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# A Chance to Catch a Breath: Using Mobile Video Ethnography in Cycling Research

#### JUSTIN SPINNEY

Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

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ABSTRACT Under the rubric of transport much previous research on everyday mobility has focused on understanding the more representational and readily articulated aspects of everyday movement. By way of contrast, emergent theorisations of mobility suggest that an understanding of the less representational those fleeting, ephemeral and often embodied and sensory aspects of movement - is vital i- f we are to fully understand why and how people move around. Accordingly, the ability of conventional methods to complement new research agendas, particularly those related to issues around the sensory, affect and embodied experience

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has been called in to question.

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This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on mobile methodologies by critically discussing a theoretical and methodological journey towards mobile video ethnography in the context of a project researching cycling in London, UK between 2004 and 2007. In doing so it  $highlights\ three\ ways\ in\ which\ mobile\ video\ ethnography\ can\ contribute\ to\ research\ in\ the\ new$ mobilities paradigm: video as a way of 'feeling there' when you can't be there; video as a way of apprehending fleeting moments of mobile experience; and video as a tool to extend sensory vocabularies. It also critically discusses the limitations of video as a text and the importance of embodied experience, interpretation and audiencing to its success as part of a mobile methodology. Whilst emphasising the need for caution, the paper demonstrates the way in which mobile video ethnography can contribute to a new mobilities agenda by facilitating more situated understandings of daily corporeal mobility which highlight an alternative time-space politics to those inscribed in road spaces.

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Introduction

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There has been a rash of research on mobility and movement within geographical and sociological enquiry (Palmer, 1996, 2001; Edensor, 2000, 2003; Sheller & Urry, 2000, 2006; Borden, 2001; Miller, 2001; Solnit, 2001; Wylie, 2002, 2005; Lorimer & Lund, 2003; Adey, 2004; Fincham, 2004, 2006; Sheller, 2004; Furness, 2005, 2007; Cresswell, 2006; Ford & Brown, 2006; Merriman, 2006, 2007; Robertson, 2007;

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Correspondence Address: Justin Spinney, Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey (D3), AQ1 Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, UK. E-mail: j.spinney@surrey.ac.uk

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Watts & Urry, 2008; Middleton, 2009) with Sheller and Urry (2006) even going as far as proclaiming the dawn of a new mobilities paradigm. The mobilities turn as it has been dubbed encompasses a broad research agenda from global labour (im)mobilities (the macro and micro scale structural and everyday phenomena which contribute to the abilities of workers to move around), virtual (the ways in which information communication technologies shape the movements of people and objects) and imagined mobility (the ways in which images, discourses and representations inform mobility), right down to everyday corporeal mobilities (the physical everyday movement of people and objects in space and time) and it is the latter which this paper speaks to.

As Büscher and Urry (2009) point out, the mobilities turn has shifted the focus of what counts as legitimate and necessary phenomena for social enquiry. Whilst previous research on everyday mobility has focused on understanding the more representational and readily articulated aspects of movement (such as time, cost, safety, weather) under the rubric of transport, emergent theorisations of mobility suggest that an understanding of the less representational - those fleeting, ephemeral and often embodied and sensory aspects of movement – is vital if we are to fully understand why and how people move around (Lorimer, 2005). The importance of this, as Shaw and Hesse (2010, p. 5) note, is that bringing such new perspectives to 'transport' issues could lead to better policy making and planning because we have a better understanding of phenomena. A key central problem, however, is that whilst fleeting moments may be representational – that is to say they are fundamental to the creation and reproduction of meaning – their transient nature does not readily lend itself to apprehension through quantitative or verbal accounts. One reason for this is that even if we acknowledge the importance of such factors, we lack the technologies, skills and vocabularies necessary to elicit and evoke sensory experiences in registers other than the visual and aural precisely because they often reside in the realm of the habitual and unconscious. As a result there has been a corresponding post-mortem of existing methods with queries being raised about whether the new research questions arising through the mobilities turn require a wholesale re-thinking of methodological

Whatever the case – and I think there is certainly an element of the emperor's new clothes here as Shaw and Hesse (2010) suggest – researchers have risen to this challenge and the new mobilities paradigm has seen an explosion of empirical work using innovative methods such as travel diaries (Latham, 2003b; Watts & Urry, 2008; Middleton, 2009), auto-ethnography (Edensor, 2003; Fincham, 2004), time-space mapping (Jiron, 2007), mobile ethnography (Palmer, 1996; Laurier, 2004; Spinney, 2006; D'Andrea, 2009) and video ethnography (Pink, 2001a, 2001b; Brown & Spinney, 2009; Laurier, 2009). The appearance of two edited collections on the subject (Downing & Tenney, 2008; Fincham et al., 2009) as well as a number of methods-based papers (Pink, 2007; Hein, et al., 2008; Büscher & Urry, 2009) is testament to the vigor with which the challenge is being taken up.

This paper contributes to this project recounting a methodological journey towards using video within an ESRC funded Ph.D. project researching cycling in London ,UK between 2004 and 2006.<sup>2</sup> Urban cycling holds unique challenges for the mobile researcher in that it largely precludes the 'ride-along' method (see for example Palmer, 1996; Spinney, 2006; Brown, 2008) due to the hazards of riding in the city

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and the unique skills and styles displayed within different cycling cultures. Drawing upon the process of overcoming such issues, this paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on mobile methodologies by critically discussing the theoretical and methodological journey towards mobile video ethnography. In doing so it highlights three ways in which mobile video ethnography can contribute to research in the new mobilities paradigm: video as a way of 'seeing there' (Laurier, 2009) and 'feeling there' when you can't be there; video as a way of apprehending fleeting moments of mobile experience; and video as a tool to extend sensory vocabularies. It also critically discusses the limitations of video as a text and the importance of embodied experience, interpretation and audiencing to its success as part of a mobile methodology. In doing so, this paper demonstrates the way in which mobile video ethnography can contribute to a new mobilities agenda by facilitating more nuanced understandings of daily corporeal mobility which move beyond seeing instrumental factors as solely determining why and how people move around. The paper concludes by offering some reflections on how these micro-scale insights – by foregrounding the reproduction and contestation of dominant rhythms - might contribute to more macro-sociological debates around rhythm and an alternative politics of everyday urban mobility (Crang, 2001; Lefebvre, 2004; Mels, 2004; Edensor & Holloway, 2008; Spinney; 2008, 2010; Edensor, 2010; Hornsey, 2010).

