

Running road races as transgressive event mobilities

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## **Abstract**

Running is a unique form of mobility because while it involves traveling over distance, it is not usually done as a means of transportation. Although running can and does take place almost anywhere, bringing together hundreds or thousands of runners at a time via an event known as a road race enables a different, transgressive occupation of space that no one runner could accomplish on his or her own. In this paper, based on participant observation, I argue that the transgressive but sanctioned nature of the mobilities that road races allow, by temporarily taking over a space devoted to motorized vehicles and turning it into a space for pedestrians, defines these events as unique moments that are only possible through the collective nature of this usually solitary form of mobility and that allow for the pleasure of being transgressive without the risks that transgression normally entails. The paper further argues for considering "event mobilities" as more than traveling in order to participate in an event, because some kinds of mobility are only possible in the context of an event.

**Keywords:** mobilities, running, transgression, events, road races

## **Introduction**

In recent work in this journal and related publications, geographers and others have argued for considering the cultural and social meanings of mobility as more than getting from one place to another (Adey 2009, Bissell 2009, Cresswell 2006, Jones 2005, Watts 2008). Walking and cycling have been considered at length by mobilities scholars because of their blend of functionality

and kinaesthetic pleasure as modes of travel (Jones 2005, Middleton 2010, Spinney 2006), or how they allow us to apprehend the landscape in new ways (Wylie 2005). Other forms of mobility such as dance or skateboarding have been studied because of the importance of bodily movement even if a journey is not taking place (Cresswell 2006, Edensor 2010, Flusty 2000, Spinney 2010).

Running, however, has fallen through the cracks of mobility studies. Running is a particularly unusual form of mobility because it is one of the few where mobility is done for its own sake (the handful of "running commuters" aside (Freeman 2013)). Generally speaking, we do not run as a means of getting from one place to another, except perhaps when we are a block away from an approaching bus or train. But unlike dance or skateboarding, even if we stay within one location while running, for example doing laps around a track, the goal is still to cover a distance. On the occasions when we *do* run to get from one place to another, it is generally within the context of a staged event, known as a road race.

In John Urry's categorization of the reasons why we still travel in this age of instant, mobile communication, he includes events as one of the categories (Urry 2001). Compared to his other categories such as talking with people face-to-face or experiencing place through bodily senses, event mobilities have rarely been taken up by mobilities scholars. There are many such events that we can imagine traveling to in order to experience: concerts, conferences, exhibits, political rallies, family reunions, and sporting events, to name a few. This conceptualization treats "event mobilities" as "events" as separate from "mobilities," where travel is required to get to a static event. But we can also think of a type of event that is itself mobile: not only

would the mobility not happen without the event, much as a person might not travel to a city unless there is a conference going on, but the mobility *is* the event.

In this article, I draw together these two under-studied elements of mobility—running and event mobilities—via the road race. Road races are events of between a mile and marathon length, using spaces that are usually reserved for cars and turning them over to people to run or walk on for the duration of the event. They may be large events that draw tens of thousands of people to major cities, or they may be small events that draw few participants outside of the towns where they take place. While road races are primarily an American phenomenon due to the history of jogging and running for exercise and competition dating back to the 1970s, major races such as marathons occur and draw participants from all over the world. In many cases, these races involve traversing ground which normally can only be covered in an automobile, such as the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge on the New York City marathon course, or are not normally open to the public at all, such as the Indianapolis Speedway on the Indianapolis half marathon course or a 5K race held on a runway of Dulles International Airport.

Here, I draw on participant observation (Denison 2006, Edensor 2003, Jones 2005, Sheehan 2006) of two different types— as volunteer/spectator and as runner—to argue for the temporary and sanctioned transgressive nature of these mobility events as a motivation for participating in them. Specifically, it is the transgressive nature of the mobilities that road races allow, by temporarily taking over a space devoted to motorized vehicles and turning it into a space for pedestrians, that defines these events as unique moments of possibility that are only possible through the collective nature of this usually solitary form of mobility. At the same time,

participants are able to enjoy occupying space in a way that is normally forbidden without the risk of being thought of as deviant, which is normally a part of transgression (Cresswell 1996). Without the event, pedestrian mobility through these spaces could not happen.

