

Article

# 'A Very Unstatic Sport': An Ethnographic Study of British Savate Classes

James Victor Southwood<sup>1</sup> and Sara Delamont<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Freelance Savate teacher, London SE1 8TG, UK; LondonSavate@co.uk

<sup>2</sup> School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff CF10 3AT, UK

\* Correspondence: delamont@cardiff.ac.uk

Received: 28 September 2018; Accepted: 24 November 2018; Published: 5 December 2018



**Abstract:** The empirical focus of this paper is a martial art, Savate, which has received little scholarly attention from social scientists in the English-speaking world. The disciplinary framework is based on symbolic interactionist approaches to bodies, embodiment and movement. The ethnographic methods employ the research agenda of John Urry as set out in his wider call for a mobile sociology. Here Urry's research agenda is used as a strategy: a key goal for ethnographic researchers. The utility of Urry's sociological work on mobilities for scholarship on combat sports is exemplified. Until now that approach has not been widely used in martial arts investigations or sports studies. The data are drawn from an ethnographic study conducted dialogically by an experienced Savate teacher and a sociologist who observes him teaching. Nine ways in which the ethnographic data on Savate classes are illuminated by the mobilities paradigm are explored so that previously unconsidered aspects of this martial art are better understood and the potential of Urry's ideas for investigating other martial arts and sports is apparent.

**Keywords:** ethnography; mobilities; teaching; mobile methods; Savate; *assaut*

## 1. Introduction

The title 'A very unstatic sport' comes from the only British book about Savate (also known as *boxe français* or French kickboxing) written by two pioneers of the sport in the United Kingdom [1]. They stress that *tireurs* (Savate fighters) keep up on their toes, move constantly, and 'dance about'. Savate enthusiasts believe learning the martial art is mentally absorbing and its 'unstatic' nature means that regular training is a way to produce physically fit and mentally alert women and men.

This paper is explicitly designed to place Savate among the ethnographic, and symbolic interactionist, approaches to the sociology of sport. It is written by James Victor Southwood an experienced Savate teacher (a *Professeur*) and a sociologist, Sara Delamont. The authors reflect on key issues arising from their research which is itself literally and metaphorically 'unstatic', using the sociologist John Urry's work on mobilities as a methodological strategy for improving interactionist ethnography [2]. The focus is both on the teaching of movements in routine classes and their display at grading events and competitions.

There are three varieties of Savate. One (*canne*) uses canes in ways parallel to fencing, the other two are varieties of unarmed contest called *assaut* and combat. Both these use punches and kicks. *Assaut* is designed so the *tireur* scores points when the blows land, lightly, on designated areas of the other fighter's body but does not hurt his or her opponent. Combat is more like boxing or kickboxing with blows and kicks that are intended to hurt. The research reported here is only about *assaut*. Savate is primarily a European sport but at the time of writing the international governing committee is explicitly building it up on other continents in the hope of getting it into the Paris Olympics in 2024. When the 2016 World Savate *Assaut* Championships were held in Croatia, forty nations sent teams, including the UK: who won four medals, a silver and three bronzes. Despite international success, the sport remains invisible in Britain as a martial art and in the academic scholarship on sport.

English language writing on Savate is sparse. In addition to Reed and Muggeridge [1] there is an American book by Tegner [3,4] for practitioners. There is no chapter on Savate in Sanchez Garcia and Spencer's [5] collection of papers by social scientists who study and practice martial arts. Crudelli's lavish picture book on martial arts [6], which runs to 345 A4 pages, only has half a page with one contemporary photograph on Savate (270), and does not mention the differences between *assaut* and combat, or indicate which the picture illustrates. In contrast Parkour (urban free running) has a whole page with three photographs (271) and the South East Asian martial arts each have large sections of 8–10 pages. One contemporary source exists in English: the Green and Svinth [7] encyclopaedia has an entry by Loudcher [8] focused exclusively on Savate in France.

Reed and Muggeridge [1] explain their characterisation of the sport as 'unstatic' as follows: 'When you fight you usually dance about instead of staying rooted to one spot: it makes you harder to hit' (p. 66). This is not only a useful way to think about succeeding in the ring as a Savate tireur but also a way to characterise the difficulties of managing a career as a Savate teacher outside France. James Southwood is a world championship medallist and teacher, an expert in the ring and has sustained a viable evening class in London for fourteen years. The ethnographer (Sara Delamont) has been observing James's classes for ten years, and seen how 'unstatic' Savate is: both as an embodied discipline and as a career. A co-authored paper [9] describes basic features of Savate in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and analyses James's career and philosophy. This paper proposes a symbolic interactionist framework for exploring Savate itself.

Waskul and Vannini [10] set out the history and current state of a symbolic interactionist approach to the sociology of the body, focused on it as an embodied phenomenon. They drew out the importance of reflexive embodiment, the performative body, the phenomenological body, the socio-semiotic body and the narrative body as the main interactionist approaches to the study of bodies. All these interactionist approaches to the embodiment are apparent in the Savate research. We approach those topics drawing on Urry's [2] landmark work on both a mobile sociology and a sociology of mobilities, and we demonstrate that symbolic interactionist ethnographic research can be enriched by it. He argued that sociological research had to develop and deploy methods which recognised nine types of mobility that characterise the contemporary world (which are explained below). Our use of Urry here is to sharpen the ethnographic gaze rather than reflect on the mobile world that Urry was concerned with [2]. A core concern of classic symbolic interactionist fieldwork advocated by Geer [11] and Becker [12] is that it must *make* the familiar anthropologically strange. In their work the familiar was medial education and hospitals, school teaching in urban Chicago, and liberal arts degree courses at Kansas State University. Here we follow their precept focusing on the symbolic interactionist approaches to the body advocated by Waskul and Vannini [10]

The fieldwork has been done on three of the four types of event where Savate *assaut* is publically visible: routine classes, competitions and grading days when tireurs in *assaut* progress, via formal testing, up a hierarchy of glove colours from blue to silver. No observation has been done on sessions where officials are trained, nor on any Savate tireur practicing alone, having a private lesson, or gaining a teaching qualification. Bodies and embodiment are central in those contexts of course and Savate is unstatic in those settings too, but we have no ethnographic data on them.

