

THE NEW YORK CITY MARATHON: SPECTACLE AND AMERICAN ROAD RACES

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over 50,000 runners gathered for the 49th running of the New York City Marathon on 3 November 2019. They assembled at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island and crossed the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge on their journey to the finish line at Tavern on the Green in Central Park. Since its conception, the New York City Marathon has had one of the largest fields of runners, and today it is among the most spectacular and prestigious road races. The New York City Marathon has evolved as an event within the context of a national and international running boom. The establishment of the race in 1970 under Fred Lebow and New York Road Runners (NYRR) would align with the start of the running boom in America and prove to introduce the urban marathon as a cultural form.¹

The New York City Marathon is not only one of the largest mass-participation marathons held annually in the world, but the history of urban marathons and contemporary road races is rooted in the history of the New York City Marathon. New York Road Runners and its coordination of the New York City Marathon curated the earliest forms of structure, industry standards, and audience in the context of modern distance running. What is also notable is the rate at which this growth in the marathon and concurrently the sport of distance running has grown within just the past 50 years. My research seeks to establish answers to three main questions: 1) What are the cultural and historical contexts that have stimulated the growth in distance running, particularly in reference to the manifestation of the mass-participation marathon? 2) How are certain logistical and embodied elements of the marathon race experience rooted in tendencies in greater culture and society? 3) What are the unique traits and methods developed within the context of New York City that has made this city in particular the centre of the running boom in America and the world?

¹ 'NYRR History.' New York Road Runners, accessed 7 August 2019, <https://www.nyrr.org/about/history>

My research will draw on historical and critical lenses for methods of analysis. I will draw from both sociological and phenomenological scholarship within urban studies and sport in addition to cultural texts from local New York City publications and popular industry publications such as *Runner's World* and *Outside Magazine*. Although there are many nuances to the running industry in terms of distance, terrain, and national context, for the purposes of this dissertation my analysis will be focused on New York City and the marathon in particular. The New York City Marathon will act as a case study for trends in distance running globally and specifically in America. I have chosen the New York City marathon as my case study because of how its history aligns with the boom in running in America in addition to the degree to which it has grown to one of the largest annual races in the world. My analysis will be broken down into three body chapters which will explore the history of the race, the structure of the race experience itself, and the relation of the race to the wider world.

Chapter 2: The Development of Road Races

Introduction

The 1976 New York City Marathon would create a new way to race. The New York City Marathon as a cultural event was established during the period of *Pax Americana* following the tumult of the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s. America in the 1970s was awash with new national and international politics which positioned the American public to consider identity politics in terms of race, gender, and sexuality in addition to the limits of American dominance as witnessed through the end to the Vietnam War, political scandals, and environmental crisis.² Distance running offered certainty in uncertain times in addition to a platform for capitalistic expression for growing middle class as the baby boomers enter adulthood in the 1970s. Distance running became both socially significant and capitalistically oriented as mass culture and globalism developed via the image revolution of American pop culture.³ Although Boston is the oldest continuously held marathon in the world, the New York City Marathon represents the first ‘urban tour’ marathon. After the 1976 iteration of the New York City Marathon, which was the first to span all five New York City boroughs, many marathons, particularly urban marathons, would take seed including the Chicago Marathon in 1977 and the London Marathon in 1981.⁴

The cultural milieu of New York and America in the 1970s laid the groundwork for the running boom. A national and local enthusiasm for the sport of running coupled with the business savvy practices of Fred Lebow and George Spitz as personifications of the new generation of mass participation runners created the spectacular five-borough iteration of the race. New York at the time of the marathon was in an economic downturn with the

² Carroll, Peter N. *It seemed like nothing happened: the tragedy and promise of America in the 1970s*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

³ Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

⁴ Burfoot, Amby. ‘The History of the Marathon: 1976—present.’ *Sports Medicine* Vol. 37, No. 4-5 (April 2007): 284–287.

government unwilling to invest further in what was seen as a declining city. The introduction of the five-borough New York City Marathon course was pitched as a one-time course change to the event done with the purpose of celebrating New York City during the bicentennial of United States independence. With the support of real estate developer Jack Rudin in addition to Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton and New York City Mayor Abraham Beame, the five-borough race was created, and its success secured its place in New York City culture for years to come.⁵

A Brief History of Distance Running

Millenia before the New York City Marathon, humans were differentiated from other animals through the evolution of the ability to run long distances by standing up-right and leaping from one foot to the next while swinging their arms in an opposite direction to their legs. The various minutiae of physical and biological traits that aid in the ability to run longer and more efficiently were naturally selected due to their importance for survival as necessary skills to hunt for food and flee from threats. As early human societies formed into villages and developed agricultural technologies, the need to run in order to flee and hunt became less important yet running persisted.⁶

Prior to the development of transportation technologies, running was utilised as a means of communication across various cultures such as in the mythical case of Pheidippides and his famous run from Marathon to Athens during the Persian Wars which would come to inspire the creation of the modern marathon for the first modern Olympics held in 1896.⁷ However, between running as a means of communication, which dates back to the earliest civilisations across the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, and the conception of running as a standardised sport of international competition in the late nineteenth century, distance

⁵ 'NYRR History.' New York Road Runners.

⁶ Heinrich, Bernd. *Why We Run: A Natural History*. New York: Ecco, 2002.

⁷ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*, translated by Peter Graves. London: Reaktion, 2009.

running can be observed within diverse cultures as a form of play. Once transportation developed to support communication and travel over long distances, running mostly relinquished its formal roles within society.⁸ What occurred instead was a proliferation of informal play and formalised sport that took seed across various societies. Rather than a universal evolution of the sport, running integrates itself into various cultures based on different values, relations, terrain, and climate among other variables that impact how and why people live in certain ways.⁹ What this looks like in terms of general trends across various continents is the development of running as ceremony in North America, running as a means of betting and wagers in Europe, and running as play and game in Africa.¹⁰

Running began to take on its current cultural form around the nineteenth century particularly in Europe and the U.K. As people moved to cities in the age of industry and began to live more sedentary lifestyles, running became a means to expel that extra energy and serve as a form of leisure to fill their new spare time.¹¹ In Great Britain, running can trace its roots to the ‘pedestrianism’ of the 17th century in which aristocrats raced their footmen to prove their prestige and reputations.¹² Through the 18th and 19th centuries, the sport grew as a means of wagers and bets, but rather than restricted to competition between aristocrats, individual athletes began to achieve fame and success for their performances.¹³ Pedestrianism of this form would be exported across the British colonies, including the American colonies where contemporary road racing would develop as the United States achieved global power leading into the 20th century.¹⁴

⁸ Sears, Edward S. *Running Through the Ages*. McFarland & Co. 2009.

⁹ Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

¹⁰ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

¹¹ Bale, John. *Running Cultures: Racing in Time and Space*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004.

¹² Spiers, Andrew et al. ‘England: The Governance and History of Running, the Decision to Run and Trends in Running Participation.’ In *Running Across Europe: The Rise and Size of One of the Largest Sport Markets*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

¹³ Thom, Walter. ‘Pedestrianism; or, an Account of The Performances of Celebrated Pedestrians During The Last and Present Century; With a Full Narrative of Captain Barclay’s Public and Private Matches; and an Essay on Training.’ Aberdeen, Scotland: D. Chalmers and Co., 1813.

