

RUNNING AS A CINEMATIC SUBJECT

by

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DEDICATION

“Life is a marathon not a sprint.”

- Anonymous

For my college teammates and Blazer sisters. Specifically my girlfriends, Gina Luke, Kristie Mueller, Nicola Franta, and Kelsey Torchia, who ran by side in my very first marathon. These remarkable women continue to teach me the value of persistence, resilience, hard work, patience, and determination both in running and in life.

I also dedicate this paper to my family and friends who have supported me along this life changing journey. Specifically, I would like to thank my parents, Mary Pat McNeil and Greg Smith, my sister, Mary Kate Smith, and the love of my life, Edward Genet, who continue to encourage me to chase my dreams.

And, for David Forester. May you find endless running trails in heaven.

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ABSTRACT

Ever since Eadweard Muybridge first photographed a man sprinting in 1887 running has worn its own path across the cinematic landscape. Running couples a natural cinematic impulse because, like cinema, it is a temporal and spatial experience. However, what truly makes running a profound cinematic subject is its expressive and perceptive nature. That is, when we are running we are not only engaged physically, but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Running forces us to go beyond our physical ourselves, to reach an enlightened state, which is in many ways similar to the embodied experience of watching a film. Cinema is widely viewed as a transformative medium that gives life to the invisible, subjective world of imagination, thoughts, and ideas. Running and cinema are ultimately visceral experiences with the power to reorient our subjectivity and thus transform our perceptions of the world and ourselves. In sum, the spatial, temporal, and reflexive similarities between running and cinema make the two a seamless pair. In order to argue running's inherent cinematic impulse and demonstrate these parallels between running and cinema this paper analyzes three running films: *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962), *Spirit of the Marathon* (2007), and *Finding Traction* (2014). It also looks at my film, *There's a Light Beyond These Woods* (2016), and the stylistic and technical choices I made in order to capture an authentic running experience. In a world where increasingly more emphasis is being placed on personal narratives and self-reflexivity, perhaps running films are the ideal representation of how cinematic storytelling can inspire self-reflexivity and alter our embodied consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike throwing a baseball, riding a bike, or learning to swim, we are all born with the innate ability to run. It is an ability that is deeply rooted in our anatomy, our ancestry, our physiology, our evolutionary history, and our collective imaginations. Christopher McDougall, ultrarunner and author of the best-selling novel, *Born to Run* (2009), put it best when he said running is the *superpower* that makes us human (239). “If you don't think you were born to run,” writes McDougall, “you're not only denying history. You're denying who you are” (244). Although not all of us may enjoy running, it is arguably as fundamental to the human condition as climbing trees is to our ape cousins. Running, which McDougall calls a “universal sensation” (McDougall 11) and Kristin Armstrong, a runner, author, and mom of three, believes deepens our personal connection with just about anything (Armstrong 4), represents a defining aspect of human identity: *an innate need to move*.

From the conception of our first Homo sapien ancestors, running has been critical to both our development and our survival. We run when we play, we run when we are late, we run from danger, we run to get places, we run to find help and safety, we run into the arms of loved ones, we run to find peace, we run after our dreams, and at the end of the day we run home. There is one problem, however: running depends on the cooperation of our body *and* our mind. Unlike any other organism on the planet humans have what Dr. Dennis Bramble, a biologist from the University of Utah and pioneer of the running man theory of evolution, calls a “mind-body conflict.” “We have a body built for performance,” states Dr. Bramble, “but a brain that is always looking for efficiency”

(McDougall 242). In other words, think of the human brain as a thrifty bargain shopper. It is always searching for more cost effective ways to acquire and save energy. Dr. Bramble's mind-body conflict theory may then offer an explanation to why less than one percent of the United States population has run a marathon despite running's biological prevalence ("Marathon Running Statistics"). "We live in a culture that sees extreme exercise as crazy," explains Dr. Bramble, "because that's what our brain tells us: why fire up the machine if you don't have to?" (McDougall 243). Our ancestors, on the other hand, lived in a time when modern day conveniences, like Uber and Lyft, Jimmy Johns, Amazon Prime, and iPhones did not exist. Instead, they depended on their legs for finding food, transportation, and safety (McDougall 242). For them, running was a means of survival. Today, however, as technological advances enable us to live in a more comfort-driven society the need to run has become seemingly out-of-date.

Yet, in recent years, research shows that recreational running is experiencing a new surge in popularity. Since 1990, in the United States there has been a three hundred percent increase in the number of running event finishers (Jessop). Running USA reported that in 2013 a record-breaking 19 million plus Americans crossed the finish line in some type of running race ("2014 State of the Sport - Part II: Running Industry Report"). Experts in the industry attribute running's resurgence in popularity to a number of different factors, but the bottom line is simple: running is a sport that almost anyone can enjoy. Unlike team sports, like soccer, or even one-on-one sports, like tennis, running does not require tons of expensive equipment or a sport-specific training facility. Nor does it depend on the participation and abilities of other participants. Running at the most

basic level is contingent on two things: the determination of the individual and a good pair of shoes. It does not get simpler than that. Running's inherent simplicity and its singularity of purpose largely contribute to why running has been crowned "the greatest metaphor for life." Because, as Oprah Winfrey describes running, "you get out of it what you put into it" (Gonzales).

In this sense, running serves as a powerful tool for personal development--running has been cited as improving one's mental health in terms of boosting self-confidence, teaching self-discipline, creating a positive self-image, raising self-esteem, promoting individuality, etc. These mental benefits, in addition to the physical ones, in turn make running a fascinating subject for contemplation and discussion. From running magazines and books to blogs and podcasts about running, many individuals view running as a topic with endless life lessons, inspirational stories, heroic feats, and motivational tips that extend far beyond the sport itself. There is one medium, however, that stands apart from the others for its ability to capture the true essence of the running experience: cinema.

Cinema, unlike books or blogs, is an audiovisual medium. It is intuitively designed for capturing *life in motion*, which was precisely the thought of nineteenth century photographer, Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge, who initially gained recognition for photographing expansive and grandeur landscapes of the American West, later became fascinated with the biomechanics of movement (Leslie, Mitchell) (Ulaby, Neda). Starting in late 1880s, Muybridge began experimenting with various camera techniques and photographing a variety of different action sequences as part of his study on human and animal locomotion. Perhaps the most iconic of Muybridge's 20,000 plus

photographs is a series of photos depicting a nude man sprinting (Leslie, Mitchell) (McKernan, Luke). This series of photographs, which Muybridge showed to captivated audiences by using his own invention called a zoopraxiscope, an early version of the modern movie projector, later became known as Muybridge's "running man," (Leslie, Mitchell). Muybridge's innovative freeze-frame technique is not only credited with capturing the first sequential photos of a man running, but also with producing the world's first "movie" (Leslie, Mitchell). Since Muybridge's iconic running man, "runners have worn a path across the cinematic landscape," writes Adam Dewar in his introduction to *The Guardian's* list of the ten best running films of all time. And, Dewar's statement is incredibly true! Whether watching the first feature-length running film from 1962, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, or the recent 2014 Academy Award nominees, *Unbroken* (2014) and *The Imitation Game* (2015), one thing is certain: running has undoubtedly become as much of a popular fitness phenomenon as it has a prominent cinematic subject.

In this paper, I argue that running lends itself naturally to film because it possesses the following inherent cinematic qualities: (1) running itself requires physical movement, and the principal purpose of motion picture is to capture *life in motion*; (2) running is a time-contingent sport, and video is a time-based medium; and, lastly, (3) because cinema and running are both visceral experiences through which we experience life and the world around us, they in turn radically shape our perceptions of both the world and ourselves. In order to argue my position that the spirit of running embodies a cinematic impulse I will analyze three running films: *Finding Traction* (2014), *The Spirit*

of the Marathon (2008), and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962). In addition to these films, I will finish my discussion by analyzing my thesis film, “There is a Light Beyond These Woods.” Building on what I learned from the other running films I will explore the methods and choices I made as a filmmaker and how those techniques helped bring my running experience to life on the big screen.

WHAT IS *CINEMATIC*?A TEMPORAL, SPATIAL, AND INTELLECTUAL EXPLORATION OF RUNNING
AND CINEMA

Before discussing running's inherent cinematic qualities, it is important to ask the question, "What makes something cinematic?" Generally speaking, something is considered to be cinematic if it is relating to, suggestive of, or suitable for motion picture or the filming of cinema (Merriam-Webster). While this is a working definition, it only touches the surface of cinematic theory. To better understand what qualifies running as cinematic I will first refer to the writings of André Bazin. (Theorists consider Bazin to be one of the founding fathers of film theory. His book, *What is Cinema?*, is a critical compilation of essays that define not just what cinema is, but why it matters.)

In arguably the most important of Bazin's essays, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," he defends the objective nature of photography and cinema against the subjectivity of the other "plastic arts" (painting, drawing, etc.). For Bazin, the credibility of the photographic image resides in its transference of reality (8). Before the invention of the camera, the ability to duplicate the comings and goings of real life was virtually impossible. Although many paintings achieved almost perfect imitations of reality, they were still only illusions of reality; for a painter, says Bazin, no matter how skilled, cannot escape the subjectivity of his own hand (7). "Photography and cinema on the other hand," writes Bazin, "are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism" (7). With the invention of first the photographic

camera and later the video camera we are suddenly able to reproduce reality as if it is unfolding right before us and without the appearance of human intervention:

For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative invention of man ... This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. (Bazin 7-8)

According to Bazin, we thus look upon photography, in contrast to painting, as an “objective lens” on reality and not an artist’s subjective interpretation. Audiences, in other words, more readily accept a photo as “real” than say a painting by Claude Monet. Bazin’s comments, however, do not consider the role of the photographer. A photograph may appear to reproduce reality, but the subject matter is always subject to the photographer’s intervention. The photograph is therefore accepted as an objectivity lens on reality more readily than a painting, but is still a product of the photographer’s subjectivity.