I begin by considering previous work on road races, which has examined participants' motivations in a number of ways but has not considered the mobilities involved in the event. I then discuss running as a form of mobility, comparing it to existing work on cycling, trains, walking, and others. This is followed by a discussion of fieldnotes from participant observation as a runner in the Chicagoland Speedway 5K in Joliet, IL, and as a volunteer/spectator in the Illinois Marathon in Champaign-Urbana, IL. While research on participants' motivations has determined that there are a wide variety of reasons for being part of a road race, and therefore my own experience is not generalizable to the running population as a whole, the paper nevertheless contributes to the study of both mobilities and running by demonstrating the temporarily transgressive nature of event mobilities as a potential motivation to participate, and as another reason for bodily travel to matter in the virtual era.

### **Road races as events**

In his discussion of why physical travel still matters when instant communication is readily available, Urry (2001) includes 'to watch an event live' (p. 241). We can imagine this to include concerts, sporting events, political rallies, or other such events that are limited to a specific time and space. Travel to get to these events is important enough that it has its own body of literature within tourism studies (Getz 2008), much of it considering the economic development implications for places that host such events, from megaevents like the Olympics to local fairs

or festivals. Some events, however, include mobilities in and of themselves. Road races are one such case. The point is not only to be in a specific place at a specific time, but to move through space in a way that can only be done *at that time*. Because road races involve changing the nature of roadways from spaces for automobiles to spaces for pedestrians, there has to be a large group acting as part of a sanctioned event to make that change happen. The slower runners in a road race are warned that the course will be opened back up to traffic at a certain time, and if they are not moving quickly enough, they will have to move to the sidewalks. On the one hand, this means they run the risk of making it to the finish line too late and not officially finishing the race. On the other hand, they will have lost the special status of runners moving through the streets and would become indistinguishable from regular residents out for a stroll or jog through their neighborhood. This type of event may include mobility, but this type of mobility also includes the event.

There is a significant amount of research within tourism and leisure studies about running and road races, especially within work on event tourism (Getz 2008). Much of this work focuses on either elite runners or major races like the Boston or London Marathons, or charity events where participants not only run, but raise money for (usually) health or medical causes in the process (Filo et al. 2009, Nettleton and Hardey 2006). Exploring runners' motivations for participation is the major thrust of this work, going beyond the personal benefits of running to include the camaraderie that stems from being part of a larger event as well as the good feelings from contributing to a worthy cause. Unsurprisingly, motivations for participating in running events, whether for charity or not, vary substantially from runner to runner (McGehee et al. 2003). Nevertheless, clusters of participant types can be identified based on their

motivations and demographics, including the desire to travel to a specific destination (Funk et al. 2007, Ogles and Masters 2003). Much of this work emphasizes the marketing aspects of the findings for purposes of economic development (e.g., Hallmann et al. 2010; but see Nettleton and Hardey 2006 for a more critical approach).

Early research on running and road races was criticized for preferring quantitative, positivist methodologies over those that consider motivations and meaning with an underlying theoretical framework (Weed 2005). More recent work on 'hallmark events' such as major urban marathons has responded to this criticism, using participant observation in addition to surveys or interviews in order to get at the meanings of these events for individuals. This includes exploring why people travel to distant places for such events. Generally speaking, runners who are more intensely involved are more willing to travel to events, perhaps even on an international scale (Getz and Andersson 2010). Such travel helps to cement individuals' identity as runners, not only through the journey itself and the resulting 'collection' of places, but through wearing t-shirts from previous, distant events as a marker of pride in their experience or as a starting point for conversation (Shipway and Jones 2008). Being far from home and on an unfamiliar route also confirms individuals as serious runners, meeting challenges unavailable to them at home (*ibid.*).

Some of this work from tourism and leisure studies considers obliquely the paradox behind people journeying for hundreds or thousands of miles to travel on foot for a relatively short distance, but this paper does so explicitly. I argue that we should consider an additional motivation for participating in road races: the unique mobility they enable as organized events.