Precisely because Savate is little known, and the core of the paper is the ethnography we start by presenting material from a typical London class in May 2015. The reader can get a sense of how Savate is taught and learnt in the UK, and begin to understand what movements Savate involves. A brief description of the research methods follows before the account of how 'unstatic' Savate can be studied and analysed to produce better ethnographic insight in the nine ways Urry proposed.

## 2. A British Savate Class Observed

All names except those of the authors are pseudonyms.

The class takes place in a small dance and aerobics studio in a large commercial gym in central London. Most members come to use the expensive machines, running, power walking,

or bench-pressing weights. The studio has mirrored walls, a high quality parquet floor, and a music centre. It is built under a railway line, and has a bare brick ceiling, which sheds grit onto the floor whenever a train goes overhead. It is cold in winter, so a thorough warm up is sensible, and hot on this summer evening.

The class begins around 7.35 p.m. The students, who have put on their kit in the changing rooms, line up facing James and an advanced student, Lawrence Todhurst, who is working towards being an *Initiateur*, the first grade of teacher. James usually has at least one student preparing to be a teacher, which involves not only gaining supervised practical experience but also producing a portfolio of structured paperwork. The two men face a class of 21 other students, about as many people as the small studio can hold comfortably and safely.

Before any physical activity begins James makes some announcements: it is 'not long' till the UK Championships in early July, and he urges the students to sign up on-line so they can compete. There are Hungarians, Dutch and French people coming, so there will be international competitors at several weights. He names three men in the club who have already registered. Then the warm-up stretches begin, led by James and Lawrence facing the six women, and fourteen other men, present. Lawrence, like other advanced students before him in James's class, is demonstrating the warm up exercises to the class as he does them himself, as part of his structured experience in learning to teach. Once the class are stretched and warmed up, James and Michael Staveley, an advanced regular student who has already signed up to fight at the UK Championships, demonstrate the first paired exercise the class are to do.

A and B stand side by side, holding hands so that B is helping A to balance while he or she kicks. James says this exercise 'is all about your balance', and that the pairs should 'keep swapping over'. A does ten kicks, then B does ten kicks into the empty space in front of them. A and B then swap sides so they can kick with the other leg. James says 'Both have a go—each leg. Get your balance good'. James puts a CD on, using the music system installed in the gym, and sets his timer—which will buzz loudly when the exercise has gone on for the time (usually 1.5 or 2 min) he has specified.

The class go into pairs, except for Michael and two other men who have to form a trio. Two of the three do the supported kick while the third does press ups, once five kicks with both legs are delivered, the person who has been doing the press ups swaps into the pair to be the 'balancer' and target, while the previous balancer does the kicks, and the kicker now does press ups. The students train their kicks.

At 7.45 James's buzzer goes, and he tells the class to get their gloves on (and they are also expected to put their gumshields in but no explicit instruction is given). James says this is their 'First proper drill' together (in this class). One man does not have his own gloves, so James opens the store cupboard and gets a pair from the kit bag he keeps at the gym.

James demonstrates with Michael again. This is an exercise set up so they can work on getting the correct range for a jab and a *fouetté* (a kick). The distance is different for the punch and the kick, and so the attacker has to move repeatedly closer to and further from their partner. James explains that, and demonstrates it. It is particularly important to get the rear foot placed at the right distance. A should do the jab and kick ten times and then the pair should swap roles. The pairs do that, as James instructed, for two minutes, which allows each of them to be 'A' and 'B' at least twice and more if they are fit and can do the exercise easily. After the two minutes James gets them to do the kick first and then the jab. That requires them to start further away and then come in closer, the reverse of the previous sequence. They do not change partners, and again the class is told to 'do ten kicks' then change roles, and again the timer is set to buzz after two minutes.

At 7.50 James stops the exercise and demonstrates the next one, again with Michael. Now A does a *fouetté*, two punches, steps to the side ('step off' James says as he demonstrates it) and

then another kick with the other leg: a *revers bas* (that is a low reverse kick delivered from a spinning body to the opponent's leg). The step is the vital bit of this sequence to enable the attacker to get into the position where the second kick can be delivered. B keeps his guard *up* so the punches and kicks are all on the gloved hands.

On this particular evening at this point James did not state explicitly that punches or kicks which land on the gloved hands do not score points in competitive bouts, but he frequently exhorts students to keep up their guard. Regulars know that this is not only for their own safety but also to stop what James usually terms 'leaking' points.

This was a typical class lasting one hour, and was followed by an hour of sparring. Twenty one is a higher number for a lesson than usual. Fifteen or sixteen people is more common, and Sara has seen classes as small as six or eight. Its basic structure: welcome and announcements, warm up and stretching, demonstration, drill and practice of moves, is similar to all the other Savate classes Sara has watched. Other martial arts are often taught using the same basic structure but the languages used vary: Portuguese for *capoeira*, Japanese for *aikido* and so on. Here the language is partly French (because the kicks have French names) but James like the other British-based instructors does not teach in French. After the section on research methods, we deploy Urry's framework to explore Waskul and Vannini's five interactionist approaches to the body [10].

### 3. Research Methods

The ethnography follows the precepts set by Hammersley and Atkinson [13], and described in detail in [14] and is augmented by face to face and email interviews with James. Fieldnotes are recorded in class by Sara, and 'written up' into a coherent narrative account within 24 h, which is subsequently analysed. James and Sara talk formally and informally about Savate when together, engage in email interviews, and write for publication dialogically. That is Sara drafts papers, sends them to James, and they then meet to produce an agreed text. This is a writing procedure Sara has used in other projects (See [15]) with martial arts practitioners. The project was approved by the ethics committee in Sara's university department in 2010, and is conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association. Central to Delamont's ethnographic research is the argument that the interactionist researcher must 'make the familiar strange'; that is to work hard to analyse interactions not just describe them. This approach to ethnography is explained in detail in Delamont [14,16].

