RACE DAY

AN EXPLICATION OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM *ONE MIND*

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research paper is an explication in support of my twenty-five-minute documentary film entitled *One Mind*. *One Mind* follows Ashwill Petersen's journey as he prepares and competes in his first 100km trail running race at George Mountain Ultra Trail (MUT) 2022. Even though the film only follows one person's story, it is representative of the experience of trail runners entering the ultra-trail running community in South Africa.

The chapters of this dissertation examine and reflect on the approach I took in representing the physical and mental challenges my protagonist faced when participating in his first ultra-trail race. My first chapter discusses Bill Nichols' modes of representation, particularly the participatory and observational modes, in relation to Julie Perini's notion of relational filmmaking. Chapter 2 analyses three existing sports documentaries in relation to *One Mind*, and Chapter 3 reflects on the production process and creative decisions involved in the making of my film. Finally, Chapter 4 considers the scope for further research and filming opportunities related to the research I have done thus far.

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INTRODUCTION

We run when we're scared, we run when we're ecstatic, we run away from our problems, and we run for a good time.

– Christopher McDougall (*Born to Run*, 2010:11).

Over the past twenty years, trail running has become one of the fastest growing recreational sports worldwide; it can be classified as any form of running that is off-road and takes place on foot (Halford, 2020). As trail running becomes more popular, runners are beginning to challenge themselves to run farther and longer. Brace, George & Lovell (2020:1) describe ultra-trail running as the physical activity of running 50km or further, in difficult and challenging circumstances, such as technical and mountainous terrain, extreme weather conditions and high altitude. An example of one of the first and most iconic ultra-trail races is the Western States 100km that takes place in the USA annually. The race first premiered as a horse race, until one rider in 1972 decided to complete the race on foot. The athlete completed the race within the twenty-four-hour cutoff time, inspiring more runners to participate in the race on foot the following year. This race marked the beginning of many more to follow.

This qualitative research paper is an explication in support of my twenty-five-minute documentary film entitled *One Mind*. It comprises four parts: a literature review, an analysis of three existing sports documentaries in relation to *One Mind*, a reflection on the production process and creative decisions involved in the making of it, and a conclusion discussing further scope for study and filmmaking opportunities stemming from the research conducted.

One Mind follows Ashwill Petersen's journey as he prepares and completes his first 100km ultra-trail race at the George Mountain Ultra Trail (MUT) 2022. Although the film follows just one person's story, it reflects the experience of trail runners joining the ultra-trail running community in South Africa, as Ashwill himself is a beginner in the ultra-distance. My interest in documenting Ashwill's journey to accomplish his first 100km race came from my own experience and introduction to trail running. Over the last two years, I have gained insight into what trail running entails and what the sport and its community represent. It is hard to express the mental and physical challenges of the sport, which is where documentary filmmaking is so powerful. My goal for *One Mind* was to capture the essence of the sport and the intricacies of preparing for an ultra-trail race, as well as display the growth and accessibility of the sport in South Africa.

In *The Rise of Trail Running in South Africa: Possibilities for Small-Scale Sports Tourism* (2019:930), McKay, McEwan & Baker state that there has been a steady increase in trail running events in South Africa, since people started realising the accessibility of the sport. South Africa, with its moderate climate, diverse mountain ranges, and long-distance trails, provides the perfect setting for people to participate in trail running as a sport (2019: 933). In *One Mind*, Ashwill decides to compete in the

George MUT, one of South Africa's most well-known and challenging ultra-trail running events. The race provides athletes with the magnificent Outeniqua Mountain range, with several peaks reaching over 1000m in vertical gain (Boulle, 2022). In the film, Ashwill and thirty-six other athletes, toe the line in the hope of completing the race. Due to the nature and distance of the race, the runners spread out over the field, leading them to run mostly on their own. Halford states that what especially inspires the rise and growth of ultra-trail running as a sport, is the focus on the 'individual challenge' (2020). More so than other forms of running, ultra-trail running can be seen as more personal, and the events are usually an 'experience in themselves'. Throughout the race, Ashwill is faced with a variety of mental and physical challenges, including fatigue in his legs, pouring rain, night-time running and loneliness. In the film he expresses that, you have to be mentally strong to handle the challenges of running a 100km for the most part on your own.