#### Mobility and Method

One of the many conceptualisations that the mobilities turn has problematised is the reduction of daily corporeal mobility to mere transport (Watts, 2008; Middleton, 2009; Spinney, 2009; Shaw & Hesse, 2010). Research on daily mobility (and cycling in particular) has been (and still is) dominated by transport geography and its associated methodological tool kit, which emphasises the calculable, modellable, and predictable aspects of movement (for a more detailed account of this trend see Spinney, 2009). Within the new mobilities paradigm there has been increasing disillusionment regarding the ability of a narrow range of methods to explain particular aspects of the practice of cycling, and indeed other forms of movement (for an excellent discussion see Shaw & Hesse, 2010). Whilst the orthodox instruments of transport geographers, such as stated preference surveys and traffic counts (see for example McClintock, 1992; Cervero & Radisch, 1996; Aultman-Hall et al., 1997; Crane & Crepeau, 1998; Parkin, 2003) might tell us something about the 'rational(ised)' push and pull and factors for cyclists, they fail to unlock the more 'unspeakable' and 'non-rational(ised)' meanings of cycling, which in no small part reside in the sensory, embodied and social nature of performance. That is not to say that the understandings produced by such statistical means do not have their place – of course they do – and I am not suggesting that some are superior to others; rather, that different methods enable us to ask different questions. However, as Cresswell (2006) and Law (1999) both note, accounts focusing on the instrumental have tended to produce static and undifferentiated accounts of everyday experience. This is in no small part because techniques such as surveys are too distant from the embodied practice of cycling, relying at best on verbalised accounts of practice divorced from the context of doing that is so fundamental to the creation of meaning in mobile practices. As a direct result of its epistemological approach to mobility, transport-oriented cycling

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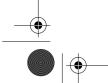
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research has narrowed its ontology of what counts as mobility, becoming overly concerned with instrumental factors as overwhelmingly determining why and how people move around. This fixation on the instrumental and 'rational' has been at the expense of the more intangible and ephemeral; the sensory, emotional, kinaesthetic and symbolic aspects of cycling. There is increasing recognition that these factors are vital in understanding how and why people move (Büscher & Urry, 2009). Watts (2008), for example, notes the importance of material objects such as laptops, sweets and music to the experience of the rail traveller. Lewis (2000) and Palmer (1996) note the importance of myriad sensations such as the touch of rock on skin or aching in the muscles. Certainly, as Hein et al. (2008) note, the senses play a significant role in defining our experience of place, yet they have been largely ignored by research methods which view them as 'irrational' factors. Similarly, Edensor (2003) and Bissell (2009) note the importance of affective factors in constituting the meanings of being mobile. Whilst often neglected, as Anable and Gatersleben (2005) note, factors such as affect need to be more prominent in cycling research if more realistic understandings of people's mobility and their travel choices are to be unearthed. However, Latham (2003b, p.1998) argues that a key problem in understanding the importance of AQ14 such factors is that, 'we simply do not have the methodological resources and skills to undertake research that takes the sensuous, embodied, creativeness of social practice seriously'. That is not to say that completely 'new' methods are required (or even possible), rather, as Shaw and Hesse (2010, p. 5) aptly comment, what is required is ...the tweaking of particular methods capable of harnessing the power of existing methodologies in mobile situations'.



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### The Challenge of Fluid Locations - 'Seeing There'

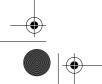
One of the key problems with researching these often fleeting aspects of mobility is that mobility is always on the move and therefore it is often difficult to apprehend, record and analyse the multiple and transient contexts and experiences of subjects. A central way in which mobilities researchers have approached this problem of fluid locations has been to employ a range of ethnographic methods. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note, location is often a prime driver behind ethnographic work, providing impetus for researching a particular group or setting but also framing a unique set of problems (36). Certainly in its earliest (anthropological) forms, ethnography was often concerned with researching one community in one location and, as Hammersley and Atkinson go on to point out, ethnographers still tend to pick either one or a small number of settings within which to conduct fieldwork (39). This is a model that has been repeated in cultural geographic enquiry where possible (see for example Crang [1994] on the geographies of service work, Cresswell [2006] on airports, Laurier et al. [2001]) on cafés, Malbon [1999] on clubbing, and Monaghan [2001] on body-building).

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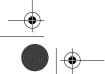
Moving beyond location-based ethnography, in an attempt to apprehend the fluidity of mobility there has been a surge of interest in techniques which emphasise 'being there' including auto-ethnography and the 'go-along' forms of mobile ethnography. Edensor (2003), for example, provides an auto-ethnographic account of car travel which seeks to illuminate the embodied and sensory production of meaning (151). AQ4

Through attentiveness to the sensations, comforts, spectacles and diverting thoughts

















and incidents of his daily journey, Edensor weaves together an account of driving made pleasurable through different ways of inhabiting the car as a 'machinic complex' (Sheller & Urry, 2000). In a similar vein Laurier (1999) provides an autoethnographic account of yachting in which he recounts how he learned the ropes of yachting by reflecting on the embodied practice of sailing.