#### 3.1. Multiple Mobilities: Embodiment in the 'World on the Move'

Urry [2] wrote that 'it seems as if all the world is on the move' and established the 'mobilities paradigm'. Core elements of his argument about the changing nature of post-industrial capitalist societies were developments from the analysis in [17] of the growth of what they called *Economies of Signs and Space*. He set out nine 'mobile methods' or 'methods on the move' to animate the mobilities paradigm. (See also [18]). His focus was not martial arts and Urry was not a symbolic interactionist or an ethnographer, but Savate is a good test case of the methodological paradigm. We have found that it offers a powerful agenda for interactionist scholars, and for ethnographers, to focus their empirical work on 'everyday life' more analytically. Our argument is that the nine types of methods 'on the move' can be used by sociologists from different theoretical standpoints. Symbolic interactionism [19] is compatible with data collection focused by 'using' mobile methods and Urry's proposals.

This research involves James in mobilities that are central to his career as a Savate fighter and teacher, and Sara in different mobilities as an ethnographer. The argument that social scientists should study mobilities, and deploy mobile methods is one we have taken on board. Savate is predominantly about movements and mobilities, and the teachers and students as well as Savate itself are globally mobile as well as energetic and agile in every class and competition. There is an on-line Savate world as well as the off-line experience of classes, gradings and competitions. The actual movements of Savate are polysemic. We have set out the nine types (or contexts) of movement that, Urry argued,

should be the focus of sociological research (2007: 39–43) in the order that best suits the Savate research, rather than that deployed by the original author. Urry argues for the study of:

- (1) moving bodies
- (2) transfer points or liminal places
- (3) virtual movements (through, for example, blogs and tweets)
- (4) moving informants by moving with them
- (5) imagined and anticipated movements
- (6) memories of past movements
- (7) 'places' that themselves move (e.g., ships)
- (8) objects that can be followed around
- (9) time–space diaries

Some of the nine are more obviously relevant to Savate in general and James's career in particular than others. For example it is inconceivable that any study of Savate would ignore moving bodies, but less obvious that it would involve 'places' that themselves move such as planes or trains, or liminal zones. Moving bodies are central to every Savate class, competition, grading day and event at which officials are trained. So, for example, not only were moving bodies the *raison d'être* of the class described earlier, like every class James teaches, moving bodies are also central at competitions and grading events.

The nine types of mobile research that Urry advocates and Waskul and Vannini's five interactionist approaches are differentially emphasised across ordinary classes, competitions, and grading events. Grading events are the most obvious 'place' to study as liminal or transfer areas, and are, themselves 'places' that move symbolically like the ships, planes and buses Urry advocated investigating. Objects that can be followed, the importance of the researchers moving with the informants as they move, and moving bodies must all be central to any study of both ordinary Savate classes and events. Across all these types of movement and the main fieldwork sites the mobilities can be actual or symbolic, and, of course, all mobilities are interpreted by humans as Waskul and Vannini [10] argued. We focus on eight of Urry's nine types of mobility below excluding time-space diaries which we have not used so far in this project. We use Urry to help us focus on Waskul and Vannini's interactionist approaches to the body. Eight of the nine types of mobility are illustrated by material from the Savate fieldwork, and then explored applying them to a championship event. That is we introduce the nine types with descriptive, generalised material about Savate because it is a largely unknown combat sport, and then we re-explore them with data from a championship.

### 3.1.1. The Mobile Researcher

Urry separates the importance of sociological researchers observing 'people's movement' and of focusing on how movement is performed including social interactions related to mobilities. His chapter on meetings provides strategies to study martial arts classes, which are a form of *scheduled* meetings. The researcher's movements in this study are of two types: inside the formal class, and the travel to the meetings. Sara has learnt to combine stability and movement while studying Savate. In any one class, for reasons of safety and non-interference, the ethnographer needs to find places to stand to observe the class which do not impinge on it. Students and instructors need to be able to focus on the martial art and not have to think about anyone else in the space, but the observer has to be able to see and hear what the instructor is demonstrating and saying. In a one or two hour class in a very small dance studio with mirrored walls she does not, generally, move from an unobtrusive corner. At gradings, and competitions, she moves frequently, to be able to see different aspects of the event. When there are two rings, she generally sits to watch fights in which James or his students are competing, but also 'circulates' to talk to informants from other clubs. Grading days, events where officials are trained, and competitions involve the researcher travelling to the venue just as the participants do. Since 2009 Sara has travelled regularly to London, and to Allingford,

Selchester, and Templecombe. Urry's emphasis on the researcher's mobilities is a way to focus on the ethnographer's reflexive body: a non-reflexive investigator who did not include her own embodiment in the study, would impoverish the project.

### 3.1.2. Transfer Points and Liminal Places

Urry [2] focuses more on physical transfer points, such as waiting rooms, airport lounges, stations and parks, than he does on the symbolic transfers that expose actors to liminality [20]. We have focused more on the symbolic transfer movements that are central to Savate. Savate 'lives' by these mobilities. Waskul and Vannini's dramaturgical or performative body is the most relevant interactionist approach for understanding liminal places. There are three main types of *transfer point* or *liminal place* in GB Savate: the formal grading examinations, the contests at championships and training events for officials. The liminal nature of championships is explained first, then that of grading events, and finally a brief coverage of the symbolic movements produced by training as an official is provided.