Likewise, we view cinema with a similar perspective. Cinema is essentially like photography’s younger brother. Unlike the photograph, however, whose subjects are frozen in both time and space, video progresses, frame by frame, to show the duration and the movement of an entire moment. Cinema can therefore be called “objectivity in time and space” (Bazin 8). Cinema, however, is not entirely objective. It is an aesthetic representation of time and space. It is, thus, important to understand that Bazin’s definition of cinema refers primarily to narrative fiction. At the time of his theoretical analysis, documentary was not even recognized as a filmmaking genre. Today, however,

there exists many alternative modes to filmmaking. None of which are completely objective despite Bazin's claim. Every film, regardless of stylistic approach—this even includes the observational mode of documentary, which strives to be as unobtrusive as possible—relies on someone behind the camera to decide who or what to film, what not to film, and how to film it. This human intervention, although different from a painter, gives the filmmaker incredible creative power and control because they essentially mediate what the audience sees. The video camera is, therefore, a *subjective* means through which we capture and view the world. This, however, does not discredit Bazin's point that cinema is strongly related to both time and space. To clarify, I am referring to space in terms of movement, and how movement affects a subject's and/or object's position and orientation in relation to a given space, which could be a hotel room, a track, countryside vista, etc. These two parameters, time and space, are defining aesthetics of cinema.

Running, in this sense, can be said to have a cinematic impulse because it also has an aesthetic relationship with both time and space. Other daily activities, such as grocery shopping, are not aesthetic in the sense that they are subject to change. Shopping, unlike running, is a leisure activity. It is by nature sporadic and has no definite rules or boundaries. Running, on the other hand, is completely dependent on time and space. Time and space, in other words, define the running experience. Picture, for example, Steve Prefontaine running around the track in the men's 5000-meter race at the 1972 Olympic games. In terms of time, the second the gun goes off, signaling the race's start, the timer starts the official race clock. In running events, the clock provides an overall

running time for the duration of the entire race. It enables race officials to track and record the pace of each individual runner and determines who crosses the finish line fastest. In terms of space, as Prefontaine and the other runners work their way around the track, they are literally running in circles. Given the track's elliptical shape with each lap the runners move away from the starting point only to eventually circle back to it. Prefontaine therefore must outrun the other competitors if he hopes to cross the finish line first. Running's direct relationship with space and time is ultimately what won Ian Stewart the bronze medal while Prefontaine only finished fourth.

Thus, discussing running as a temporal activity is much like discussing music's relationship with rhythm; the two go hand in hand. Every runner, young or old, male or female, beginner or elite marathoner, is always in a race against the clock. Whether running a race, doing a workout around the track, or going for a Sunday morning long run, time is quite literally of the essence. Time is the quantifier that determines whether Steve Prefontaine will win or lose in *Without Limits* (1998), what mile-pacer fifteen-year-old, Ralph Walker, has to run to get his miracle in *Saint Ralph* (2004), and whether Nikki Kimball will break the men's long trail record in *Finding Traction* (2014). In contrast to one-on-one sports and team sports, where participants compete head to head trying to rack up a greater score or number of points than their alleged opponent(s), a runner's only true opponent is the clock. Marathoner and author, Haruki Murakami, discusses time's adversarial role in his memoir, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. He writes, "Most ordinary runners are motivated by an individual goal, more than anything: namely, a time they want to beat. As long as he can beat that time, a runner will feel he's

accomplished what he set out to do, and if he can't, then he'll feel he hasn't" (9-10).

Time is thus more than just the antagonist. It is literally the measurement of success.

In addition to being temporal, cinema is also a spatial medium. That is, although video itself exists only on a two-dimensional plane, it captures life in its three-dimensional form. Video thus possesses a spatial-like presence that, unlike the static images of paintings and photography, which convey a pseudo sense of depth, allows viewers to experience and interact with subjects, objects, and the environment as the camera itself moves throughout the frame. This is why cinema is often referred to as a medium *in motion*, or "motion-picture." Film theorists for years have been defining cinema in terms of movement: "painting in movement" (Leopold Survage in Stam 33); "architecture in movement" (Elie Faure in Stam 33); "the plastic art in motion" (Riccioto Canudo in Stam 33). In other words, cinema's unique ability to capture live action both spontaneously and simultaneously is what distinguishes it from other mediums. This ingenuity, combined with the mobility of modern video cameras, endows movies with a sense of movement and spatial presence that other plastic arts can only hint at.

Videographers can literally move with their subjects and track their movements. Cinema thus invites audiences to engage in and experience life, whether it is a bustling street in New York City, a lioness pack hunting an antelope on the Serengeti, or a new seedling breaking through the forest floor, in its immediacy and spatiality.

Movement, likewise, is also fundamental to the art of running. After all, "Running is just a controlled fall," says Dr. Dennis Bramble (McDougall 219). This "controlled fall" is actually a combination of many movements working together--i.e. physical

exertion, gravity, balance and counterbalance, tactile response, etc. Put together, these forces are what enabled Billy Mills to win gold in 10,000 meter at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (*Running Brave* 1983), Folsom prison inmate, Larry “Lickety Split” Murphy, to beat Frank Davies (*The Jericho Mile* 1979), and Forrest Gump to run across the United States not just once, but four times (*Forrest Gump* 1994). Gump’s epic long run, although fictional, exemplifies the true tenacity of this sport. He says,

That day for no particular reason I decided to go for a little run. So I ran to the end of the road. When I got there I thought maybe I’d run to the end of town. When I got there, I thought maybe I’d just run across Greenbow County. I figured since I’d run this far, maybe I’d just run across the great state of Alabama, and that’s what I did. I ran clear across Alabama. For no particular reason I kept on going. I ran clear to the ocean. When I got there I figured since I’d gone this far I might as well turn around and keep on going. (*Forrest Gump* 1994)

By the end of Forrest’s journey he had run for three years, two months, fourteen days, and sixteen hours and ran across over thirty states! After watching Gump’s running montage it is obvious why running and cinema are made for each other: because they are both *movement* motivated. No other artistic medium can literally keep pace with Gump like motion pictures can.

Movement, or the different ways in which we orient ourselves within our environment, is one way through which we perceive space. In both running and filmmaking we experience and interact with a given space as we move through it. Likewise, a specific place, whether it is a pool, a mountain trail, a public bathroom, or a dark alleyway, also informs the ways in which we can move within that space. In terms of running, the race course greatly influences one’s speed, cadence, and overall style of running. Factors such as the distance, type of terrain, the weather, and course conditions all impact how a runner navigates from the starting point to the finish line. Runners are

thus movement motivated. In regards to filmmaking, camera movements are often motivated by some type of action on the screen, for instance, Gump's epic long run. As Gump runs the camera moves with him keeping pace as he crisscrosses across the country. So whether chasing after *Marathon Man* (1976) or following real-life Forrest Gumps, Marshall Ulrich and Charlie Engle, as they race across the country (*Running America* 2010), cinema is the only medium that can not just go the distance, but also bring the true essence of the running experience to life.

Time and space, however, are not the only contributors to running's cinematic impulse. In his book, *Film Theory An Introduction*, Robert Stam offers a reasonably in-depth yet comprehensive overview of what theorists consider to be "the essence of cinema." Channeling the writings of Abel Gance and Jean Epstein, Stam refers to cinema as a "visceral" experience that "endow[s] human beings with a new synesthetic awareness" (35). In other words, the cinematic experience is an *embodied* experience. Unlike painting, drawing, or sculpture, cinema reproduces life in its felt presence and immediacy (Stam 35). The experience of viewing life as itself is what gives cinema its prowess. In sum, it endows the cinematic experience with the transformative power to alter our subjectivity while engaging and challenging viewers on both an intellectual and emotional level. Stam therefore expands upon Bazin's *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* by citing film's credibility as a means of invoking a viewer's sensibility. Quoting Epstein, Stam says:

Thanks to cinema "we experience hills, trees, faces in space as a new sensation. Given motion or its appearance, the body as a whole experiences depth. ... The cine-camera, more than the car or the airplane, makes possible particular, personal trajectories that reverberated through the entire physique" (35).

It is not, however, sufficient enough to claim that running is cinematic simply because it is also a visceral experience. Although Wes Holman, a forty-four year old runner looking to make a comeback after once being banned from the sport (*On the Edge* 1986), and Chris Cahill, an aspiring young Olympic pentathlete caught in the throes of competition and love, (*Personal Best* 1982) would both attest to this truth, running's connection with cinema runs much deeper. There is a connection that stems from their ability to reorient our perspective and, therefore, re-determine the spatial, temporal, and personal lenses through which we view the world and ourselves.

In this sense, it is important to examine the cinematic experience as a means of subjective reflexivity. In his essay, *The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic "Presence,"* Vivian Sobchack claims that the expressive and perceptive technologies of photography, cinema, and electronic media have "radically transformed not just our comprehension of the world but also our apprehension of ourselves" (135). To frame her argument, she borrows the following quote from Elaine Scarry: "We make things so that they will in turn remake us, revising the interior of embodied consciousness" (Sobchack 135). While these "things" Scarry refers to could be any number of expressive technologies, such as writing, poetry, or painting, Sobchack believes that the perceptive technologies of photography, cinema, and the electronic media of the television and computer are more transformative in terms of Scarry's "interior of embodied consciousness" because they are culturally *pervasive*: "They belong not merely to scientists or doctors or an educated elite but to all of us--and all of the time" (Sobchack 135).