Whilst these accounts are valuable in demonstrating the value of 'being there' and the kinds of knowledges that it can help to elicit, they are highly subjective and neither can they, nor do they, try to say anything about the multiple meanings which these practices might have for other protagonists. Indeed, auto-ethnography lends itself more to the study of practices where meanings are more consistent. For example, in previous research that I had undertaken with road racing cyclists, it was a less problematic process to conduct 'auto-ethnography' because as a culture road racing frames quite tightly the projects and understandings of its participants (Spinney, 2006; see also Palmer, 1996). I therefore found my understandings and experiences to be broadly similar to others within the group. In the conduct of urban cycling, however, I was to encounter diverse groups and individuals who cycled for many different reasons and in many different ways. As a result there would be much less kinaesthetic and symbolic consistency in how participants - and indeed I - would interpret the same practice. As a result auto-ethnography could not provide reliable and generalisable insights, an issue that I return to later in the paper in relation to calibrating the researcher's body as a research tool.

#### **Mobile Ethnography**

Numerous researchers have therefore attempted to retain the 'doing' element of ethnographic research whilst seeking to understand the experiences and movements of others. The advantage of this over less immediate or embodied methods is that it provides an insight into the situated and contextual nature of knowledges and practices. Lee and Ingold (2006) for example have focused on the practice of walking to demonstrate how places are created through routes; Lorimer and Lund (2003) have focused on the technological aspects of hill-walking to position it as a technical and technological accomplishment; and Pink (2007) has used a walk-along technique to show how people perceive the environment through the senses and constitute place through everyday mundane practice. Thus the embodied 'doing' of research in these accounts foregrounds experiential, affective and material aspects of practice which are often marginalised in less participative modes such as surveys. The value of this is that we can see how what people do – rather than what they say they do – orients them to, contests and reproduces wider spatio-temporal orderings.

In the examples above the 'location' of fieldwork is constantly moving yet the pace and mode of movement allows the researcher to be present. A logical extension of the walk-along therefore is to attempt to adapt the technique to cycling in the shape of the 'ride-along'. Certainly, the solution for Palmer (1996, 2001), and in my own (Spinney, 2006) research with racing cyclists was to ride and talk. Palmer's (1996) account of French racing cyclists draws upon observations of both her own practices and those of other participants in order to understand the embodied, social and symbolic aspects of racing and training. However, she also recounts how arduous and difficult doing so was; despite being extremely fit she relates how the intensity, distance and danger of



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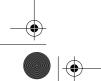
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the first group rides she went on reduced her to tears. Fitness notwithstanding, on quiet lanes and roads with little traffic the ride-along approach is not hugely problematic; as I have noted in my own research on racing cyclists (Spinney, 2006) there are plenty of opportunities to talk on 4–5 hour training rides (see also O'Connor & Brown, 2007). However, the particular modalities, spatialities and pace of certain forms of movement pose significant problems for the researcher with respect to eliciting knowledges in the context of the practice itself (Palmer ,1996; Spinney, 2006, 2007; Brown et al., 2008; Brown & Spinney, 2009). In conducting research on the often solitary and trafficladen practices of urban cycling for example, my initial problem became one of how to be able to follow people on everyday journeys and be able to talk to them about those journeys, ideally in the context of the journey. Whilst useful in certain contexts, in metropolitan locations a ride-along is often either unsafe or risks precluding the very practice it seeks to investigate, and therefore another way of accessing the experiences of mobile participants was required.

#### 'Seeing There' and 'Feeling There'

What is required in such contexts is a method of 'being there' without actually being there. One way in which researchers have tried to do this is by employing video as a way of retaining and evoking some of the context and detail of the practices under scrutiny whilst allowing the researcher to talk through practices 'as they happen' during playback with participants (see for example Laurier, 2004, 2010; Brown, 2008; Spinney, 2008; Brown & Spinney, 2009). Laurier (2010) calls this use of video in such instances a form of 'seeing there'.

Video may seem like an odd choice here because as a form of vision it will be positioned by many in the social sciences as suspect. Nowhere is this suspicion more evident than in geography where, as Crang (2003, p.500) notes, the detached and distancing gaze has been theorised as the (masculine) antithesis of collaborative and engaged qualitative work (see for example Rose, 1993). Kindon (2003, p.143) suggests that given the association of the gaze and vision<sup>3</sup> in geography, it is not surprising that video has been little utilised. However, Ingold (2000, p. 253) suggests that perhaps the association of vision and distance has more to do with the ways in which theorists have taken preconceived ideas about vision as other than active and generative into their studies (see also Jay, 1993, 1999; Shields, 2004).

MacDougall (1997, p. 287) for example notes that much that can be said about the body, time, gender, identity, emotion and the senses may best be said through film because of its capacity for synaesthesia<sup>4</sup> (in Pink, 2006, p. 49). Certainly video is increasingly finding a place in social enquiry. Laurier (2004), for example, has used video to inform his research on motorway driving. Where he was not able to accompany people in their cars he filmed their interactions to be analysed and discussed later (see Laurier, 2010 for methodological reflections on this research). Parr (2007) has used video as part of a participatory methodology to explore the worlds of those with mental health problems, and Kindon (2003) has used video as part of a participatory feminist practice of looking (see also Shrum et al., 2005; Pink, 2006). What all these examples illustrate is the way in which ordinary and fleeting aspects of everyday life can be apprehended where they were previously missed or glossed over in the production of more static texts. Congruently there is a cautious but growing

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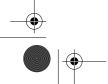
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Using Mobile Video Ethnography in Cycling Research 1

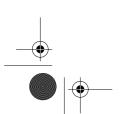
AQ14 interest in video methodologies (Pink, 2001a, 2001b, 2006, 2007; Latham, 2003b; Laurier, 2004, 2010; Spinney, 2007, 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2008; Downing & Tenney, 2008; Mausner, 2008).