This leads me to introduce the research question for this study: *How does Bill Nichols' participatory and observational modes of representation portray the physical and mental challenges my protagonist faced, when preparing and competing in his first ultra-trail race at George Mountain Ultra Trail (MUT) 2022?*

This dissertation is structured around four chapters. In Chapter One, I use a literature review to explain why I chose Nichols' modes of representation, discussed in the third edition of *Introduction to Documentary* (2017), as my main theoretical framework. I compare and contrast the first edition of *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) and review the critiques Nichols has received regarding his modes of representation. I focus primarily on Nichols' participatory and observational modes of representation and I provide an overview of Julie Perini's notion of relational filmmaking, discussed in ***Relational Filmmaking: A Manifesto and its Explication*** (2011), which I believe contributes to the creative processes in the production of *One Mind*.

My second chapter examines three sports documentaries, namely *Free Solo* (Chin & Vasarhelyi, 2018), *Solace* (Gibbons, 2021) and *The Alpinist* (Mortimer & Rosen, 2021). I analyse these films in relation to *One Mind,* to reflect on how the use of the participatory and observational modes of representation portray the physical and mental challenges Ashwill is faced with when preparing and competing in his first ultra-trail race at George MUT 2022. In this chapter, a few of the ethical concerns regarding the use of participatory and observational modes are addressed. Even though participatory and observational modes of representation are the main consideration, I also review the expository and poetic modes to showcase my comprehension that a film can consist of a combination of different modes, as discussed in Chapter One. Touching on the poetic mode of representation, I discuss its relation to the use of added nondiegetic sound and music and how this was used to showcase the mental and physical challenges faced by the main protagonist in the film *Solace*. I further examine how the

expository mode of representation, often associated with voice-over narration, can lead to a bias perspective if not used with consideration.

In Chapter Three, I reflect on the production process and creative decisions involved in the making of *One Mind*. In relation to Bill Nichols' participatory and observational modes of representation, Julie Perini's notion of relational filmmaking is considered when reflecting on the creative process of producing my film. I also touch on the performative and poetic modes of representation and how circumstances have led to the use of these modes. I discuss in depth the challenges Ashwill faced during his 100km ultra race, as well as the challenges I faced during the making of the film, and how these challenges guided the creative processes involved in the production of *One Mind.*

In Chapter 4, I consider the potential for further research and filming opportunities related to my research. I conclude that the increasing accessibility and growth of trail running in South Africa offers future opportunities for filming, which could help to solidify the sport's future in South Africa and encourage more people to join the ultra-trail running community.

Chapter One: THE STARTING LINE

Literature Review

How am I going to do this?

In the paper, *Introduction to Documentary, First Edition* (2001), Bill Nichols describes the six modes of representation in documentary films. These six modes can be defined as the poetic, expository, reflexive, performative, participatory and observational modes of representation (Nichols, 2001:99). Using previous models and traditions also created for the analyses of documentary film as a departure point, Nichols created six modes that not only take the filmmaker's unique voice into account, but also the film's overall structure (Natusch and Hawkins, 2014:104). Nichols provides us with a clear and understandable way to analyse documentary films, and, also take into account that a documentary film does not only consist of one mode in isolation, but can rather be seen as consisting of a combination of modes. This leads me to use Nichols' modes of representation as main theoretical framework.

For the purpose of this study, I decided to focus mainly on participatory and observational modes of representation when reflecting and analysing the documentary film *One Mind*. After considering the first edition, I establish that the third edition of *Introduction to Documentary* (2017) provides a revised and updated version of Nichols' modes of representation. I found the revisions more comprehensive and thorough, especially when considering the participatory and the observational modes of representation. I believe Nichols' increasing awareness of the value the modes provide, and the critique it has received, makes the third edition more substantial. For these reasons, I predominantly examine the third edition of *Introduction to Documentary* (2017) when considering Nichols' modes of representation, although I still make reference to the first edition where applicable.

Nichols discusses that the invention of portable synchronous sound recording in the 1960s led to the notability of the observational and participatory modes of representation (2017:113). This gave filmmakers the opportunity to move more freely and to film an experience as it is happening in real time (2017:132). The observational mode of representation can be described as the abandonment of control and the acceptance of spontaneity. The lived experience is usually filmed without the staging or arrangement of specific scenes, and, in post-production, no extra music, sound, voice-over commentary, or effects are added to contribute to the overall mood or the argument of the film (Nichols, 2017:132). The presence of the filmmaker is usually ignored, making the subject the primary focus, and giving the viewer the opportunity to make sense of the character, without the filmmaker guiding the viewer's perception. In contrast, the participatory mode allows for interaction between filmmaker and subject (Nichols, 2017:137). Nichols states that '…the filmmaker's presence and perspective often contribute significantly to the film's overall impact' (2017: 139). It gives the viewer an idea of how the presence of the filmmaker alters a certain situation or experience, allowing the filmmaker to concurrently become a social actor.

