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Abstract

This paper examines the Transcontinental Race (TCR), a self-supported ultra-distance cycling event across Europe, as a site where surveillance, care, and recognition intersect in complex ways. Drawing on two autoethnographic reflections from the 2023 (TCRNo9) and 2025 (TCRNo11) editions of the race, the paper traces a shift in how mediated practices shape riders' experiences and relationships. I analyze race tracking technologies and online reporting as forms of participatory, benign surveillance: GPS traces, digital narratives, and spectators' affective investments create a shared rhythm of visibility that connects riders, organizers, volunteers, and audiences. At the same time, the race experience inevitably exceeds surveillant gazes, foregrounding embodied rhythms, sensory intensities, and affective encounters that cannot be fully captured by digital traces. By integrating both perspectives, the paper conceptualizes the TCR as a communicative figuration that continuously reorganizes visibility, agency, and care. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on mediatization, mobility, and the relational dynamics of surveillance.

Keywords

mediatization, communicative figurations, surveillance, care, recognition, mobility, digital infrastructures, ultracycling

1 Introduction

TCRNo11, Day 16. Two currencies from the finish line. Up at dawn in Skopje to inhale gas station coffee, a chicken sandwich, and milk chocolate. My route snakes toward the Serbian border at Pelince. The Macedonian side is rundown but smooth. One kilometer further, the Serbian border patrol officers wave me over. Passport in hand, I brace for scrutiny, but instead the younger officer grins: "Tom? Yeah, we've been following the race. Would you like some water?" The moment was striking not only because it disrupted expectations of control, but also because it revealed the border as more than mere state infrastructure: it was an encounter zone, where watching turned into witnessing, and witnessing into care.

Ultracycling races such as the Transcontinental Race (TCR) are underexamined laboratories for exploring how mobility, endurance, and mediation intersect in contemporary societies. Since its founding in 2013, the TCR has become a flagship event in the world of self-supported ultra-distance cycling, with participants traversing several thousand kilometres across Europe under strict rules of autonomy: no outside support, no drafting, no pre-arranged help. Riders must navigate their own routes, repair their own mechanicals, and manage their own nutrition and sleep, while adhering to mandatory control points and sections scattered across the continent (Fig. 1). What makes the TCR distinctive compared to other endurance events is not only this ethic of self-reliance, but also the degree to which the race is mediated by digital infrastructures and practices of watching.

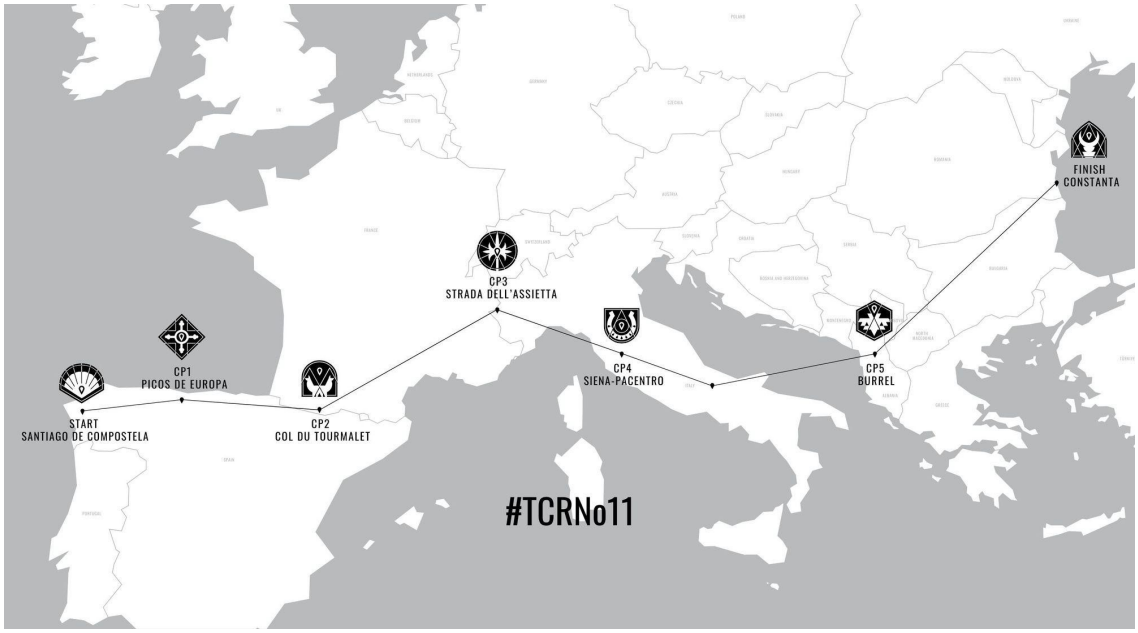

Figure 1. TCRNo11 race map by LostDot.cc with control points in Spain, France, Italy, Albania, and Romania

The event is accompanied by an elaborate digital layer: every rider carries a GPS tracker that updates their position in near real-time on an interactive online map (Fig. 2). This feature, known among fans as "dotwatching" has become a defining cultural practice of ultra-distance race consumption. Alongside the map, organizers maintain blogs, podcasts, and social media feeds that narrate the race as it unfolds, highlighting dramatic moments, rider achievements, and setbacks. Some riders liveblog or podcast their race experience. Families, friends, and strangers alike follow riders' progress, often with deep emotional investment. For many participants, the awareness of being watched becomes a constitutive element of the race itself. The TCR, then, is not only an endurance challenge but also a mediated spectacle where rhythms of mobility are synchronised, narrated, and made legible to distributed audiences.