¹⁴ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

An American Pastime

Due to the colonial influence of the British, pedestrianism would take root in the American colonies and continue to develop after the period of British colonialism in the United States.¹⁵ The British influence on distance running in America would be the basis for the development of American road races as a spectacular and global form. However, it is important to recognise this subsumption of British sporting tradition as more than a local domestication, but rather as a continued colonisation.¹⁶ Along with the destruction of Native American communities went an erasure of native sport culture which includes a rich tradition of running both as ceremony and play.¹⁷ Native Americans achieved sustained success at ultramarathon distances. For example, the runner Jim Thorpe even accomplished a podium-level performance at the 1912 Olympics, but these stories are too often repressed and removed from the tradition of 'American' runners to the point that even the record of Jim Thorpe set at the 1912 Olympics remains unofficial today due to an unfair mobilisation of the amateur rule applied to his participation in minor league baseball.¹⁸

Pedestrianism existed as a rich and active sport for wagers and spectacle in America through the nineteenth century.¹⁹ With growing power and a sense of national identity, America embraced athletic success over the British as a form of patriotism and pedestrians often achieved celebrity status as athletes which would be unparalleled within running until the boom of the 1970s.²⁰ Leading up to the late nineteenth century, the craze for pedestrianism would echo from London to the new urban centres of America including New

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dyreson, Mark. 'Imperial 'Deep Play': Reading Sport and Visions of the Five Empires of the 'New World,' 1919–41.' *International Journal of the History of Sport* Vol. 28, No. 17 (December 2011): 2415 – 2441.

¹⁷ Walton, Theresa A. and Ted M. Butryn. 'Policing the Race: U.S. Men's Distance Running and the Crisis of Whiteness.' *Sociology of Sport Journal* Vol. 23, No. 1 (2006): 1-28.

¹⁸ Nabokov, Peter. *Indian Running: Native American History and Tradition*. Ancient City Press, 1987.

¹⁹ Moss, George. 'The Long Distance Runners of Ante-Bellum America.' *Journal of Popular Culture* Vol. 8, No. 2. 1974.

²⁰ Sears, Edward S. *George Seward: America's First Great Runner*. Scarecrow Press, 2008.

York and Chicago.²¹ However, come the American Civil War, leisure sports would momentarily fade from view with the reinstitution of sports in the post-American Civil War decades assuming new forms as popular national pastimes which would be unique to this newly unified country and its re-assertation of its patriotic identity.²²

Even after American independence, the British would continue to dominate the world in terms of culture including the culture of distance running.²³ Standardisation of the sport including distance measurements and time keeping would be born in Great Britain as the pioneer of the sport. These standards would be integrated into global sport at the first Olympics as observed in the standardisation of track and road running competitions in 1896.²⁴ The first international Olympics in 1896 the marathon would involve a 40-kilometre race over a designated course from Marathon Bridge to the Olympic Stadium in Athens.²⁵ Although it would be appropriated within local contexts to perpetuate local heroism and mythic achievement as in the Boston Marathon to be held the next spring after the 1896 Olympics. The five-borough New York City Marathon in 1976 would be one of the first marathons to concretise as an annual event with other marathons to follow such as Chicago, Berlin, London, and Tokyo which are now at the core of distance running competitions and held every year.²⁶

Leading into the 20th century, there would be a shift in global power as the British Empire begins to decline, and the United States prospers after the Civil War with the second wave of industrialisation. With this impending shift in economic power relations comes a

²¹ 'Pedestrianism in London.' *The New York Times*, New York: The New York Times Company. (24 September 1878): 1; 'Pedestrianism.' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Chicago: Tribune Publishing (5 February 1879): 5.

²² Schultz, Jamie et al. (2014) 'A Brief Taxonomy of Sports that Were Not Quite American National Pastimes: Fads and Flashes-in-the-Pan, Nationwide and Regional Pastimes, the Pastimes of Other Nations, and Pan-National Pastimes.' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* Vol. 31, No. 1-2 (2014): 250-272.

²³ Tomlinson, Alan. 'POWER: Domination, Negotiation, and Resistance in Sports Cultures.' *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* Vol. 22, No. 3 (1988): 235–240.

²⁴ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

²⁵ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

²⁶ Cooper, Pamela L. 'The "Visible Hand" on the Footrace'; Burfoot, Amby. 'The History of the Marathon: 1976—present.'

shift in cultural power and influence.²⁷ A similar shift can be observed in the world of running. The organisations and standards of British running that were pioneered in the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century would not only be adopted in America but innovatively transformed via innovation to constitute a new way to race and compete.²⁸

American distance running following the American Civil War and into the 20th century can be understood as a projection of American identity and ideals both within the nation state and globally.²⁹ The American city becomes the space where individuals are brought together to connect with both the city and the country in an experiential and embodied nature.³⁰ The Boston Marathon, a point-to-point course from Hopkinton, Massachusetts to Boston, Massachusetts, the Boston Marathon enacts a metaphor for the journey many Americans made to immigrate to American cities. The New York Marathon would later produce a similar effect through its course as it spanned five boroughs starting in 1976.³¹

Races were spaces that appeared open to most men. This communicated a sense of democracy and fairness as compared to the classist structures of European society and the racism and inequality of other sectors of American daily life. However, while appearing open to all, this façade of fairness would mirror the illusionary freedom of America during this period. Although still a sport of only limited interest at the time compared to other popular and newly invented American pastimes, these races of democracy and identity would act as early means to connect newly immigrated and disenfranchised athletes and spectators to both city and country.³² However, come the 1970s, and the coupling of capitalist and mass-

²⁷ Dyreson, Mark. 'Imperial 'Deep Play''

²⁸ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

²⁹ Dyreson, Mark. 'Globalizing the Nation-Making Process: Modern Sport in World History.' *International Journal of the History of Sport* Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 2003): 91–106.

³⁰ Hockey, John. 'Sensing the Run: The Senses and Distance Running.' In *Senses and Society* Vol. 1, No. 2, (July 2006): 183-202.

³¹ Cooper, Pamela. *The American Marathon*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

³² Ibid.

participation designed races with narratives of American athletic achievement would create a boom that would reverberate in terms of culture both nationally and internationally beyond New York.³³

New York State of Running

Through much of American history, New York has been a key economic and cultural centre. Situated on the eastern seaboard on the Atlantic Ocean, it was a key centre of trade and transportation during Dutch and British rule. During the American Revolution, New York acted as a key meeting place for both patriots and royalists in securing the future of the city and the country. Many pedestrian races would draw crowds across the metro area and greater New York City, and amid the revival of footraces under the name of ‘running’ after the turn of the 20th century, New York would once more be host to some of the most famous footraces in American history.³⁴ Mere months after the first Olympics, a marathon would go from Stamford, Connecticut and finish in Bronx, New York. America’s second oldest marathon would be founded just a few miles north of the city in 1907 in Yonkers, New York.³⁵ A number of these spectacular new road races, including arguably the most spectacular race of all, the 3,423.5 mile, trans-American footrace of 1928, would persist in New York City during the early decades of the 1900s. This would eventually lead to a formalisation of road running in the United States inspired by the Road Runners Club in Britain, founded in 1952.³⁶

Harrison Browning Ross would form the Road Runners Club of Philadelphia in addition to the earliest form of distance running media via a mimeographed newsletter called the *Long Distance Log*. In 1958, Ted Corbitt would found the New York Road Runners Club

³³ Stracher, Cameron. *Kings of the Road: How Frank Shorter, Bill Rodgers, and Alberto Salazar Made Running Go Boom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. Kindle Edition.

³⁴ Moss, George. ‘The Long Distance Runners of Ante-Bellum America.’

³⁵ Kennedy, Patrick L. ‘There was a Marathon in New York in 1896.’ *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company, 5 Nov. 2017.

³⁶ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

(later called New York Road Runners or NYRR) and in the same year he would meet with Ross in New York and other members of the running community and found the Road Runners Club of America (RRCA). The RRCA was created to grow the road running community through the production of races and a standardisation of road races. The mission of the organisation was to be a counter to the monopoly of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) which was uninterested in the sport of road running and also embraced exclusionary practices that resulted in barriers to entry into races and even specific restrictions on the basis of sex. By 1961, what was formerly a small number of road races had grown to over 600 nationwide, and by 1964, best practice was being established by RRCA race organisers including standardised course certifications and timing.³⁷

After the tumult of the culture wars in America and New York in the 1960s, the 1970s would be a time of reoriented social relations.³⁸ Amid what Boorstin terms ‘the image revolution’ and the growing business of globalisation, post-Civil Rights Era America was positioned to reconstruct the American image and identity after the fractures of the previous decade.³⁹ Further, New York had undergone an extreme economic downturn, famously proclaimed in a *Daily News* headline in the 1970s to ‘...drop dead,’ was left to answer the question of how the middle class could negotiate the intensity and stress of urban life whose landscape was ridden with crime and poverty.⁴⁰ With a country and city left to redefine itself, ideals of America and New York as collaborative and innovative spaces provided the ideological opportunity for road running of the time to blossom from a purely competitive sport to a democratic pastime.⁴¹

³⁷ ‘RRCA History: Celebrating 60 Years of Running the Nation : 1958-2018.’ RRCA, accessed 9 August 2019.