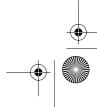
The bulk of the fieldwork discussed here centred on 20 case studies with London cyclists. The format I settled upon for each was to conduct an initial audio 'biographical' interview with each participant. Following on from this, three rides/ journeys were filmed with each participant taking in different journeys/spaces in London. For each trip a different camera angle was used in an attempt to gain a variety of perspectives. For the first journey the participant had the camera mounted on their helmet or head in order that their view of the journey could be recorded; on the second journey the researcher followed the participant with the camera and filmed them to try and get a view of what their body was doing; in the third ride the camera was mounted on the handlebars pointing back at the participant in an attempt to film the face and its expressions in response to particular events. I would also ride these routes where possible in an attempt to bridge the gap between what Laurier (2010) calls 'seeing there' and being there. However, this was not always possible, notably in the case of trials riding, BMX and some messenger riding, due to the skill and equipment required for these forms of riding (something I talk in more depth about in the section on decoding the text). Once the three rides were filmed the footage was partially edited if necessary and used as the basis for an in-depth interview. <sup>6</sup> By using video I was able to retain much of the context and detail of people's riding and talk about this with them when replaying the footage. Far from being distancing, in this instance video enables the researcher to access aspects of the journey which were previously beyond reach. Much like ethnography then, what defines mobile video ethnography is, in Geertz's (1973, p. 6) words, the intellectual effort that it is; in this instance a form of 'thick description' of the journey and in particular the sensory and affective moments of the journey. In the following sections I outline three ways in which video can aid the project of thick description in relation to the mobile practice of cycling.



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As a form of research data and representation, video data embodies the movement which the fixity of photographs and written texts so often fail to evoke. Video opens up movement for analysis in a way which would be impossible with a static image. It is unique in this regard because it spans space and time to produce a text, thereby opening up the possibility of analysing the rhythms of journeys (see Edensor, 2010); the pauses, stops, flows, weaving, waiting, rapidity and freewheeling, all of which say a lot about how and why people ride. In enabling fleeting and ephemeral movements to be played back, what was previously deemed impossible to reflect upon or seemingly insignificant can be dissected in detail. Nowhere was this clearer than when trying to elicit embodied understandings from participants. In conjunction with people's accounts of what they do, such analysis allows new meanings of existing practices to be excavated. Because we begin to illuminate how people use space and their bodies, how they interact and where and how they look, we gain a far clearer idea of how they are generating meanings through movement: video has the potential to bring us into the picture.









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To illustrate this point I want to briefly discuss an example from a spectacular form of riding known as trials riding, which involves leaping off and balancing on the street furniture on heavily modified 'trials' bikes. It is, as one rider David suggested to me, a 'very technical bodily practice' (Field diary, 11 September 2005). In an attempt to convey some of this bodily technicity and its sensuous nature, one rider Chris offered a lengthy and detailed account of one move – doing a 'gap' near St Paul's Cathedral – from start to finish (see Figure 1). Whilst there is not the space to reproduce Chris' account here, it was characterised by kinaesthetic sensations of jumping, kicking, pulling, bending, stretching, feeling, balancing and swapping between different sensory registers. In addition, Chris' account explicitly highlighted the way in which the visual all but disappeared at points, knocked out of focus by bodily movements. For example, Chris recounted how the wider world of sight disappeared as he focused, adrenalin kicked in, moves practiced a thousand times were performed seemingly unconsciously and balance was found through a sequence of hops; his body reached out and dropped suddenly and the jump was attempted with explosive force followed by a stream of quick correctional balancing manoeuvres. All this was enveloped in a stretching out of time as the world disappeared completely and Chris talked about how he exited one place and entered another by shifting between different sensory registers.

The main point that I want to draw out in relation to Chris' narration of movement is that it was the ability of video to be stopped, paused and slowed down that allowed this very nuanced account of place and the body to emerge. I was able to ask about Chris' movements as they were 'done' in a way that was impossible whilst they were actually being performed. Because of its properties as a form of field note, video enables participants to talk through embodied feelings with the researcher where they would normally be excluded from 'participating'. Accordingly, I would suggest that video can be more than just a way of 'seeing there' and as Latham (2003b) and Jarvinen (2006) have argued; as a form of audio-visuality it can be a route to other senses and feelings, a way of 'feeling there'.

**Linking Moments** 

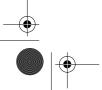
Video was also valuable as a way of linking together seemingly unconnected moments to understand how the journey becomes meaningful. I want to offer one brief example of how the playful meanings of one commuter's journey emerged through analysis of video data. When Joe (a 28-year-old office worker) talked through the video of his journey to work, he pointed out that he enjoyed the feeling and flow of cycling and would go to lengths to ensure that his journey was full of 'flow'8 (see Figure 2). Using the video he was able to show me different moments of flow and the contexts in which they originated. Through an unfolding conversation with Joe he emphasised various moments through which he maintained the 'ideal conditions' of continuous movement; the feeling of speed on the straight, weaving through traffic, running a red light, doing a track stand, cornering, and moving across spatial boundaries in order to keep his 'flow' going and make his journey more rewarding. For example, focusing on Joe's track stand at some traffic lights, he talked through how it enabled him to keep moving internally by trying to balance even though he wasn't going forward; he talked about the bodily thrill of cornering smoothly and weaving

















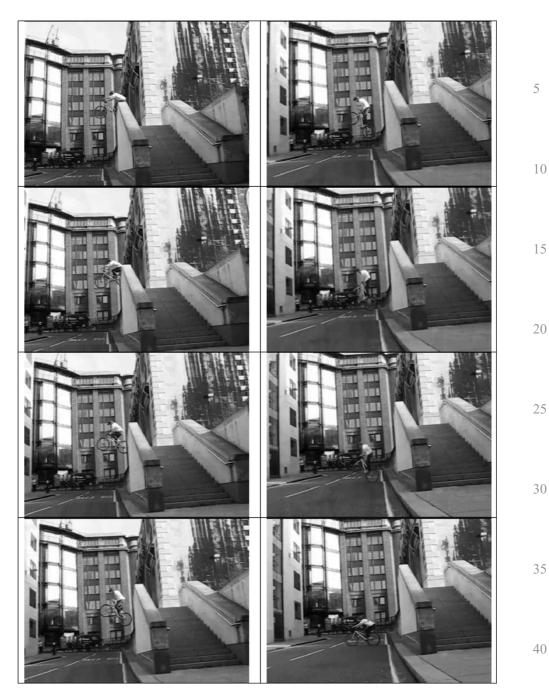


Figure 1. Chris 'doing the gap'.















