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**Feeling the way: notes toward a haptic  
phenomenology of distance running and scuba diving**

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## **Biographical Notes**

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## **Abstract**

Along with a resurgence of interest in 'the body' within the social sciences generally over the last two decades, in recent years a corpus of sociological research specifically on sporting embodiment has started to develop. Calls have been made to analyse more fully and deeply the sensory dimension of the lived sporting body, including via phenomenological perspectives. This article contributes to this developing literature by bringing to bear insights derived from existential phenomenology on two distinct sporting milieux: middle/long-distance running and scuba diving. As the social sciences in general have been accused of a high degree of ocularcentrism, here we focus upon touch, and specifically upon heat and pressure as two key structures of haptic lived experience.

Key words: phenomenology; sporting embodiment; the senses; touch; haptic.

Word count: (excluding references)

## **The Sensuous Body**

Although the past two decades have witnessed a veritable explosion in writings on the body, the sociology of sport has only recently begun to address the sensory dimension of sporting embodiment (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007; Sparkes, 2009), particularly at the phenomenological level. Exploring and mapping cultural (and subcultural) constructions of the body and inscriptions of discourse are of course necessary and important research endeavours, but may result in an under-theorisation of the materiality and experiences of the lived body (Burns, 2003). As Sinclair (2005: 90) notes, this can leave us with a “desire not to drown bodies in a sea of abstraction but to focus on the here-and-now, raw reality of the body” (2005: 90). With its emphasis on concrete, grounded experience and “the here and now of bodily existence and presence” (Münch, 1994: 151), a ‘sociologised’ form of existential phenomenology is well-suited, we argue, to exploring the here and now of lived sporting experience, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the structural and cultural location of bodily presence. In this article we orientate the phenomenological lens to examine two specific lived sporting worlds: those of middle/long-distance running and of scuba diving, focussing upon the senses of touch. The approach we use is more properly termed ‘phenomenological sociology’ in being a form of sociology that employs insights from phenomenology (Schwarz, 2002), rather than being more ‘purely’ philosophical. For ease of reading, however, we use the general term ‘phenomenology’ unless more specific usage is required for clarity.

Along with a burgeoning interest in sporting embodiment, research into the sociology/anthropology of the senses has also begun to develop (Howes, 1991). As a counterpoint to the ocularcentrism or ‘hegemony of sight’ (Pallasmaa, 2005) endemic in much ‘Western’ writing on the corporeal, here we centre upon the haptic (relating to the sense/s of touch). The article contributes to a small but growing literature using phenomenological-inspired perspectives to address elements of sporting embodiment

(e.g., Breivik, 2008; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007; Wacquant, 2004), particularly outside of the well-researched areas of pain, illness and injury.

The article responds to recent calls (e.g. Mason & Davies, 2009; Sparkes, 2009) to address sociologically and qualitatively the complexities of lived sensory experience. Here we focus upon the relatively under-researched sense of touch within sports studies, using data from three research projects. The article is structured as follows. First we provide an overview of the theoretical framework of phenomenology, which underpins our phenomenologically-inspired sociology. This is followed by a brief consideration of sociological, anthropological and geographical perspectives on the senses, so as to contextualise our own study. We then describe the three research projects from which our data are drawn, and present these data under two main categories relating to the haptic: perceptions of temperature and of pressure. It should be noted here, that we use the term 'haptic' as including internal corporeal sensations, not only those restricted to the external surface of the skin (see also Paterson, 2007), as explained further below.

### **Sociological Phenomenology and Sporting Embodiment**

Modern phenomenology emerged from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and now spans a wide-ranging, multi-stranded, and highly varied set of theoretical frames; a veritable 'tangled web' (Ehrich, 1999) of different traditions, such as transcendental, hermeneutic and existential forms (see Allen-Collinson, 2009a, for an overview). Phenomenology, derived from the Greek 'phainomenon', is the study of phenomena, things as they present themselves to, and are perceived in our consciousness. Existential and sociological phenomenology in particular highlight the 'situatedness' of such consciousness, both corporeally and in terms of social location. Within the phenomenological tradition generally, researchers seek to capture as far as possible (whilst always acknowledging the inevitable partialness) the 'essences', the core characteristics or structures of a phenomenon. Kvale (1996) describes the phenomenological approach as being interested in elucidating both that which appears

and the manner in which it appears, via the study of participants' own first-person perspectives and held meanings about their world. For the purposes of this article, we engage with the grounded, lived bodily experiences of undertaking sporting practices, using insights drawn from Merleau-Ponty's (2001) work on perception, including the haptic. Whilst originating in philosophy, forms of phenomenology have been taken up and utilised in a myriad of ways within different disciplines such as sociology and anthropology (Katz and Csordas, 2003), including sports sciences and sports studies (see Allen-Collinson, 2009a; Kerry and Armour, 2000).