At championships there are private and public liminal movements. Behind the scenes at competitions there are two semi-private transitions, as well as the public ones. Weighing-in is done in sex-segregated relative privacy and can lead immediately to a form of private movement. Competitors may have to take immediate action to lose weight to fight in the category they have entered. In 2016 Alex Grierson had to spend time on a rowing machine, before the weigh-in closed, to sweat off two kilos. Once the weigh-in is over people will eat and drink before their fights begin. This is because in Savate competition the weight categories are vital. The men's weight categories are under 56 kg, 56–60 kg, 60–65 kg, 65–70 kg, 70–75 kg, 75–80 kg, 80–85 kg, over 85 kg and the women's 48 kg, 48–52 kg, 52–56 kg, 56–60 kg, 60–65 kg, 65–70 kg, 70–75 kg, and 75+ kg. For international championships each country can only enter one person of each sex in each category. So for competitors at a national event the weight category in which they fight can determine whether or not they get a place in their national team. On an event day, the result of the weigh-in determines whether they can compete in the category for which they registered, and therefore whom they actually fight. So bodies that need to be moved above or below a category line are a preoccupation. Consequently tireurs discuss their weight, and how they moved themselves into a specific category, in terms of transfer points. Sara is often told about such transfers: for example 'I worked hard to get my weight down so I could fight in the under 70kg category', or 'I've decided to aim for the under 75kg category because Chad has retired from competition and I can get into the team at that weight'. A change in a tireur's 'normal' fighting weight category is soon *visible*, because the tireur then competes in that weight category and is listed there. When people compete successfully at a championship they can move from being a tireur who is only known in their club to being the person who 'reached the quarter-finals in the Spanish Open' or 'won four fights in Limerick'. If chosen for the national team the fighter becomes 'an international', and if, like James, they win a medal they have a new international status: such as 'won the silver medal at the 2015 European championships'.

At competitions a public transfer occurs regularly and almost continually between competitor, judge, referee, timekeeper ('chrono'), and cornerman. The three judges, the referee and the officials at the table (the time keeper and the senior official) are changed after 4–6 bouts. The officials wear black trousers and white shirts. It is common to hear 'Can I have X, Y, and Z to be judges, *now*, please!' and see three people putting on white shirts and black trousers over their fighting kit or ordinary clothes, and hurrying to the ringside. Fighters who are not yet qualified to be officials regularly 'corner' for their club mates and friends, and so move from their own warm up and fight to corner and then back to being a spectator.

Generally in the UK *assaut* and combat are done at different events, taught in separate classes and the training of officials and gradings are also separate. So while some tireurs are skilled at both types they do not normally move between them on the same day in the same space. On a couple of occasions Sara has seen two or three *assaut* tireurs make the transition to the third, more exotic and least known, form of Savate, *canne* in which sticks (canes) are used to do moves like fencing. Only the

Templecombe club teaches *canne*. For the majority of Savate *tireurs*, who train only *assaut*, *canne* is exotic and ‘unknown’. At the UK championships in 2015 two members of that club, Valentine Coombe and Agnata Lefroy, fought *assaut* bouts, but also did a demonstration of *canne*. The dramaturgical body is central to the public liminal aspects of Savate events, and Urry’s strategy enables the researcher to challenge the familiarity of competitions and displays.

Grading days are the most obvious liminal places, indeed their whole function is transition. A student can achieve a higher level of glove if they perform well enough in a set of predetermined routines. The processes of testing students for the basic gloves, or for an upgrade, has only a small ‘audience’. Most of those present are the *tireurs*, their coaches, and those doing the testing. Students trying for a grade of glove perform the sequences in front of the judges, and the results are publically announced. The results are announced in class later, and circulated on social media, when the changed status becomes more widely known. The two highest levels of glove (white and silver) are only available in France, so a candidate for those levels from any other country, including the UK, has to move to be tested. When James decided to put himself forward to be tested for the silver gloves he went on a weeklong course for non-French *tireurs* in France that culminated in the test. He gained the silver gloves, becoming only the third Britain ever to achieve them.

When officials are trained those people also undergo a status passage from a student to an insider who can referee or judge contests. Training to be a qualified official is done in designated sessions, without an audience of any kind. A student might invite a friend or flatmate to watch their grading test, but no one would invite anyone to watch them training to be a judge or referee because it takes several hours of sedentary and technical instruction. Students think any non-Savate practitioner would find it dull. Sara has not yet observed such a session, but would be the only non-participant there. The transition would be visible when the ‘qualified’ person began to judge or referee fights.

The transition from student to instructor is done partly by private study and happens gradually. It is the least visible translation while it takes place. When a would-be teacher passes the appropriate qualification they can get insurance (a requirement of hiring many venues) and begin to recruit their ‘own’ students. Qualifying as an instructor is largely a private transition, but would be visible to students in the classes when the would-be teacher began to practice on them. Qualification could be celebrated on social media, and then, if the freshly qualified teacher started his or her own classes, their new status would be fully public.

### 3.1.3. Virtual Movement

Urry (2007: 40) argues that sociologists should ‘explore the imaginative and virtual mobilities of people’ through analysis of emails, blogs, texting, web site, and other on-line sources, alongside studying ‘real’ offline travel. When Tegner [3] wrote his book on Savate it could only have been seen on TV or in films. Now film, TV, video games and cyberspace all display and explore Savate. Virtual movements have become an important part of GB Savate. New students used to discover and then join James’s classes when TV series with Savate in them (e.g., [21]) were shown. In 2018 they are more likely to find such series on You Tube than see them broadcast on TV. More advanced *tireurs* use Facebook, Instagram, Periscope and share news, pictures and video clips. James regularly urges students to share their Savate activities on social media to encourage their friends to try it. The announcements of classes, of competitions, and of events such as ‘Train with the Team’ (when anyone can join a UK team training day) are done on social media. Anyone can use sites like You Tube and find clips of Savate, and view its movements. Practitioners can review their own performances at competitions on-line. Urry’s stress on the sociological importance of studying virtual movement fits with Waskul and Vannini’s emphasis on the Socio-Semiotic body: the body as a cultural symbol. The ethnographer of Savate, guided by Urry, can make the ‘virtual’ strange as well as the offline interactions to explore the Socio-Semiotic body.