Each of these technologies, however, stimulates and shapes our values and perceptions of what matters in the world differently. Although Sobchack initially groups photography, cinema, and electronic media together, she later recognizes their individuality as separate aesthetic forms and representations of the world:

Each technology not only differentially mediates our figurations of bodily existence but also constitutes them. That is, each offers our lived bodies radically different ways of “being-in-the-world.” Each implicates us in different structures of material investment, and--because each has a particular affinity with different cultural functions, forms, and contents--each stimulates us through differing modes of presentation and representation to different aesthetic responses and ethical responsibilities ... In sum, just as the photograph did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so in the late twentieth and early twenty-first, cinematic and electronic screens differently solicit and shape our presence to the world, our representation in it, and our sensibilities and responsibilities about it. (Sobchack 136-137)

Cinematic technology, although dependent on the photographic, creates visual experience that is uniquely its own. The cinema-camera records live action simultaneously and spontaneously by rapidly taking a series of photographs. These images are then played back, usually at twenty-four photographs, or frames, per second, to create a moving image. The moving picture, says Sobchack, *animates* photography (146). Unlike photography, which Andre Bazin saw as primarily a form of mummification (Bazin 4), cinema emerges not as a moment of the past, but as moment that is presently habitable; as if the presented movement is coming into fruition right before our very eyes. For the very first time cinema makes possible not only the objective reproduction of life, in both its original materiality and immediacy, but also makes visible “the very structure and process of subjective, embodied vision” (Sobchack 149). Vision, or the power or action of sensing the world through the eyes, was for a long time considered to be a private experience, invisible to others, that each of us experienced as

our own. Cinema, however, makes objectively visible this previously private experience (Sobchack 149). While novels and paintings have entertained us with this insight for centuries, cinema separates itself by making possible for the first time “visual reflexivity” (Sobchack 149). As Sobchack says,

Prior to the cinema this visual reflexivity in which we see ourselves seeing through other eyes was accomplished only indirectly: that is, we understood the vision of others as structured similarly to our own only through looking at--not through--the intentional light in their eyes and the investments of their objective behavior. The cinema, however, uniquely materialized this visual reflexivity and philosophical turning directly--that is, in an objectively visible but subjective structure of vision we not only look at but also look through. In sum, the cinema provided--quite literally--objective insight into the subjective structure of vision and thus into oneself and others as always both viewing subjects and visible objects. (149)

The novelty of cinema’s visual reflexivity allows audiences to virtually experience “seeing through someone else’s eyes.” It provokes says Sobchack “a sense of existential presence” that intimately connects viewers to a particular character, place or situation (150). That is, as the audience, we feel as though we are actually present within the scene, as if we are embodying a particular character. Cinema’s capacity to visibly materialize the personal (memory, emotion, mood, desire, pain, etc.), the past, and the future as experiences that are presently and simultaneously occurring in time and space, radically transforms our consciousness of the world and our apprehension of ourselves.

In the same way that the perceptive and expressive materiality of cinema has the power to “remake us,” running is also a means through which we remake ourselves. Kristen Armstrong, author and official editor for Runner’s World, exemplifies this in her book, *Mile Markers: The 26.2 Most Important Reasons Why Women Run*. She begins her novel by writing, “I am not a good runner because I am me; I am a good me because I am

a runner” (3-4). Running, says Armstrong, restores her equilibrium, repairs her sense of gratitude, and returns her to herself, “but a better version” (111-112). Similarly, in the film *Spirit of the Marathon* (2008), veteran marathoner Ryan Bradley says he enjoys running marathons because “[Like] most people who run a marathon, it changes you somehow.”

This notion that running can, and does, transform an individual is an essential part of running’s attraction. Olympic gold-medalist Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams (*Chariots of Fire* 1981) would agree that running is a sport that not only changes its participants physically, but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually; it possesses the power to alter a runner’s perceptions of both herself and what truly matters in the world. “Long-distance running,” writes Japanese novelist and runner Haruki Murakami, “more or less, for better or worse has molded me into the person I am today” (172). In this sense, the nature of running (like cinema) can be said to be both expressive and perceptive. When we run we are expressing not only our innate desire to move, but also extending who we are and who we want to become.

For instance, in the 2013 documentary, *The Runners*, filmmakers Matan Rochlitz and Ivo Gormley challenge a band of anonymous runners to answer intimate questions as they run their routes. The point of the film, says Gormley, was to try to “understand what goes on in the minds of runners as they charge through the streets. What does it do to them and what can we find out about ourselves by interrupting them at this moment of vulnerability and clarity?” (2013). Surprisingly, (or perhaps not surprising to those who are runners) Gormley and Rochlitz are able to engage their interviewees in deeply

personal conversations. The runners opened up and shared their feelings about love, marriage, escaping depression, the existence of God, men and women's sexual needs, coping with old age, the regret of not having children, and watching a loved one deteriorate from dementia. As if free from consequences and caught in a moment of vulnerability, the runners talk freely and honestly with Gormley and Rochlitz as if they were long-time, childhood friends. Gormley attributes their interviewees' openness, and the clarity and depth of their conversations, to their running. He says,

Filmmaking is an extraordinary opportunity to ask people questions that you can't ask at any other time ... The problem though is that it's always on your terms, your interviewee is stuck on a chair in front of you; they can't escape, they can't move ... My friend and collaborator Matan Rochlitz had the idea that people might be more open if they were asked questions while running. They'd be distracted; perhaps you could ask about things that you couldn't otherwise. Perhaps it would be a different way of asking some big existential questions. (Gormley)

Rochlitz and Gormley were right; the runners answered their questions honestly and shared their feelings freely without much hesitation. Although the film is too short for any real character or plot development, in the end it successfully gives audiences a glimpse of what goes on in a runner's mind. Through their conversations the runners in the film show that running is more than a tactic for staying fit, but an outlet of expression; a means through which men and women, the young and the old, beginner to marathoner, can discuss their thoughts freely, clear their head, solve problems, cope with life's troubles, discover beauty, make peace, find freedom, and ultimately express who they are openly and without judgment.

In addition to being expressive, running is also a perceptive activity. Again, Kristin Armstrong's book, *Mile Markers: The 26.2 Most Important Reasons Why Women*

Run, is exemplary. Armstrong, for example, does not call her book's twenty-seven sections chapters like most novelists (the twenty-seventh chapter actually being the "26.2" chapter for the last 385 meters, or .2 of a mile, in a marathon). Armstrong instead uses the running term "mile markers." She chose the term mile markers, which she also uses for the book's title, for its metaphorical duality. Firstly, mile markers are indicators of a runner's progress. They are a series of markers, perhaps a flag, cone, or sandwich sign, placed along a racecourse at mile intervals. Runners rely on mile markers to know how far they have come and how far they have left to go. They are incredibly important, especially during long distance races, like a marathon, where it can be hard to keep track of the overall distance and one's place after running for so many hours and in a crowd of thousands of people. Secondly, mile markers, or milestones, are often used figuratively to refer to memorable moments in one's life; e.g., graduating from college, celebrating one's 50th birthday, giving birth to one's first child, or completing a marathon for the first time. These events forever leave a mark on our lives, whether they commemorate a moment of triumph or failure, redemption or forgiveness, strength or humility, these milestones become part of who we are. Armstrong utilizes the "mile markers" metaphor to discuss, as she says, "our collective history as runners and women" (3). Some of her "mile markers," for example, are "Beginnings," "Healing," "Play," "Independence," "Identity," "Freedom," etc. Her third mile marker, for instance, which is titled "Friendship," Armstrong writes about her experience qualifying for, and then competing in the Boston marathon. During the Chicago marathon, Armstrong and her friend, Paige, wore pace bands listing their goal race splits, or the mile times they would have to run in

order to qualify for the Boston marathon. Next to each race split they also wrote “prayer intentions”--the name of a person to honor for each of the twenty-six miles. Armstrong later reflected upon this practice and how running for someone else, not just herself, not only helped her qualify for Boston, but strengthened her inner convictions about God and faith. She writes: “Runners are an inherently spiritual crew, having firsthand experience with the concept that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Going physically beyond yourself helps you understand that there is something bigger and mightier than you” (15).

By the end of the race, Armstrong has literally run herself to a point of extreme exhaustion. It is in this vulnerable state, however, that she suddenly has a spiritual revelation. This moment exemplifies how the extreme demands and personal sacrifices that distance runners encounter, whether that means “going physically beyond yourself” like Armstrong, facing life-threatening danger like the competitors in *Desert Runners* (2013), or enduring one hundred miles over California's Sierra Nevada mountains like the four elite runners in *Unbreakable: The Western States 100* (2010), can force us to extend beyond ourselves and in turn strengthens the human spirit. Runners, in other words, by enduring physical pain and mental fatigue, deepen their spiritual connection with the world, realize a greater potential within themselves, discover how to be resilient, and build a stronger sense of self. Running thus benefits runners by not only giving them an outlet for self expression, but also simultaneously transforming their perceptions of both the world and themselves.

In light of these considerations, we can say that running is a physical activity that is also intimately linked to our internal and external consciousness. As Armstrong’s book

demonstrates, running every day is much more than a fitness commitment. It is a commitment to being present in the moment (external consciousness) and strengthening one's appreciation and gratitude for herself and the life she is given (internal consciousness). The mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits Armstrong experiences as a runner, however, are not a secret. Ask any runner, beginner or elite, young or old, male or female, and they will attest to how running has helped them to become a better version of themselves--i.e. a better parent, a better lover, a better friend, a better spouse, a better leader, a better listener, a better steward of the Earth, a better disciple of God, or simply a better person than they were yesterday.