³⁸ Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. The Free Press, 2001.

³⁹ Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image*.

⁴⁰ Roberts, Sam. ‘Infamous ‘Drop Dead’ Was Never Said by Ford.’ *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company, 28 Dec. 2006.

⁴¹ Haberman, Aaron L. ‘Thousands of Solitary Runners Come Together: Individualism and Communitarianism in the 1970s Running Boom.’ *Journal of Sport History* Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 2017): 35-49.

A Jewish-Romania immigrant working in the textiles industry named Fischel Lebowitz (later called Fred Lebow) began running with NYRR in the late 1960s. A less-than-averagely skilled runner for the time period who often completed marathons in four hours and was in his mid-30s when he started running, Lebow did not fit the mould for competitive running at the time. He was never going to be a contender in a race, but he loved the sport of running for the community and the experience. He was a skilled showman, as many were who worked in the fashion industry of 1960s New York, and his charismatic personality and ambition resulted in heavy involvement in NYRR. He was one of the first non-competitive runners to have a major role in a running organisation, and in 1970 he organised the first New York City Marathon in Central Park. By 1972 Lebow was appointed president of NYRR and he orchestrated and supported the first all-women's race called the 'Crazylegs Mini Marathon,' in addition to a sit-in by female New York City Marathon runners months later in protest of the AAU-enforced separate starts for men and women.⁴²

Under Lebow, distance running would continuously transform to support marginalised demographics both within America, the city, and the running community. His events invited people of all races, origins, and creeds. More than competitions, these were spectacular and innovative themed races such as the Fifth Avenue Mile, the Empire State Building Run-Up, the Midnight Run, and numerous others. Alongside these uniquely themed races was the idea that every runner should receive a race medal and a race souvenir which is traditionally a race t-shirt as established by Lebow himself in his early years of race organising.⁴³ By 1976, the idea of a five-borough marathon would prove to be the ultimate event of race spectacle and production conceived and grown over the years by Fred Lebow and NYRR co-president Vincent Chiappetta. As the New York City Marathon grew through

⁴² 'NYRR History.' New York Road Runners.

⁴³ Rubin, Rob. *Anything For a T-Shirt: Fred Lebow and the New York City Marathon, the World's Greatest Footrace*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004.

the last quarter of the 20th century and into the 21st century, this event and NYRR itself would develop and prosper alongside the larger running community and industry.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cooper, Pamela L. 'The "Visible Hand" on the Footrace: Fred Lebow and the Marketing of the Marathon.' *Journal of Sport History* Vol. 19, No. 3 (1992): 244-256.

Chapter 3: The Myth and Ritual of the Marathon

Standardisation of the Marathon

The origin of the modern marathon is rooted in myth. The first use of the word ‘marathon’ as a running race at the 1896 Olympics in Athens would be in direct homage to the classical story of the 25-mile journey Pheidippides made from Marathon to Athens to announce the defeat of the Persians.⁴⁵ The reference in the name ‘marathon’ to this classical war-time event appropriates its context as war to be used in a new contemporary of international politics where war between nations is displaced by competitions of international influence and politics. The birth of the marathon as the apex of road running is thus born from this creation of the myth of sport as a contemporary form of battle.⁴⁶

At London in 1908, the distance of 26 miles and 385 yards, which is known today as the official marathon distance, would be ran for the first time. It would be fabled that the course underwent an extension of a final 385 yards for the reason of either moving the start line closer to Windsor Castel so the royal children could see the start from their nursery or rather to move the finish line so that it finished in front of the royal box at the Olympic Stadium.⁴⁷ However, neither is true. The extension is in response to the landscape of the city with changes to the course made to account for added security at the start line, remeasurements, detours, and to allow for more time for the runners to run on the track in front of the stadium audience.⁴⁸

This origin story of the modern marathon situates the race as an embodied urban event of both spectacle and control. The unconventional distance and the royal origin story imbue the distance with a contemporary myth that linked to the city of London and

⁴⁵ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*.

⁴⁶ Beck, Peter J. ““War Minus the Shooting”: George Orwell on International Sport and the Olympics.’ *Sport in History* Vol. 33, No. 1 (2012): 72-94.

⁴⁷ Wilcock, Bob. ‘The 1908 Olympic Marathon.’ *International Society of Olympic Historians* Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 2008): 31-47.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

constructions of global power. To add to the mysterious origins of the adoption of the 26.2 mile distance for the marathon, there would be no explanation by the IAAF for the appropriation of this specific distance when it was adopted as the Olympic standard after the 1912 Olympics.⁴⁹ Marathons across the world, including the Boston Marathon, would adopt this standardised distance, but it would not be until the 1970s when New York and Chicago join Boston as urban marathons held annually that a trend which would divide the American distance running calendar into spring and autumn marathon seasons and eventually the world would be developed.⁵⁰

How to Make a Race

What is new about the distance races of the 1970s is the development of an expanded field of runners. Prior to the 1970s, distance races were either organised locally to cater to the participation of sportsmen and enthusiasts or rather designed as a commodified competition for pure spectacle by sponsors looking to make money or official sport organisations as a venue for elite competition. The urban marathon becomes an integrated space where amateur and elite participate on the same course.⁵¹ Lines are blurred between the spectator and spectacle. Here, the masses both observe the spectacle as spectators and create it through participation in the event. The marathon becomes an idealised space of democracy where anyone can theoretically participate. However, in actuality underpinning this progressive liberalism are issues of systematic oppression and access, especially exacerbated as the race grows and participation becomes increasingly regulated.

The establishment of the marathon as an integrated field of talent grows from the amateur demographic of the community. These informal organisations begin to develop

⁴⁹ 'Marathon.' World Athletics. [worldathletics.org](https://www.worldathletics.org). (accessed 4 December 2019).
<https://www.worldathletics.org/disciplines/road-running/marathon>

⁵⁰ Burfoot, Amby. 'The History of the Marathon: 1976—present.'

⁵¹ Stracher, Cameron. *Kings of the Road*.

aspects that mirror corporations as they develop races to appeal to a wider community.

Distances races became a mass consumable product tied to the needs of urban individuals of the 1970s.⁵² As individuals are increasingly alienated from their work during the early years of the global information economy, serious leisure begins to form as an embodied experience that allows for a physical relief from the new idleness of modern work and a tangible product in a world whose products are increasingly elusive as related to one's labours.⁵³ In an increasingly commodified world, to pay for a race becomes an opportunity to spend capital as a means to achieve and pursue leisure in a serious and mechanistic way that both mirrors and complements the increasing demands of a 24-hour marketplace and workplace.⁵⁴

Here running offers an escape from this new world of mental and emotional saturation through the means of embodied physicality. What is crafted through the practice of running is a paradoxical creation of a freedom in the connection to nature and oneself that running brings in addition to a habit of restriction tied to serious leisure and the need to constantly be productive and efficient which follows the mentality of workplace demands.⁵⁵ The language of running even comes to adopt language of commodified and productive sentiment which utilises terms such as dedication, consistency, and efficiency to orientate runners to the relationship to their selves and their training which they are developing within the sport.⁵⁶

This embodied experience is coupled with the cultural influence at the elite level. The image and aesthetic of Frank Shorter winning the Olympic Marathon in Munich in 1972 is traditionally seen as the moment when distance running entered the world of the everyday American and captured their imaginations.⁵⁷ The site of this white, indistinguishable

⁵² Rubin, Rob. *Anything For a T-Shirt*.

⁵³ Marx, Karl. 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret,' In *Capital, Volume One*. London: Penguin, 1990.