### 3.1.4. Imagined and Anticipated Movements

Urry [2] advocates paying research attention to ‘experiencing or anticipating in one’s imagination’ the goals of movement. A focus on ‘atmosphere’ lifts the researcher’s gaze from ‘material infrastructures’ to the study of feelings and ‘imaginative travel’. This is an important dimension of Savate. To explore what Waskul and Vannini call the Phenomenological body (the body as a province of meaning) detailed research attention to how meaning is made among Savate tireurs. Classes are permeated with imagined and anticipated movements. In the class summarised earlier, for example, James instructed students to imagine themselves competing at a future event the UK Championships. Typically on 14 August 2015 James opened the class by announcing a fighting event scheduled for Ireland in November, so they could think about registering to fight. Routinely in lessons he reminds students that certain movements score points in fights, and, just as vitally, prevent (by blocks or dodges) the opponent scoring points. Every demonstration James does offers the students a vision of movements that they can imagine themselves mastering (or perhaps cannot envisage ever being in their repertoire).

Students planning to present themselves for grading have to learn the required sequences, imagine themselves doing them, and practice them with the anticipation of success. Going for the initial (blue) gloves is an imagined step from being a novice to a serious practitioner. Deciding to go for a higher glove grade involves imagining oneself as a tireur with, for example, the yellow gloves, which will carry a public status as a fighter of a specific standard, from whom a level of skill is expected. Just as people imagine future movements, so too are memories central to Savate as the next section shows.

Since 2014, there has been an important imagined movement in the sport, a global move of Savate itself. The prospect of Paris staging the Olympics in 2024 has led to every level of Savate from the international governing body down to the ordinary classes offers the globalisation of Savate, and its symbolic move to be ‘An Olympic Sport’. That change could lead to improved funding, higher status and more participation in many countries. As an imagined movement, being part of Paris 2024 is the grandest imagined of all.

### 3.1.5. Memories of Past Movements

Urry [2] argues that because memory is so fundamental to mobility, researchers need to develop methods to recover such memories. Remembered movements can be pleasant or unpleasant. Travel to events may have been smooth and the event location a good one. The tireur then recalls and recounts how the competition was held in a space with good floors, the weather and hotel were relaxing, the food edible and the costs reasonable. In contrast horror stories: of late flights, long journeys on bad roads, poor food, high costs and inadequate accommodation are remembered negatively. Negative aspects may be associated with successful fights (as triumphs despite the poor circumstances) or causally related to how they prevented the team from achieving a good performance. This focus of Urry’s also relates to Waskul and Vannini’s phenomenological body, and again making the apparently familiar, ever-repetitive talk about past movements constantly ‘strange’. Even more relevant here is recognising Waskul and Vannini’s Narrative Body, because the relevant talk is predominantly narrative.

For many teachers and students the memories of past movements involve injury. Stories are told of how an injury occurred, where and when (perhaps playing football, at work, snowboarding, in a car accident, or when doing Savate), and what consequences it had for their Savate self. Teachers have had injuries, or needed surgery for bodily repair, and will recall how that impeded their Savate career. The early arrivals on 14 August 2015 talked about their own fights, and those of others at the UK championships. One of the Selchester men had got a broken jaw and this was so unusual that people analysed that fight. When Sara met him after the 2016 World Championships James ran through all his fights for Sara, comparing his French and Belgian opponents. One evening before class James spent some time rehearsing successful moves in his recent fight with Francis Kincross, a UK veteran, who ‘has lots of quick, hard to spot’ attacks. Other students listened to these conversations, which took place in the coffee shop at the gym before the 7.30 p.m. class, and added their own memories of movements at these events, or equivalent ones.

On 19 March 2015 James began his regular class by giving the students the '*salut*' (formal greeting) and then told the class that he and some people had been to an international competition in Helsinki. 'London people' had had 21 fights and won 11 of them: 'They rocked' he says. He and Graham Bendix had won. Everyone in the class could enjoy the experience because 'there are a great many photographs on the Face Book page' they can download and share. Social media are routinely implicated in imagined and remembered movements, and vice versa.

### 3.1.6. Studying Moving Informants by Moving with Them

Urry argued that the ethnographer should use 'co-present immersion' (p. 40) and 'walking with' or travelling with actors in the research setting: moving while doing ethnography. This proposition covers many facets of traditional ethnography, and the many mobile methods currently fashionable (e.g., [22]). Moving informants and fieldsites means that the ethnographer should go with them. Here again the reflexive body is the most important embodiment for the ethnographer. In Sara's case to attend the 2015, 2016 and 2018 UK Championships the move was from home city to Selchester by express train to London, underground across London to another station, local train and a walk. As no one lives at any Savate venue, all those present have travelled, but Sara has a longer and more varied journey to routine fieldwork in London than anyone training there, and to reach gradings or competitions as long a trip as the teachers and students based in the UK. Of course a team from Ireland or Belgium have a much longer one involving crossing borders.

Sara's only moves in class, and at grading and competition events, are designed to keep out of the way of the tireurs, judges and graders, and enable the activities to be observed. As already explained above, the ethnographer may sometimes need to be stationary to enable others to move. While co-present, Sara's moves are in no way similar to those of James or the students, because they are only undertaken if she has become stiff, too cold to focus on the interactions or is suddenly impeding James or the class. At grading events, when one sub-group is being tested, those preparing for their test may have a lesson in a different part of the room, and a decision has to be made about which activity to watch. If there are children present taking Savate lessons or fighting or being graded, Sara has to be careful not to observe them, as the project has no ethical approval for the study of children in Savate. That can require physical movement away from one part of the venue to another. At competitions there are often two or even three rings, and it is common for spectators, and the observer to move between them. Other movements include greeting people, with handshakes or hugs, and sometimes holding babies or helping put out food, drink or lists on tables. The commonest 'static' nonmovement asked of Sara is 'can you keep an eye on my stuff?' while someone goes to change, get weighed, fetch themselves food and drink, or carry in equipment from a car.