Take, for example, the heroic true story of U.S. Olympian, turned Japanese POW camp survivor, Louie Zamperini (*Unbroken* 2013). Zamperini, who many view as an inspirational figure and war hero, competed in the 1936 Berlin Olympics when he was only nineteen years old. Zamperini, despite being young, was a very talented distance runner with a promising future in track and field. The outbreak of World War II and cancellation of the 1940 Olympics in Tokyo, however, put a halt to Zamperini's olympic career and instead, he enlisted in the United States Air Corps. One day while out on a search and rescue mission the plane Zamperini was flying experienced a mechanical failure and crashed into the Pacific Ocean. Zamperini and his co-pilot, Russell Allen Phillips, survived forty-seven days at sea before washing up on shore in enemy territory. Zamperini and Phillips were immediately taken as prisoners. For the next two years, until the war's end, Zamperini endured brutal physical and psychological torture. Zamperini, however, never gave up faith. After returning to the U.S., Zamperini wrote a book about

his experience called, *Don't Give Up, Don't Give In*. In his book, he talks about how running taught him resilience and unknowingly prepared him for his years of captivity. He writes, "I didn't know it then, but my persistence, perseverance, and unwillingness to accept defeat when things looked all but hopeless were part of the very character traits I would need to make it through World War II alive." Zamperini's unbreakable spirit is a true, real-life testament to the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual strength that anyone can garner and learn from the sport of running. Like Zamperini, other courageous runners, such as Abebe Bikila (*Atletu--The Athlete--2009*), Terry Hitchcock (*My Run 2009*), and Dean Karnazes (*Ultramarathon Man: 50 Marathons, 50 States, 50 Days 2008*), also demonstrate the significant impact running has on the human spirit. By practicing this form of daily exercise runners are quite literally transforming themselves from the inside out.

To sum up, running's effect on one's internal and external perceptions is comparable to the perceptive transformations that viewers experience when watching a film. Indeed, when we are watching a movie or running through the mountains, not only are we consciously engaged in the activity, but also existentially. In this sense, we can say that running has an inherent cinematic impulse because it shares certain fundamental characteristics with cinema. Running, like cinema, is a temporal, spatial, and perceptive and expressive experience. These shared qualities are ultimately what make running a compelling cinematic subject. So although video mediates our engagement, while running physically demands it, we experience both of them on similar temporal, spatial,

and intellectual levels. In summary, running transitions well to the big screen because these similarities preserve the true essence of the running experience.

FINDING TRACTION (2014): CRAFTING AN AUTHENTIC ULTRARUNNING
EXPERIENCE

In 2014, Montana PBS released *Finding Traction*, an award-winning documentary about ultra runner Nikki Kimball. The cinema vérité style documentary present the inspirational story of Kimball's quest to become the fastest person in history to run the oldest hiking trail in America: the Long Trail. The 273-mile trail--a distance that is longer than ten back to back marathons with an elevation gain that is twice that of Mount Everest--snakes through Vermont's picturesque but treacherous Green Mountains. The film crew, lead by director Jaime Jacobsen, follows Nikki's journey from its beginning--training and racing in Montana's Rocky Mountains--to her record attempt. With the help of Nikki's running crew and support team and insight from the world's leading evolutionary biologists, *Finding Traction* provides an intimate and raw portrayal of what drives an elite runner, like Kimball, to push the limits on what the human body can endure. In order to give viewers an authentic inside look at the life of an elite ultra runner the film faces the difficult challenge of not only keeping up with Kimball on the trail (literally), but also matching her intensity and passion for life, stride for stride. The film team employs various techniques to make viewers feel "in the moment" with Kimball while also offering a new perspective on the tremendous endurance, resilience, and spirit that is required to compete at this elite level of ultra running.

First and foremost, given that the film is about an elite ultrarunner, the film crew had to capture the feeling of running. In other words, if Jacobsen wanted viewers to experience ultrarunning the way Kimball does the film needed to bring audiences along

for the ride. Just like standing on the sidelines observing a marathon is a completely different experience than actually running the full 26.2 miles, if Jacobsen wanted viewers to be part of Kimball's journey the filmmaking had to create a cinematic experience that authentically captured the running experience. This meant shaping everything from the film's overall structure to the style of shots around Kimball's movements. One way the film crew was able to make viewers feel as if they were traversing the Long Trail alongside Kimball was by arming her pacers and support crew with GoPro cameras. So, as Kimball set off on each leg of the race, her pacer was not only equipped with water and food, but also a GoPro. This enabled to film crew to film in places where, said Jacobsen, "setting up a camera crew ... wasn't practical" (Lloyd). The GoPro's small size plus amazing video capabilities allowed the video crew to capture every step of the journey as Kimball ran through dense forests, climbed steep, rocky uphill, peered down gnarly crevasses, and trudged through complete darkness with only a headlamp illuminating the trail ahead. GoPro's compact size also enabled the film crew to be unobtrusive. This helped capture some "intimate and intense moments like we were right there with Nikki," said Jacobsen (Lloyd). With GoPros in the hands of Kimball's support crew, specifically her best friend/training partner, Jenny Pierce, and coach/lead pacer, Dennis Ball, viewers are given a rare and raw perspective of the challenges Kimball endured while out on the trail.

The GoPros were therefore critical in recording and documenting intimate moments that might have otherwise be lost to the wilderness. When darkness falls, for example, on day four Kimball has just sixty-eight miles to go, but only nineteen hours

left to break the men's record. Her every move from this point forward is incredibly critical if she is going to break the men's record. The editor at this point, instead of cutting back and forth to stagnant interview shots, which would remove viewers from the situation, solely relies on the GoPro footage captured by Pierce. This decision intensifies the drama of the moment and keeps audiences' attention on Kimball. So as she stumbles around in complete darkness with only the light from her headlamp illuminating the trail viewers feel as if they are right there with Kimball. The dialogue between Kimball and Pierce, which, without Pierce's GoPro, otherwise would have been practically impossible for the film crew to capture given how far off pace they were, is some of the most honest footage of the entire film. Kimball at this point is utterly exhausted and hysterically crying. As she collapses on a log in the middle of the dark woods her dialogue with Pierce is delirious and emotionally charged:

“I'm so sorry!” (Kimball)

“For what?” (Pierce)

“Cause I just can't move. I really don't like this.”

“Nope, we gotta get up and keep moving. We have to go.”

“Help me!”

“You want me in front of you for a while?”

“I'm OKAY... (sobbing) God damn it! Why does this keep happening to me!”

This intimate moment conveys the dichotomy between Kimball's desperation to beat the men's record and her body's overall fatigue. Its rareness ultimately creates a personal connection between the audience and Kimball. So, when Kimball hits her breaking point and cries out, “This is just so much hell! ... Can I just have a five-minute nap? ... I want to die. I need to stop!” her words resonate with viewers and we can literally feel her agony. By utilizing GoPro shots with their first person point of view, Jacobsen is able to give viewers an inside perspective on the physical, mental, and

emotional demands experienced by an elite ultra runner. So, although the GoPro footage is sometimes choppy, the use of these little rugged cameras is pivotal to the film's overall success. The versatility of the GoPro camera, in other words, enables Jacobsen and the film crew to not only track Kimball's through Vermont's dense wilderness, but also to witness moments of true grit and mental strength that characterize the sport of ultrarunning.

Time, like movement, is another important factor to Kimball's story. Time, or pacing, plays an incredibly crucial role in dictating Kimball's progress. Kimball, in order to become the fastest person in history to run the Long Trail, must not only complete the entire distance, but run it under a certain time. Her pace on the trail is therefore central to the film's overall pacing. Her timing, in other words, is what drives both her decisions and the story forward.

For instance, unlike an organized race where Kimball would be running against other ultra runners, for this race she is running the 273 mile route alone. Over the course of this multi-day expedition the clock is Kimball's only unwavering opponent. It is therefore critical that the film conveys to its viewers the pivotal role time plays throughout Kimball's run. One way the film tracks Kimball's time is with animated graphics. These animated graphics map Kimball's route, track what day it is (day one, two, etc.), note her position in relation to the men's and women's records, count how many miles she has completed, and show a timer indicating her overall pace. By cutting to these graphics at different parts of Kimball's journey, the film creates a visual timeline for viewers. This way, the audience is never confused about Kimball's progress.

The graphics also draw attention to the critical role time plays in the team's decision making. Kimball herself says it best in one of her early interviews, "If we start off too fast we won't make it ... and something bad will happen." Dennis Bramble, Kimball's endurance coach and lead pacer, also discusses time's importance when he compares Kimball's aid stations to NASCAR pit stops. He says, "We want to have everything prepared, ready, cooked, get her fixed up and ready to go as soon as possible." This conveys to viewers that Kimball's pacing and the timing of her crew has to be on point and practically perfect if she is going to accomplish her goal.