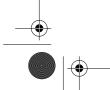


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Figure 2. Joe 'going with the flow'.















through traffic, the muscular sensations of the legs moving, and the playful way in which he carved a route out of both pedestrian and vehicle spaces.

What is of real relevance here is the way in which video helped to excavate the meaning of Joe's journey as other than utility. By facilitating the bringing together of disparate moments and experiences in the journey, video in this instance allowed the playfulness and flow of Joe's journey to be apprehended and understood. Whilst Joe could no doubt talk about these things without video, it is precisely because such things are in many ways habitually and unconsciously enacted that it is unlikely that he would have identified them as both significant and related without the video there to guide him. There is then a cautionary tale here regarding the role that video plays in partially constructing the phenomena that it sets out to research. The ability of video to repeat and rub moments up against each other serves to emphasise often unconscious and habitual movement, bringing it to the attention of the participant (and researcher) where previously it may have been 'invisible'. Video does not just disclose these new formations, rather it serves to construct them because of the way it enables spatio-temporal practices to be manipulated.

I for one do not believe this is a 'killer blow' for all techniques as Miller and Rose (2001) have demonstrated, construct to some extent that which they seek to discover. Beyond this, one insight that emerges from Joe's journey in a very valid way is the idea that it is simultaneously and inseparably a form of utility and leisure. After all, Joe could go from A to B by bus, tube or car, but none of these feels like cycling; travel choice is fundamentally about how it makes us feel and, therefore, what we do or don't want to feel. Those who persist in segregating mobility into either leisure or utility and providing accordingly would do well to understand such fundamental inter-weavings of everyday practice. As I will discuss in more depth later, one way in which the playfulness and rhythms of Joe's journey speak to broader macro-sociological issues is that they highlight the discrepancies between the rhythms materialised through instrumental understandings of movement and the rhythms produced by more situated and playful understandings.

#### Video and Vocabulary

As these accounts both suggest, video can help participants articulate their experiences of fleeting sensations because it allows them to be slowed down and replayed in a non-linear manner. Practices and moments previously deemed non-representational because of their inability to be verbalised, articulated and associated may now be articulated as representational. Moreover, as MacDougall (1997, p. 287) notes, video has synaesthetic properties in that it can to an extent represent sensory experiences beyond the visual (in Pink, 2006, p. 49). However, in the context of writing through research, in order to communicate meaning these experiences must at some point be articulated linguistically and the lack of vocabulary in sense-worlds makes this a challenging task. The dominance of the visual and aural means that there is a lack of vocabulary available when researching other sensory registers such as touch, the kinaesthetic and balance. Willis (2000, p. 27-28) points out that language can be particularly poor at articulating sensuous meanings as these are generally unformed and 'in cultural solution': 'bits of meaning inhere separately in material items or liminally in elements of practice. They cannot easily be invaded or absorbed by

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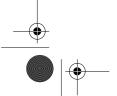
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linguistic meaning...'. As Smith (2002) noted in relation to teaching a group of dance students:

when I talked with them about how they viewed themselves, about how they saw their minds in relation to their bodies, they spoke of their cognisant abilities, their ability to solve problems or work with technology, as if this work was separate from their bodily or physical self. A few people spoke about the idea of having feelings that were part of what made them unique. None of them referred to other ways of knowing the world or themselves in terms of intuition, muscular sensation, or kinaesthesia. (p.124)

In her capacity as a dance instructor, Smith commented that this unease with the body appeared to be near-universal whether she was teaching experienced dancers or newcomers, and went on to relate how much work it required to get students talking about their movement. Following Serres (1985), Howes (2005) characterises this language-bound body as a, '...desensualised robot, moving stiffly, unable to taste or smell, preferring to dine on a printed menu than eat an actual meal' (p. 2). As Pow (2000) goes on to explain, it is often difficult for people to express their experience of senses other than vision due to the limited vocabularies associated with non-visual dimensions (p. 169, see also Jarvinen, 2006). So how might video help? As I have AQ4 already suggested, the technical and synaesthetic properties of video open up aspects of movement for scrutiny in ways not possible with more static modes of representation. In doing so, video allows participants to articulate the relationships between sensory experience, place and context in ways which were previously difficult, if not impossible. Paralleling the ways in which Smith got her dance students to talk about movement in bodily rather than intellectually-rooted ways (p. 124), as a result of the video-assisted process of being able to talk through sensory and affective meanings in different ways we can further the construction of a vocabulary for the 'unspeakable'. Accordingly, language can begin to play more of a role in how we understand and represent the embodied, the fleeting and the sensual. In this sense, video becomes a bridge between embodied practice and language, enhancing the ability of language to express the ephemeral and embodied. The use of video to elicit linguistic accounts obviously does not completely free the body from the confines of language. However, if video brings language closer to representing bodily and sensory experiences as I believe it can, it can perhaps to some extent loosen the linguistic ties that bind the

#### **Decoding the Text**

Whilst I believe that video has much to offer, it is important not to uncritically assume that video is an instant route to excavate previously inaccessible layers of meaning. As Laurier (2010, p. 111) has noted, video appears to offer the possibility that events will disclose themselves without any effort on the part of the ethnographer. This is not the case however, and the video text is authored and interpreted like any other and this needs to be remembered at all times. Accordingly, I want to highlight the importance of interpretation, audiencing and experience to the success of video as a form of representation.









