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Cover: Barefoot 17-year old South African-born Zola Budd competing for Great Britain in 1984 at the Los Angeles Olympics, having just been entangled with Mary Decker, the reigning American champion and Budd's own role model, pictured falling to the ground beside her. Budd, who had taken the lead, lost her stride following the accident, finished 7th, and was booed by the stadium crowds. Decker would soon claim Budd had intentionally tripped her, though the judges and Budd herself denied this.

Inset: details from Edwaerd Muybridge, "Running Full Speed," *Animal Locomotion*, Plate 63, collotype, 1887.

When we walk, we keep contact with the ground. When we run, both our feet lift off. Running is the closest we come to flying on a daily basis, an act as magical as it is mundane. It's been called the most democratic, accessible sport, and also the oldest: a great, healthy endeavor with a solid reputation. But I disagree. Running is not a sport. It's too common an activity. Moreover, it's too metaphorically suggestive to be a sport—not like rhythmic gymnastics, volleyball, or logrolling are sports. While running may be the Olympic discipline *par excellence*, it occurs everyday, everywhere, for the most part as either a barely registered exercise activity, or as a poetic image used to evoke the inner, archetypal hero—an icon of everyman's "personal best." There's hardly a middle ground. Running struggles to exist as an event. But for this, the runner is not to blame.

The activity has an intrinsic photographic and cinematic *élan*. Eadweard Muybridge's foundational photo sequence features a succession of 12 square pictures of a nude man in profile, running. He is joined by a bottom row of 12 narrow vertical frames of himself pictured from behind. The parts of him that matter are legs, arms, and buttocks—the mechanics of his run laid bare by multiple high-speed cameras parsing the distinct stages of a single stride into still units of odd gesticulation. Trace the corporeal contours in each frame, and you'll fabricate a running man zoetrope.

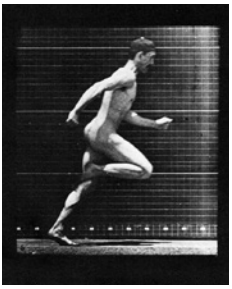
It's a short leap from there to the quirky swarms of human bodies speedily crossing highly trafficked streets or dispersing from factory gates in early films. From its inception, cinema seemed driven to reveal the dormant racer trapped in every human being. The technology had to develop further before seeing us as the essentially slow-paced beings we are. Yet, the optical allure of a traveling shot tracking a sole runner still compels filmmakers — whether a youngish Dustin Hoffman playing the Marathon Man, a desperate red-haired German named Lola, the literary *idiot savant* Forrest Gump, or a troubled Alan Turing. And the action is as metaphoric as it is literal and material: "running" is also what the camera and the celluloid are doing when they're taking the shot.

Humans are the furless survivors we've become today because we were able to outrun our hairy predators 2.6 million years ago. One can readily conjure the *National Geographic* footage that reenacts the story of human origin. It's midday on the scorching African steppe. First we see a human (male) running, sweating, hunting; then again later at sunset, sitting by a fire, cooking meat that will feed the muscles to ensure his continued survival tomorrow. From this narrative angle, it's easy enough to understand how we ran our way out of the cheetah's paws straight into the techno-capitalist urban reality we now inhabit in our state-of-the-art running gear, including gadgets to closely monitor the total number of steps we clock daily. The storyboard is prototypical: persistence, endurance, triumph. We overcome physical as well as ideological obstacles to achieve a higher, purer something: we run. But what happens when there's no longer a need to outrun the predators? Shouldn't that be the moment when running becomes a "sport," sublimating a primordial struggle between animals and animals, then animals and humans, into a friendly competition between humans and humans?

Instead, this is the moment when running becomes a picture rather than an event to witness. I know well enough how to watch that genealogic story on television or in a movie theater, but not when the running is happening live in front of me. Runners cross my path on a daily basis, as do school buses and dog walkers, to the extent that my street experience would feel awry if any of them suddenly went missing, but their presence is not in itself a story. At best, a finish line picture metonymically stands in for the whole race. As a child, I cherished a collection of Carl Lewis/Ben Johnson-type finish photos, but I've completely forgotten the rest of those races. (Only Zola Budd sticks out. Barefoot and notorious for emotional drama, she knew well enough how to captivate me.) This kind of pictorial substitution is even more typical when it comes to long distance running, with its frozen stills of raised arms and depleted grimaces underneath SEIKO banners.