Figure 2. TCRNo11 heatmap showing rider routes (https://www.followmychallenge.com/live/tcrno11/heatmap/)

This paper takes the TCR as a case study for examining how surveillance, care, and recognition are reconfigured in the context of mediated endurance events. It does so by drawing on two autoethnographic reflections from my participation in the 2023 (TCRNo9) and 2025 (TCRNo11) editions of the race. These reflections, originally published in shorter form as essays in *Diggit Magazine* (Van Hout 2023, 2025), provide situated accounts of how digital infrastructures both structure and fail to capture the lived realities of the race. I argue that racing the TCR operates through *benign surveillance*, where being tracked produces reassurance, connection, and community. The race experience also throws into relief the *limits of surveillance*: while tracking remains central, the race exceeds digital capture through embodied rhythms, sensorial encounters, and affective recognitions that cannot be reduced to data traces.

Placing these reflections in dialogue allows for a richer theorisation of how endurance events are shaped by communicative figurations (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018). This concept highlights how patterned interrelations between actors, infrastructures, and practices give rise to dynamic configurations of communication in deeply mediatized societies. In the case of the TCR, these figurations involve riders, organisers, dotwatchers, and local communities, interconnected through GPS technologies, online storytelling, and embodied encounters. By analyzing the race through this lens, the paper demonstrates how surveillance and recognition are not opposing logics but interdependent dynamics that coexist within the race's mediated ecology.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it rethinks surveillance in the context of endurance sports, moving beyond disciplinary frameworks to highlight how tracking practices cultivate belonging and care. Second, it introduces recognition as a crucial dimension of mediated mobility, showing how solidarities and acknowledgements emerge in ways invisible to digital infrastructures. Third, it advances the concept of *rhythmic multiplicity* to account for the coexistence of infrastructural, embodied, and ecological temporalities within mediatized mobilities. Together, these contributions extend KomFI's agenda by situating ultracycling as a fertile site for studying communication under conditions of deep mediatization.

Methodologically, this paper adopts an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), positioning the author simultaneously as participant and analyst. The reflections presented here are grounded in my lived experiences of the TCR, supplemented by an archive of race photographs, reports, screenshots, Strava ride logs, text messages exchanged during the events (WhatsApp, Instagram), media coverage, and field notes written during the race. These materials serve as a corpus through which ultracycling is analyzed not only as a physical challenge but as a mediated and relational practice.

The strength of autoethnography lies precisely in its partiality. It does not aim for representativeness in the statistical sense, nor does it aspire to exhaustiveness. Instead, its power derives from producing situated, embodied insight into dynamics that are otherwise difficult to access (Larsen, 2014). By foregrounding the lived textures of racing such as the affective intensities, bodily negotiations, and contingent encounters, autoethnography renders visible the relational dynamics of surveillance and recognition that standard accounts often obscure. The partiality of perspective is not a limitation but an analytic resource: it illuminates how broader social and technological processes are inhabited and negotiated from within. A further methodological choice is to draw on my experience in two different race editions: TCRNo9 and TCRNo11. This comparative angle strengthens the analysis by highlighting continuities and transformations in the communicative figurations of the TCR. The analytical juxtaposition demonstrates not only the persistence of surveillance as a structuring condition but also its insufficiency as an encompassing framework.

The reflections presented here should be read not as autobiographical storytelling for its own sake but as empirical material for theorisation. They reveal how surveillance, care, and recognition are co-constituted within endurance events, and how mediatization is lived as both presence and absence. In this way, the paper contributes methodologically by showing how the partial, situated vantage of autoethnography can generate insights beyond the individual case into the processual reconfiguration of communicative figurations in deeply mediatized societies.

Autoethnography implies a reflexive stance. As a participant, I am implicated in the very dynamics I analyze: my awareness of being tracked, my interactions with dotwatchers, and my negotiations with bodily limits are not only data but also constitutive of the phenomena under study. Acknowledging this positionality is essential for recognising both the strengths and the limits of the analysis.

Autoethnography offers depth and immediacy but claims neither totality nor representativeness. Instead, what I present here is one perspective among many possible rider experiences. The partiality of the account is not a flaw but a resource, allowing us to see how mediatized endurance is lived from within, while also underscoring the necessity of reading these reflections in dialogue with broader theoretical frameworks and comparative cases.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, I develop a conceptual frame that brings together mediatization theory, surveillance studies, mobility research, and the framework of communicative figurations. Sections 3 and 4 present the two race reflections in analytical form: first, the experience of benign surveillance; second, the exploration of recognition and the limits of capture. Section 5 then synthesizes these perspectives, theorizing the interplay between capture and care and situating it within the communicative figuration of the TCR. Section 6 concludes by outlining the broader implications for the study of surveillance, mobility, and mediatization.

2 Conceptual frame: mediatized mobilities, surveillance, and communicative figurations

The TCR sits at the intersection of sport, mobility, and mediation. To analyze how its communicative dynamics unfold, three strands of scholarship are relevant: mediatization theory, surveillance studies, and mobility research. This section situates the race within these literatures and draws them together through the lens of communicative figurations, a concept central to the KomFI research programme.

2.1 Mediatization and the reshaping of social rhythms

Mediatization theory addresses how communication, culture, and social life are transformed under conditions where media infrastructures become deeply interwoven with everyday practices (Krotz, 2007; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In this perspective, media are not neutral channels of transmission but constitutive forces that reorganise temporality, space, and social relations. Hepp and Hasebrink (2018) describe mediatization as a process whereby communication is increasingly structured through digital platforms and infrastructures. In the context of the TCR, this means that the race is not only experienced locally and bodily but also constituted through mediated co-presence. GPS tracking platforms, race podcasts, and social media updates do not merely document the event but

actively shape how it unfolds: they synchronise audiences with riders, generate rhythms of anticipation, and create shared affective investment.

This dynamic highlights the temporal dimension of mediatization. As Krajina, Moores, and Morley (2014) argue, media shape "rhythms of everyday life" by imposing patterns of attention and connection. In endurance racing, the near real-time updating of GPS locations punctuates the flow of the event with pulses of visibility. For audiences, suspense builds in moments of silence—when a tracker stalls or when a rider approaches a checkpoint. For riders, the awareness of being watched structures their own rhythms of self-presentation, sometimes motivating, sometimes burdensome. The TCR thus exemplifies what Couldry and Hepp (2017) call the mediated construction of reality, where infrastructures of communication reorder how events are lived and shared.