Of particular interest to the sport sociologist is phenomenology's focus upon the 'lived body' (*Leib*), the body that links mind, body and world in an ongoing, fluid, dynamic relationship. Heidegger (2005) reminds us that humans are enmeshed within, and arise out of existence; his concept of *dasein* (being-in-the-world) highlights how we are always already 'in and of' the world. Merleau-Ponty (2001) further emphasises the centrality of the body in our world-self relationship, portraying the body as the standpoint from which we perceive all things. Our 'being-in-the-world' for Merleau-Ponty (2001) is based on the union of the 'psychic' and the 'physiological', and so: "Lived experience is embodied experience" (Sandelowski, 2002: 112). For existential phenomenologists, we both produce and are produced by the spatio-temporal world in which we are located. More sociological forms of phenomenological analysis address the structurally, politically and ideologically-influenced, historically-specific, and socially situated nature of human embodiment and experience. Feminist phenomenological analyses (e.g. Preston, 1996; Young, 1998) for example, acknowledge and analyse the structurally, culturally and historically-located nature of gendered embodiment.

Phenomenology has long been concerned with embodiment issues, experiences and meanings of sport, exercise and movement (Arnold, 1979; Breivik, 2008). Given his interest in embodied consciousness, perception, intentionality (the notion that consciousness is always intentional, directed towards something), and the ways in

which we experience lived time-space, Merleau-Ponty's existentialist approach has been utilised in phenomenologically-inspired analyses of various sports and physical cultures. Here we give just some examples indicative of this kind of research. In relation to karate, for example, Masciotra *et al.* (2001) provide a detailed, phenomenologically-grounded account of spatio-temporal distancing and co-ordination, whilst Spencer (2009) similarly considers issues of spatio-temporality and 'body callusing' within mixed martial arts. The dialectical relationship between 'player-body-subject' and the lived-space of the playing field has been analysed in relation to football/soccer (Breivik, 2008; Hemphill, 2005; Hughson and Inglis, 2002). Those researching mind-body practices and physical cultures have found Merleau-Ponty a particularly profitable resource: Samudra (2008) portrays kinaesthetic experiences in Silat Bangau Putih, a Chinese Indonesian self-defense system, whilst Morley (2001) examines yoga practice and breath-control utilising some of Merleau-Ponty's constructs relating to the lived body and also drawing comparisons between the practice of yoga and phenomenology itself, particularly in relation to epochē/bracketing (described below). Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's framework of embodied consciousness and being-in-the-world, McDonald (2007) considers Kalarippayattu, a martial art of southern India, and the politico-philosophical significance of corporeal activity. Addressing sports and physical activity generally, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) explore the sensory dimension of the sporting body and the centrality of sense perceptions, employing Merleau-Ponty's (2001) work on the body as subject of perception.

It is existential phenomenological perspectives to which we turn in this article, in particular the work of Merleau-Ponty. Before proceeding to consider the specifics of touch in relation to our chosen sporting domains of middle/long-distance running and scuba diving, we briefly consider the relatively new sociological research arena of the senses, within which our work is situated. We then describe the three research projects from which our illustrative data are drawn. It should be noted that we employ a sociological version of the phenomenological concept of 'essence' (see Allen-



Collinson, 2009a), as an irreducible or core element of a phenomenon, something without which the phenomenon would cease to be recognised by participants as that phenomenon. As Katz and Csordas (2003) note, within sociology/anthropology, this does not constitute a *universalised* 'essence'; indeed essences can be specific to the experience of a culture/subculture, social group or indeed of an individual.