⁵⁴ Stebbins, Robert. *Serious Leisure: A Perspective For Our Time*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007.

⁵⁵ Latham, Alan. 'The history of a habit: jogging as a palliative to sedentariness in 1960s America.' *Cultural Geographies* Vol. 22, No. 1, (2015): 103-126.

⁵⁶ Shipway, R. and Holloway, I. (2010) 'Running free: Embracing a healthy lifestyle through distance running', *Perspectives in Public Health*, 130 (6): 270-276.

⁵⁷ Bale, John. *Running Cultures*.

American man achieving glory at the verge of exhaustion connected with the everyday, lower and middle class Americans who sought tangible achievement in their lives which seemed to be increasingly alienated from the production of end-products.⁵⁸ This appetite for running would set the stage for running to transform from a competitive sport of eclectics to a spectacular business of experiential events.⁵⁹ The New York City Marathon has spearheaded the definition of the contemporary marathon across many elements of the event which can be analysed in three distinct parts: Pre-Race, The Race, and Post-Race.⁶⁰

Pre-Race

Registration

A formal race is defined by the need to register. It is through registration that an individual distinguishes themselves as a participant and is therefore able to collect result upon completion of the race. Core to a formal distance race is a result that is associated with an individual. Early racing was purely recreational, and the registration of the individual that belongs to the result was often done at the finish line. Once a person finished, they would claim their position and time and offer their name if it is not already known by the organisers.⁶¹ However, the commodification of running which occurred as road racing developed required a fee in order to participate. The introduction of monetary exchange alienates the runner from the race by creating an estranged and transactional relationship between runner and organiser. This capital would serve to support the event but as a means of contribution rather than the grassroots contributions which were more tangible and personal in effect.

The exchange of money can be regarded as the original sin of road racing. The race becomes a product and commodity which is increasingly more elusive as the entry fee

⁵⁸ Robinson, Roger. *When running made history*. 2019.

⁵⁹ Reischer, Erica L. 'Running to the Moon: The Articulation and Construction of Self in Marathon Runners.' *Anthropology of Consciousness* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2001): 19-35.

⁶⁰ Cooper, Pamela L. 'The "Visible Hand" on the Footrace.'

⁶¹ Race Directors HQ. '4 Alternatives to Chip Timing.' *RDHQ*. Race Directors HQ. (accessed 4 December 2019). <https://www.racedirectorshq.com/alternatives-chip-timing/>

increases and the spectacular elements of the race are grown.⁶² No longer is a race as simple as a start, finish, and a result, but rather there becomes a hierarchy of entry, experience, and further fixtures of capitalist products that come to permeate a race. More is added to define a race such as a participant t-shirt, a medal, and numerous other amenities which become expected of a race. The structures of road races as a form of serious leisure come to adopt capitalist tendencies which prioritise the business model instead of the community-driven and athletic-oriented models of previous forms. What is mythologised as a democratic and accessible sport for everyone is increasingly underpinned with neo-liberal techniques which fuel economic interests via a mass-experiential event of commodity spectacle rather than the previous basic constructions whose only demands were of participation in competition.

In the contemporary race, the fiscal landscape of the event requires registration to act as a system of control whose ends are that of safety and economic gain rather than its original relationship to the assurance of results.⁶³ Registration is no longer about results for the individual, but rather protection of the race organisers both financially and legally. Individuals must apply for entry to pay for the resources required for the race and amenities received in addition to submit to the rules and waivers instituted by the race organising body. In exchange for this monetary exchange and submission to the rules, individuals are granted entry to this race where the bib becomes their legal identification in the realm of the race.⁶⁴

These individuals are abstracted to that of a number and subsumed into a mechanistic mass, and it is only at the finish line that they are finally granted a reunification of their name with their number as the finish formulates their official results that bear their name.⁶⁵ And here, the result itself requires the reassociation with the individual as race results by their

⁶² Marx, Karl. 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret.'

⁶³ Deleuze, Gilles. 'Postscript on the Societies of Control.' *October* Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7.

⁶⁴ Atkinson, M. and Young, K., 2008a. Deviance and social control in sport. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

⁶⁵ Kracauer, Siegfried. 'The Mass Ornament,' In *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, translated by Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

very form segregate and organise individuals along statistical lines of gender and age. The refusal to offer one's name and demographic details publicly negates the privilege to an official result as the result itself requires the data of a full, embodied human to be placed behind each number.⁶⁶

The Exposition

The pre-race exposition becomes the central commodity spectacle of the marathon. As numbers of registrants to the New York City Marathon increased, bib distribution became increasingly difficult to accommodate for a growing field and a growing non-local demographic. This presented the challenge of how to distribute bibs and information to such large amounts of people prior to race morning. The solution was to hold a running exposition. This not only allowed for the appropriate distribution to large amounts of people, but it also provided an opportunity to increase profits by giving the running industry a space to connect directly with the market of runners.⁶⁷

The idea of an exposition as a condensed form of commodity spectacle is linked to the idea of the famous international expositions of the world's fairs.⁶⁸ Here, instead of the commodities of the world condensed in a singular space in a global city, the running exposition created an experience of global commodities specific to the running community. Just as early expositions conditioned individuals to be capitalistically minded and partake in the soon to be malls and arcades of cities, the running exposition not only tailors the products and information to be runner-specific but also crafts an image and an imaginary of the individual runner and the collective running community.⁶⁹ Products are assorted and range from gear to nutrition to other races that can be entered. Here a runner is taught what is

⁶⁶ 'Privacy Policy.' NYRR. New York Road Runners. (accessed 05 December 2019). [Nyrr.org](https://www.nyrr.org/privacy-policy).

⁶⁷ Cooper, Pamela L. 'The "Visible Hand" on the Footrace.'

⁶⁸ Simmel, Georg. 'The Berlin Trade Exposition.' *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1991) pp. 119-123.

⁶⁹ Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1991. pp. 17-19.

required to perform their identity as a runner and be an active and productive member of the running community.

The Race

The Start

The terrain and logistics of the urban marathon, as formulated in New York, becomes a ritual immersed with martial references.⁷⁰ In the mid-20th century, war in the Western countries becomes displaced by heroic re-enactments of global competition.⁷¹ The marathon becomes one of these events where honour and accolades can be achieved as they had once been largely won in the traditional European wars. Each individual is a trained soldier ready to take on the battle of the marathon and some fight on their own, while others are affiliated with specific battalions or running clubs. These individuals spend months in basic training to prepare them for the battle of the race, then on race day starts their war-time journey.

Runners deploy from their localities to meet in New York for the race. After they pick up their race materials from the expo, they adorn their race kit with their bibs as identification to show that they are a runner in the race and their timing chip which acts as their weapon against the clock which chases them down at every mile. On race morning, they bring only what fits in a clear plastic bag. One clear plastic bag can be transported by the race organisers to the finish line, but all else must either be discarded at the start or carried with them all the way to the end. Runners assemble at various points in Manhattan and are transported in masses to the start on Staten Island. They are on coach buses, ferries to Staten Island, and shuttles that wait for the ferries to arrive. As they start their journey to the start, each one of them emotionally prepares for what lies ahead.

⁷⁰ Segrave, Jeffrey O.. 'The sports metaphor in American cultural discourse.' *Culture, Sport & Society* Vol. 3, No. 1 (2000) pp. 48-60.

⁷¹ Beck, Peter J. "'War Minus the Shooting.'"