2.2 Surveillance: from discipline to participation and care

Surveillance studies provide a second entry point. Classical accounts, drawing on Foucault (1977), conceptualise surveillance as a disciplinary apparatus: a one-way gaze that enforces self-regulation. More recent work has emphasised the proliferation of distributed, participatory, and affective forms of surveillance. Haggerty and Ericson (2000) coined the term *surveillant assemblage* to describe how diverse systems of monitoring converge, fragmenting and reassembling bodies into data flows. In the TCR, the GPS tracker exemplifies such assemblages: riders' bodies are decomposed into data points—latitude, longitude, speed, idle time—that circulate across networks of organisers, audiences, and commentators.

Yet surveillance is not only coercive. Andrejevic (2007) introduced the notion of participatory surveillance to capture contexts where individuals voluntarily produce and share personal data as part of social interaction. Social media platforms epitomise this logic, but endurance races also embody it: riders consent to constant tracking, and many embrace the visibility it affords. Being seen is not experienced as domination but as reassurance, care, and connection. This ambivalence has been theorised by David Lyon (2018) in *The Culture of Surveillance*, which argues that watching has become a routine, accepted dimension of social life. Within this culture, surveillance can generate solidarity as well as control. In the TCR, dotwatchers do not simply monitor; they cheer, empathise, and worry. Surveillance becomes infused with affective care, blurring the line between watching and looking after.

At the same time, critical perspectives remind us that surveillance always entails reduction. Dourish and Bell (2011) emphasise how digital representations inevitably simplify and obscure complex realities. A GPS trace can map where a rider is but not how they feel, what challenges they face, or the solidarities they encounter. This distinction between capture (i.e. the datafication of rider movement) and recognition (i.e. acknowledgement within social relations) is key to the argument of this paper.

2.3 Mobilities and rhythms

A third strand of literature comes from mobility studies, particularly the "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010). Mobility is understood here not only as physical movement but as a cultural and political phenomenon shaped by infrastructures, power relations, and social imaginaries. For Urry (2007), mobilities are always entangled with systems of mediation: travel is coordinated through maps, apps, and infrastructures

of visibility. The TCR exemplifies this entanglement: riders' mobility is inseparable from its mediated representation. Cresswell (2010) argues that mobility is imbued with meaning through three dimensions: movement, representation, and practice. In the TCR, movement is physical pedalling across Europe; representation occurs through GPS traces and platformed content; practice encompasses the embodied, affective routines of endurance.

Temporalities are crucial here. Lefebvre's (2004) *Rhythmanalysis* provides a useful vocabulary for analyzing how social life unfolds through multiple, overlapping rhythms: bodily, technological, environmental. Endurance racing highlights these frictions vividly. The steady pulse of GPS and Strava updates collides with the irregular rhythms of fatigue, hunger, weather, and border delays. Recognition emerges in these dissonances: moments of solidarity, care, or exhaustion that resist being flattened into data points. By integrating mobility studies, the analysis situates the TCR not only within surveillance and mediatization but also within broader debates about how movement, mediation, and meaning coproduce one another.

2.4 Communicative Figurations

The concept of communicative figurations provides the integrative framework for this analysis (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018). A communicative figuration refers to a patterned constellation of actors, media, and practices that holds together dynamically in processes of communication. Unlike static models of media influence, figurations highlight relationality, contingency, and change.

Three analytical dimensions are central:

1. Actors: TCR riders, organizers, volunteers, audiences, and local communities.
2. Media and technologies: GPS trackers, blogs, mapping platforms, and social media.
3. Communicative practices: dotwatching, narrative construction, mutual care, and embodied recognition.

These dimensions interact processually. The race's figuration is sustained by infrastructures of tracking and storytelling, but it is continually reconfigured through embodied encounters, (inevitable) technological and mental breakdowns, and affective dynamics. Importantly, communicative figurations can accommodate tension and multiplicity. In the TCR, capture and recognition do not cancel each other out; they coexist within the same figuration. Mediated infrastructures scaffold belonging, while alternative rhythms generate solidarities that remain invisible to data. By emphasizing relationality, the figuration approach avoids binaries of surveillance vs. resistance and foregrounds how mediated and unmediated dynamics intertwine.

2.5 Analytical parameters

Bringing these strands together, three parameters guide the empirical analysis:

1. Process over outcomes: the TCR's communicative dynamics are understood as evolving relations rather than fixed structures. What matters are the ongoing negotiations between riders, organizers, and audiences, rather than static endpoints or definitive judgments.

2. Ambivalence over binaries: surveillance is approached as relational and affective, capable of enabling care as well as control. It is neither inherently oppressive nor inherently benign, but takes shape through the situated practices and encounters it mediates.

3. Rhythms over snapshots: the focus is on temporalities and multiplicities; how mediated and embodied rhythms coexist, overlap, and sometimes conflict. This highlights the flow of experience over time, rather than isolated moments frozen into data points.

These parameters structure the subsequent analysis, showing how the TCR exemplifies communicative figurations of mobility under conditions of deep mediatization. In analyzing the TCR through this lens, the paper shows how mediatized endurance events reveal the ambivalence of contemporary surveillance cultures: they produce visibility and connection, but they also generate absences, silences, and excesses that resist representation. The TCR exemplifies how deeply mediatized societies are lived not only through data capture but also through affective rhythms, relational recognitions, and temporal dissonances that remain beyond the gaze.