The camaraderie that comes from running with a group is part of this (Filo et al. 2009), but so is the occupation of spaces that are not traditionally available to pedestrians. The following section discusses running as a form of mobility in more detail, drawing on existing work on other forms of mobility and relating it to my own experiences as an amateur runner and race volunteer.

### **Running and road races as forms of mobility and transgression**

For the most part, we do not run for purposes of transportation, but for physical fitness. For many people, the reason to run is to enjoy the movement of one's body, including pushing the limits of that body in terms of speed and/or endurance. Like cycling, there may be pleasure associated with feeling one's speed as the world flashes by, experiencing or performing the city or other landscapes in a different way (Jones 2006). Or we may find pleasure in feeling our muscles move in a regular rhythm, the kinaesthetics that can only be experienced by a body in motion (Spinney 2006). For others, running is done to shape one's body by increasing lung capacity, strengthening muscles, losing weight, etc., where the outcome is more important than the process. Finally, for some people, part of the experience comes from measuring our time and distance and racing against ourselves. These motivations are not mutually exclusive, of course, and there are many other reasons why runners run, as mentioned in the previous section. One of the advantages of running as a form of exercise or a hobby is the ubiquity of its availability. Weather permitting, running can be done solo, anywhere and at any time. Of course, the definition of 'bad weather' varies from person to person and climate to climate, including extremes of heat, cold, precipitation, and wind. Different individuals have preferences

for the time of day and weather conditions under which they run, but for the most part, running is a solitary yet potentially ubiquitous sport.

Nevertheless, there are running events that bring together runners (and walkers) of widely varying capabilities to a single time and place. While the section above described work from a leisure studies or tourism studies perspective with regards to the reasons for participation in such events, there are also experiential elements of road races. In particular, the auto-ethnographic approach that has been used in cycling (Spinney 2006), driving (Edensor 2003), and walking (Middleton 2009, Wylie 2005), among others, can also be used to elucidate meaning from running. The Crescent City Classic in New Orleans has been studied in this manner as a noteworthy example of how a road race performs different functions for participants, sometimes for the same person as they journey through the race (Sheehan 2006). This example also illustrates how the city and the race are understood through each other, meaning that the New Orleans experience might not be repeatable in other locations because of the fun-loving reputation of this city.

In particular, an ethnographic approach reveals how despite the solitary nature of many runners, relationships also matter in the sense of sharing the event with other people. This includes getting one's children to come out and run alongside for the whole race or part of it, running with a group of friends or colleagues even if it means finishing more slowly, or non-runners cheering on their friends and family, making this very solitary sport not so solitary. In fact, road races offer multiple opportunities to participate in ways other than running. Spectators are an important part of these events, from encouraging flagging runners to

contributing to the general celebratory atmosphere (Sheehan 2006). For larger events, volunteers are essential to making the race possible, not only in terms of handling participant registration in advance and clean-up after the race, but in keeping the race course clear of vehicular traffic. Even if they are not running down the middle of the road, these non-running participants are also experiencing the streetscape in an atypical way. This experience, the chance to occupy space as a pedestrian that is normally reserved for cars, is a reason not previously considered for participating in road races as a runner or walker, a spectator, and as a volunteer. It is the atypical nature of mobility inherent to road races that makes them attractive to some participants, something that has not been previously considered in either mobility studies or studies on running.

Furthermore, road races are a type of mobility that can only be experienced collectively, in part because of their transgressive nature. In discussing transgression, I draw on the work of Tim Cresswell, whose In Place/Out of Place defined transgression as "to have been judged to have crossed some line that was not meant to have been crossed" (Cresswell 1996, p. 23), usually in a geographic context. Cresswell notes that resistance is based on intention and may or may not go noticed, while transgression is based on results, including its visibility to others in terms of breaking the social norms of a particular place. In contrast, in the case of road races, the transgression of pedestrians into vehicular space is very clearly sanctioned and ordered. Nevertheless, I would argue that this is part of its appeal: participants can transgress into space which they can normally only occupy from inside a moving vehicle (if at all) without the physical risk of encountering said vehicles and without the social risk of being labeled as deviant (Cresswell 1996). The next two sections illustrate this based on fieldnotes from participant

observation in two different road races in Illinois: the Chicagoland Speedway 5K in Joliet and the Illinois Marathon in Champaign-Urbana<sup>1</sup>.