The start area on Staten Island is Fort Wadsworth, an active military base. The area is secured in the days leading up to the event, and participants are ushered into the secured start villages on race morning as long as they carry the right papers be it either a credential for non-runners or a participant race bib for runners. Here the constructed start villages create a fort for runners on the physical site of a fort for soldiers. Fort Wadsworth was chosen specifically as a spot for the start of the race because it is known that it can hold enough individuals and be secured leading up to the race; the very same reason why Fort Wadsworth was created for martial needs in the first place.⁷²

Runners wander the villages full of physical support from medical tents, toilet facilities, nutrition and hydration, and even emotional support in recent years in the form of support dogs. All of these amenities are meant to prepare runners for what they are soon to face on the course. They wait to be called to the start and line up in orderly corrals. With the booming start of the cannon, the start is initiated. This same weapon that was used to defeat armies signals the start of this athletic competition, signalling the time for everyone to charge up across the bridge to confront the enemies that await them along the 26.2 miles. But without a physical enemy to battle as in many athletic competitions, they are left battling their own bodies and minds to gain advantage over the physical and emotional stresses of the course in the task ahead.⁷³

The Course

The course read within an urban context liberates runners from the constraints of the park.⁷⁴ With roads associated with the class and privilege of car ownership, road running

⁷² Tomlinson, Alan et al. 'Introduction: Mapping Sports Space.' *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 46, No. 11 (2003) pp. 1463–1475.

⁷³ Shields, David and Brenda Bredemeier 'Contest, Competition, and Metaphor.' *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* Vol. 38, No. 1 (2011) pp. 27-38.

⁷⁴ Reid, H. (2007) 'The Freedom of the Long-Distance Runner', in. M. Austin (ed.) *Running and Philosophy: A Marathon for the Mind*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

empowers the everyday individual to claim the city via the road as a space for everyone.⁷⁵

New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses had undercut the development of public transport and public spaces to develop New York City as a contemporary city built for the car.⁷⁶ Road and highway projects dominated the city through much of the 20th Century and resulted in a segregation of areas and neighbourhoods with the car owner the privileged flaneur who was able to move between these spaces without impediment.⁷⁷ The New York City Marathon challenges this idea of the car city of New York and crafts a race that demands the roads be opened to the everyday participants and affords a flaneuristic tour through all five boroughs. This not only liberates the individual but creates a race and experiences that reveal the literal connections between the boroughs.⁷⁸ It rejects the abstraction of public transport and driving and creates an embodied experience where the city is traced on foot.⁷⁹

The layout of the course as a point-to-point route from Staten Island to Central Park represents a metaphorical journey for the individual and a greater urban myth of the city.⁸⁰ At the level of the individual, the course represents an odyssey of physical achievement. The particular metaphorical journeys have been represented in coursework differently across lines of gender, race, and class. However, what is consistent is the idea that the marathon becomes the stage of competition where individuals can wage these internal battles in a real, physical manner.⁸¹ At the level of the city, the course allows for urban storytelling to take place.

Through the tracing of streets and neighbourhoods, a story of the city is constructed about the

⁷⁵ Smith, Andrew. *Events in the City: Using public spaces as event venues*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

⁷⁶ Gratz, Roberta Brandes. *The battle for Gotham: New York in the shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs*. New York: Nation Books, 2010.

⁷⁷ Coates, Jamie. 'Key figure of mobility: the flaneur.' *Special Issue: Key Figures of Mobility* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2017) pp. 28-14.

⁷⁸ Cook, Simon and Paul Simpson. 'Jography: Exploring Meanings, Experiences and Spatialities of Recreational Road-running.' *Mobilities* Vol. 11, No. 5 (2015) pp. 744-769.

⁷⁹ Certeau, Michel de. 'Walking in the City.' *The Practice of Everyday Living*, translated by Rendall, Steven. University of California Press, 1984.

⁸⁰ Cooper, Pamela. *The American Marathon*. pp. 27-48.

⁸¹ Shipway, Richard and Ian Jones 'The Great Suburban Everest: An 'Insider's' perspective on experiences at the 2007 Flora London Marathon' *Journal of Sport & Tourism* Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008) pp. 61-77.

connection and integration of the formerly separated five boroughs into one New York City. The creation of the five-borough race in New York from Staten Island to Central Park would predate and come to inspire the other point-to-point urban marathons such as the London Marathon and its journey from the Royal Park of Greenwich to Buckingham Palace and before the Berlin Marathon which starts in the Tiergarten and circles the city to finish back through the Brandenburg Gate.⁸²

The New York City Marathon course unites the city and all five of its boroughs. Each borough is toured and showcased on the journey to the centre of Manhattan and thus the centre of New York City. The literal placement of the course in all five boroughs reproduces the history of the roads and neighbourhoods which are appropriated for the race. The organisation of and by the communities along the course further colour the human geography of the city. How the story of New York is told via the infrastructures is through its many bridges. The New York City Marathon consists of crossing a total of five bridges throughout the race. This course is defined by the rigor of its terrain. Bridges in New York City have a history of connecting the disparate parts of the city to construct a singular New York City out of multiple boroughs and municipalities that previously existed.⁸³ More than means of transportation, the bridges themselves became sites of spectacle and exceptionalism. As New York is photographed and visualised as a city, its bridges become representative of sweeping architectural achievement.

The start of the race is on the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge and provides one of the most central forms of spectacle. The two-tiered bridge is one of the most photographed elements of the course with runners flanking both sides of street on the bridge and additional lanes underneath the first tier. The Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge was the largest suspension

⁸² Smith, Andrew. *Events in the City*.

⁸³ Reier, Sharon. *The Bridges of New York*. New York: Dover Publications, 2000.

bridge in the world for nearly 20 years and still remains the largest suspension bridge in America. Tied in name to the famed explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano, the bridge becomes representative of a sense of exploration and achievement. With the first climb of this bridge, runners embark on an adventure across a bridge whose spectacular size and history add to that of the glory of the marathoner. With the many bridges to come later in the race, each climb becomes one of spectacle from the site of thousands of runners but also the embodied spectacle of the views of the city afforded by being drawn to a high point above it all.

Due to the structures of these bridges, it becomes one of the only places where crowds of spectators dissipate, and runners are left with their thoughts. Every race has these moments of quietness where the crowds phase out and runners are left largely alone for a stretch of time, reminded that it is only them who must make it from the beginning to the end.⁸⁴ The larger races have filled many of these gaps with spectators, but it is in New York that the unique logistics of the bridges preserve these moments of silence where runners must battle it out for themselves before eventually being welcomed to the finish line in Central Park.

Post-Race

The finish line marks the completion of the race. A new form of time is undertaken from when a runner starts the race and they enter a unique space of embodied experience geared toward competition and exploration. After they cross the start line into this competition space of the course, they are no longer concerned with the everyday time of clocks. The crossing of the first time mat and hitting the stopwatch on their watches in addition to the clocks on the course mark a new type of time that exists to measure the new time of the event.⁸⁵ When runners cross the finish line the suspension of every day time is

⁸⁴ Robbins, Liz. *A Race Like No Other: 26.2 Miles Through the Streets of New York*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.

⁸⁵ Smith, G. 'Racing against time? Aspects of the temporal organization of the runner's world' *Symbolic Interaction* Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002) pp. 343–62.

terminated as they pass across the threshold from the competition space of the course into the everyday world outside of the course which they came from. Like soldiers returning from war, runners are greeted gleefully at the finish line and provided with amenities and services to aid their initial recovery.

Runners are provided a handful of real and symbolic amenities for their efforts on the racecourse. The first of these is usually a race medal. Medals have existed for centuries and are often associated with achievement. In its traditional form, medals were specifically symbols for martial achievement. However, the appropriation of this form of award would be most influentially by the 1896 Olympics and adopted by many European races thereafter.⁸⁶ In America, runners did not commonly receive medals until the 1970s, but rather were given a t-shirt. These t-shirts especially distributed by race organisations like NYRR not only gave runners an object for their participation but worked as advertisement for the race itself and the organisation in addition to giving sponsors a place to have further advertisement as well.⁸⁷ Although the New York City Marathon would give participant medals from its 1970 race, it would gain even further popularisation among other races as Americans witnessed Frank Shorter win the gold medal in the 1970s Munich Olympics.⁸⁸

After runners are given their medals, they often receive a tinfoil blanket to keep them warm and a variety of nutritional amenities to refuel. The technology of the tinfoil heat sheet is borrowed from emergency services used to ensure the body temperature of individuals is regulated. The distribution of these tinfoil sheets on a mass scale comes to resemble the media images of war-torn areas which depict masses of civilians receiving aid. As runners hobble with sore muscles under their tinfoil blankets they further resemble the looks of

⁸⁶ Fox, Kit and Mark Remy. 'An Obsession with Race Medals.' *Runner's World*. New York: Hearst, 15 Jul. 2014.