Nichols (2017:112) further states that as filmmakers started to make more use of the observational and participatory modes of representation, they realised the importance of the relationship between filmmaker and subject. This introduced certain ethical considerations that one needs to be aware of when making use the two modes of representation (Nichols, 2017:112). For example, when using the observational mode, the voyeuristic aspect of observing someone that is unaware of the camera or filmmaker can lead to the violation of the subject's right to privacy (Nichols, 2001:111). The passivity of the filmmaker can also lead to the quandary on what the course of action should be, should something harmful or unsettling happen to the subject (Nichols, 2001:112). Is it the filmmaker's responsibility to intervene and prevent any further harm or judgement, or should the act of remaining invisible remain the main objective? In the case of the participatory mode of representation, how the filmmaker chooses to portray their subject can lead to certain ethical issues, especially if the power dynamic between filmmaker and subject is unequal. It can also lead to accusations of bias if the relationship between subject and filmmaker is not clearly stated (Nichols, 2001:116).

Even though Bill Nichols provides us with clear and useful modes of representation for the analysis of documentary films, these modes have also been subject to critique. According to Natusch and Hawkins (2014:105), Nichols' modes have been critiqued for being too 'reductive' and 'inconsistent'. The fact that documentary films are often quite experimental, makes it difficult to assign only one mode to a documentary film, and, should a film consist of more than one mode, it arguably defeats the purpose of the modes all together. Another criticism is the categorization of the modes in relation to specific eras in time, and how this can lead to inconsistencies and potentially a static perception of the modes, rather than a fluid one (Natusch and Hawkins, 2014:105). Nichols, however, reviewed his modes over time, and in the third edition he acknowledges that his modes of representation are not perfect and that it doesn't 'constitute a genealogy of documentary film', but should rather be seen as 'a pool of resources available to all' (Nichols, 2017:114). He further states that each documentary film doesn't fall into one particular mode, but 'can consist of a combination of modes'.

Taking the critique as well as Nichols' clarifications into account, I believe Nichols' modes not only provide a comprehensive explanation of documentary films, but also a fluid approach to analysing documentary films (Natusch and Hawkins, 2014:104). I am, however, aware that the combination and use of two or more different modes can potentially lead to a juxtaposing analysis of a film. I address these juxtaposing characteristics, especially in relation to the participatory and observational modes, in more detail in Chapter Three. Even though I primarily consider the participatory and observational modes of representation when analyzing and reflecting on the process of creating *One Mind*, I also touch on the expository and poetic modes to showcase my understanding that a film can consist of a combination of modes and that 'we can accept this fluidity as cause for celebration' (Nichols 2017: 114).

Natusch and Hawkins (2014:104) take Nichols' statement on fluidity further, by saying that the modes of representation can also be used on a micro level, where, scene by scene, they are analysed according to the different modes. By considering each image or scene separately, one gains a better and more in-depth understanding of a film as a whole (2014:105). Even though I do not conduct a scene-by-scene analysis of *One Mind* (due to the word count limitation of this paper), I do analyse specific scenes in detail, on a micro level, to showcase my understanding of Nichols' modes, and how these modes (especially the observational and participatory) are used to portray the physical and mental challenges Ashwill faced.

When reflecting on the production process and the creative decisions involved in the creation of *One Mind*, I use Julie Perini's article, *Relational Filmmaking: A Manifesto and its Explication* (2011), to discuss her notion of relational filmmaking in connection to Nichols' observational and participatory modes of representation. Perini states that relational filmmaking can be described as filmmaking that is 'characterized or constituted by relations' (2011:8). Relational filmmaking is not only characterised by the lived or embodied experience, but also by the relationships the process of making the film creates and explores. During the filming process of *One Mind*, Ashwill had the opportunity to become a co-filmmaker, resulting in a creative collaboration between myself and Ashwill. This co-creation can be seen as an example of filmmakers producing films with people rather than about them, emphasising the relational quality as referred by Perini (2011:9).

Chapter 2: THE RACE

Film Analysis

Why am I doing this?