### **Running the Chicagoland Speedway**

At the Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, IL, in April 2012, a track that is normally used only a few times a year for NASCAR vehicles is opened annually in April for a two-lap footrace totaling 3.1 miles. (Contrast this race, for example, to Grand Prix races that turn city streets into racecourses, trading one kind of automobile for another (Cheng and Jarvis 2002)). I ran this race in 2010 and 2012, and I draw on the experience of both races to illustrate some elements of road races as a type of event mobility. Having never attended a NASCAR event, I cannot speak to all of the differences between the track on race day and when I observed it, but I am fairly certain that when attending a NASCAR race, one is not able to drive directly into the infield. That was the first sign that we were using this space in an atypical way, parking in an area normally reserved for racecar drivers and their crews.

Not everybody in a 5K run participates in the same way. This event was hosted by a local high school, and so some of the runners were members of the high school track team, competing to beat each other and win the race. Many of us had no such ambitions, but merely wished to experience the event of running with a large group of people, of pushing ourselves or testing ourselves against others. There were a number of families there as well, with children (almost all boys) who ran if not the entire race, at least one lap around the track. There were also a number of participants (mostly older) who chose to walk entirely instead of run. Even though

the race was not taking place on city streets, there was still a set time by which everyone was expected to vacate the track so that cleanup could commence.

The race started on the pit road, in the interior of the large, oval track and parallel to a straightaway, all of which had been blocked off to vehicular access. Standing on that road and seeing the thick black tire marks from where racecars screeched to a stop for tire and oil changes mid-race was a clear reminder that we were not in a space meant for pedestrians. And yet at the moment, we were the only ones allowed to be there. The track itself is of course steeply banked at the turns, and many people waiting for the race to begin, especially children, would walk or run up that steep slope to experience a road surface on which they would probably never drive or ride. Normally, not even a regular driver is allowed on this surface, only highly skilled drivers in specialized vehicles with a singular purpose. Furthermore, most of those drivers and their crews are young, white men, whereas the group of people participating in the 5K race was much more diverse in terms of age, gender, and race. To be able to walk or run in a space that is designed for racecars and the people associated with them is extremely unusual, and it is the main reason why I drove for an hour and a half to run for thirty-four minutes.

After the starting gun went off, and runners and walkers shuffled into position based on their relative paces, the group quickly thinned out into a line one or two people wide around the track. As with most road races, there were water stations set up so that participants didn't have to carry their own water. Garbage cans were placed several yards past the water station, with volunteers ready to pick up any cups that were not discarded directly into the bins. The course involved traveling down the pit road, making one complete lap on the track, and making most

of a second lap to finish along the pit road. This meant that the fastest runners were turning back onto the pit road to finish while the slowest runners were still finishing their first lap, minimizing conflict between runners moving at different speeds. Mile markers were posted, but the only visible clock was at the finish line, meaning that runners had to either carry their own timepieces or know their pace very well over the entire course of the race.

After finishing, my parents talked about how they should invite my aunt and uncle, both NASCAR fans, to come to the race next year. Even if they only walked around the track once, it would be an experience that they otherwise couldn't have, to walk on foot in a space that normally belongs to not just automobiles, but high-performance racing cars. The road race allowed us access to a space that is not usually open to the public, and when it is, is reserved for a handful of drivers. There was no re-routing of traffic necessary, and no temporary closure of streets—in fact, there was a temporary opening of roadways to the public, at least members of the public who had registered for the race. Even when the speedway was open for its official function, we would not have been allowed to drive into the infield or walk the pit road. In contrast, most road races take place at least in part on city streets, necessitating more interaction with the non-racing public, as shown in the next section.