### **The Sensory Dimension**

As Conquergood (1991) notes, ethnography is an embodied practice, and can be an intensely sensuous way of knowing. Using ethnographic approaches, social anthropology was perhaps the first of the social sciences systematically to address the cultural dimension of sensory experience (see for example, Geurts 2002; Howes, 1991; Stoller, 1989). Classen's (1993, 2005; Classen *et al.*, 1994) extensive work on the cultural-historical study of the senses is noteworthy in this area. The emergent field of 'sensuous geographies' (Paterson, 2007; Rodaway, 1994) has similarly generated fascinating insights into the geographies of the senses. Indeed it seems that the social sciences are currently witnessing something of a 'sensorial revolution' (Howes, 2006). The importance of bringing the sensory dimension in to theorisations of the self/body/society nexus has now been clearly signalled, for as Bull *et al.* (2006: 5) note, and as is commensurate with phenomenological perspectives: "The senses mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object". Anthropologists such as Geurts (2002) highlight the ways in which the patterning of sense experience varies culturally (and historically), given that the senses are both the shapers and bearers of culture. To this we would add that such sensory experience also varies subculturally, for example in relating to particular sporting and physical subcultures. Wacquant's (2004) participant observation-based research on boxing, Potter's (2008) 'participant experience' dancing ethnography, and Downey's (2005) study of capoeira provide strong examples of ethnographic research that embraces and vividly portrays the sensory dimension of physical practices and cultures.

It is indeed timely to address the sensorium<sup>1</sup> within sports sociology, but, as Potter (2008) signals, it should be borne in mind that the Euro-American 'classic five' senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, do not allow for other equally 'viable' senses such as heat, pain and kinaesthesia (the sensation of bodily movement), all of which are pertinent to the sociology of sporting embodiment. The inter-relatedness of the senses should also be borne in mind, for rarely do we experience singular sensory modality, but rather 'multisensory processes' (Calvert *et al.*, 2004). Whilst cognizant of this multi-sensory mode within our lived sporting experience, it is upon the senses of touch that we focus in this article. First, we describe the research from which our illustrative data extracts are drawn.

### **The Research**

The following analysis is based upon data generated by three separate research projects: two on distance running and one on scuba diving. Our purpose in including data from three different methodological approaches is to illustrate how these can be utilised in phenomenological analysis. The distance running projects were autoethnographic/autophenomenographic projects undertaken by the authors, whilst the diving project was an interview-based project carried out by the second author with an experienced scuba diver. The latter's permission has been granted for the inclusion of all data extracts. The extracts below are categorised as RS1, RS2 (Running Study 1 and 2 respectively) and DS (Diving Study).

RS1 was a collaborative autoethnography, undertaken by both authors as two experienced middle/long-distance runners during a period of two years during which we were recovering and rehabilitating from long-term running injuries. Our distance running biographies extend over 42 and 24 years respectively, and whilst falling firmly within the non-élite category, our running encompasses two of Bale's (2004) forms: 1) welfare running, pursued for health and fitness aims; and also 2) performance running, pursued in order to improve and sustain performance. We are thus *serious*

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<sup>1</sup> The totality of the perceptual apparatus as an operational complex.

*runners*, those whom Smith defines as: “regularly [running] further and faster than fitness for health would demand” (2000: 190).

Autoethnography examines the dialectics of subjectivity and culture, and in general entails the detailed analysis of the researcher(s) *qua* member(s) of a social group or category; in our case the distance-running subculture (see Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007). The autoethnographic genre is now relatively well-established within the sociology of sport and physical cultures (e.g., Kaskisaari, 1994; Lussier-Ley, 2010; Tsang, 2000) and ranges over the full continuum of ‘analytic’ to ‘evocative forms’ (see Anderson, 2006). During the two-year period of the research, we recorded individually and in detail our daily engagement with the injury and rehabilitation process via field notebooks and micro-tape recorders. Within a joint log, we generated analytical themes and concepts. Throughout the research we sought to engage in personal reflexivity and what Burns (2003: 230) terms ‘embodied reflexivity’, subjecting to question and analysis the impact of our bodies on the meanings, beliefs and knowledge used and generated, in general our bodily ways of knowing. Commensurate with the phenomenological attempts to ‘capture’ (however partially) the core, essential elements of a phenomenon, we regularly asked ourselves what elements within an emergent theme we deemed essential to the experience.