⁸⁷ Rubin, Rob. *Anything For a T-Shirt*.

⁸⁸ Stracher, Cameron. *Kings of the Road*

individuals who have survived war but are in a form of shock or injury as they stumble onwards into the world and, in some cases, require medical attention.⁸⁹

As they are discharged from the finish area into the city, they must re-join the outside city which they had previously been separated from by the barricades and security of the course. Their medals mark their achievement and distinguish them from the general population. It entitles them to benefits such as free public transportation for the day and discounts at stores and vendors across the city.⁹⁰ Non-participants view the medals of the runners and feel a kind of respect and often offer material and immaterial forms of support in the form of verbal congratulations and further physical amenities. This lasts for a couple days before the city forgets about the marathon and individuals place their medals on display generally within the private space of their homes. However, some runners have even experimented to push the limits of how long to wear these medals. One such case found that the public continues to support this achievement if not with an outward appreciation but an unspoken respect for much longer than just a few days after the race.⁹¹ The efforts of the public represents one way which the marathon seeps outside of its temporal and physical restraints and affects the wider world and community.

⁸⁹ Elcombe, Tim L. 'Sport, Aesthetic Experience, and Art as the Ideal Embodied Metaphor' *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* Vol. 39, No. 2 (2012) pp. 201-217.

⁹⁰ Reszutek, Dana. 'NYC marathon deals and freebies for runners.' *AM New York*. New York: Schneps Media, 27 Oct. 2016.

⁹¹ Meyer, Matthew. 'Wearing My Race Medal for a Month Gave Me New Faith in Humanity.' *Runner's World*. New York: Hearst, 27 Aug. 2019.

Chapter 4: The Runners' World

From Community to Collective

The New York City Marathon owes much of its success to the ability to grow via three fronts: the local, the national, and the global. In many ways, the multi-layered sense of the event that has distinguished it as a competition of great interest across three realms mirrors the forms of urban growth that have impacted New York and many other global cities. What starts from a local solidarity and union finds itself at the heart of national imaginations and eventually international investment via sponsorship and travel. These three sectors were developed within distinctive eras of the event via technological advancements, yet today each of the layers of the event are key to its solidification as a true local and international sporting spectacle.⁹²

Whereas many events are purely constructed and placed according to money and pitches from investors, the urban marathon is distinct in that its embedded in the local which becomes vital to its success. At the very centre of the urban marathon is the seemingly democratic notion that it is made for everyone from the local to the national to the international.⁹³ And in many ways, it is this multi-layered sense of relevancy that gives a global city its intoxicating distinction from other large cities.⁹⁴ However, due to that very allure, it is necessary that the various forms remain intact and in balance to allow for the satisfaction of a complexity of social identity.

New York

From the beginning, amateur running races were largely community organised. Although elite fields were often provided the luxury of designated arenas for competition provided by professional sport bodies and individual businesspeople who often reaped the

⁹² Caesar, Ed. 'How New York City Made The Modern Marathon.' *The New Yorker*. New York: Condé Nast, 27 Oct. 2015.

⁹³ Haberman, Aaron L. 'Thousands of Solitary Runners Come Together.' pp. 35-49.

⁹⁴ Sassen, Saskia. 'Cities.' pp. 1 – 10.

profits of ticketing and sponsorship, early amateur events lacked enough public interest to elicit such monetary interest.⁹⁵ Therefore, these races did well to exist within their means and produce races at minimum costs among a relatively small public of interested individuals as a means to serve their own ends of racing for the pure joy of competition. Although it would be the very commodification of road races by Lebow which would work to elevate these races from community events to global sport competitions worth millions of pounds, it is still important to recognise how the New York City Marathon today is still able to achieve much of its success because of a retention of its grassroots and local sense that give the marathon not only a sense of spectacle, but also the image of heart, no matter how limited or contrived. What produces this sense of heart and locality can come to be defined by the individuals that take part in the race organising process, the orientation of the organisation and the race within the city, and the individuals who race and participate in the event.

The Race Organisers

Although Lebow, would be criticised by some for de-personalising the experience of racing in New York City, in many ways, it would be Lebow and his legacy that continue to give the race a sense of humanity and personality on behalf of the individuals that orchestrate the race.⁹⁶ New York Road Runners began as an organisation of enough members where one could reasonably know everyone who participated much like many local running clubs are today. However, with the growth in the city and the interest in running, this was no longer feasible. Therefore, what seemed to replace knowing everyone was being able to know the people at the heart of the operation. Whereas, creating groups within this much larger organisation would create clichés and further dilute a sense of unity, Lebow and his team made it their job to get to know the runners so that there was still a connection and sense of consistency in races and an organisation that seemed as fleeting as the city. Whereas, early

⁹⁵ Gotaas, Thor. *Running: A Global History*, translated by Peter Graves. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

⁹⁶ Cooper, Pamela. *The American Marathon*.

members of the club were happy to exist within their cliques, Lebow constantly introduced himself to runners and built his vision of NYRR as one of personability and connection on behalf of the race organisers.⁹⁷

During his lifetime, people would run with Lebow in Central Park, see him at the Road Runners Clubhouse, and see him at the finish line of many races including the New York City Marathon every year. Lebow became a kind of mascot for the organisation in the sense that everyone was able to share an anecdote or experience with Lebow, and those who were not able to could at least recognise his name or voice and live through his stories.⁹⁸ Even today, with a statue standing at 90th and East Drive in Central Park which is routinely moved to the finish line at Tavern on the Green and a half marathon that bears his namesake, Lebow lives on as a central historical and actual figure for the NYRR experience.⁹⁹ He would not be the last, however. Many of the NYRR races bear the names that allude to a history of New York and running that many were a part of or at least can align themselves with throughout the calendar year. With the races placed around the city, the names connect to where these individuals hail from and posit racers in a history even if they were not there to experience it.¹⁰⁰

Even so, the role of NYRR race director and volunteer continues to hold essential importance within the local sense of the New York City Marathon. In a tradition that started with Lebow, the CEOs of NYRR and race directors would affectionately be called by runners by their first name and be seen getting their hands dirty at the start, running the race, and later at the finish line.¹⁰¹ The new millennium would see Mary Wittenberg win the hearts of New

⁹⁷ Rubin, Rob. 'Anything For a T-Shirt.'

⁹⁸ *Run for Your Life*. Directed by Judd Ehrlich. New York: Screen Media, 2008.

⁹⁹ Mitrovich, Daniel S. *Forever at the Finish Line*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Doyle, Ted. 'Connecting the Past to the Present at the NYRR Ted Corbitt 15K.' *nyrr.org*. New York Road Runners, 7 Dec. 2019. Accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

¹⁰¹ Padnani, Amisha. 'A Runner's City: How the World's Biggest Marathon Took Shape.' *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company, 30 Jan. 2017.

Yorkers as she raced NYRR races and constantly aligned herself with clubs around the city.¹⁰² Years later, Michael Capiraso and Peter Ciacia would take on this figurehead role and initiatives were taken to introduce them to the new family of runners at races.¹⁰³ At the New York City Marathon, these individuals along with many of the elites would wait at the finish line for the final finisher to finish. For a race of over 50,000 runners, it was important to keep the point that every last runner matters as much as the runners that finish at the front.¹⁰⁴

The Community

The New York City is distinctive in how it makes itself a part of the city. It is the locals that have stakes in not only running the race but crafting it in the image of New York. There is a kind of pride associated with both creating an experience that each other can share in across the city as co-occupiers, and also that of welcoming people to New York from around America and the world.¹⁰⁵ Just as New York Road Runners transitions from a volunteer running club to a non-profit organisation, at the individual level, people exist within this space of involved volunteer and paid staff member.¹⁰⁶ It is often the fervour of volunteering and devotion that allows for this transition to that of staff. It is as if an honest dedication seen through previously unpaid labour is required in order to be inaugurated officially into the company. From the woman who makes the wreath for the elites from her garden since her husband won the race in the 1970s to the man and his family who volunteered on Staten Island for years before being put in charge of race operations, the narrative persists.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Macur, Juliet. 'New York City Marathon Chief Finds Next Step Has Arrived.' *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company, 12 May 2015.