### **Enabling running events**

The Illinois Marathon has run since 2009 in Champaign-Urbana, IL, 130 miles south of Chicago, including a half-marathon and 5K in addition to the main event. It is advertised as a race that qualifies those who finish under a certain time to participate in the Boston Marathon—furthermore, because of the local topography, it is one of the flattest courses on which runners

can qualify for Boston. The race starts and finishes on the University of Illinois campus, looping to the east through the city of Urbana for the first thirteen miles, after which the half-marathoners finish, and then looping westward through Champaign before finishing on the track in the main stadium. Participation in the race has grown exponentially, up to nearly 20,000 runners in the three events. The race attracts entrants from all fifty states and a dozen foreign countries, as opposed to the 5K at the speedway, which only had one participant who traveled over a hundred miles.

Because of the length of the race, the course is on city streets for all but the last few tenths of a mile. The course has been slightly re-aligned each year to minimize the disruption to vehicular traffic, but there can still be significant delays. Drivers are not allowed to cross the street that runners are on unless there is a wide enough gap for them to do so—the runners have the right-of-way. Volunteers are stationed at every intersection along the 26.2 miles to instruct drivers as to alternate routes they can take or to help them cross when the running traffic clears, which can take 20-30 minutes during the peak period. For a few hours on a Saturday morning in April, automobility must cede to runners and walkers. I participated for the first four years of the race as a volunteer (and the fifth year as a runner). Being a volunteer provides the opportunity to enforce the subversion of automobility, to tell cars where they can and can't go. There is a certain amount of enjoyment that comes from this reversal of power above and beyond the good feeling of being a volunteer.

The relationship between runners and non-runners is even more noticeable in the marathon. In the first few years of volunteering, I was stationed either on a commercial street or adjacent to

the university, and so there was only a handful of spectators from the immediate neighborhood. In 2012, I was stationed in a residential neighborhood at an intersection where the runners were turning from northbound to westbound on one side of a temporary barrier that went diagonally through the intersection, and cars were on the other side, turning the other direction. Spectators lined up along the barrier, holding signs and watching for friends or family in the race. A running club from Chicago chose this corner to set up a tent and offer their own refreshments to their club members when they came by. Most spectators stayed long enough to watch for the person or people they knew in the race and then left. Sometimes they had to guess when and where to be based on the runner's expected pace, while others were texting or following tweets from the runner on the course. As the race went on, there were drivers who would pull up to the curb and park in what was ordinarily a lane of traffic, hop out to cheer a particular runner, and then drive away, presumably to repeat the process at a different intersection. Since traffic volume was very low, and police were concerned with keeping the race going and not with issuing traffic tickets, this transgression of the normal rules of the road was as accepted as was the takeover of the streets by twenty thousand runners.

This temporary appropriation of the streets by pedestrians occurred one of three ways depending on the layout of the course, each of which had different implications for drivers, runners, and volunteers. An intersection where the runners turned had a diagonal barrier, meaning that cars could still make a left or right turn in half of the intersection, though many drivers saw the barrier from a block or more away and turned off in advance to avoid the intersection altogether. A second type of intersection was a straightaway where the runners had right-of-way on the entire road, and drivers were trying to cross. Volunteers were strictly

instructed to give the runners priority and not let cars across until there was a sufficient gap. This included irate drivers who needed to get to work, FedEx drivers trying to deliver a package, and others whose mobility unfortunately intersected that of tens of thousands of runners. All the drivers could do was wait, some very impatiently despite the announcements in local media and information that had been mailed to every residence within the vicinity of the race course. The third type was where only part of the road was reserved for runners, such as a two-lane road with a turn lane in the middle where one lane was marked off with traffic cones for runners and one lane in each direction for cars. This was most common on the parts of the course after the half-marathoners had turned off; the volume of runners dropped considerably and runners were more spread out, making it hard to justify closing the entire road. Volunteers at intersections still had to make sure cars and runners were in the proper lanes, especially cars coming from side streets, but overall, potential conflicts were greatly reduced compared to the second type of intersection<sup>2</sup>.