RS2 is an autophenomenographic study of female distance running undertaken by the first author. Autophenomenography (Allen-Collinson, 2009a; Gruppetta, 2004) is an approach analogous to autoethnography but where the researcher analyses her/his own experiences of a phenomenon rather than of a cultural/subcultural social ‘place’, as in autoethnography. In order to document her lived experience of training for middle/long-distance running, the first author has maintained a research log for 2.5 years (still ongoing), which includes detailed subjective and corporeal experiences of daily training sessions. The research format follows Giorgi’s (1997) guidelines for phenomenological research (see below). Given the ideographic, autophenomenographic nature of the research, however, it departs from Giorgi’s method with regard to constructing *general* descriptions across a range of participants.

Instead, the focus is upon the researcher's own lived experiences of a phenomenon, an approach which has been used to good effect in the qualitative research literature generally (e.g. Lessier-Ley, 2010), including by existential phenomenological researchers, such as in Toombs' (2001) powerful account of her own lived experience of Multiple Sclerosis.

The scuba diving research was an in-depth 'topical life-history case study' (Allen-Collinson, 2009b; Ward, 1999) undertaken by the second author and a vastly experienced scuba diver. Originally, the second author engaged in informal discussions with the diver which produced copious notes over a number of weeks. The notes were used to develop an interview agenda which was employed during a series of five semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting around 60 minutes. In addition, substantial follow-up email correspondence has subsequently taken place to check out with the participant specific queries and to provide further detail. This proved particularly useful as repeated clarification was needed to grasp the embodied complexities of scuba diving, in terms of how the body responds to such factors as depth, pressure, light, refraction and so on. The participant had 32 years of diving experience at the time of interview and had been an accredited scuba instructor with the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) for the previous 10 years. There are precedents within the sociology of sport for this kind of exploratory research involving a single interviewee (e.g. Krane *et al.*, 1997) In the context of our paper, the diving research provides an interesting contrastive element to the running studies vis-à-vis haptic phenomenology under divergent environmental conditions. In all three studies a central research aim was to 'capture' the essential elements within the descriptions of specific phenomena.

All the projects followed Giorgi's (1997) phenomenological method, in that they involved: i) the collection of concrete descriptions of phenomena from an 'insider' perspective; ii) the adoption of the phenomenological attitude; iii) initial impressionistic readings of the descriptions in order to gain a feel for the whole; iv) in-depth re-reading of these descriptions as part of a lengthy process of data-immersion,

to identify themes and sub-themes; and v) the production of general statements of the essential patterns or structure(s) of the experiences. With regard to this latter point, the ideographic nature of the projects and limits of generalisability should be borne in mind. In relation to the running data, our long careers in running engendered confidence of fulfilling Garfinkel's (2002: 175) phenomenologically-derived 'unique adequacy requirement', for the researcher to "be *vulgarly* competent to the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon...". This requirement, however, renders problematic another key element of the phenomenological method: epochē or bracketing, the setting aside – or at least acknowledgement and addressing of – prior assumptions and pre-conceptions regarding a phenomenon, thus requiring increased critical self-reflection of the 'insider' researcher.<sup>2</sup>

In RS1, whilst cognisant of the impossibility of complete epochē, in an attempt to bracket sociologically (in terms of identification and acknowledgement) as far as possible our preconceptions about running, we engaged in mutual 'consciousness- and reflexivity-raising' sessions, seeking to challenge our existing beliefs and assumptions. In RS2, in order to bracket as much as possible her own preconceptions about female running embodiment, the first author engaged in two specific bracketing practices: 1) discussions with insiders and non-insiders to the distance-running subculture, both female and male; 2) reading ethnographic accounts of different sporting and physical activities in order to compare and contrast the key elements of these with middle/long-distance running. The diving data were considerably more amenable to epochē, given our personal lack of first-hand familiarity with the diving lifeworld. As noted above, where our lack of familiarity raised questions and required further clarification, the second author was able to follow these up in detail with the participant.

These then are the research projects from which our data are derived, and from which it emerged that the haptic featured as more salient than we had first imagined.

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting discussion of bracketing as a research technique, see Gearing (2004).

Both sporting domains generated a wealth of data testifying to the 'multiple sensory modes' (Potter 2008) involved, and indeed the multiple senses of touch (Paterson, 2007).