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When using video, the researcher is essentially creating a reduction; a text, in much the same way they would if taking photographs or diarising events. Unlike the traditional field note however, the participant as well as the researcher becomes the audience and interpreter of the video text, albeit one where the participant may be the lead interpreter if not author. In order to successfully decode the elements of practice within the text, the viewer must find these elements of the practice culturally meaningful. Both Marks (2000) and Pink (2006) have emphasised a theory of audience which notes the cultural specificity of sensory experience in particular (Marks, 2000, p. 195 in Pink, 2006, p. 53) See also Jarvinen (2006) who notes:

...it is obvious in comparison to an average spectator, experienced dancers are always far more attuned to expressing themselves through their bodies and through movement, and are thus more likely to interpret the movements of others as their self-expression than would those 'lay' spectators who do not possess the same physical familiarity with the practice of the art form. (p. 76)

As Jarvinen suggests, people are attuned to practices in different ways and as a consequence the embodied sensations of riding might mean very little to some riders; and thus, with or without video they would find it very difficult or pointless to talk about such experiences. This was highlighted for me when reviewing a video with one participant who commented that I seemed very interested in the kinaesthetic aspects of her movement, whereas – as she pointed out –the journeys we were talking about were much more about visual connections with landscape. Video then cannot suddenly make moments, sensations and practices meaningful for participants, and as interpreters care still needs to be exercised to ensure that we do not impose our own readings over those of participants. However, for those participants for whom embodied aspects of movement resonate, I suggest that video can make it easier for these participants to talk about such things in more detail and in relation to specific contexts and places.

Taking a cue from Geertz's The Interpretation of Cultures (1973), I would further suggest that the researcher needs to attune themselves to the practice in question in as many registers of meaning as possible to minimise the danger of misinterpretation. The most effective way for the researcher to do this is to be open to, and to take on board, the many different interpretations of the practice articulated by participants. It is important to reiterate therefore that as the researcher I would also ride the same routes as participants in an attempt to bridge the gap between 'seeing there' and being there and to 'soak up' some of the feelings of riding these routes. Csordas (1999), for example, asks '...whether it is sufficient to attend to the body or whether one must in addition attend with the body, now understood as a tool for research' (p. 149). Stoller (1989, 1997) for one has written on the ways in which ethnographers' experiences in the field can be used to learn about sensory experience. Such approaches, it is argued, place an emphasis on experiential ethnography and individual subjectivity:

...the phenomenological ethnographer uses both body and intellect as research instruments and might understand personal experiences of cultural concepts that are otherwise untranslatable, through her or his own embodied experiences. (Pink, 2006, p. 43)

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Certainly Palmer (1996) suggests in her ethnography of French racing cyclists that it is only, '...by actively participating in the painful practices of everyday life that the agony of cycling becomes comprehensible' (p. 135). Such an approach foregrounds a kinaesthetic and embodied approach to interpreting the practices that other riders engage in and talk about. Differently from an interpretation of cycling practices based only upon textual representations, this approach allows an embodied and participatory interpretation where the whole body is employed in understanding the meanings of movement. I would suggest that the immediacy of insight that such an approach can allow is essential to the project of understanding mobile practices, a point made by Lorimer and Lund (2003) in relation to hill-walking: 'ultimately, by moving and interacting with hill-walkers we ensured that our ideas emerged out of, and were reworked and enriched through, direct embodied experience' (p. 132). There may, however, be significant differences between the affective capacities of researcher and researched that influence interpretation of the same phenomena. This was certainly the case in my research; as a quite experienced rider I found myself less able to understand the embodied and affective experiences of novice riders – my body had forgotten for example what it was like to ride in London for the first time. I was also unwilling to even take part in some events organised by very experienced bike messengers because they were so far outside of my 'comfort zone'. As this suggests, whilst researching and attuning the body is desirable, it is not always a successful process. Thus whilst the process of doing helps to calibrate the bodies of both the researcher and researched in order that the interpretations of both are more likely to be congruent, perhaps the best that can be hoped for in many instances is empathy rather than understanding.

Whilst video potentially offers a number of benefits methodologically, as with any other mode of representation it is impoverished as a way of establishing meaning without a knowing audience. Moreover, the power of video to convey sense-worlds, or indeed any meanings, is weakened if the viewer as the audience and interpreter of the text is unfamiliar or lacks attunement with the practice in question.

### **Discussion: From Micro to Macro**

In this paper I have made an argument for utilising video as a tool to access the more fluid and fleeting aspects of urban cycling as a mobile practice. Whilst not without its drawbacks there are three key benefits that video can bring when researching practices which are on the move and where meaning is produced through the interpretation of embodied interaction. The first of these is what Laurier (2010) calls 'seeing there'. Talking to participants whilst doing is often not possible in the case of urban cycling but video allows the researcher to 'see there' when being there is not possible. If visual insight were all that video allowed it would still be quite limiting in the elements of practice it could convey. However, the combination of audio and visual, coupled with a knowing audience gives video a capacity for synaesthesia (McDougall, 1997), the mixing and merging of sensory experience (p. 287):

film certainly can represent aspects of sensory experience visually through metaphors for that experience and willing the viewer to comprehend the film











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subject's sensory experience empathetically or comparatively through his or her own resources of experience. (Pink, 2006, p. 51)

Of course all texts have the ability to convey something of the nature of practice. Cresswell (1993) in talking about Kerouac's On the Road attests to the original form of its presentation as attempting to mimic the constant mobility of the journey by being one continuous unpunctuated paragraph on a 120-feet-long piece of paper (p. 256). However, does such an approach really get us any closer to the experience of Kerouac's road trip? In such instances, writing presents a two-fold problem because it not only attempts to reconstruct experience through ready-made concepts, but by attributing a practical and rational end to a potentially pointless act through its communication in the first place (Posso, 2006, p. 315). As Posso goes on to note, discursive thought and language require that uninterrupted flows of consciousness are dissected into discrete linear states, 'language keeps us outside reality; it fails to grasp things because it can but describe aspects of them in "lifeless" repeatable terms' (p. 315). Video as a text is not immune from many of the same criticisms that Posso raises in relation to written texts. Crucially however, video can provide much more detail of context and movement than a language-based text and is arguably more successful at putting the viewer in the picture, particularly when using first-person camera perspectives. So whilst video cannot hope to convey what it is like to be there, it can do more than simply allow the viewer to see there, providing some insight into what feeling there would be like.