3 Racing as benign surveillance

TCRNo9 offered a case of how surveillance infrastructures can be experienced not primarily as coercive but as connective and reassuring. While the logic of monitoring was inescapable—each rider carried a GPS tracker that broadcast their location in near real time—the affective and social meanings attached to this visibility complicated any straightforward reading of surveillance as discipline. Instead, as my reflection after the race emphasized, being tracked was inseparable from being cared for, acknowledged, and integrated into the unfolding narrative of the event.

3.1 The tracker as mediator

The race began with the ceremonial moment of attaching a GPS tracker to the bike. From then onwards, every pedal stroke was recorded, transmitted, and visualised on the official race map (Fig. 3). The device was small, but its significance was immense: it rendered my presence in the race both legible and durable, projecting it into a digital environment where audiences—family, friends, fellow cyclists, and anonymous dotwatchers could (and did) follow. Far from feeling intrusive, this tracking initially produced a sense of reassurance. Knowing that my location was visible meant that I was part of something larger, embedded in a community of riders and dotwatchers. In moments of solitude on mountain passes or empty plains, the tracker became a reminder of belonging. This sense of mediated co-presence aligns with Couldry and Hepp's (2017) argument that media infrastructures do not merely represent reality but actively constitute the social bonds through which reality is lived.

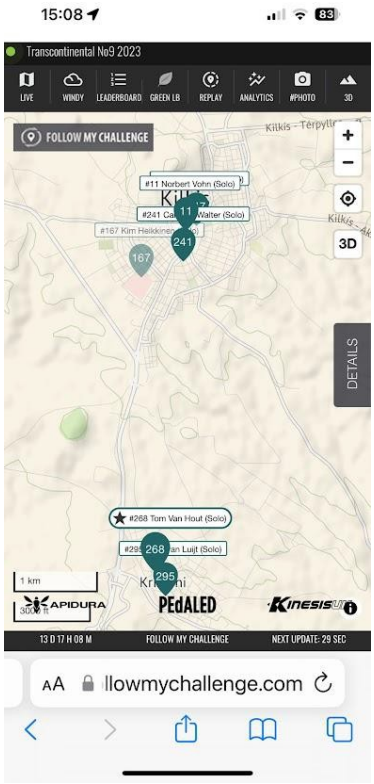

Figure 3. TCRNo9 racemap screengrab
followmychallenge.com

For organizers and race monitors, the tracker primarily served as a mechanism of control: it allowed them to verify that riders followed approved routes and avoided banned roads. For everyone else, however, the tracker mediated care. Family and friends, anxious about the risks of long-distance cycling, monitored my progress and drew comfort from each dot update, sometimes asking why my marker circled while I was shopping for groceries. Online spectators followed the unfolding drama, celebrating milestones and worrying over sudden pauses. At times, strangers even stepped out of their homes to shout my name in support. Surveillance, in this context, was suffused with affect.

3.2 Dotwatching and the affective public

Dotwatching deserves special attention as a cultural practice. It has become emblematic of ultra-distance racing, turning the abstract flow of GPS coordinates into an immersive spectator experience. Dotwatchers refresh maps repeatedly, interpret changes in speed or direction, and speculate about riders' conditions. For those of us being tracked, awareness of this invisible audience generates a peculiar form of pressure and support. My TCRNo9 reflection underscored how dotwatching cultivated an affective public. Rather than imposing discipline, surveillance here created a dispersed community bound together by rhythms of anticipation and recognition. Each tracker update punctuated the race with moments of shared attention: when a rider reached a control point, when two dots converged on the same road, when a signal stalled in remote terrain. These were not just data events but affective events, provoking emotions across networks of spectators. This resonates with Lyon's (2018) claim that contemporary surveillance must be understood as cultural as well as technical. The act of watching is woven into everyday practices of care,

solidarity, and enjoyment (Fig. 4). In the TCR, the surveillant gaze was not hostile but infused with empathy and investment— what I caption here as benign surveillance.

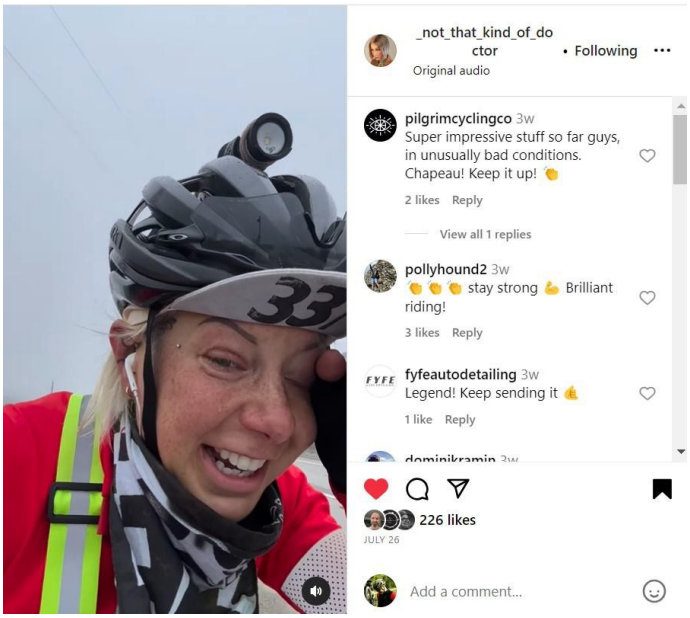

Figure 4. TCRNo9 pairs rider Sarah Ruggins summits San Gottardo (Instagram reel, posted July 26, 2023)

3.3 Care infrastructures

Surveillance also doubled as a form of care infrastructure. Race monitors followed dot movement to check riders' wellbeing after a long stop. Fellow riders, too, occasionally followed others' dots, anticipating chance encounters, verifying route choices or checking on someone who seemed to be in difficulty. For families at home, the tracker was a vital conduit of reassurance, transforming anxiety into connection. This reveals the ambiguity of surveillance in mediated mobility. While the language of "tracking" carries associations of control, the lived experience highlighted its caring capacity.