However, because video is a time-based medium the film's true challenge was less about communicating the importance of time and more a concern of how to condense Kimball's five plus days of running, and a lifetime of training, into just fifty-six minutes. But this challenge is not new. In the world of filmmaking, editors run into this problem every day; splicing and dicing hours upon hours of footage while also trying to maintain the seamless, fluidity of time. The film's editor, Stephanie Watkins, however, had the unique challenge of not only transforming Kimball's inspirational story into a feature-length documentary, but also manipulating time so viewers would feel actively involved in the journey. In other words, in order to give viewers an authentic running experience (without actually making them leave their seats) the film's editing had to embody the sensation of running. On one hand, the pacing had to feel fluid and continuous like the stride of an elite ultra runner. On the other hand, running ten back-to-back marathons through Vermont's grueling backcountry, even for a superior ultra runner like Kimball, was not going to be smooth and easy. No matter how much Kimball trained and prepared

at some point running was going to become excruciatingly painful. The extreme physical and mental transformations Kimball endures are at times too hard to watch and make viewers question her sanity. This, however, affirms Watkins' achievement. Her editing invites viewers to not just tag along, but to emotionally experience what Kimball is going through, to share in both her excitement and her vulnerability. For instance, on day one Kimball's goal is to run twenty-four hours straight in order to get ahead of Jonathan Basham's--the male record holder--pace. Given that this is just the start of the journey, Kimball is feeling confident, fresh, and in charge, and the editing parallels her mood: the music is passionate and energetic; the sound design is relaxed and focuses in on Kimball's steady breathing; the use of slow-motion draws attention to her muscular legs and strong, powerful stride which indicates Kimball's tenacity and resilience; the moving (GoPro) camera shots make viewers feel that they are vicariously running through the magnificent scenery; the long takes and matching action cuts create a continuous sense of motion like audiences are also moving through time and space. Together these editing techniques encapsulate Kimball's persona. They convey her playfulness without downplaying her intensity or her passion for ultrarunning.

The film's pacing, however, dramatically shifts as the pressure begins to escalate and Kimball becomes increasingly more fatigued both mentally and physically. For example, at the end of the second day Kimball is nowhere to be seen and is over two hours behind her predicted time. It is growing darker by the minute and a thunderstorm has rolled in over camp. The crew's mood is tense and uneasy as they begin to search by flashlight for a sign of Kimball. Previously, Bramble, who was her pacer for this

segment, had explained that Kimball had not been able to do much running that day because the terrain had become extremely difficult and dangerous. In a tightly framed interview, Bramble leans in and tells the camera, “It’s getting dark, and the trail is getting really technical and complicated. Some of these stretches the only way in and out is on foot. If one of us were to slip, fall, get severely injured, it could definitely end the expedition.” If Brambles’ interview did not fully convey the riskiness of Kimball’s situation the scene’s editing amplifies the foreboding feeling and sets an ominous tone. The transitions between shots are sporadic and quick. These fast paced cuts mirror the franticness of Kimball’s worried crew and make viewers feel equally on edge. So although, for the sake of time, this moment is truncated and not shown in its entirety the scene’s emotional value, and overall importance, is not lost. Its editing successfully (and dramatically) communicates the severity of a trying to do what Kimball is doing and the imminent danger she is up against. In summary, Watkins’ editing not only invites viewers to step into Kimball’s shoes, but also allows audiences to get inside her head and experience the sheer brutality of her sport.

The final component of crafting an authentic insider view on Kimball’s journey is uncovering what personally drives Kimball to run these insane distances, and in turn, exploring how ultrarunning has impacted and shaped her perspective on life. In classic cinema vérité fashion the film relies heavily on the interview technique to tell Kimball’s story. The interview tactic, which Bill Nichols identifies as a key component of the interactive documentary, allows Jacobsen to interact with Kimball and her support team in a conversational exchange. For instance, at about three minutes into the film Kimball

has just begun her record attempt and is power hiking up a gnarly rock face. As audiences watch her crest the ridge she says in voiceover, “There is nothing in the world when you get past a certain point of deprivation, but survival. I’ve explored these parts of myself and my soul, (the film then cuts to her interview shot) but I don’t know what the limits are, and I guess that’s part of why I’m doing this.” The interview, as Kimball’s response demonstrates, is a key tool in a filmmaker’s discursive repertoire and wields tremendous power. One of the main purposes of interviewing Kimball in *Finding Traction* is to provoke a sort of self-reflective dialogue. To, in other words, engage Kimball on an introspective level. It is through these (pseudo) conversations--pseudo in the sense that both the interviewer and interviewee are aware of the artifice of the camera and that having knowledge of the camera’s presence will undoubtedly inform, impact, and influence the conversation that ensues--that viewers truly come to know Kimball and understand that the purpose behind this race is much greater, and more personal, than the glory of rewriting history.

Through Kimball’s various interviews audiences learn that her motivation for running the Long Trail is multifaceted. On one hand her ambition stems from a childhood dream. She tells viewers, “I grew up just several miles from the Long Trail. That’s literally where I learned to walk. And I’ve been dreaming about running the Long Trail since I was kid.” On another hand, it is fueled by deep motivation to explore her personal limitations. “There is something for me more sacred in that world, in the world where I’m under physical duress, and where I’m in beautiful places,” she says in one of her interviews. Kimball later reveals that she suffered from a severe bout of depression and

that running became her saving grace; “I couldn’t have fought depression without activity. Just that half mile of walking at the worst of my depression, even though I’d be crying during part of it, I think it really helped keep me alive.” On the flip side, Kimball also believes that when it comes to running her fight with depression is her “secret weapon.” By knowing (and overcoming) that type of immense suffering and tremendous grief she has in turn become a stronger and more resilient runner. She says,

“When things get really, really bad on an expedition, or in an ultra race, I can look back to the pain I was in at the worst of my depression and the pain I’m in in an ultra race isn’t that bad ... I’ve been there and known that, yeah, if you can get through that point, happiness happens again. And it’s kind of one of the things you wish you could tell everybody when they’re looking down the barrel of the gun ... you will find happiness again and you can.”

Through these interviews audiences feel like they get to know Kimball personally. Viewers learn that she is more than just this insanely fast runner who likes to run crazy long distances. Kimball, just like the rest of us, is human. She has experienced exquisite beauty and overcome overwhelming pain. She is an undefeated world champion and a survivor of depression. She is a pioneer for women’s rights in the international running community and a role model for young girls to get outside and be active. She is a woman driven by an intense passion for life and fueled by a deep desire to live intentionally and purposefully. Kimball’s interviews, along with those of her family, friends, crewmembers, and prominent evolutionary biologists, are ultimately vital to telling her story. While the Long Trail expedition in itself provides the film’s initial structure and pacing, the interviews give Kimball’s story context and depth, and are essentially what make the film worth watching. They are the backbone to what could otherwise be seen as just another self-indulgent story.

Overall, *Finding Traction* is arguably one of the best running documentaries to ever be made. The film's success is a direct result of Jacobsen's ability to transfer Kimball's experience to the big screen. By effectively utilizing running's inherent cinematic qualities *Finding Traction* is able to give viewers a unique, inside look at the world of ultrarunning. In this sense, one might call this documentary not a film, but an experience because it brings the realities of ultrarunning--the demands it places on one's mind, body and spirit--to life.

SPIRIT OF THE MARATHON (2007): CAPTURING THE HUMANNESS OF THE
MARATHON EXPERIENCE

“Sometimes the moments that challenge us the most define us,” says Deena Kastor, the American female record holder in the marathon and the 2004 Olympic bronze medalist. In just ten words this opening line sums up the main message of Jon Dunham’s 2007 running flick, *Spirit of the Marathon*. Like *Finding Traction*, *Spirit of the Marathon* is also a cinema vérité style documentary that attempts to capture the running experience. The films, however, vary dramatically in their success. While both filmmakers utilize the interview technique to give their films perspective and instill meaning, *Spirit of the Marathon* lacks the depth and complexity that ultimately make *Finding Traction* feel less like a documentary and more like a virtual running experience.

Dunham, instead, relies heavily on indirect interviews to weave together his compelling, yet at times cliché, narrative about the history of the famed 26.2-mile event. Dunham, along with his award-winning film crew, spent four years and traveled to five different countries making this (supposedly) one-of-a-kind documentary about the 2005 Chicago marathon. The film follows six individuals--two world-class runners and four amateur runners--as they prepare for and eventually compete in (all except Ryan Bradley) the Chicago marathon. Aside from the six featured runners, the film also stars many notable figures in the running community, including Alberto Salazar, Amby Burfoot, Katherine Switzer, Paula Radcliffe, Frank Shorter, Grete Waitz, and Dick Beardsley, as well as critically acclaimed running authors, like Roger Robinson (*Running in Literature*), John Bingham (*Marathoning for Mortals*), Hal Higdon (*Marathon: the*

Ultimate Training Guide), and Tom Derderian (*Boston Marathon: the History of the World's Premier Running Event*). Dunham's goal is to capture the drama, history, and essence of this world-famous and beloved running event. As the quote on the film's cover attests, "When you cross that [marathon] finish line--no matter how slow, no matter how fast--it will change your life forever." This quote by Dick Beardsley sets the inspirational and prophetic tone that unfortunately plagues the entire film. While there is truth in the comparison that is often made between running and life, *Spirit of the Marathon's* attempt to manifest this metaphor inevitably falls short.

That is not to say, however, that there is no inspirational or informational value to Dunham's film. In fact, the film's strength also lies in its weakness. Firstly, the film is weak because it primarily explores the marathon on a surface level. It fails to fully dive into the depths of the marathon experience and vet not just the highs, but also the personal lows, setbacks, sacrifices, and pain that each individual runner faces. For example, when Ryan Bradley, the Boston marathon hopeful, suddenly drops out of the marathon because of a meniscus injury in his right knee he also seems to drop out of the film. In his last interview, he says, "You know it takes a certain level of training to hit that marathon and when you can't do what you're used to doing it affects you mentally." This injury is obviously devastating for Bradley, but instead of exploring his frustration and the mental degradation he alludes to, the film moves on and Bradley all but disappears. What could have been an emotive scene is now easily forgotten. The only takeaway is that running can sometimes cause serious injury and that this can affect a person's spirit.

Secondly, Dunham fails to amply utilize cinema's potential to bring the true spirit of the marathon to life. The scenic, location shots and talking head interviews, despite being picturesque and technically well executed, are frankly overused and predictable. This disappointment, however, is not at all a reflection on Dunham's abilities. It is a comment on the film's dearth of emotional profundity, which is (unfortunately) sacrificed for the sake of covering the marathon's rich history and also featuring the personal stories of six diverse runners. The film, in other words, suffers from an overall lack of emotional complexity and depth. Dunham's desire to cover all these topics in only a hundred minutes is not just overly ambitious, but a major hindrance to the film's ability to intimately connect with viewers. The narrative, as a result, is too complex, which makes the film both cliché and predictable.