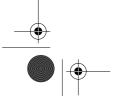
The technological capabilities of freeze-frame and slow motion, whilst implicated in the spectacularisation of movement in many ways, <sup>10</sup> can further aid analysis by allowing fleeting moments to be stretched out; bridging the gap between the representational and the so-called non-representational. As Laurier and Philo (2006) have noted, there is a tendency within non-representational thinking to see many sensory, emotional and affective facets of human experience as '...unspeakable, unsayable and unwriteable', and that any attempt to represent them, '...inherently loses them' (p. 354). Whilst I would agree that representations can only ever be a window into practice (see Spinney, 2008), as Thrift (2004) has commented, increasingly there exists

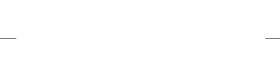
...the ability to sense the small spaces of the body through a whole array of new scientific instruments which have, in turn, made it possible to think of the body as a set of micro-geographies. Second, there is the related ability to sense small bodily movements. Beginning with the photographic work of Marey, Muybridge and others and moving into our current age in which the camera can impose its own politics of time and space, we can now think of time as minutely segmented frames, able to be speeded up, slowed down, even frozen for a while. (p. 67)

As Thrift suggests here, the possibility is thus opened up that some forms – and in particular more participatory forms – of video practice can provide a 'deep' window into embodied practices. Closely linked to this notion of video as a deep window, is the idea that video can help provide a broader vocabulary for sensory experiences other than the visual and audible. As Durkheim (1976) argues, every sensation is

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related to a particular moment that will never recur and hence actual sensations are incommunicable (Durkheim, 1976, p. 433, in Ingold, 2000, p. 158). Accordingly, Ingold (2000) notes that sensations are personal and private whilst representations are public and social and there is no way in which a sensation can be made to pass directly from one individual to another. Consequently, experiences are shared through verbal and visual means which serve as bridges to establish mutual understanding (p. 158). The benefit of video in this sense is that it is capable of conveying a greater depth and richness of content to be decoded, which in turn can enable participants to talk about sensory experiences in ways and in detail previously prohibited.

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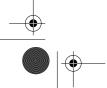
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The flip side of this is that video perhaps constructs what is being researched to a greater extent than other textual mediums. Indeed Thrift (2004) also notes the possibility that video imposes its own politics of space and time and should be treated with caution. That is not to say that the politics of the video camera can only be negative, and in fact I would highlight two ways in which the these politics might be positively assessed. Firstly the use of freeze-framing and the ability to view practices and moments repeatedly enables what we might - after Virilio's dromology (1986) describe as a counter-dromology. Dromology is the logic of speed and Virilio notes that the speed at which something happens can change its nature. Moreover, he argues that faster moving things come to dominate the slow. The importance of using video, whether it be freeze-frame techniques or simply the laborious and repetitive analysis of the everyday (Laurier, 2010, p. 116) is that in slowing down and repeating the seemingly mundane and inconsequential, meanings which had been glossed over or neglected are recuperated and the possibility arises that they may take precedence over those meanings read at 'speed'. Lorimer and Lund (2003), for example, caution against a dystopian tendency to objectify the quantification and 'fixation' of affective and embodied practice, suggesting instead that both quantifications and subjectivities arise inter-relationally through the same encounters (p. 131). Thus the use of video as a research tool, '...accords with the notion that there is nothing inherently regressive about spectatorship and images, and that readers and communities can be related together through these processes' (Borden, 2001, p. 126). As a result, technologies such as video must be seen as situated and processual rather than as 'operating upon' practices, and are therefore vital to understanding embodied and affective

performances of place and identity. It is here that I want to introduce the second way in which the politics of the video camera might be positively assessed. At the beginning of this paper I asked what might the micro-scale insights that video allows bring to the macro-sociological agendas articulated in the introduction of this special issue and mobilities research more generally. There are no doubt many ways video may contribute, but I want to focus briefly<sup>11</sup> on the role that video can play in contributing to the burgeoning literature on rhythm by highlighting an alternative politics of daily movement which unsettles official rhythms and claims to the city. As I and others have outlined elsewhere (Spinney 2008, 2010; Edensor, 2010; Hornsey, 2010), various material and socio-legal signals in the built environment attempt to define how we should move around, setting out desired forms of conduct and framing what movement means by making certain movements easier to perform than others. The corollary of this is that alternative urban rhythms become harder to imagine. However, as the example of Joe illustrated, some users regularly ride off this rhythmic 'score'; going when they should stop,















weaving when they should be stationary, and using spaces 'inappropriately'. However, the rhythmic variations outlined in Joe's account (or many others I might have given) are neither always 'criminal' (though they may be criminalised) nor resistant; rather for many riders these rhythms are constituted through a more playful engagement which is highlighted through repeated viewing, analysis and discussion of their daily movement.

It is partly video's ability to act as a deep window on practice and a as form of bridging apparatus that enables such analysis of often fleeting and taken for granted sensations, experiences and practices. As a result, previously marginalised meanings are more likely to be articulated and emphasised. What was previously deemed lessthan-representational is opened up for analysis and may be key to understanding the representational nature of embodied and everyday mobility. Whilst this is just one example, Joe's account shows how a rider can carve out a space for playful and sensory encounters even when engaged in the supposedly utilitarian practice of getting from A to B. Highlighting the importance of flow and play to the commute starts to break down the dualism of leisure and utility present in cycling discourse, suggesting that 'rational' and reductive explanations of travel as driven by what is at A and B can miss the point somewhat. As Thrift (1997, p.145) points out, whilst many theorists have regarded play as superfluous to the real business of life, in instances such as these it is seen to encourage new and meaningful configurations of experience and place. Rather than simply reproduce the dominant rhythms appropriate to these spaces, accounts such as Joe's suggest that the personal, situated understandings of riders are central to the construction of different readings of time and space. Such engagements with space invert the normative utilitarian codes of rationality that dominate road spaces, temporarily reframing them as playful and sensuous spaces. Thus the particular time-space politics of video can themselves be a useful tool in a reinvigorated mobilities agenda which seeks to highlight alternative politics of time and space in the city and beyond.