### 3.1.7. Objects that Can Be followed

Urry [2] states that 'methods need to be able to follow around objects'. He separates objects that gain value as they move (antiques), or lose it (cheap souvenirs), and those that move to be assembled (the components of a computer). 'As objects travel' he argues they can acquire symbolic and material accretions. Urry's proposal that researchers, or their research gaze, should follow *objects* that move is relevant to the Savate study. There are objects which move after a tournament to the home of a tireur. Winners at competitions get medals, plaques, shields or trophies to keep, depending on the generosity of the organisers of the event. The intrinsic value of the physical object does not correspond to the prestige and importance of the tournament. James, who has travelled to events more than most tireurs of his generation and been more consistently successful, has in 2018 five medals from international assault events (2 bronze, 2 silver, one gold) and four trophies (for participation, third place and second place). He also has his official certificate for his silver (the top level) *gant* (glove) award. These objects come 'home' with James, and only move again when his whole 'home' does. Studying what tireurs do with their awards (if anything) would be interesting.

It would be instructive to follow the specialist leotards that the international tireurs wear from their first wearing at a specific event, through subsequent outings until they become worn out. The 'descent' of clothing from special occasions to routine ones, and eventually into the dustbin (or in some cases its preservation as a souvenir like a wedding dress) has not been part of the research on martial arts thus far, but would be illuminating. In Savate official British team clothing is sometimes shared, in that a new international may be given, or lent, items by a more regular international tireur. At the 2017 pre-European Championship team training day a leotard emblazoned with 'UK Savate Team' owned by Adelaide Burnett, who was not in that team, because she was pregnant, was lent to another woman, Angela Waterhouse, to wear in Belgium at her first international competition. Scales move because they have to be taken to each event so the competitors can be weighed. Gloves, mouth guards, clothes and shoes move with students and teachers from home to class, to events, and back again. Clothing, gloves and shoes have to be bought, and in the UK obtaining them may involve ordering from France. Buying special Savate shoes or leotards is a visible commitment to the sport, and so is a symbol of adherence. Water bottles and sports drinks move, and at competitions so does food. Spectators and competitors carry food: for themselves and to share the latter take food that is carefully chosen to prevent the tireur feeling ill during fights and to relax after the day is over. The more experienced a Savate person is, the better they know what they can and cannot eat to maximise energy and not produce lethargy or bloating. Several of Waskul and Vannini's interactionist types are relevant here, narratives about objects that are close to the body, and the relations of objects to dramaturgical bodies. Again these quickly become familiar to a researcher and have, constantly to be made strange.

### 3.1.8. The Study of Places That Do and Do Not Move

Urry [2] was particularly interested in studying 'places' that move, devoting chapters to trains, to cars, and aircraft, and their accompanying static features: stations, roads and airports. He also stressed the imaginaries of those three modes of mobility. Savate teachers and learners move using trains, cars, and planes, as well as bicycles, buses and, in London, the underground. Travel overseas is usually done as group, which strengthens the 'team spirit'. This section starts with a 'place', the class, that does *not* 'move'. Unlike some other martial arts, where the teachers make an effort to transport the students 'mentally' to the country of origin of the discipline (e.g., Thailand or Japan), the classes James runs are obviously in the UK and indeed in London. Savate teachers do not create a 'French' ambience. Joseph [23], who studied capoeira classes in Toronto, wrote vividly about how, as she entered the capoeira space she felt herself moving in her imagination from Canada to Brazil for the duration of the routine class as well for festivals, performances or parties. This was accentuated by the language being Portuguese, capoeira music being played, the spaces decorated with Brazilian flags and other 'exotic' symbols, as well as different styles of embodiment. British savate students do *not* feel they are, even temporarily, in France. The language is English except for technical terms and the venue is not draped in French flags, posters of the Eiffel Tower or the bridges over the Seine, for routine classes or for championships or grading days. French tireurs may feel, in their London classes, that they are 'at home' for the duration, but we doubt it: UK Savate teachers do not aim to establish a 'French' atmosphere in the classes but a brisk, professional one. James does aim to welcome and celebrate students from all countries, so an Italian woman working in London is readily accepted into the friendship group, but he does not try to pretend everyone is in Marseilles or Nantes for two hours.

In contrast to routine classes, which take place in the same gym every week, the pre-competition training events, the gradings, and the competitions do move. In part they move to be in bigger spaces, but they also circulate around different towns and countries. The UK championships have been held in London, Allingford, Selchester, Templecombe and the Victorian garrison town of Bracingham, during Sara's research. International Championships in Savate *Assaut* have been held during James's career as a tireur, which began in 2004, in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Hungary, Italy and Spain. France has held more championships than any other European country. Additionally there are regular opportunities for James and his students to go to 'Open' events in other countries, such as Ireland

and Finland, if they can afford the costs and schedule the time. James makes time to go and train in France at clubs where he knows the instruction will be useful to his career. Anyone in UK Savate who is eligible to try to get the white and then the silver gloves has to go to France for the test.

### 3.1.9. Time–Space Diaries

The ninth mobile method advocated by Urry has a good deal of potential for martial arts researchers, and is one that we have not yet systematically deployed. Urry [2] argued that researchers should recruit respondents who will keep time–space diaries, in which they record ‘what they are doing and where’, how they move during those periods and the modes of movement’. Such diaries could be digital, audio, pictorial or written, or any combination of these. The investigators can also be reflexive and record ‘their own trajectories’. Gathering such records will be a useful way to conduct future research on UK Savate.

Having demonstrated how all nine of Urry’s proposed strategies are, or could be, productively used in the Savate research, the paper now explores one event using the Urry ‘template’ as an aide to fight familiarity.

## 4. Moving Bodies: At the UK Championships

In 2015 the UK Savate championships were held in Selchester, a cathedral city, inside the London commuter belt which has been a centre of excellence in UK Savate for over 35 years [1]. The local organisers, Alex Grierson and Adelaide Burnett, are both international medallists. They have organised the UK Championships several times during the research period and Sara has attended five there. In this account of Savate’s ‘unstatic’ nature we contrast an important competition with routine classes.

