].