Participation in the race was sustained by this infrastructure: riders accepted surveillance not reluctantly but as an enabling condition of endurance. At the same time, this care was asymmetrically distributed. Not all riders had equal audiences or support networks following their dots. Some attracted large communities of dotwatchers; others moved in relative obscurity. Care, in this sense, was mediated by visibility, popularity, and social ties—an uneven distribution that echoes broader critiques of participatory surveillance (Andrejevic, 2007).

3.4 Rhythms of visibility

TCRNo9's mediated temporality was shaped by rhythms of visibility. Each tracker update marked a beat in the unfolding symphony of the race. Riders became attuned to these rhythms, aware that long pauses might cause worry, or that sudden accelerations would spark excitement. These mediated rhythms intersected with embodied rhythms of fatigue, hunger, and recovery. At times they aligned—such as the relief of arriving at a control point. At other times they diverged sharply: hours of suffering in the heat on an Albanian

gravel climb (Fig. 5) collapsed into a barely perceptible shift on the map. This disjuncture illustrated the partiality of capture. Data produced legibility but obscured intensity.

Figure 5. Albanian gravel, en route to Peshkopi.

Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis provides a useful lens here. The TCR's communicative figuration was sustained by overlapping tempos: technological (tracker updates), narrative (race blogs), and bodily (muscular endurance, sleep deprivation). These rhythms were neither synchronous nor reducible to one another, but their interplay generated the lived temporality of the race.

3.5 Limits of capture

Even on the TCRNo9, when I first discovered the positive aspects of being tracked, the limits of capture were evident. The tracker could show where I was but not how I was. It could map progress but not the internal negotiations of pain, motivation, and decision-making that defined endurance. Moments of roadside solidarity with other riders—sharing food, exchanging advice, offering a few words of encouragement—were invisible to the mediated gaze. Encounters with local residents, fleeting gestures of hospitality, or sudden changes of weather also resisted inscription into the digital record. These were experiences of recognition, care, and contingency that remained outside the frame of surveillance. The recognition of this gap between capture and experience returns in the TCRNo11 reflection. While the TCRNo9 account emphasised the connective value of surveillance, it also gestured toward its insufficiency as a full account of the race.

3.6 TCRNo9 as a communicative figuration

Understanding the TCRNo9 through the lens of communicative figurations reveals how actors, infrastructures, and practices coalesced into a dynamic mediated ecology.

- Actors: riders, organisers, audiences, race monitors, dotwatching families and friends.
- Infrastructures: GPS trackers, online maps, blogs, and social media.
- Practices: dotwatching, cheering, encouraging, storytelling, and commenting.

These elements together produced a figuration in which surveillance was not simply imposed but actively inhabited. Participation meant entering into a rhythm of visibility where capture was reinterpreted as care. This reframing challenges simplistic dichotomies of surveillance and resistance. Instead, TCRNo9 demonstrated how surveillance can be embedded in affective, relational practices that sustain participation. Still, as subsequent analysis will show, the figuration was incomplete. The race continually generated experiences that slipped beyond its mediated gaze, reminding us that surveillance always produces absences alongside visibility.

The TCRNo9 reflection highlighted the TCR as an example of benign surveillance, where being watched created reassurance, belonging, and affective connection. GPS tracking operated not as coercion but as care, while dotwatching produced an affective public invested in riders' rhythms of visibility. Yet even in this apparently harmonious figuration, the insufficiency of capture was apparent: embodied intensities and ephemeral solidarities resisted inscription. The following section turns to TCRNo11, where these limits became central to the race experience.

4 Beyond the gaze: recognition and rhythmic multiplicity in the TCRNo11

While GPS trackers, blogs, and online audiences remained central, the lived experience of racing revealed how much unfolded outside mediated infrastructures: in embodied rhythms, fleeting solidarities, and encounters with ecological and political environments. This observation shifts the analytical emphasis from capture (i.e. representation through data) to care and recognition (i.e. participation in relation). By participation in relation I mean the ways riders, organizers, and audiences become entangled in networks of mutual attention, responsibility, and affective exchange—forms of connection that exceed data capture and matter precisely because they are lived and felt.

4.1 Recognition as relational practice

The distinction between being visible and being recognized was central to the 2025 reflection. GPS tracking made every rider visible, but visibility did not amount to recognition. Recognition occurred in contingent, embodied moments: the nod of acknowledgment between riders passing in the night, the conversation with a stranger offering directions, the warmth of hospitality at a roadside café. For example, during a long day of riding through France, a brief café encounter in Sisteron became a moment of recognition: a cyclist looked up from his phone and greeted me by name. He then offered me a seat at his table and we spoke about bikepacking over coffee. This fleeting exchange affirmed a sense of belonging within a dispersed cycling community.

Recognition also surfaced in mediated form. At the conclusion of the 2025 edition, my assigned race monitor, a volunteer responsible for ensuring compliance and safety through GPS oversight, sent a message via Instagram to congratulate me on finishing (Fig. 6). What might otherwise be understood purely as a function of surveillance was transformed into

an affective acknowledgment: the official gaze became a personal gesture of recognition. The message did not simply verify completion; it affirmed participation as meaningful, situating me within the narrative of the event. This exchange underscores how monitoring and care are not separable but entangled, producing forms of mediated recognition that blur the line between surveillance and solidarity.