For instance, about twenty-five minutes into the film, Ryan Bradley, a repeat marathoner and Boston hopeful, is eating dinner with his wife and a couple friends. He starts talking about the gender and age profile of Boston marathon qualifiers and explains that more women and older men tend to make the cut off time. With the subject on Boston, the film suddenly transitions away from Bradley to a Ken Burns-esque photo and video montage of the Boston marathon. After learning about Boston's unique history and famous qualifying system from authors Hal Higdon and Roger Robinson, the film then returns to Bradley who is down in his basement running on the treadmill. Bradley has been running marathons with his wife Colleen for years, but he has not yet run Boston-- he missed the qualifying time by twenty-two seconds. On the treadmill he demonstrates the seven-minute fifteen-second pace that he needs to run in order meet Boston's

qualifying time. Bradley then cranks the treadmill up to maximum speed, a five-minute mile pace, which he explains is slower than the pace of most elite marathoners. At the mention of elite marathoners, the film jumps to the streets of Tokyo, Japan where Daniel Njenga Muturi, who is ranked top ten in the world for the marathon, is on an early morning run with his teammates. This back and forth pattern persists throughout the entire film. It not only makes the film predictable and at times hard to follow, but starves the viewers of the opportunity to personally get to know each character. This ultimately summarizes the film's fundamental problem: Dunham is trying to juggle too many stories at once. For instance, on one side of the story, a number of critically acclaimed running authors are giving viewers an elaborate, comprehensive history lesson on the marathon. However, at the same time, the film is bouncing from Chicago to California to Tokyo and Kenya in order to track the training progress of its six marathon hopefuls. Needless to say, Dunham has bitten off a lot more than he, or any viewer, could reasonably digest in a single film. The resulting narrative ultimately isolates viewers instead of inviting them to partake in the experience.

Despite inundating audiences with talking head interviews and being at times predictable and monotonous, the film's complex narrative does, however, bolster viewers' motivation and enthusiasm for the marathon. The six-featured runners, which include two first time marathoners, Lori O'Connor and Leach Caillie, two repeat marathoners, Ryan Bradley and Jerry Meyers, and the two elite marathons, Kastor and Njenga, give the film a number of diverse perspectives. Their individual goals and reasons for wanting to run the Chicago marathon are all incredibly different.

For example, Chicago will be Lori O'Connor's debut marathon. She signed up to run because she says "she felt the need." Having first run a 5k and then a half marathon, O'Connor decided that the next, natural step was to start training for a marathon. She says, "I've also had friends ask me, you know, 'do you think you're going to win?' And it's kinda like, no, not at all, not in any way. And I was like, wow, I am going to finish and I'm really excited!" For O'Connor, her goal, like that of many first time runners, is to simply cross the finish line. However, for Olympic bronze medalist, Deena Kastor, crossing the finish line is not enough. "When it comes down to it," says Kastor, "I've never won a marathon. Ultimately, I need to win a race." For Kastor, Chicago presents an opportunity to not just run another race, but to potentially win.

The dichotomy between Kastor's and O'Connor's goals exemplifies the true spirit of the marathon and of Dunham's film. By focusing on the six runners' diverse motivations and goals Dunham is able to successfully capture the humanness of the marathon experience. This aspect is in part what makes running a marathon such a unique, unforgettable experience. Dunham even says it himself, "It is this tremendous diversity that is part of what makes [the marathon] such a unique and empowering event" (Allison). As the six-featured runners in Dunham's film demonstrate, the marathon is not an exclusive sport. John Bingham touches on this when he says, "There are people who are competing in marathons and there are people who are completing marathons and the beauty is the sport is big enough to embrace us all." So, although running a marathon does require a certain amount of training and preparation as well as a decent pair of shoes the only real stipulation lies within each individual. As author Hal

Higdon puts it, “The marathon could be called everyman’s Everest. Most people who have a moderate level of fitness can teach themselves, coach themselves, to run [the distance].” And, that is the true beauty of this twenty-six mile and 385-yard race. It is what makes the marathon so fascinating because it is at heart an event for anyone who is brave enough to take on the challenge. So, although the six runners are running with different goals in mind, come race day they will all be standing on that starting line together. This combined feeling of self-fulfillment and interconnectedness that the marathon cultivates amongst its participants is the true and real *Spirit of the Marathon*.

In this way, runners and non-runners alike can relate to and garner inspiration from Dunham’s film. Unlike *Finding Traction*, which solely focuses on elite ultra runner, Nikki Kimball, *Spirit of the Marathon* tells the story of the marathon from numerous, diverse perspectives. For instance, some of the sport’s greatest pioneers--Katherine Switzer, Amby Burfoot, Sara Mae Berman, Joan Benoit-Samuelson, Paul Tergat, to name a few--are in the film. As prominent figures in the running community they give the film credence and validity by offering training tips, words of wisdom, stories of personal experiences, historical context, and overall insight on the marathon. Together, these numerous interviews weave together a rich history of the 26.2-mile race. This is ultimately the film’s strength. It showcases that the marathon is a diverse event and inspires viewers--whether they are young or old, male or female, experienced or beginner--that if they put their mind to it they too can run a marathon.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER (1962):

THE FIRST RUNNING FILM OF ITS KIND

The French and British cultural movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s gave birth to an emotional and subversive “new wave” of cinema. The filmmakers of this rebellious new subgenre sought to branch away from the Hollywood’s studio system with its orthodox techniques and artificial sets and instead looked to lives of the country’s working class citizens. This shift away from the established standards of the modern film industry opened the door for more edgy, independent productions. The result was a new strain of filmmaking that produced a number of moody, lyrical dramas about working class citizens. For a long time British cinema had ignored and marginalized the strife and social injustice that plagued its working class, but with the emergence of these new “kitchen sink dramas” the angry, alienated youth took center stage.

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, released in 1962, is a key film from this new cinematic era of “kitchen sink realism.” This angsty film is an adaptation from Alan Sillitoe’s short story of the same name. The filmmakers of the 50’s and 60’s often looked to the works of “angry young men” writers like Sillitoe and John Osborne to illuminate the dark and gritty truth behind the government’s bright promises of social reform. *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is thus a bewitching film about Colin Smith, an aimless working class youth from the industrial district of Nottingham. Smith’s disillusionment with modern society leads him and a buddy to commit a series of impulsive robberies, which eventually result in his arrest and incarceration at a British reform school. It is here at the reform school that Smith discovers his natural talent for

long-distance running. Urged by the school's governor to train and develop his running abilities, Smith continues to pursue running. As his endurance improves the governor begins to take a strong interest in Smith and singles him out as the school's best hope of beating Ranley, a swanky public school, in their upcoming sports day. The governor's keen desire to win leads to a series of privileges for Smith. One of which includes unsupervised runs around the school grounds. It is on these runs that audiences come to understand Smith and the reasons behind his gruff, insolent demeanor. It is also in these running scenes that director Tom Richardson's artistry truly shines. Although fiction, the running sequences "have a vivid, compelling air of reality," says Bosley Crowther in his New York Times movie review. The combination of Richardson's "free cinema" techniques, attention to detail, and instinctive sense of cinematic flow skillfully brings to life the intimate, lonely world of the long-distance runner.

When the film begins, for instance, audiences know nothing about Smith or of the circumstances that brought him to Ruxton Towers. He is just one of a group of juvenile delinquents in the back of a prison van. His truculent, surly behavior is, however, unwavering and wins him few friends at the compound. It is not until Smith suddenly shows an aptitude for running during a competitive soccer game that Richardson reveals portions of Smith's past. As Smith's running persists it triggers more flashbacks to his home life prior to his incarceration.

One morning, for example, Smith and the rest of the boys are performing a series of exercises in the courtyard. The governor is making his routine morning checkups when he suddenly addresses the boys. He says, "Well lads, you've all heard me say that if

you'll play ball with us, we will play ball with you." Calling Smith forward he tells one of the other officers to open the gate and in a demonstration of trust tells Smith to go out on the usual run, but this time he is to do it alone, without supervision. Smith is tentative at first, but the moment he breaches the gate a sense of freedom and joy washes over him. Running like madman Smith sprints and skips through the tree-covered grounds before collapsing at the base of little hill. Smith lies on his back gasping for air and staring up at the treetops. As he rests and rejoices at his luck, he thinks back to his mum and siblings and their tawdry home in Nottingham. Viewers watch as Smith's mother aimless squanders their recently deceased father's life insurance money. When the family returns home everyone crowds around the telly with their candy and toys. Making himself right at home, Mrs. Smith's new 'fancy man' remarks, "Marvelous how cheap things are when you can pay cash!" Smith disenchanted by the scene retreats to his parents' room. After staring blankly into the mirror, he sits down by a picture of his father and proceeds to burn the money that his mother forced him to take. With the flash back over, the film returns to the boys' dormitory where an officer rouses Smith to get up and go for his morning run.

Richardson's use of running as a trope to see into Smith's thoughts is incredibly effective. It not only sheds light on his character, but also conveys the mental aspect of long-distance running. Author Kristin Armstrong discusses this topic at length in her book, *Mile Markers*. In the book's first few pages, she says, "Running has taken me in and continues to comfort, heal and challenge me in all kinds of magical ways ... I can clear my head and solve problems when I run, or make peace with not knowing. I can

find beauty, or at least redemption, no matter what.” Haruki Murakami also touches on what goes on in a runner’s mind in his novel, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. Murakami writes,

The hour or so I spend running, maintaining my own, silent private time, is important to help me keep my mental well-being. When I’m running I don’t have to talk to anybody and don’t have to listen to anybody ... I’m often asked what I think about as I run. Usually the people who ask this have never run long distances themselves ... The thoughts that occur to me while I’m running are like clouds in the sky. Clouds of all different sizes. They come and they go, while the sky remains the same sky as always. (16-17).

