

# 5

## PERFORMANCES OF ASYNCHRONOUS TIME

Simon Faithfull begins his performance art piece *0.00 Navigation* by swimming ashore at the southern end of England in the town of Peacehaven. As he emerges from the waters of the English Channel, he is fully dressed in black pants and a black sweater. He takes the GPS receiver out of his pocket. He is exactly at the Prime Meridian and starts his walk along this longitude. His project is to walk the entire length of the Meridian across England, regardless of what may get in his way. Immediately obstructing his walk are the large white cliffs of Peacehaven that begin at the edge of the beach. His slow climb up the side of the sheer cliff takes several minutes, but once he reaches the top, he again pulls out his GPS receiver and continues his journey along the line that demarcates Greenwich Mean Time. We see all of the action from the point of view of the camera that is filming him, which is always from behind. Through the black-and-white footage, we follow Faithfull as he stays as true to the Meridian as possible. At times, however, the single cinematographer cannot follow Faithfull's journey down steep ledges or wading slowly across canals that go up to his chest. Instead, we watch from afar. At other times, we are right on his heels as he hops over picket fences and through the homes of strangers. As Faithfull says of the piece, "I am interested in the maps that we create in our heads. These maps are a combination of our immediate locale (the humdrum everyday world we move in) and the other psychological world that we hear of from afar."<sup>1</sup> *0.00 Navigation* is a performance of the process of signifying the space of the Prime Meridian. In other words, his is a performance of the lived practice of life along the Meridian as it contrasts with the many imaginaries around this space. For me (somewhat foolishly), the Prime Meridian signaled an emphatic relationship to north-south bearings, yet in most of the footage of Faithfull's performance streets took odd angles, rarely conforming to the north-south trajectory I had inscribed on my imaginaries of this space. This is



one key element to this project: how our practices of space conform or disrupt the imaginaries of those spaces.

Faithfull's locative performance also brought up an important question for me: Who is the audience of this piece? Am I, as the viewer of the film, the intended audience? Is it the person following him with the camera (whoever he or she may be)? Perhaps the audience is made up of the passersby on the streets or the owners of the homes he walks through. Alternatively, maybe Faithfull is performing for the technology he is engaging: his performance is for the gaze of the GPS satellites. While we can answer by saying "all of the above," the question itself provokes another meaningful inquiry that resonates throughout mobile media culture: where does the *primary action* take place? Intimately tied to this inquiry is the question of time (especially since Faithfull's project is to walk along the line that, for most, represents the standardization of global time): in what time does the primary action take place? By staging his performance of the Prime Meridian as a document that must be accessed at a later time, we confront these questions of audience presence and performance time.

Throughout this chapter, I look at performances that utilize mobile and locative media to engage participants and performers in the tension over ideas of co-presence and mediatized interactions. How do our mediated interactions—especially ones that take place in asynchronous time—foster a sense of embodied connection across space? The history of Western culture has practiced its affinity for logocentrism: the idea that the human voice (and all that's coupled with it, such as embodied proximity and face-to-face interactions) has been the seat of full, embodied "presence." But our recent practices with mobile technologies have showed a different prioritization: we are increasingly connecting through asynchronous technologies like text messaging instead of through synchronous technologies like phone calls. By looking at performances similar to Faithfull's *0.00 Navigation*, I will argue that our practices of embodied engagement with mobile devices are challenging the temporal nature of presence and ideas about what constitutes a primary action.