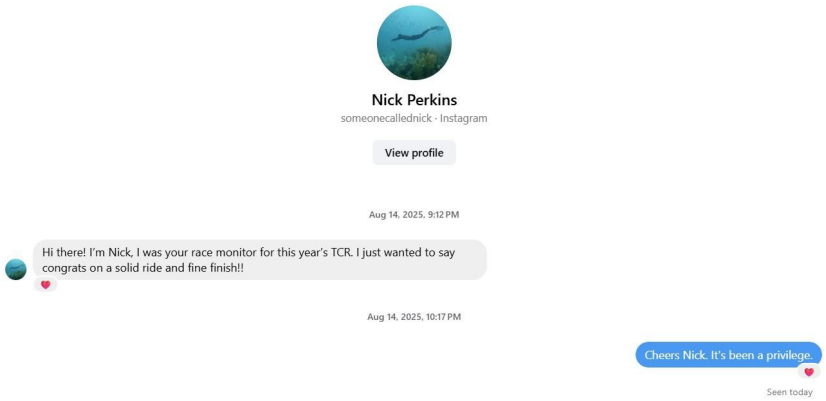

Figure 6. Race monitor's message

Recognition here is relational rather than representational. It involves being acknowledged within shared vulnerability and endurance, not being registered as data. This reframes the TCR as an ecology of relations, where riders are sustained by practices of acknowledgment that exceed the mediated gaze.

4.2 Ecologies of care

Recognition often materialized as practices of care, grounded in material and affective support. These emerged in local encounters as much as in interactions among riders. On Day 2, after a brutal climb into the Picos de Europa and the collapse of my hotel plans, it was local villagers who directed me to an alternative lodging, where I spotted four other TCR bikes parked in the hotel bar. The hotel chef offered a non-alcoholic beer and improvised a snack of honey, crisps, and raisins scavenged from the breakfast buffet. For the tracker, this was a pause; for me, it was a moment of restoration through hospitality.

On Day 6, another encounter underscored the unpredictable forms care can take. While searching for a public restroom in a French town, I asked a man with a mobility cane for directions. Before I could thank him, a passerby hurled abuse at him. His guide dog snarled in response, silencing the aggressor. This incident was not about me but about witnessing care enacted by a non-human companion—an inversion of the usual hierarchies of protection. Such vignettes illustrate what feminist care theorists (Tronto, 1993; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) emphasize: care is often invisible, contingent, and improvised, yet it sustains endurance. In the TCR, care circulates in ways infrastructures of capture cannot see: through roadside hospitality, interspecies solidarities, and small acts of recognition among riders.

4.3 Borders and the Politics of Recognition

Borders reveal another layer of recognition: not just intersubjective but geopolitical. Within the Schengen Zone, crossing borders is, officially, an unremarkable affair, especially for someone with a Belgian passport like myself. But on a bike, borders are still felt. You feel them in the shift in asphalt texture, the presence or absence of roadside shrines, the sudden proliferation of Lidl signs, or in the language of the roadworks. The border reveals itself in infrastructure before it does in signage. These subtle cues remind you that you are moving through layers of political and historical sediment: traces of sovereignty, conflict, and policy carved into the landscape.

For the tracker, a border crossing is a line on a map; for the rider, it is an experience saturated with uncertainty, anticipation, and sometimes confrontation. During the 2025 race, one rider was denied entry to Serbia from Kosovo, since Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's statehood. For dotwatchers, this appeared as a detour; for the rider, it was an encounter with contested sovereignty and geopolitical refusal (Fig. 7). The contrast is telling: borders can be banal or disruptive, unnoticed or decisive, depending on their geopolitical status. Surveillance infrastructures flatten this variability into smooth digital traces, but the lived experience of crossing is always situated, contingent, and sometimes fraught.

Figure 7. A TCRNo11 rider is denied entry into Serbia and has to reroute

My own crossings illustrated the variability of border regimes. On Day 16, crossing from North Macedonia into Serbia, border police recognised me as a rider and—remarkably—were themselves dot-watching. They offered water refills before sending me on my way. What might otherwise be a routine checkpoint became a moment of convivial recognition, a reminder that borders can oscillate between sites of friction and unexpected hospitality.

These examples underscore how the politics of recognition are woven into mobility. For surveillance infrastructures, borders appear as lines to be crossed. For riders, they are lived encounters with sovereignty, legitimacy, and sometimes solidarity. Recognition is not only interpersonal but geopolitical: to be allowed to pass, to be welcomed, or to be refused.

4.4 Rhythmic multiplicity

The TCR unfolds through multiple, overlapping rhythms that often diverge from mediated visibility. Technological rhythms were imposed by the steady pulse of GPS updates and the narrative pacing of the daily race podcast and race report, which together created the sense of a coherent unfolding storyline. At the same time, embodied rhythms shaped the race in ways that could not be reduced to this tempo.

Cycles of fatigue, hunger, injury, and recovery punctuated the event, and their intensity often bore little resemblance to the neutral trace visible on a map. For instance, bonking midway through a gravel parcours in Tuscany on day 11 (Fig. 8) was experienced as a crisis, then mitigated by an unexpected act of hospitality at a rural agriturismo and the comic presence of a snoring pig in the bushes. Online, however, this appeared simply as a minor delay in progress, stripped of affective intensity.

Figure 8. TCRNo11 parcours 3. Strada dell'Assietta, Italy. Photo credit: Tomás Montes LostDot.cc

Ecological rhythms further complicated this picture. Weather systems, daylight cycles, and shifting terrain structured the pace of riding in unpredictable ways. Crosswinds and headwinds on the Asturian coastline slowed riders down, reshaping their trajectories, but these disruptions were invisible to

dot-watchers. Finally, geopolitical rhythms played a decisive role in mobility, with border frictions, local routines, and cultural infrastructures interrupting or redirecting riders' paths. While crossings within Schengen often felt banal, contested frontiers in the Balkans introduced uncertainty and delay, experiences that the tracking map flattened into neutral cartographies.

Taken together, these temporalities illustrate what Lefebvre (2004) calls the multiplicity of rhythms that underpin everyday life. The TCR is not defined by a single temporal order but by the frictions generated when technological, embodied, ecological, and geopolitical tempos overlap and collide. Crucially, recognition often arises in the gaps between these rhythms—when ecological unpredictability interrupts digital synchrony, or when embodied collapse disrupts the smooth tempo of capture. These frictions highlight the insufficiency of surveillance alone to account for the lived experience of ultracycling.These rhythms are not harmonized but interwoven in dynamic, contingent ways. At times they align, such as when a control point arrival coincides with personal triumph and online recognition. At other times they diverge, such as when bodily collapse interrupts the smooth tempo of digital capture. The analytical point is that mediatized endurance events cannot be understood through a single rhythm or temporal framework. Recognition of multiplicity is essential to capturing the lived experience of participation.