Telling drivers where they could and couldn't go carried some risk for volunteers because of potential negative reactions to being told that at this point in time, *drivers* were the ones transgressing by using the streets. Therefore, local police were stationed at some key intersections, while others roamed the course to monitor multiple locations. The extra authority that a police officer lent to the situation (beyond the official-looking reflective vests of volunteers) was welcome when drivers were not willing to accept the incursion of pedestrians into their space. For example, at Mile 1, the street approaching this fairly busy intersection from the south had to be blocked off well before the start of the race, which volunteers and police did with traffic cones. However, some impatient drivers realized they could cut through a

gas station on the corner and access the street where runners would soon be approaching. The police officer who was monitoring that intersection went into his trunk for a roll of yellow crime scene tape and blocked off the exits from the gas station onto the racecourse. During the race, volunteers noticed more than one car being stymied by that yellow tape in their attempt to cut through the gas station. Because of the high volume of traffic and the fact that the course ran through this intersection multiple times, police presence was maintained throughout the race, meaning that volunteers had backup if drivers became belligerent about not being able to go where they wanted<sup>3</sup>.

After the last runners and walkers passed, along with the chase cars following behind them, the course was officially reopened. Public works employees came by to remove traffic cones and barriers, and within a few minutes, the space was transformed from a marathon course back into a standard city street. Runners who were going too slowly were told they would have to walk on the sidewalk if they wanted to continue, because the transgression of pedestrians into automobile space had officially ended. The time-specific nature of this event was thus clearly emphasized: while anyone could take place in the mobility of pedestrians through a space normally reserved for automobiles, that transgression was only possible within a narrow window of time (and only for those who had paid to register). Furthermore, the level of transgression was based on the number of people participating in the event together: once the main pack of runners was through, cars were allowed to cross the race course as long as they didn't interfere with the handful of runners still going by. Non-runners were key to this participation as well: a few weeks before the marathon, event organizers warned the public via local media that if they didn't have enough volunteers to watch all of the intersections along

the way, they wouldn't be able to hold the race. The event mobility of the road race therefore depends on a transgression of standard mobilities and spaces, but only within a closely circumscribed time and space, and only because of the interconnections among the multiple kinds of participants, runners and otherwise.

### **Transgressive mobility events**

This paper began by pointing out that running as a form of mobility and events as a motivation for mobility have both been neglected within mobilities studies. The road race serves as a way of bringing these two together, demonstrating how the temporarily transgressive nature of the mobility of this particular event is a defining characteristic that explains why some participants travel hundreds or thousands of miles by car or plane to journey a few miles on foot. After all, anyone can run 3.1 or 26.2 miles from wherever they live, so why journey to another location solely for that purpose?

Unlike events such as Critical Mass or Ciclovía, there is no deliberately utopian element to road races. There is no call (however quiet) to take back the streets for non-automotive traffic as with the monthly Friday-evening rides of Critical Mass and their performance of bicycles as traffic (Furness 2007), or as with the official banishment of cars from a major street on a Sunday morning for the cyclists, inline skaters, and walkers of Ciclovía (Sarmiento et al. 2010). Nor are there elements of resistance to the standard use of urban space as in skateboarding or urban cycling (Borden 2001, Chiu 2009; but see Spinney 2010), or if such elements exist, they are closely circumscribed in time and space. Runners are given a specific amount of time to complete the course, after which they have to finish on sidewalks like any everyday jogger

going through the neighborhood, or have to vacate the premises as in the case of the Speedway. Most of these events are held only once a year, in part because of the large amount of (volunteer) labor that goes into them, but also because the transgression of automobile space can only be allowed infrequently. The infrequency of these events is part of why the underlying political motivation of imagining the streets differently is not present in a road race the same way it is in the cycling events mentioned above. The temporary transgression of pedestrians onto major streets or race courses may be pleasurable precisely because it is only for fun and doesn't involve the weight of trying to effect political change.