¹⁰³ Crouse, Lindsay. 'Chief of New York City Marathon Has Goal for All: Great Time, Fast or Otherwise.' *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company, 13 May 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Turner, Katherine. 'They Save the Best for Last.' *Blog.strava.com*. Strava, 25 Jun. 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Robbins, Liz. *A Race Like No Other*.

¹⁰⁶ *Run for Your Life*. Directed by Judd Ehrlich.

¹⁰⁷ Kern, Colin. 'The Wreaths for the Marathon Winners Come From My Grandmother's Backyard.' *The New York Times*. New York: New York Times Company, 28 Oct. 2019; Robinson, Joshua. 'Victor Navarra Dies at 55; Directed Marathon Start.' *The New York Times*. New York: New York Times Company, 31 Dec. 2007.

The role of volunteering in the initial decades comes from an involvement in the city that ties them to a race as a non-runner, but this is eventually formalised as volunteers are enlisted en masse via the 9+1 programme that allow for New Yorkers to gain entry to the NYC marathon by running nine NYRR races and volunteering at one event in a calendar year.¹⁰⁸ Here the informal aspect of runners pitching in to put on events is set to stone as it is made a necessary in order to partake in the city's marathon. Here allows for not only a continuous pool of volunteers, but a devoted base that comes to shape the marathon and other NYRR races through variations of both paid and unpaid labour.

A paternalistic system is ordered as NYRR conducts races and organises volunteers and coaching programmes while the autonomy of informal relations are left to the various running clubs within NYRR. Local clubs are grouped into Club Council that meets as a less enforced board of directors that NYRR is left to answer to as the organisation takes shape over the years. And even as individuals continue to cross and uncross lines of staff and non-staff there is a distinction between being producer and consumer. As the organisation has grown beyond the city, more efforts are needed in order to allow locals special privileges over the thousands of outside runners. While the opportunity to gain employment in various full-time and part-time roles offers New Yorkers a role in production once more, club entries also allow for those New Yorkers that can prove the local involvement within their running clubs to gain entry that is unique to their role as local runners.¹⁰⁹ And here, as space is continued to be made for local runners, the essential New York essence of NYRR races is both retained but also conditioned as people who not only runner in New York, but perform a degree of involvement locally whether it be through volunteering, racing, or running with a

¹⁰⁸ 'TCS New York City Marathon 9+1 Program.' New York Road Runners, accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

<https://www.nyrr.org/run/guaranteed-entry/tcs-new-york-city-marathon-9plus1-program>

¹⁰⁹ 'Find a Local Club.' New York Road Runners, accessed 15 Jan. 2015. <https://www.nyrr.org/getinvolved/club>

club. In this way, performance in a localised and embodied sense is essential to claim this privilege.

America

Race Calendar

The New York City Marathon renders itself within a national context through its complementary orientation to other American races and cities. The date of the race in the calendar has changed and adjusted over the years in response to local weather and regional races.¹¹⁰ The date of the New York City Marathon oscillated from its earlier September and October dates in the 1970s and 1980s to later in November in the 1990s.¹¹¹ However, analysis of weather trends in New York and recommendations for ideal racing temperatures, the first weekend in November, the same date as daylight-savings was solidified as the official annual date in the later-1990s through to today.¹¹² The solidification of the date of the race in this way creates a ritual experience of the event. It is both predictable in its annual nature and also takes into account its location within the general framework of fall road races spaced in the year to fall after the cross country races of the autumn and prior to the track races in the spring.¹¹³

Other major races and marathons would similarly assemble themselves in the autumn road racing season. With the major races never falling on the same weekend, there became a series of premier marathons across the United States that would be the dominate competitions for elite, sub-elite, and amateur athletes alike. Chicago would present itself earlier in the autumn at first in September, then eventually early October to account for the possibility of both late-summer heatwaves and early autumn snowstorms. Other races on the eastern

¹¹⁰ Vuuren, Van and Chris J. 'A ritual perspective on the Comrades Marathon.' *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*, Vol.36, No. 2 (Jan. 2014) pp. 211-224.

¹¹¹ 'New York City Marathon History.' New York Road Runners, accessed 15 Jan. 2020.
<https://www.nyrr.org/tcsnycmarathon/getinspired/marathonhistory>

¹¹² Wolfe, Jonathan. 'New York Today: Sleeping Better After Daylight Saving Time.' *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company. 4 Nov. 2016.

¹¹³ Magill, Pete. 'Strong for a Season.' *Runner's World*. New York: Hearst. 23 Jun. 2014.

seaboard such as Philadelphia and Marine Corps would similarly situate themselves around New York with Marine Corps being just before New York, and Philadelphia providing an end of season victory for those lost to New York and thusly closing the marathon racing training season.¹¹⁴ These races both tailor themselves to prime weather conditions of their regions, but also a complement to pre-existing races of prominence with New York being one of the first and largest of these type of races.

The New York Brand

The status of the New York City Marathon would be linked to the imagined spectacle of the city of New York.¹¹⁵ The race built this spectacle through both the recruitment of an elite field through prize money, time qualifying standards and privileges for amateur and sub-elite athletes, and savvy marketing of images and branding. The introduction of prize money and awards by Lebow in the early years of the race would prove to incentivise a race worthy of spectatorship and therefore investment by sponsors.¹¹⁶ The recruitment of elite athletes to compete in the New York City Marathon provided an annual stage for American distance runners who would otherwise have to wait until the next Olympics to showcase their talent in a truly competitive and prestigious context.¹¹⁷ Images of the star power of the New York Marathon both in the form of top elite athletes and later amateur celebrity athletes would not only attract sponsorship but also amateur participation.

The creation of a time-qualifying field of runners provide a distinction in status for amateurs to chase and also act as a form of feeder for top American talent. This field of runners was broken into the categories of sub-elite, local competitive, and time-qualifier. The sub-elite field allows for runners who are under the status of elites to have a distinction from

¹¹⁴ Luff, Christine. 'The Best Fall Marathons in the United States.' *Verywellfit*. New York: Dotdash. 14 Jan. 2020.

¹¹⁵ Cronin, Anne M. and Kevin Hetherington. *Consuming the entrepreneurial city : image, memory, spectacle*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

¹¹⁶ Cooper, Pamela L. 'The "Visible Hand" on the Footrace. pp. 244-256.

¹¹⁷ Huber, Martin Fritz. 'Why These Elites Can't Miss the New York City Marathon.' *Outside*. Outside Integrated Media, 30 Oct. 2019.

the mass of people and also privileges and amenities for a higher standard of race experience. The local competitive distinction provided similar distinctions as that of sub-elite, however, it was specifically created for members of local New York City running clubs in order to give them added connections to their hometown race. Although general time-qualifiers are not given as many material privileges, their guaranteed entry provides a form of immaterial status tied to how they were able to enter the race in contrast the general entries through the drawing or charities.¹¹⁸

New York would also come to define itself by the image of the race. From the picture of a course that seems to snake and constrict around one of the most iconic cities when overlaid a map of the city to images of the sheer number of runners on the streets and bridges of the course, New York constructs an overall sense of a triumph of spectacle and greatness which exudes from the sense of innovation and excitement of New York City.¹¹⁹ Images of runners crossing the looming Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge into Brooklyn and huddling in masses out of Central Park after the race are used to strike awe in the average person and allow them to envision themselves as a part of those masses of individuals.¹²⁰ The images of the individuals with their vests that noted their names, their cities and countries, and their charities provided an individuality to the mass meant to help people to connect with these images and posit themselves in these roles as diverse runners.