Rarely does an unaffiliated tourist purposely plan a trip specifically to watch a marathon. In New York, Chicago, or Boston, there will be road-blocks, rerouted buses, train interruptions, restaurants with altered service hours, all hindering the sightseeing experience and seriously impinging on one's ability to complete the *Time Out* city guide's list of things to be done. Ergo, runners' friends and family members tend to make up the majority of the crowd on race weekends. It's more likely,

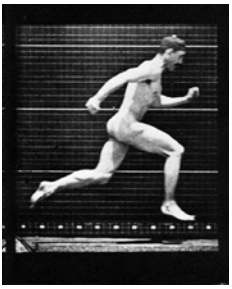
in fact, that the participants themselves will be tourists—though for distance runners, the place is not merely scenery, but strictly terrain. Other sports effectively produce an experience of landscape, but the place of a foot race, wherever that place may be, is above all else an image of ambition—a poetic image, in other words.



Consider how cycling or car racing, unlike running, have been successfully turned into spectator sports: curious pilgrims in the French Alps, adventurous campers in the Moroccan desert, nocturnal jetsetters at Le Mans. Here, there's a distinct synchronicity between landscape tourism and sports viewing. Admiration for mechanics, muscle, and willpower can be simultaneous and non-contradictory with admiration for a postcard view. These sports bring uninitiated, previously uninterested visitors to a site (or string of sites) with the offer of awe. Bikes and cars turn into a pretext, guiding viewers through a natural beauty that's seemingly there for the express purpose of appearing later as a backdrop in photographs. The sports underway merely prescribe perspectives and points of view.

Although I can't visualize the last time I watched an athlete running for sport, it's easy to picture myself running because a) I'm a prototypical human being, and b) I've seen so many others on screen. Even if I don't run regularly, I can mentally step out of my own moving body and observe

it clearly, in profile. The cliché of the Hollywood tracking shot surely informs my projection, but the image draws equally on those classic cartoon animations that turn regular legs into a blurry, wheel-shaped cloud moving faster than the scenery (which may not be moving at all).



At the gym, the computerized treadmill display epitomizes how readily we can completely identify with a flickering green light. Running my own legs into a mental cartoon blur, I track my progress through an abstract landscape seen in section view — a pulsing LED relief made of Tetris-shaped columns of various heights. The two defining coordinates in this depiction are time and resistance. There's no sea-level or milestone. My course is the gradual move from left to right, up and down, through time and space compressed into slim, adjacent towers. When the section view suggests that I'm on a downhill stretch, the vertical flicker of the column on the display nonetheless gives the impression that I'm climbing. Only by switching to laps mode, do I gain an aerial view of the *parcours*, where time and space show up in a more intuitive form. I become the blinking point on an endless loop, dipping in and out of virtual existence as my feet lift and land repeatedly.

How does running, or the ways in which we look at it, stand apart from other forms of athleticism? Olympic running's founding myth is a story of

swift communication. Running was the best method to quickly transmit the message "we won" (*nikomèn*) from the town of Marathon to Athens —a distance of 42 kilometers. The legend hinges on the runner's very invisibility; he succeeded because he swooshed by, unnoticed. In the climactic moment of the story, the messenger, after barely uttering the word, succumbs before his king. The relay was essentially private, from one individual to another. Today's marathon re-enacts the same hopeful, yet still precarious moment in the immediate wake of a war. Most sports translate local enmity into friendly, albeit passionate confrontations in stadium settings. According to this theory of agonistic impulse, organized sport is precisely a way of avoiding actual battle: players and spectators alike live through the emotions of mortal conflict in order to avoid acting on them. In running, then, the drama has already passed, because the action is meant to be missed.

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