### **A haptics of running and diving**

In the 'Western' hierarchy of the senses, touch has often been attributed low status, being categorised as one of, or even *the* most physical and 'base' of the senses (Moulton, 2010). For phenomenologists, however, touch is an important, complex, multi-faceted and highly valorised sense. As Paterson (2007) notes, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty discussed touch and focussed upon the hitherto under-examined somatic sensations of proprioception and kinaesthesia, perceived as integral to a 'felt phenomenology'. Proprioception is the perception of the position of one's body in space, and for some this includes perception of the deep tissues of the body, "of enclosed or encircled corporeal space" (Morley, 2001: 76). It is in this more encompassing sense that we use the term. Extero-receptors include the 'classic five' sense organs, while proprioceptors lie in the deep tissues and muscles (Potter, 2008). Kinaesthesia is our sensation of movement of body and limbs, which Paterson (2007: ix) describes as relating to "sensations originating in muscles, tendons and joints". To these foregoing 'classic' senses of touch, Potter (2008), following Classen (1993), adds the perception of heat (a sense of energy and life force) as a distinct perceptory mode, experientially similar to smell, as discussed below.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility has been found salient within the phenomenology of sporting experience (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007). This concept refers to the notion that our sense perceptions are reversible, we both touch and are touched; touch is both transitive and intransitive (Paterson, 2007). In relation to sports and physical cultures, this haptic relationship can constitute a central structure of experience, and has been analysed in relation to the physical environment of running (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007), including meteorological conditions (Allen-Collinson, 2010), the touch of clothing within dance (Potter, 2008) and of

equipment such as sailboards (Dant and Wheaton, 2009), in the soccer player's contact with the playing field, ball, and other players (Breivik, 2008; Hemphill, 2005; Hughson and Inglis, 2002), to give just some examples. This emphasis upon the sensing, touching body in movement (Manning, 2006), is certainly apposite to sporting embodiment.

The sportsperson's touch is often an active, deliberate, highly specific and much practised one, combining pressure between the sporting body, terrain and equipment, and sometimes other bodies, together with a heightened awareness of the body as it moves through planes. As Ingold (2004) points out, studies of haptic perception have focused almost exclusively on manual touch, with a resultant need for research examining 'footwork'. This is particularly so in relation to phenomenological explorations of sports and physical activities such as running, walking, dance, martial arts, and football, for example. Indeed some sporting actions may require a very high degree of footwork 'dexterity' and accomplishment: "When Zidane was discovered, his control was so dextrous that it was said that he had feet where his hands should be" (Okwonga, 2008: 34). Such skill and control are used not only in relation to objects such as footballs, but also in relation to the terrain underfoot. Indeed, the properties of 'ground', sensed by and through the feet, are crucial to bodily comportment and action within many sporting activities, and we briefly consider this in relation to running. In general then, sportspeople touch, and are in turn touched by, the physical properties of the sporting environments they inhabit.

Whilst the problems of articulating touch through the largely intangible medium of language have been well noted (Paterson, 2007), here we attempt to portray some of the haptics of running and scuba-diving embodiment. Rodaway (1994: 48) defines the haptic experience as: "a combination of tactile and locomotive properties [which] provides information about the character of objects, surfaces and whole environments as well as our own bodies". Commensurate with phenomenological tenets, we must point out that we can never fully 'capture' and portray lived experience, but only try to

convey some of its essential elements and meanings. In this article, we do not address touch between persons; intercorporeality being a vast area in itself and one which has been relatively well documented phenomenologically within sport (e.g. Hemphill, 2005; Hughson and Inglis, 2002; Masciotra *et al.*, 2001). In order to give greater focus to our analysis, we address here the physical rather than the social environment, whilst acknowledging that these are fundamentally intertwined within the phenomenological tradition - and indeed others (see for example, Goffman's (1971) interactionist analysis of walking in public spaces). The themes we address here centre upon haptic lived experiences in relation to temperature and pressure. It should be emphasised, however, that within the phenomenological spirit these are not necessarily experienced as separate and distinct, but we present them as discrete categories for analytic purposes. Commensurate with the qualitative approach, we have used slightly extended quotes in order to provide some contextualisation of the haptic elements experienced.