4.5 Heterotopian care

Care and recognition sometimes take shape in ambiguous, heterotopian spaces—outside official infrastructures yet central to endurance. During TCRNo9, when a fellow rider and I stumbled upon a brand new but seemingly deserted riverside wedding venue in Albania, we were first asked for money to stay, then unexpectedly offered a room for free. Hungry, we eventually cooked pasta ourselves in the empty restaurant kitchen, washing it down with draft beer. This improvised feast became one of the most memorable moments of the race, later memorialized in a personalized rider card by a Dutch artist (Fig. 9). Such experiences illustrate how care emerges in spaces of uncertainty, negotiated between strangers and environments. They complicate the ethos of radical self-reliance by showing that endurance is sustained through contingent, relational ecologies. These heterotopias of care remain invisible to surveillance infrastructures but indispensable to the race's social reality.

Fig. 9. Cap 268 rider card. Artwork by @mrcl_sketches

4.6 TCRNo11 as a reconfigured communicative figuration

Understanding the TCR as a communicative figuration highlights the shifting interplay between capture and recognition. The figuration continued to involve the familiar elements of actors, infrastructures, and practices, but their relations were reconfigured in ways that underscored the insufficiency of surveillance. Riders and audiences remained central, yet in lived experience local residents and roadside solidarities became more salient than in their mediated representation. GPS tracking remained indispensable to the race's organisation and visibility, but it was increasingly recognised as partial, unable to convey the ecological unpredictability or the embodied intensities of participation. Alongside the familiar practices of dotwatching and race coverage, other practices gained prominence: gestures of mutual care, fleeting solidarities, and forms of relational recognition that proved just as vital to sustaining participation as the mediated infrastructures themselves.

This reframing underscores the dynamic nature of communicative figurations. They are not static templates but processual configurations that evolve as participants negotiate tensions between infrastructural rhythms and embodied realities. Surveillance infrastructures structured participation but could not account for its full ecology. Recognition and care operated alongside, sustaining endurance through relational and affective practices. Together, these dynamics situate the TCR as a communicative figuration not only of surveillance but of the rhythms and relations that continually exceed it.

5 Between capture and care: refiguring mediated mobilities

The race reflections reveal an analytical tension at the heart of mediatized endurance: the event is simultaneously structured by infrastructures of capture and sustained by practices of care and recognition that exceed capture. Rather than treating these as opposed logics, their coexistence can be understood as constitutive of the race's communicative figuration. In this sense, the TCR provides insight into how mobility in deeply mediatized societies is lived through rhythmic multiplicity—overlapping temporalities produced by digital infrastructures, embodied participation, ecological conditions, and political constraints. By theorising the interplay between capture and care, surveillance can be repositioned not as a binary of coercion versus resistance but as a relational process that both enables and obscures participation.

The analysis highlighted how GPS tracking, blogs, and social media generated a logic of capture. Riders' movements were continually recorded, visualised, and integrated into an unfolding narrative accessible to distributed audiences. Capture created reassurance: knowing one's presence was visible brought a sense of belonging. For audiences, capture provided the raw material for dot-watching, producing emotional investment and collective rhythms of anticipation. This dynamic resonates with Andrejevic's (2007) concept of participatory surveillance, in which data are not extracted against individuals' will but voluntarily produced as part of participation. Riders accept surveillance because it is constitutive of the event. The GPS tracker is not an optional accessory but a defining infrastructure of the TCR. Yet capture is reductive. As Dourish and Bell (2011) remind us, digital representations simplify and abstract embodied experience. Hours of struggle, fleeting solidarities, and affective intensities collapse into a thin line across a digital map. Capture affords visibility, but not experience.

The analysis then shifted attention to what capture excludes. Recognition, in this context, is not synonymous with visibility. Instead, it involves acknowledging one another's vulnerability and presence through relational practices: sharing food, exchanging encouragement, or offering roadside assistance. Recognition also extended to encounters with local residents and with the landscapes themselves, whether moments of hospitality, negotiation, or confrontation that were invisible to dot-watchers.

Recognition foregrounded the relational, embodied, and affective dimensions of endurance. It required being-with rather than being-seen. Where capture inscribed data, recognition materialised in contingent encounters. Where capture reduced, recognition expanded. Feminist care theorists help articulate this distinction: Tronto (1993) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argue that care is relational, situated, and often invisible within dominant infrastructures. The TCR demonstrates this invisibility. While mediated care circulated through dot-watching and online messages, much of the care that sustained endurance was enacted off-screen in embodied, contingent relations.

The tension between capture and recognition can also be understood through the lens of rhythmic multiplicity. Both reflections emphasised the coexistence of heterogeneous temporalities. Technological rhythms were established by the steady tempo of GPS updates, parcours timings, and blog posts.

Narrative rhythms were produced by the pacing of online storytelling and commentary. Embodied rhythms unfolded in cycles of fatigue, hunger, sleep deprivation, and recovery. Ecological rhythms were shaped by weather systems, daylight, and terrain. And geopolitical rhythms emerged in border regulations, traffic flows, and cultural routines. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis reminds us that rhythms coexist, overlap, and conflict. The TCR's communicative figuration is thus defined by rhythmic multiplicity: participation means inhabiting and negotiating multiple, incommensurable tempos simultaneously. Recognition

often arose in the gaps where rhythms collided—when embodied exhaustion interrupted the tempo of digital capture, or when ecological unpredictability disrupted narrative coherence.