The first noticeable difference between ordinary classes and tournaments is a symbolic movement—the separation of the sexes and the ‘sizes’. Routine classes are mixed, so men and women of all sizes train together. Competitions are different. Men only fight men, and women fight women, and both sexes fight in weight categories. So Zelma Deeping fights other women in the under 56 kg category. It is only the fighters who are sex-segregated at the weigh-in and in the fights. Every other role and activity warm up and sparring, judging, refereeing and cornering is unsegregated.

The event was scheduled to start at 9.00, with a weigh-in session so that fights could begin at 11.00. The gym had to be cleared by six o’clock. There is a great deal of movement at the beginning of the day, setting up the rings, the warm up area, the spectators’ area, tables for taking money, food and drink, and possibly items for sale such as T-shirts, and posting the lists of the fights and of the officials. At the other end of the day there is urgent movement to pack everything up and remove the rubbish, and everything else that does not belong in the hall.

All five of Waskul and Vannini’s interactionist approaches to the body can be seen in action at any championship, and Urry’s strategies help to disentangle them. Fighters and officials are at their most reflexive and their bodies are simultaneously performative. The Savate bodies on display are socio-semiotic objects, carry phenomenological meaning, and are the source of past and future narratives. Precisely because all championships are, in one way, ‘the same’, using Urry to force the researcher to make them unfamiliar is vital.

There are two main types of body movement at an event such as these championships. First all the competitors, their coaches, friends and families have travelled to be there. Secondly, all the competitors have come primarily to move their bodies: to warm up, to fight, help their friends warm up and to fight again. At the 2015 Championships in addition to the competitors and supporters from the four main English clubs, there was a group from the UK town of Westerford, a French club, an Irish group and some Dutch fighters. Of the hundred or so people in the main hall that day, only twenty or so lived in Selchester, the others had travelled considerable distances. Sara’s journey of eighty seven miles each way was not the longest.

It is not only competitors who move at events. Each fight has three judges around the ring, two officials seated at a table on the fourth side, a referee in the ring with the competitors, and at least one

cornerman for each tireur. Coaches, judges, referees, and cornermen, who may or may not also be fighters, move throughout the day. Judges are seated while judging, but the other people stand or move about rapidly. Cornermen stand still in the fighter's corner during each round, but then provide water, hold buckets to be spat into, towel down the fighter and retie shoes, in the gaps between rounds.

At the 2015 Championships all the officials were called to a briefing at 10.50. There were two rings, so twelve people were needed as officials for the two contest. At 11.10 Alex Grierson and Ursula Graeme, senior figures in UK Savate, called out 'officials to the rings please'. Every bout involved three people (the two fighters and the referee) moving for three rounds of 1.5 min while seven other people were relatively stationary. When a round or bout ends, the cornermen are active, and one of the officials walks round the judges to collect their score sheets. Meanwhile other fighters warm up, and the audience are relatively still, but noisy, during rounds and then move about between fights. Thus a day of research by Sara at these national championships was focused on several types of moving bodies, moving objects, and the use of trains, cars, buses, and planes to deliver everyone to the school. People who no longer compete, or do so rarely, may be very busy officiating, coaches may help fighters warm up by sparring with them, and all the tireurs qualified to referee or judge will spend time doing those tasks. Fighting and officiating require different clothes, so there is a good deal of hurrying to the changing rooms to put on the fighting leotard, or replace it with black trousers and a white shirt to officiate. Novices and experienced tireurs will be 'cornering' for club mates' mobile bodies. During the day dozens of photographs were taken for sharing on social media, and most people present used social media to share what they were doing with absent friends and fellow tireurs. Memories were created for future discussion, imagined movements were almost 'visible' in the hall, as people prepared for their next fight, and coaches used the bouts to de-brief their fighters and instruct their club members. This brief description gives an insight into the potential utility of Urry's typology of methods.

Subsequent Savate events illustrate the conceptual utility of Urry's framework for our research. The 2018 London Open Event provided an example of all the types of movement that the 2015 UK Championships described above did, with one further dimension. One of the French clubs had problems with their cross channel travel, and arrived about three hours late. That disrupted the schedule of many fighters, because the French opponent was late: so the road travel of one club upset the plans of the organisers, caused a shortage of judges and referees for the whole morning, and forced several tireurs to change their planned schedule of eating, warming up, cornering for friends, and competing for medals.

The 2018 UK Championships were different from the 2015 ones because the Northern Ireland clubs raised enough money to bring over 20 juniors and children to fight. That meant three rings were set up rather than two, many more judges and referees were needed, and, most striking for Sara, the clubs from England had all brought 'their' children to compete, changing the balance of the age of competitors, and providing more fights with female competitors. Of course the fights in the rings were important, but so too were the Northern Ireland fundraising, the plane journey, the hotel stay, being near London for the first time, and the balance of the audience. Parents, and siblings filled the seats set out for spectators and changed the atmosphere. These observations about events in 2018 are brought into a different focus because the clubs from outwith England decided to make long journeys in order to be involved in the unstatic sport.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Urry's [2] sociological argument for a mobile sociology (mobile in both real and in virtual spaces) was formulated as a theoretical proposal. He was advocating the proposition that in a global, transnational world, where mass tourism, and the shift to cyberspace of many jobs, financial transactions, family and social relationships, media consumption and mass leisure, mean that most social phenomena no longer occur in one physical location (Lash and Urry 1983). Sociologists had to adapt or see the discipline die. His book was, effectively, calling for a paradigm shift in sociology.