There is also the event-specific nature of this form of mobility. As stated above, running is a sport that can be done at almost any time and in almost any place. But the road race makes a certain kind of transgressive mobility possible. Without hundreds or thousands of people coming together in one space-time, the temporary occupation of automobile space would not be possible. For example, in the Chicagoland Speedway race, there was a palpable feeling of being in a space that was made for cars, the concrete track very different from a running track surface despite its similar shape, the high banked turns and mesh fences emphasizing that the danger inherent in this place during "normal" conditions, even if the track stands empty most days of the year. For many people, there might also have been some minor transgression involved in occupying a space usually dominated by young, white, male professional athletes. Nevertheless, we would not have been able to show up on any other Saturday morning and access the racetrack; the sanctioning of the event was necessary in order to experience this particular form of mobility. The same is true of races that traverse major bridges such as the Verrazano-Narrows or the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, or that go through areas that usually have

completely restricted public access, such airport runways at Charlotte, O'Hare, or Dulles International Airports.

For the Illinois Marathon, the main attraction was probably not the excitement of the destination or the tourism opportunities it afforded (Funk et al. 2007), but the 'flat, fast' nature of the course itself. Local participants could run the course at any time, since there are sidewalks or pedestrian paths over almost its entire length. Nevertheless, participating in the event offered the opportunity to share the experience with other people and also to run on streets that they might travel every day by automobile, seeing their city in a new way (Sheehan 2006). At the same time, if transgression involves being seen by others as boundary-crossing, risking the label of deviant or rebel (Cresswell 1996), that risk is minimized here. The boundary-crossers are the drivers who cross the path of the racecourse, not the runners, as seen by police enforcement of the racecourse. Runners would normally be on the sidewalks, not in the street (although there are runners, especially in the winter, who prefer to run in the street for more even footing). Participants can therefore enjoy the transgressive pleasure of occupying space they are normally discouraged or banned from being in, without running the physical risk of challenging cars or the social risk of being seen as deviants<sup>4</sup>. In fact, runners are being cheered on by crowds and honored for their athletic accomplishments by being in that very space at that time. There is still a circumscription of space going on: runners are required to keep to the course, and in larger races where GPS-enabled chips are attached to a shoe or clothing, runners may be disqualified if they deviate from the course. The only intersections where runners have the right-of-way are those with volunteers holding back traffic; everywhere else in town, cars still have primacy. Nevertheless, the pleasure to be had by temporarily transgressing the

"natural" order of things by being a pedestrian in a vehicular space is enhanced by the sanction of the event, which removes the risk of being truly transgressive and going outside the bounds of accepted behavior.

Road races are therefore a prime example of how physical mobility still matters in a virtual era. Although running can and does take place almost anywhere, bringing together hundreds or thousands of runners at a time enables a different, transgressive occupation of space that no one runner could accomplish on his or her own. At the same time, this one form of mobility is intertwined with many others, including virtual travel to the race course ahead of time, journey by car or plane to the event site itself, and the movement of objects such as t-shirts, water bottles, and traffic cones to, from, and along the race course. Participants in event mobilities therefore cannot substitute virtual travel for physical, because the experiences they are seeking are only possible in conjunction with other participants in a monitored, structured space. In other words, events make possible specific forms of mobility (of which running is only one example), as well as sanctioned transgressions: temporarily enabling the occupation of space that is usually off limits without fear of consequence.

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<sup>1</sup> While I have also participated as a runner in two different half marathons, my energies were devoted to completing these races and not to taking fieldnotes. I will make brief reference to these experiences, but they are not the focus of this article.

<sup>2</sup> This is not always the case in a road race; the Newport Half Marathon in Newport, RI, for example, cannot close the course to cars because there are no alternative routes around the peninsula. Orange cones designate one lane of a two-lane road for runners, while the other lane must be shared by cars going both directions.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the lack of volunteers or police along the Newport course meant that drivers were crossing the course at will, regardless of approaching runners. Some even swore at runners and demanded they get off the road, turning runners into the transgressors.

<sup>4</sup> The failure of the Newport organizers to keep cars from entering the race course resulted in a great deal of confusion on the part of both runners and drivers, especially when drivers started swearing at runners for occupying road space. Runners did not expect to be *actually* transgressing the rules of the road but assumed their presence on the road was sanctioned by other users, as is usually the case with a road race. Being placed in the role of transgressor by drivers therefore made this race occasionally dangerous and much less enjoyable.