The framework of communicative figurations (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018) provides a way to conceptualise this interplay of capture and care as a processual, relational configuration. The TCR involved a shifting constellation of actors, infrastructures, and practices. Riders and audiences were central, yet in lived experience local residents and roadside solidarities became more salient than in their mediated representation. GPS tracking, blogs, mapping platforms, and social media scaffolded mediated visibility, but they were recognised as partial, unable to convey ecological unpredictability or embodied intensities. Alongside dot-watching and narrative storytelling, other practices gained prominence: gestures of mutual support, fleeting solidarities, and forms of relational recognition that proved just as vital to sustaining participation as mediated infrastructures themselves.

Communicative figurations allow us to theorise the race as a reconfiguring ecology in which capture and care coexist, overlap, and continually reshape one another. This resonates with Hepp and Hasebrink's (2018) emphasis on communicative figurations as dynamic rather than static. The TCR's figuration evolves with each edition, each encounter, and each technological adjustment. What remains constant is not the dominance of surveillance but the coexistence of mediated and unmediated practices that define participation.

Synthesising the two reflections allows us to rethink surveillance in ways that extend beyond endurance sport. The TCR demonstrates that surveillance can operate as reassurance rather than coercion, enabling care networks that sustain participation. It shows that visibility is not sufficient: recognition emerges relationally in embodied encounters that resist capture. And it illustrates that surveillance is lived not in singular rhythms but in multiplicities, coexisting with ecological, bodily, and geopolitical tempos that exceed it. This reframing aligns with Lyon's (2018) argument that surveillance is a cultural as well as technical practice. Watching in the TCR is not simply a function of power but a mode of relation—ambivalent, affective, and incomplete.

By theorising the interplay of capture and care, the TCR contributes to broader debates in surveillance studies, mediatization, and mobility research. It demonstrates that surveillance is ambivalent, not merely disciplinary but relational and affective; that mediatization is partial, with infrastructures that scaffold participation without exhausting meaning; and that mobilities are plural, unfolding across multiple, overlapping rhythms that resist reduction to any single frame. The case also advances the agenda of KomFI's *Communicative Figurations* research by showing how endurance events exemplify the processual reconfiguration of communication in deeply mediatized societies. The TCR illustrates how actors, infrastructures, and practices dynamically assemble, disassemble, and reassemble around tensions of visibility, recognition, and care.

The dialogue between the two race reflections shows that the TCR is neither simply an instance of benign surveillance nor a realm of pure resistance. It is a figuration where capture and care coexist, structured by mediated infrastructures but continually reconfigured by embodied, ecological, and relational dynamics. Recognition emerges in the gaps where capture fails, and care circulates both through mediated visibility and through off-screen encounters. Understanding the TCR in this way offers a conceptual vocabulary for analysing mediated mobilities more broadly. Endurance events illuminate how surveillance and care are not opposing logics but intertwined processes in which rhythmic multiplicity shapes the lived experience of mediatized societies.

6 Conclusion

The Transcontinental Race (TCR) provides a unique empirical site for examining how mobility, surveillance, and care are configured in deeply mediatized societies. By drawing on autoethnographic reflections on two race editions, this paper has traced a conceptual shift: from understanding the race as an instance of benign, participatory surveillance to recognising how endurance participation exceeds surveillance through embodied, relational, and ecological rhythms. The TCR is not reducible to either surveillance or its refusal. Instead, it exemplifies a communicative figuration (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018): a dynamic configuration of actors, infrastructures, and practices where capture and care coexist in productive tension. The race's figuration is structured by GPS tracking and storytelling, but continually reconfigured through embodied, ecological, and affective practices that exceed them. Surveillance here operates not only as control but as connection, while recognition demonstrates the relational dimensions of care beyond the gaze. I would argue that this analysis contributes to three scholarly debates.

First, it advances surveillance studies by foregrounding the ambivalence of surveillance in mediatized endurance events. Rather than treating surveillance as purely disciplinary, the TCR illustrates its connective, affective, and caring dimensions, alongside its inevitable limitations. This supports Lyon's (2018) argument that surveillance has become cultural as well as technical—an everyday mode of relation—but adds emphasis on how its insufficiency creates openings for alternative practices of recognition.

Second, it enriches mediatization theory by showing how infrastructures of visibility organise social relations without exhausting them. The TCR demonstrates the partiality of mediatization: while media construct reality in specific ways (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), they also leave silences and absences. These silences are not marginal but central, shaping the experience of mobility through what remains beyond representation.

Third, it extends mobility research by articulating the concept of rhythmic multiplicity. Endurance events highlight how mobilities unfold across overlapping temporalities—technological, embodied, ecological, and geopolitical. Recognition often arises in the frictions between rhythms, where the smooth tempo of digital capture collides with the unpredictability of embodied and environmental cycles. This rhythmic multiplicity provides a conceptual vocabulary for analysing mobility not as linear or singular but as heterogeneous and contested.

For KomFI's research agenda, the case of the TCR offers a vivid example of how communicative figurations are lived in contexts of deep mediatization. The race illustrates how figurations are dynamic, processual, and relational: they are sustained by infrastructures of capture but continually reconfigured through practices of recognition and care. This underscores the importance of analysing not only what mediatized infrastructures make visible but also what they render invisible—the relational work, affective solidarities, and embodied intensities that resist capture.

Looking beyond endurance sport, the implications extend to other domains of mediatized mobility: from digital health monitoring to workplace tracking and platform-mediated gig work. In all these contexts, infrastructures of capture structure participation but fail to encompass the full range of lived experience. Recognition, care, and multiplicity remain vital, reminding us that mediatization does not totalise but configures and reconfigures in uneven ways. Ultimately, the TCR demonstrates that surveillance and care are not opposing logics but intertwined processes in contemporary mobility cultures. To study communicative figurations is to attend to this interplay: the ways infrastructures scaffold connection, the ways recognition exceeds visibility, and the rhythms through which capture and care continually negotiate one another.

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