### **The heat of the moment**

Within the literature, heat has been theorised both as a specialised sense of touch (e.g. Geurts, 2002), and also as a distinct sensory perception (Potter, 2008). Here we utilise and compare both these theorisations in analysing the data. First, in relation to heat as conceptualised as distinct from (traditional notions of) touch, Potter (2008: 453-454), drawing upon her ethnographic research with professional contemporary dancers, argues that heat is a distinct perceptory mode, on the grounds of both physical bodily experience, and also in relation to the variable levels of significance that heat and touch carry. Whereas touch is a proximal sense requiring contact of the body with an external object, heat, she argues, is perceived both within the human body and at its boundaries where it merges with the external world. This trans-boundary capacity makes it somewhat analogous to the sense of smell. For runners, as for Potter's dancers and other athletes, heat is indeed a key structure of experience, and effective bodily 'warming up' (and down) are important elements in



both training and competition performance. For runners (especially those not in the first flush of youthful athleticism), warming up exercises are undertaken to 'loosen up' stiff musculature, and to prepare the body for imminent physical demands. This requires a heightened awareness of somatic sensations in muscles, tendons and joints. And, commensurate with phenomenological perspectives, there is a strong mind-body linkage, a mental as well as corporeal 'warm up', especially for those of us engaged in 'mind work' for most of the working day:

... I use the radio and tape player in the car as a device to get myself up and ready for training. As soon as I get in the car and leave the campus, I crack on the radio. If I can't find a station with some decent rock, it's on with the Zep or Coverdale tape. I need something with a rocksteady beat, something with a lot of whack to it, something you can feel deep down... It's an energizing thing really, such a change from being so static and sedentary at work, so mind-orientated. I really need that change of tempo, to wake me up, to get everything moving so as to be ready to pull on the training gear as soon as I get home. It's like I have to prepare my muscles and also get myself focused for the sensations of running. A lot of academic thought is abstract, it's mediated and disembodied, but distance running demands right-on physicality from the very first step, when the elements hit you... (RS1 Log 2)

Second, moving to perhaps more traditional notions of heat perception as a specialised sense of touch, for both divers and runners the heat of the elements through which they move emerged as central components within lived experience. From the outset of the dive, for example, the touch, 'texture', movement and temperature of the water are intertwined in experience, influencing the choice of

clothing (whether to don a dry suit or wet suit, swimming costume, shorts, and so on), which in turn affects the sensations experienced in the underwater environment:

It's so much freer and I really enjoy the sensation of being in the water and in tactile contact with it. I can feel the movement of currents and I can feel subtle changes in temperature... Well a current is like an underwater wind so it's like if you could imagine a wind against you on the surface... That's why I like tropical diving because I can feel these changes all over, it's like my skin gets back to being a tactile area again... As far as touch is concerned it's a much less enjoyable experience in the dry suit compared to a wet suit, and a wet suit compared to being in shorts. (DS)

Analogously for runners, the touch and temperature of the air are important elements of the outdoor (and indoor) running experience. For us, indoor running is a last resort, as the touch of the elements is such an integral component of the running experience both pleasurable and dis-pleasurable (see also Allen-Collinson, 2010). In the data extract that follows, for example, the touch of warm air caressing newly-exposed skin generates cutaneous pleasures:

Today has been the first day it's just about been warm enough to take the training tights off... Pull on the shorts and the white skin revealed after an autumn and winter hiding. The feel of the air is amazing running down the road, something the skin has not experienced since last year. It's a kind of a caress I guess, the shorts being very short and the breeze moves over the legs, and around the back of the glutes [gluteal muscles] where the hamstrings insert into them, and up the split of the shorts on the thigh... The skin feels unrestrained, like it's

free. 'Running free' - the meaning is not lost, especially at the end of long working days at a computer. (RS1 Log 1)

Sometimes, though, the haptic experience of the elements is not so pleasurable and a *lack* of heat touching the body may generate 'dys-pleasure' (c.f. Scarry 1985). The following extract from a running log demonstrates the impact of cold air on sensory receptors, both mechanoreceptors (pressure-detecting) and thermoreceptors (temperature-detecting); a point which is elaborated in the next section in relation to the intertwined experience of pressure, heat and pain.