Armstrong and Murakami both address the mindfulness that running brings to their lives, thus, signifying that running is as much a mental activity as it is a physical one. Richardson also conveys a similar message through his use of flashbacks. These flashbacks, in other words, serve as a window into Smith’s silent thoughts. They demonstrate running’s self-reflective and meditative power as well as the mental toughness that one needs to excel in the sport. The attention Richardson gives to both the physical and the intellectual experience of running is critical to garnering viewers’ sympathy for Smith. Although these scenes are merely artistic interpretations of what goes on inside a runner’s head, they are incredibly believable. The authenticity and honesty that they in turn bring to the film speaks to Richardson’s success.

In addition to using flashbacks to bring the mental side of the running experience to life, the film also employs specific cinematic techniques to embody the physical sensation of running. These cinematic techniques, which include both handheld and moving camera shots, location shooting, impressionistic editing and sound design, and narrative discontinuity, are all hallmarks of the groundbreaking British documentary movement known as “Free Cinema.” This highly influential movement represented a new

attitude towards filmmaking (Dupin). Its members shunned the conservative and established ways of mainstream British cinema and denounced the conventional films of the 1950s as being completely detached from the realities of contemporary British life (Dupin). The goal of these “Free Cinema” documentarians was to bring filmmaking to the streets and produce independent films that captured the real lives of the country’s working class people. This shift in subject matter also pioneered a new, more personal approach to filmmaking. The founders of “Free Cinema” insisted that filmmakers should have the freedom to freely express themselves in their work and wrote in their manifesto, “no film can be too personal” (Dupin). Although “Free Cinema” was short-lived and has been denied the status of a true film movement, it played key role in influencing the filmmakers of Britain's “New Wave” cinema. By applying “Free Cinema” techniques to the writings of “angry young men” authors like Sillitoe these filmmakers branded a new style of filmmaking, which was coined “social realism” or “kitchen sink realism.”

Richardson’s film adaptation of Sillitoe’s *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is a hallmark of this new stylistic approach. By borrowing film tactics from the “Free Cinema” documentary movement Richardson is able to embody the physical sensation of running. The film’s realist style, in other words, encapsulates the running experience by reproducing the feeling of moving through time and space. Richardson relied heavily on location shooting as well as handheld and moving camera shots to convey a sense of motion that mirrored that of a runner. Around an hour into the film, for example, Smith is starting one of his early morning runs. It is barely daybreak and Smith’s figure is a mere silhouette running along the horizon. As Smith moves the

camera pans left keeping pace with him. When Smith enters a grove of trees near a pond it appears at first that the camera has lost him. But, that is not the case. Through the throngs of tree branches viewers can just barely see Smith's profile. The camera continues to follow and move in synch with Smith. When he runs along the edge of the pond the camera dips down and focuses on his reflection as it glides across the water's still surface. Throughout the entire sequence Smith never leaves the frame. His movements dictate the way the camera moves as if an imaginary string is connecting the two. The primary use of long and wide shots also enhances the experience by drawing attention to the landscape through which Smith is running. Neglecting close ups allows viewers to see Smith's entire body as he runs. This amplifies his movements and conveys to viewers that running as a total body, sensorial experience. The editing, sound design, and shots also make the sequence lyrical. Richardson's attention to details, like Smith's reflection on the pond's surface and filming Smith at distance through the curtain of tangled tree limbs, tap into audiences' senses and give the scene an impressionistic vibe. The editing is also expressive in its discontinuity. The editing, as mentioned before, uses flashbacks to jump back and forth through time. Richardson uses this technique to mimic the way memories ebb and flow across a runner's mind. This invites audiences to enter Smith's personal thoughts while also conveying the silent, lonely march of the long-distance runner. The sound design along with the editing additionally helps to create a perpetual feeling of being in motion. The music and sound design, for instance, overlap various scenes, which creates a sense of continuity throughout the entire sequence. The overall effect is a poetic yet realistic impression of the running experience.

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, although fiction, is a marvelous presentation of how running is inherently cinematic. Richardson's use of "Free Cinema" documentary tools to authentically document a runner in motion has ultimately revolutionized the way cinema visualizes running. His ability to capture both the mental and physical aspects of the sport not only makes the film a success, but an important historical document of British "New Wave" cinema. One might even crown, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, as the predecessor of today's running documentaries, like *Finding Traction* and *Spirit of the Marathon*. Overall, the film is an invaluable example of cinema's potential for capturing an authentic running experience.

TELLING MY RUNNING STORY:

“THERE’S A LIGHT BEYOND THESE WOODS” (2016)

“I am not a good runner because I am me; I am a good me because I am a runner.”
--Kristin Armstrong

Nothing has had a greater impact on my life than the day I started running. Since then I have realized that running is much more than a sport. It is a way of living; a lifestyle committed to self-improvement and self-discovery, and a daily reminder to be present in each moment because tomorrow is not a guarantee. I like running not because I am a particularly fast or especially talented runner. The truth is I have never won a race and most likely never will. But here is what I know: running has made me a better person. Channeling author Kristin Armstrong and her book, *Mile Markers*, I believe that running has led me to the truest and most honest version of myself. It is the one thing that keeps me grounded, calms my worries, gives me peace, reminds me to be grateful, restores my self-confidence, strengthens my relationships, heals my broken heart, helps me forgive, prepares me for life’s unexpected challenges, brings me immense joy, and shows me what it means to live passionately. “There’s a Light Beyond these Woods,” is a short documentary about my experience training for my first marathon. The film is a personal story about what marathon training has taught me about myself and how running has profoundly impacted the ways in which I choose to live my life.

I decided to attempt the marathon because I wanted to prove to myself that I could. It was a commitment that required me to go completely beyond myself, to reach a new level of openness and willingness. This meant embracing uncertainty and

discomfort--not avoiding it. By accepting that the spirit is strong and the flesh is weak I would be able to discover limits of my own potential. As T.S. Elliot once said, "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go." Back in 2005 when I was a sophomore in high school I was injured in a freak track and field accident. Another runner and I collided while doing a sprint workout. The result was a complete tear of the posterior cruciate ligament in my right knee. While surgery was not necessary, the doctor told me to more or less forget about long distance running. Anything over thirteen miles he said would not only put a huge strain on my knee, but be incredibly risky. The news devastated me, but I knew my race was not over. Instead of heeding the doctor's advice and throwing in the towel, I decided to find my own silver lining in the best way I knew how: I kept running.

Now, many years later, this film follows me as I take on the biggest challenge of my running career: the marathon. Given the personal nature of this story I took a different approach to filmmaking than with past films. These various stylistic and technical choices, such as filming with only GoPro cameras and using narration, all stemmed from three main goals. The intent of these goals was to ensure my story would be (1) authentic, (2) introspective, and (3) inspiring.

The first goal was to authentically capture the running experience, similar to the running sequences in *Finding Traction*. This award-winning film did an outstanding job of giving viewers a raw and intimate look into the world of ultrarunning. The film successfully achieves this goal by making viewers feel a part of Nikki Kimball's journey. While watching the film, in other words, audiences feel like they are right there with

Kimball taking part in all the action. I found this visceral experience enthralling and I knew I wanted to replicate its same intimacy and immediacy in my film.

My second aspiration was inspired by the short documentary, *The Important Places* (2013). Although this film is about a father and son's love for the Colorado River, and not about running, its self-reflective tone and intimate approach to storytelling were two elements that I also wanted to express. In other words, I did not want to make a film that relied on talking heads to tell the story. Nor, did I want to discuss the science behind knee injuries or dive into the history of the marathon. While there is nothing wrong with these approaches, they are not what interest me about running. Instead, I wanted to explore running as a subjective and introspective activity. It is after all the only time I truly dedicate to myself. Running for me is as much a physical activity as it is a mental and spiritual one. For example, I sometimes find it difficult amongst the demands and chaos of our modern lives to take time out of my day to just focus on me. Running gives me that much needed timeout away from the daily grind. While I run, my mind is free to wander and muse over whatever is occupying my thoughts. Oftentimes, I will think about my day, my plans for the evening, or merely observe the people and things around me. Other times, I find that I am more introspective and spend my run reflecting on the meaning and purpose of life. Running ultimately helps me stay emotionally balanced, intellectually engaged, and spiritually connected with others and the world. In my film, I wanted to explore running as a practice of self-awareness and to give viewers an intimate look inside a runner's mind.

Lastly, the third goal of my film was to explore the ironic dichotomy that running is an individual pursuit, yet culminates in large group events, like the marathon. Runners, in other words, do not have to choose between having their cake or eating it. We essentially get the best of both worlds. This is what I believe ultimately makes running so unique and special. Part of my inspiration for this goal came after watching the short ESPN documentary, *Every Day* (2015). This *30 for 30* short is about marathoner, Joy Johnson. Her remarkable story showcases this beautiful dichotomy and offers inspiration to runners and non-runners alike. Johnson, who started running at the age of fifty-nine, eventually completed over forty-eight marathons before passing away after her twenty-fifth New York City marathon in 2013. Johnson's incredible running career proves that in the end it is not the number of steps that matters, but the experience of sharing those steps with thousands of complete strangers. After she became hooked Johnson ran marathons all around the country, but her favorite race by far was the TCS New York City marathon. The NYC marathon is the largest marathon in the country with over 50,000 runners. After reflecting on her first experience running in New York, Johnson says, "I had never felt anything like it ... I felt like I was a part of something special." While marathoning is primarily a solitary pursuit with individualized goals, personal challenges, and private moments for self-reflection, it culminates in mass events where thousands of strangers come together to share blood, sweat, and tears as they put themselves to the ultimate test. As a result, these pack events have a genuine mass appeal. Running's attraction, in other words, is twofold. The appeal to participate is driven by twin desires for self-improvement and the thrill of the experience. The conjunction of elite runners

racing for sponsorship, titles, and record times with the personal narratives of the masses is different from other sports. This ethic of inclusivity is ultimately what makes running so appealing and unique.