Traditional PR and marketing would both mobilise these images and craft texts surrounding them to instil a more directive source of meaning beyond the basic image. The press would be at the centre of the growth of awareness about the New York City Marathon. Each year since the 1970s, around the time of the marathon, long-form articles would be

¹¹⁸ Longeman, Jeré. 'Sub-Elite Runners Chase Improvement.' *The New York Times*. New York: The New York Times Company. 3 Nov. 2013.

¹¹⁹ Highman, James. 'Introduction to sport tourism destination marketing and management.' In *Sport Tourism Destinations*. New York: Routledge, 2007. pp. 153-160.

¹²⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried. 'The Mass Ornament.'

drafted documenting the marathon and the various characters that are a part of the story from the organisers to the runners to the history of running and the race.¹²¹ Eventually this would grow to full coverage of the events in the early 2000s by television networks and eventually streamed online. This exportable form allowed the race and the city to be represented across the United States and the world.¹²² Not only was the elite field presented as a form of interest in the coverage, but the every day runner was represented as a central component of the event. More than the most competitive aspects of the marathon, the coverage over the years has adopted continued nuance in presentations of the non-profit organisation of NYRR behind the race and even the entire movement of running that is inspired through community-focused actions such as the national youth programmes of NYRR.

Advertising campaigns by NYRR would bolster the attention gained by this coverage. The first campaign would arise around the early 2000s. The first campaign would be given the tagline of ‘Get Your New York On.’ The slogan and campaign were meant to inspire a universal connection and sense of belonging in New York City and the marathon itself as its marquee fitness event. Built around culture and ideas from writers such as Tom Wolfe who said ‘One belongs to New York instantly, one belongs to it as much in five minutes as in five years,’ this campaign works to incite a history of the city based around migration and inclusion in a truly local experience. These advertisements not only exist online and in mailers, but were plastered across the city, draping the city in an excitement each autumn leading up to the race like how the leaves change colours in the lead up to winter. This creates an anticipatory and pervasive sense of the event that is soon to overtake the city every year on the given weekend. This would be replaced in 2017 by the ‘It Moved Me’

¹²¹ ‘Times Topics: New York City Marathon.’ *Nytimes.com*. New York Times Company accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

¹²² Vigner, Peter. ‘If New York Is a Media Town, the Marathon Is a Media Race.’ *Runner’s World*. New York: Hearst, 5 Nov. 2010.

campaign.¹²³ Through this campaign the promise of New York would be elevated to a more universal plea to emotions and the transformative power of running. As missionaries promise the benefits of conversion, the race promises a similar sense of transformation by partaking in this now embedded race in New York that has taken on magical effects based on the polished spectacle and power that it has achieved over the years. It is this universal and global sense of the race that has also been in the process of being grown and solidified in the later years of the race.

Global Sponsorship

Sponsorship by major local and global companies code the race in multiple economic systems. Although the first sponsors existed within the five boroughs, as the race grew, the sponsors with the most money to contribute to the race today are multi-national corporations.¹²⁴ The necessary costs and race fees that this race has accumulated thus dresses the race in an international capitalistic system. From the paid presence of vendors at the expo to consumer products that cater to the needs of marathoners and create branded products for the New York City Marathon specifically to the advertisements that litter the course and the various pre and post-race amenities, the race is consumed by commodity. The New York City Marathon therefore becomes as politically charged as the vested interests of money that plaster images of itself throughout the race via images, amenities, and investment.¹²⁵ Runners buy into it both by their experience of the advertisements and vendors but also their active buying into it through their race entry and the various products they buy just by partaking and preparing for the race. Thus, the New York City Marathon becomes central to growing and promoting a running industry where the consumers continually constitute its creation through

¹²³ Coffee, Patrick. 'The New York City Marathon Picks a Brooklyn Agency to Help Move Its New Message.' *Adweek*. Adweek, 2 Mar. 2017.

¹²⁴ 'Partners.' New York Road Runners. Accessed 15 Jan. 2020. <https://www.nyrr.org/tcsnycmarathon/partners>

¹²⁵ Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 'Introduction: Branding the Authentic.' In *AuthenticTM: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. pp. 1-14.

their activity in the pastime. As more money flows into the race and more people, so do the capacities of the industry and the New York City Marathon in turn.

International Runners

Early years of the New York City Marathon, countries with strong running cultures and political relations were known to travel between them to the places that offered the most competition and prize money. The countries most travelled to for these types of competitions were the United Kingdom and eventually the United States due to the existing structures within running and the availability of prize money from the organisers and sponsors.

Amateur international runners would also be interested in the early days of the New York City Marathon due to the growing trend in sports tourism especially among residents of the UK, France, and Italy. As the marathon grew in interest and difficulty to enter, tour operators would act as official avenues for sorting participation in the race. Through the tour operator, no longer would international runners need to organise and secure their race experience. Rather, a further commodified pathway of experience was crafted by these providers which offered guaranteed entry to the race, flights, hotels, and sometimes other supplementary activities in New York. These organisations would facilitate the movement of people and money but also act as bastions of local marketing for the marathon itself.¹²⁶

Excitement at the elite and amateur level provided were further fuelled by the Abbott World Marathon Majors which was instituted in 2006. This international series of global races consisting of Berlin, Chicago, New York, Boston, and London creates an international competition that spans events and countries.¹²⁷ More than a singular event in the case of the Olympics or a single marathon, this brought the world's largest and most popular marathons together into the singular space of competition culminating in the award of prize money for

¹²⁶ 'TCS New York City Marathon International Tour Operators.' New York Road Runners. Accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

¹²⁷ 'Overview.' *Worldmarathonmajors.com*. Abbot World Marathon Majors. Accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

its elite winner and a more qualitative journey of accomplishment and special medal for amateur competitors.

The Virtual Marathon and the Future

The New York City Marathon itself has positioned itself outside of the World Marathon Majors as a global event in its introduction in 2018 of virtual races. Although virtual races have existed since the time of the internet and early GPS watches, the platform Strava and its partnership with NYRR offered a more standardised and accredited form of organised virtual races. The popularity of Strava and its pseudo-competitions via challenges within the platform coupled with the size of New York Road Runners made for an anticipated boom in the institution of a partnered virtual race. The Virtual Marathon allowed anyone in the world to run a marathon and gain entry into next year's marathon.¹²⁸ This digital component allows for the early framework to evolve distance running through de-localised and disembodied experience that is both alienated but also connected. Such a platform and method tied to the New York City Marathon plants the seed for the institution of running in a new frontier of networked and globalised experience.

¹²⁸ Spiroff, Ally. 'New Virtual Racing Series Might Actually Make You Want to Try Virtual Racing.' *Runner's World*. New York: Hearst, 3 Jan. 2018.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The New York City Marathon developed into one of the premier international running events through the cultural shifts that followed the 1970s and the specific urban and cultural context of the city itself. Based in a history linked to Europe and the United Kingdom in particular, running was adapted within an American context in the form of road racing. Urban contexts were particularly situated to lead the development of these events due to the organisational resources and the number of potential participants and spectators. As the popularity and investment in these events grew, they developed more advanced and commodified structures.

My research found that central to the development of the contemporary mass-participation marathon in New York were the histories of races and running clubs and the proximity of international business which would serve to develop and commodify the running community through figures such as Lebow. The race structure and experience of the marathon would provide an answer to the trends in immaterial labour in culture through an event that provided a metaphorical physicality related to war experiences. The production of the image of the race through PR and marketing tied to the spectacle to the urban experience of New York which has been successfully in drawing participants from across America and the world.

My survey of the historical context of the New York City Marathon and its development into its contemporary form can act as the groundwork for future research. Each one of these chapter can be developed further in order to explore the important minutiae and particularities that I was not able to explore fully due to the length of this particular study. The frameworks developed in this dissertation can also be used to understand both other mass-participation races across America and the rest of the world in addition to the

exploration of other forms of running including cross country, track, and trail running. My analysis of the New York City Marathon as one of the most formative and desired races in the world allows for a core understanding of the popularisation of contemporary running. From this research, further studies can be developed to understand innovations in race technologies in global markets and analysis the impact and structures of running in other markets across the world.

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