Boom! It hits us hard as we come around the corner down the dimly lit avenue, seeking opportunities to invade us, a big March wind, probing its fingers into the gaps between cuffs and gloves, into the tight zips not fully fastened, for the lower ear where the hat finishes, going for any exposed skin, going for the throat with its chill. We take turns to lead tucking one behind the other, gaining in turn respite from its attentions. 'Shit,' J curses, taking the lead, forcibly reminded of the need to layer on the Vaseline as the wind cuts cheeks yard by yard. (RS1 Log 1)

### **Under pressure**

Paterson (2007: ix) defines 'tactile' as "pertaining to the cutaneous sense, but more specifically the sensation of pressure (from mechanoreceptors)". First we consider hardness in relation to proprioception. Just as the female bodybuilders in Shilling and Bunsell's (2009) study describe their enjoyment of muscles worked hard and 'bursting out' of skin, so similar feelings of intense physicality and heightened muscular awareness, also infuse our running:

I love the feeling of hardness of abs, it's as if I start the run sometimes with a soft, rounded abdomen, I can almost feel it wobble from hours

sitting at the computer or teaching in front of 100s of other static bodies. But then as my body streamlines from sedentary stiffness, the headiness [i.e. cognitive focus] of the working day, as it transforms once more into the musculature of my running-woman's body, it's as if the contours, the bodylines become firmer - there is a strength to my outline and my core, and it seems as if my abs harden and retract into me so that I can feel the power gather there in my core, pulling the air in to me and then pushing it out. (RS2)

For divers, felt pressure is a key structure of experience, for as they descend in to deeper water, the pressure mounts. If remedial action is not taken these feelings of pressure may be followed by discomfort and eventually pain. Initially, pressure is felt as the mask presses down more firmly against the face, and can be relieved by breathing out through the nose. There is also painful pressure in the ears and sinuses, which the diver can reduce by pinching and blowing the nose simultaneously, in order to equalise the pressure in the middle ear. When descending in a dry suit, divers can feel discomfort as the suit begins to constrict flesh. Experienced divers become adept at gauging very small gradations in pressure and in making constant compensatory adjustments:

The pressure of the suit against you as you descend, as the water pressure increases, that can feel really quite uncomfortable... You get pinching at certain points and sometimes a general effect. You know when you get your blood pressure taken and the collar squeezes your arm, it's like that, but all over, as you descend. You are very quick to respond to changes in pressure, so you don't get that feeling of being squeezed. I think you are very sensitive to pressure because pressure changes in very small distances under water, so you are always having to make adjustments (with air) because of those changes. (DS)

Divers become skilled at making these small, improvised, continual adjustments to their air pressure so as to avoid bodily pain and discomfort, becoming 'attuned' (Ingold, 2000) to their pressured aquatic environment. For runners too, such corporeal awareness and attunement are important, but principally in relation to the element of earth (although attunement to air and meteorological conditions is also important). Terrain is more than mere ground, but also holds connotations of fitness for running purpose – its 'going': the condition underfoot and its effects upon progress, including properties of ground (the kind of rock, soil, temperature of the ground, hardness, evenness, and so on), and also what is growing or lying on it. Runners' intentionality is thus strongly focussed upon the terrain their feet cover, together with the feel of the running shoes upon which they (apart from barefoot runners) rely to protect their pounded feet. The following extract demonstrates the interplay, in felt experience, of ground and the sensory receptors: mechanoreceptors (pressure-detecting), thermoreceptors (temperature-detecting) and nociceptors (pain-detecting):

The wrong shoes on for this race - too new on a hot day. My feet are breaking in, not the shoes. The soles are too thin for this distance and the condition of the ground. The combination means blisters big time. The skin starts to smart little by little and it's not the toes, it's the soles of both feet, fiery messages transmitted until I know the blistering is spreading. The question arises - drop out of the race or do something else? I bang both feet down for a mile, eyes nearly closed until the pain dulls and reduces to a tolerable level. After the race I sit on the kerb with a cup of tea, looking at my bare feet. A kind of runner's stigmata...  
(RS1 Log 1)

In contrast, there is the pleasure of softer, more cushioned surfaces; the interweaving of hardness/softness, pleasure/pain in our lived experience is salient:

Fabulous run mainly in fresh, crisp but soft snow. The banality of the working town is transformed into a winter wonderland of snow and icicle adorned trees, lamp-posts, fences and aials... The fresh snow on the park is soft and twinkly-crunchy underfoot, cushioned to the foot sole. Quads and calves have to work harder on the soft surface, a benign aching testifies to their greater workload as I reach the end of the parkland and head toward the road and pavement stretch before it's back on to the track. Bang! Plantar fascia [connective tissue supporting the foot arch] snap back, retract and sting in shock as I hit the hard-frozen pavement. Ouch, ouch, ouch! I can feel them pull away, cowering from the unforgiving concrete. Thank the gods it's quite a short stretch to the pine-needle-strewn section of track where they can recover. (RS2)