Our focus in the paper has been much more restricted: on five types of interactionist ideas about bodies. We have shown that a study of one small subculture—in the case study people who teach and learn one combat sport—can be enriched by Urry’s methods agenda and Waskul and Vannini’s (2006) theoretical insight. By focusing carefully on different aspects of UK Savate, such as the liminal nature of the pre-competition weigh in, or the ‘gift’ circulation of a tournament leotard, or the pictures of training posted on SnapChat, hitherto unsuspected insights can be gained. Such a systematic focus on mobilities would, we propose, enrich the research on other sports such as tennis, field hockey or luge, as well as other martial arts.

Using a mobilities approach to conduct and organise the findings of ethnographic fieldwork is potentially productive for interactionist sociologists. A perennial problem facing ethnographers in their own society is to make the familiar anthropologically strange [11,24]. Working with a focus on mobilities of different types, whether on-line or off-line, ‘real’ or ‘symbolic’ is a useful strategy to aid both data collection (the ‘mundane’ movement can be re-envisaged, the symbolic seen in more depth) and to think about analysis in normal ways. Careful attention to mobilities can be one way to make the implicit explicit, for the ethnographer or for the readers of the research or even for the respondents. When Seyer-Ochs [25] got high school students in the Fillmore district of San Francisco, a school where she had taught, to draw her their maps of the neighbourhood and guide her around it, the focus on movement was illuminating for her. As a teacher she had been entirely ignorant of the students’ geographies of the area, and about how they moved in it. She highlighted two key informants who navigated their movements according to the territory of a gang, (where they were and were not active), according to where the police were, and their key landmarks were funeral parlours something she, as a teacher, had never ‘noticed’. For these African Americans, death was so frequently part of their lives, that ‘everyday life’ was partly shaped by the desire to avoid death and remember the deaths of friends and enemies. Only driving round the district with key informants made that ‘real’ for Seyer-Ochs.

Understanding the lives and the social world of Savate students and teachers is enhanced by focusing on Savate itself as unstatic and locating that absence of stillness in the gym and the ring in the context of all the other movements the tireurs make without giving them much explicit thought. Whatever social science perspective a scholar prefers there is a case for using Urry’s ideas as one approach to doing research on physical culture. It will help make the implicit explicit and to widen the focus from the movements of the activity (field hockey, luge, parkour, or mountaineering) to the many mobilities in which it is embedded.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, J.S. and S.D.; Data curation, S.D.; Formal analysis, S.D.; Methodology, S.D.; Writing—original draft, S.D.; Writing—review and editing, J.S. and S.D.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** We are grateful to all the anonymous participants in UK savate who have welcomed Carlyle, and provided the data. R. Bartle Jones word processed the paper for us. George Jennings provided a critical and constructive review of the draft for us.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## References

1. Reed, P.; Muggeridge, R. *Savate: Martial Art of France*; Paladin Press: Boulder, CO, USA, 1985.
2. Urry, J. *Mobilities*; Polity: Cambridge, UK, 2007.
3. Tegner, B. *Savate: French Foot and Fist Fighting*; Thor Publishers: Ventura, CA, USA, 1960.
4. Tegner, B. *Savate: French Foot and Fist Fighting*, 3rd ed.; Thor Publishers: Ventura, CA, USA, 1983.
5. Sanchez Garcia, R.; Spencer, D. (Eds.) *Fighting Scholars*; Anthem: London, UK, 2013.
6. Crudelli, C. *The Way of the Warrior*; Dorling-Kindersley: London, UK, 2008.
7. Green, T.A.; Svinth, J.R. (Eds.) *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopaedia of History and Innovation. Volume 1 Regions and Individual Arts*; ABC-Cleo: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 2010.

8. Loudcher, J.-F. Savate, chasson, and French boxing. In *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopaedia of History and Innovation. Volume 1 Regions and Individual Arts*; Green, T.A., Svinth, J.R., Eds.; ABC-Cleo: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 2010; pp. 256–262.
9. Southwood, J.V.; Delamont, S. Tales of a *Tireur*. *Martial Arts Stud.* **2018**, *5*, 72–83. [[CrossRef](#)]
10. Waskul, D.; Vannini, P. (Eds.) *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body*; Ashgate: Aldershot, UK, 2006.
11. Geer, B. First days in the field. In *Sociologists at Work*; Hammond, P., Ed.; Basic Books: New York, NY, USA, 1964; pp. 372–398.
12. Becker, H.S.; Wax, M.; Wax, R. Great tradition, little tradition and formal education. In *Anthropological Perspectives in Education*; Wax, M., Diamond, S., Gearing, F., Eds.; Basic Books: New York, NY, USA, 1971; pp. 3–27.
13. Hammersley, M.; Atkinson, P.A. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 4th ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2019.
14. Delamont, S. *Fieldwork in Educational Settings*, 3rd ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2016.
15. Delamont, S.; Stephens, N.; Campos, C. *Embodying Brazil*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2017.
16. Delamont, S. *Key Themes in the Ethnography of Education*; Sage: London, UK, 2014.
17. Lash, S.; Urry, J. *Economies of Signs and Space*; Sage: London, UK, 1983.
18. Sheller, M.; Urry, J. The new mobilities paradigm. *Environ. Plan. A* **2006**, *38*, 207–226. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Atkinson, P.A.; Housley, W. *Interactionism*; Sage: London, UK, 2003.
20. Van Gennep, A. *Les Rites de Passage*; English Translation (1965); Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, UK, 1909.
21. Normandeau, J. *The Deadly Arts*; National Geographic TV Series: London, UK, 2006.
22. Kusenbach, M. Mobile methods. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*; Delamont, S., Ed.; Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK, 2012.
23. Joseph, J. Going to Brazil. *Glob. Netw.* **2008**, *8*, 194–213. [[CrossRef](#)]
24. Atkinson, P.A.; Coffey, A.; Delamont, S. *Key Themes in Qualitative Research*; Alta Mira Press: Walnut Creek, CA, USA, 2003.
25. Seyer-Ochs, I. Lived landscapes of the Fillmore. In *Innovations in Educational Ethnography*; Spindler, G., Hammond, L., Eds.; Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, USA, 2006; pp. 169–232.



© 2018 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).