Based on these goals I made two important decisions about how I wanted my film to look and what I wanted viewers to take away. Running, as I have explored throughout my paper, is inherently cinematic. It lends itself naturally to cinema because, like cinema, it is a temporal and spatial experience. It also an intellectual experience that allows time for self-reflection and personal exploration. These aspects of running make it a compelling subject for the big screen. Not every film, however, authentically embodies the running experience. I believe one of the main determinants of a successful running film is audience experience. In order to make a film inspirational and compelling viewers need to walk away feeling changed some how. This presents an interesting challenge for a sport like long-distance running. Running, unlike team sports where collaboration and teamwork shine, is incredibly personal. The goals and motivations are completely dependent on the individual. This personal aspect presents a unique challenge for filmmakers.

In order to tackle this problem in my film, I made the stylistic decision to make an essay film. An essay film is widely held as a hybrid form of filmmaking that rests somewhere between fiction and nonfiction cinema (Rascaroli 24). According to Giannetti, however, it is “neither fiction or fact, but a personal investigation involving both the passion and intellect of the author” (quoted in Rascaroli 24). The essay film, in other words, takes a new personal, reflexive and unconventional approach to filmmaking

(Rascaroli 24). In her paper, *The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Comments*, film theorist, Laura Rascaroli, identifies two essential characteristics of the essay film: reflectivity and subjectivity (25). These two qualities appealed to me because they are also important elements to the running experience. Like an essayist, the desire to contemplate the self and the meaning of life is also second nature to a runner. Kristen Armstrong's writing perfectly exemplifies this. She writes:

There are too many thoughts in my head, too many feelings in my heart, too many things I want to do and say--and if I'm not careful, I can get overwhelmed with myself. Running restores my equilibrium, quiets the noise within, re-prioritize my list, repairs my state of gratitude, and returns me to myself, but a better version, nice and roomy in my own skin. (111-112)

Few if any sports other than running allow time for such reflectivity. Thus, a runner is in many ways an unpublished essayist--Armstrong being the exception. The profound, reflexive thoughts that occur while running become something of an internal dialogue. In sum, the subjective and reflective nature of the essay film would help me to effectively accomplish two of my goals: (1) explore running as a spiritual, intellectual, and introspective activity, and (2) reflect on running's ironic dichotomy as an individual pursuit with a strong community undertone.

Indeed, skeptical evaluation is the most prominent component of the essay film. Quoting theorist Graham Good, Rascaroli writes: "The essay [film] aims, in other words, to preserve something of the *process* of thinking" (26). The film's plot is therefore driven not by the chronological order of events, but by the process of evaluation. The film's text is more or less an act of self-reasoning through which the subject reaches some sort of deeper understanding.

Another important component of the essay film says Rascaroli is subjectivity: “Most if not all accounts of the essayistic also places emphasis on its personal, almost autobiographical nature” (Rascaroli 26). Subjectivity, however, is not unique to the essay film. Many documentaries are personal stories, but are not considered essay style films. Rascaroli distinguishes the essay film as a transgressive approach somewhere between documentary and experimental film. It is, she says, a style of intellectual yet emotional cinema (Rascaroli 27). In other words, the essay film seeks to portray the personal and invisible world of imagination, thoughts, and ideas (Rascaroli 27). This effort allows essayists to have more freedom and employ more expressive means than the pure, conventional documentary.

Making an essay film therefore gave me the creative liberty I needed to present running as a introspective and reflexive activity. It also allowed me to be incredibly subjective and create an intimate dialogue with viewers. For example, I completely avoided using interviews to craft the narrative, and instead, relied almost exclusively on spoken narration. This, however, presented its own challenges. I struggled immensely with writing a script that was not overly self-indulgent, but self-reflective. I also had trouble finding the right balance between words and picture. In other words, when solely relying on voice-over narration there is a natural tendency to say too much. If I could not find the right balance I ran the risk of drowning my film in words and not allowing the images to speak for themselves. My narration ultimately needed to add depth to my story not explanation. The end result, although not perfect, is a self-reflexive narrative that

emphasizes how marathon training has helped me embrace life's uncertainties and realize my potential.

Secondly, I made the technical choice to only film with GoPro cameras. Some may view GoPro as a camera with limited range of uses and abilities. I, however, believe that these tiny cameras offer filmmakers an enormous amount of potential and enhance the ways in which we visualize storytelling. GoPro, for instance, offers a number of technical advantages that made it especially useful for capturing an authentic running experience. First of all, the GoPro campaign is designed around capturing personal experience, hence their slogan "Be a Hero." Secondly, its small design yet incredible video capabilities make it extremely portable, versatile, and still visually effective. Thirdly, the vast number of GoPro accessories, including its waterproof housing and drone connectability, enables the camera to go just about anywhere. Together, these factors offer the perfect combination for bringing the running experience to life.

The use of GoPros in my film does not, however, take away from its cinematic value. I believe it enhances it. GoPro is a company that is constantly pushing the boundaries on where filmmaking can take us. Although marketed as consumer level camera, GoPro has proven its worth at the professional level and has revolutionized the ways filmmakers approach storytelling. I wanted to use GoPros in film to create a vivid and immersive running experience. My inspiration for this concept came after watching the trail running sequences in *Finding Traction*. The film team relied heavily on GoPro cameras to document Nikki Kimball as she raced through the dense forests and steep terrain of Vermont's Green Mountains. What convinced me, however, was not just the

camera's portability, but also the raw emotion it brought to the footage. In addition to being small and maneuverable GoPros are also discreet. Because of their unobtrusive nature it is easy to forget that you are being filmed. This helped *Finding Traction's* film crew capture Kimball in her element, but naturally and organically. It also enabled the cinematographers to expose the emotional turmoil that Kimball was going through without staging, intervening, or utilizing reenactment.

By totally relying on GoPros I was able to explore both the sensory and intellectual sides of running. I have been a runner for most of my life, but this film pushed me to think about running in a new, innovative way. Not only was I the subject of my film, but I was also running my very first marathon. The GoPro's versatility allowed me to easily film myself while its simple design also enabled me to employ the help of friends and family, who had little to no filming experience. I ultimately believe that GoPros are powerful cinematic tools that have completely redefined the filmmaking experience as well as audience interaction. I also believe that GoPro will continue to enhance our understanding and sensory relationship with the world well into the future.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that technology is ephemeral and ever advancing. GoPro may be a powerful tool for filmmakers today, but as the cinematic landscape evolves it will have to face new challenges. Perhaps another camera will surpass GoPro or maybe GoPro's niche will become irrelevant altogether. We are already witnessing this with the recent introduction of the Sony Action Cam. Unlike GoPro, whose camera has a single lens, the Action Cam now has interchangeable lenses. This gives the filmmaker more stylistic control and allows for better image quality. In sum,

just because filmmakers currently view GoPro as an important narrative tool now does not guarantee that it will continue to advance storytelling into the future. The same can be said about the essay film. The stylistic approaches to filmmaking that are popular today are also constantly evolving. As technology advances and changes this also impacts the methods and means through which we share our stories. Additionally, as new a generation of filmmakers comes to replace the older generation they will inevitably introduce their own ideas, styles, and preferences to the cinematic landscape.

In sum, I present *There's a Light Beyond These Woods* as a case study for the use of the essayist style and of GoPro's technology to capture an authentic running experience. Although I experienced challenges in making this film, I believe both the essay film and GoPro have enormous potential and provide both filmmaker and viewers with a new perspective on what it takes to run a marathon.

CONCLUSION

Running and cinema are two peas in a pod. Their compatibility is characterized by their commonalities. They share, in other words, an equal desire to temporally, spatially, and intellectually explore both the interpersonal as well as the existential world. Although running and cinema engage us in different ways they affect us on similar perceptive and expressive levels. Running's inherent cinematic qualities thus make it a compelling and inspirational subject for the big screen. From fictional films like *Forrest Gump* and *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962) to documentaries like *The Runners*, *Finding Traction*, and *Spirit of the Marathon* running has paved its path through cinematic history.

Looking forward to the future I believe audience experience will continue to motivate, shape, and revolutionize our approaches to filmmaking. GoPro technology is just one way that we are already pushing the limitations on where cinema will and can go--and the possibilities are exciting! The essay style documentary is another mode through which we are exploring the boundaries of cinema. The essay film unlike traditional documentaries strives to give life to the intangible world of one's imagination, thoughts, and ideas. My thesis film, *There's a Light Beyond these Woods*, is my personal exploration, a case study, of both the essay film and GoPro technology. Although technology is forever changing I believe that this is an exciting time for filmmakers. Now more than ever filmmaking is catering itself to telling personal narratives and enhancing audience experience. The goal is to offer an expressive outlet and in turn inspire viewers to change their perceptions—a goal that is also central to running. Through this process

of telling my own running story I learned that despite running's natural cinematic impulse the true inspiration lies within experience. As Vivian Sobchack once said, "We make things so that they will in turn remake us, revising the interior of embodied consciousness" (135).

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