## **Discussion**

Using insights derived from existential phenomenology, this article has examined the haptic dimension in relation to two lived sporting worlds: those of middle/long-distance running and of scuba diving; and to two key structures of haptic experience: temperature and pressure. The different kinds of data have been included in order to illustrate how different sporting activities produce specific haptic experiences and competencies. Furthermore, the experiences portrayed occur within particular geographical areas and 'social spaces' (Lefebvre, 1991): 'the dive', 'the race', 'the training session', and so on. It is via embodied sporting activity that this particular kind of lived space is produced or created (Lefebvre, 1991; Hemphill, 2005). This lived space then requires certain forms of haptic knowing, often sport-specific, and necessary for skilful practice. As Ingold (2000) has noted, such practice is not purely the property of an individual body but rather a total system of relations with the surrounding environment.

With regard to the sporting domains we have considered, the diving body, and particularly the hands, develop an embodied memory of how to do things underwater, a facility which Merleau-Ponty (2001) has termed 'historical density'. This concept also applies to the running body and especially runners' 'footwork' (c.f. Ingold, 2004) as they traverse forms of terrain. Whilst this expertise may be practised directly via the hands or feet, 'body auxiliaries' (Merleau-Ponty, 2001) may also be employed, such as diving booties, running shoes, football boots, aerodynamic clothing (Allen-Collinson, 2010), hockey sticks, sailboards (Dant and Wheaton, 2009), and so on. As has been illustrated via the running and scuba diving data, practitioners develop specific senses of touch, constantly 'alert' and responsive to tiny differentials in pressure and temperature. This haptic acumen is combined in the sporting moment with other sensory modalities and competencies, so as to accomplish embodied sporting practices, thus allowing players to become thoroughly *attuned* (Ingold, 2000) to their particular sporting craft(s) and environment.

At present, the empirical literature on sporting embodiment and the phenomenology and/or sensory dimension of sports participation, is embryonic, and any generalisations are necessarily rudimentary. It is possible to generate basic categories amenable to analysis, and here we have addressed the haptic elements of pressure and temperature, linked to other categories such as skin, feet and hands. Moving on to future research, we might wish to relate those categories to the tools of sport, the sporting 'body auxiliaries' (Merleau-Ponty, 2001), ranging from hockey sticks and cricket bats, to parallel bars, surf boards, and snooker cues, for example. We might then examine these latter in relation to the initial categories, and begin posing questions as to the structures of experience within different sporting activities and actions. Subsequently, we might build in a further haptic element: touch involving other participants/competitors, posing questions about lived experiences of sporting inter-embodiment. The sports we have considered here, although certainly amenable to being undertaken in a team or group context, might be construed as more individualistic, and so it would be interesting to investigate the haptics of inter-

embodiment in group or team-sport contexts. Once the interrelationships between the three levels of categorisation (embodied, embodied via auxiliaries, and inter-embodiment) are empirically charted, it then becomes possible using the phenomenological method to develop general statements of the structures of experience involved, and to posit theoretical generalisations about particular modalities of sporting touch. A further step might then be to address the other sensory activities experienced by participants in a particular sport, and so to produce a synthesised multi-sensory analysis. A challenging prospect, but one which phenomenology is well placed to address.

This article advocates phenomenologically-inspired sociology as just one means of undertaking detailed, qualitative investigation into the sensory dimensions of sporting embodiment; we propose it as a potent complementary approach to a range of other theoretical perspectives on embodiment. Allied to the power of sociological theoretical frameworks, including those that theorise 'difference' (based on gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, degree of impairment, and so on) phenomenology permits us to delve deeper into the structures of sporting and physical activity experiences, always taking into account the full force of social-structural location. Phenomenological sociology can, we argue, generate fresh research insights, grounded in the carnal, 'fleshy', lived, richly-textured experiences of the moving, sweating, touching, seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting sporting body; a body which also inevitably holds (sub)cultural meanings, significances and purposes, and is subject to the lived experience of social-structural constraints.



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