**Notes** 

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1. I use the term 'less representational' here to distinguish these elements of practice from the nonrepresentational. My point being that whilst these sensory and affective elements might be harder to apprehend and represent, they are, in many cases, profoundly significant and full of intent. This does not mean that I am suggesting that the sensory and affective can be represented 'intact', rather that some forms of representation may evoke them better than others.

The Ph.D. project built upon research undertaken for a Master's degree which looked at sensory and representational aspects of road cycling (see Spinney, 2006). The central research question for the thesis asked what structures and makes movement meaningful in the context of cycling in London. In order to answer these questions the thesis not only explored different styles of cycling in London through a series of case studies, but also the different actors (for example planners, engineers, NGOs and Borough officials) contributing to the material provision of cycling infrastructure and discursive constructions of eveling.

3. Many critics have long associated vision with mastery and hegemony in Western societies (see for example Howes, 1991; Classen, 1993; Rose, 1993). The argument goes that vision is synonymous with visualisation resulting in a representationalist theory of knowledge and the world which allows detachment and domination to arise (Ingold, 2000, p. 282), which in turn is embodied in particular ways of seeing such as the masculine 'gaze' (Rose, 1993).

As one of the referees of this paper pointed out, it was video artists rather than researchers who pioneered many aspects of video ethnography by recording, reflecting and writing about their daily

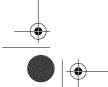
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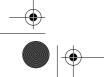
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routines. As a result video ethnography has epistemological and methodological roots which are distinct from more positivist research methods. It is also worth noting that using video as a research method has only become more plausible because of continuing innovations and the affordability of portable and digital devices.

- It is here that the first caveat to using video should be made. It can be very time-consuming and the researcher needs to gain a degree of competency with the equipment if the technology is not to get in the way of the research process. Not only did I experience a number of technical issues but achieving good camera positioning and lighting was also a learning curve of trial and error and a number of rides had to be videoed more than once due to poor camera positioning or technical failure.
- My approach was to run through both edited and non-edited videos of riding with participants in the hope that their interpretations took precedence. However, in some instances I foregrounded my own interpretation through editing video due to the time constraints of watching unedited video. I also played a role in interpreting the narratives of participants in terms of the wider goals of the project; their narratives of embodied movements and affective registers were purposely juxtaposed with abstract notions of cycling as instrumental and utilitarian. A reflexivity to interpretation is thus no less important when decoding video, rather it is if anything more important because of the extra content and detail which video can provide.
- The ability to come back to review people's movements also facilitated any further analysis of the images by me when writing through the research. Up to three years on from filming the rides, watching the videos brings back an awful lot of context and detail which would have been lost otherwise. In this way, video acts as a superior memory aid over other forms of field-noting.
- According to Ford and Brown (2006), flow is a form of peak experience which is characterised by a high level of confidence and control and a "...sense of rhythm and flow, with a sense of being on "auto-pilot", free and absorbed in the moment' (p. 159).
- This then is in part a question of how far interpretative frameworks reside within culture or embodied experience. There is scant room for a full discussion here (see Ingold [2000] for a definitive account or Spinney [2008] for an account related to cycling specifically) but what I would say in line with Ingold is that the ability to perceive a sensation as positive or significant is structured via the building up of a repertoire of bodily skills and dispositions - body knowledges or 'habitus' - which enable that sense-data to be managed. Thus cultural models are seen not to exist outside of the activity itself and body knowledges are acquired '...not through formal instructions, but by routinely carrying out specific tasks involving characteristic postures and gestures...' (p. 162). As a result, whilst 'all' subjects maintain the physiological ability to sense in a similar way, the ability to make sense is unevenly distributed. Consequently if, 'people from different backgrounds orient themselves in different ways, this is not because they are interpreting the same sensory experience in terms of alternative cultural models or cognitive schemata, but because, due to their previous bodily training, their senses are differently attuned to the environment' (Ingold, 2000, p. 162). Such a line of argument validates Cresswell's (2006) related point that in turn, "...representations of mobility are based on ways in which mobility is practiced and embodied' (p. 4). This I think is a key tenet of the prerepresentational in that the original movement takes precedence over any representation of it. This makes sense, otherwise how would any representation come into being? Crucially then, sensations can be construed as meaningful without mediation by representations (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 87). If there is one conclusion to be drawn from this, for me it is that as Ingold (2000) states, any attempt to separate the discourses of the senses from their actual practice is unsustainable: 'for what is discourse, if not a narrative interweaving of experience born of practical, perceptual activity? The meanings to which it gives rise...are not added on top of lived bodily experience, but lie in the ways in which the strands of this experience are woven together' (p. 286). Interpretation then is both embodied and discursive. Mountain-biking, trials, BMX and to a large extent messenger films, particularly the short no-budget films made by the riders themselves, can be situated within what has been termed the 'cinema of attractions'. In this form of film-making, the spectacle and performance which the image displays are emphasised over any role the image might play in the flow of narrative (Wayne, 1997, p. 102). In doing so, this form of film-making '...orientates the image towards an open acknowledgement of the spectator' (p. 102) and thus spectacle. A number of elements characterise this genre, such as the use of a single camera, low camera angles, a rider-focused misé en scene, a lack of dialogue and fast editing (Wayne, 1997). As a result the end product tends to be a relentless sequence of 'attractions' one after another which emphasise skill, bodily technicity, danger and spectacle.











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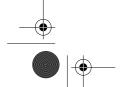
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11. For a more detailed account of mobile rhythms in relation to mobile methods see Spinney (2010) and also Boyle (2004).

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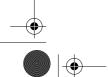
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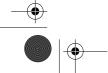
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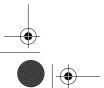


















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