In preparing and producing *One Mind*, I watched three sports documentaries that dealt with extreme athletes in different ways: *Free Solo* (Chin & Vasarhelyi, 2018), *Solace* (Gibbons, 2021) and *The Alpinist* (Mortimer & Rosen, 2021). The films were chosen for analysis as I believe there are specific moments in each film that form a connection with how the observational and participatory modes of representation are used in *One Mind* to portray the mental and physical challenges the protagonist is faced with during his first 100km race. McDonald discusses that sports' documentaries play an important role in placing sports in their social contexts. They are not just used to showcase the performance in a specific field, but also to reveal other factors at play that contribute to the broader social context of a specific sport (2007:222). Each documentary discussed below not only addresses the performance of its protagonist, but also provides the viewer with a deeper knowledge about the individuality of each one, and how they proceed to handle a difficult challenge.

Free Solo tells the story of Alex Honnald's preparation and attempt to climb the El Capitan wall, free solo – alone and without the use of a rope (Dyer, 2019). The 'wall' is a rock formation in Yosemite National Park, California, and is renowned as the toughest technical challenges in climbing. I chose this film for its use of the participatory and observational modes of representation, and how these modes are used to portray the main protagonist, faced with an extreme and difficult challenge. Nichols discusses that, one of the ethical considerations one needs to keep in mind when considering both the participatory and the observational modes of representation, is the role of the camera and how this may affect how people behave or present themselves (2017:134). In *Free Solo*, this becomes a topic of debate, because, for Alex, it wouldn't have felt like he was climbing alone if there was a camera present. It was the presence of the camera that made him stop on his first attempt of climbing El Capitan, free solo.

This led the cameramen to use a more observational approach to filming the climb. In this sense, one can say that the observational mode of representation, for the most part, was used for the subject's own safety. However, one should also keep in mind that the use of the observational mode can lead to a sense of anticipation where one cannot help but to wonder if the protagonist is going to succeed or fail, or in the case of *Free Solo*, if Alex is going to fall or not. This anticipation can be used to the filmmakers' advantage to keep the viewer engaged and watching. Considering this, one can say the filmmakers' use of the observational mode becomes less sincere, as the mode of filmmaking wasn't necessarily just used with the subject's safety in mind, but also to create more dramatic tension with the viewers.

When using the observational mode of representation, the filmmaker should be aware of their role, should something happen to the subject during the filming process (Nichols, 2017:135). The filmmaker will have to make the decision if they will intervene, should the subject face any harm. During Alex's

second attempt, there were moments where even the film crew could not look, due to the uncertainty of whether Alex will fall or not. In these moments, I believe the use of the participatory mode in *Free Solo* emphasises the relationship between the protagonist and the filmmaker, as well as the pressure and anxiety the film crew must have felt during the filming process. The fact that most of the filming crew are also climbers, means that they understand the risks of climbing free solo (Dyer, 2019). In various scenes they are visible to the viewer and can be seen discussing what the best filming strategy would be for the life-and-death situation they're planning to film, leading them to become participants in the film, too.

In *One Mind,* the viewer watches as the protagonist is faced with extreme weather conditions, fatigue, isolation, technical terrain, cramping etc. Even though these challenges are different from the ones' Alex is faced with in *Free Solo,* they are just as significant. In one scene, Ashwill states that he was already feeling tired and sore in the first twenty kilometres of the race and had to mentally prepare and brace himself for the next eighty kilometres. In the last thirty kilometres of the race, Ashwill runs in the dark and in pouring rain, with just the light of a small headlamp for guidance. I believe, the fact that Ashwill is still an amateur ultra-trail runner, enhanced the risks of these challenges, since he might not have had the necessary experience to handle certain situations. Where safety was the main reason for the use of the observation mode in *Free Solo,* in the film *One Mind,* the observational mode is used to give the viewer more insight into Ashwill's character, and how he handles the challenges he is faced with. It is used to tell his story as truthfully as possible, by not imposing my own view on his subjective experience. I am, however, aware that there are moments in *One Mind,* where my own subjectivity as filmmaker and producer, becomes visible. The fact that I'm a runner as well, makes it difficult to remain objective, but I believe it becomes a useful tool to understand and create relatability with the physical and mental challenges Ashwill faced during his race.

When considering *One Mind* in relation to *Free Solo,* a significant difference that is noticeable, is how, in *Free Solo,* Alex can be recognised as a professional endurance-sport athlete, whereas, in *One Mind,* Ashwill can be seen as representative of someone who has only recently entered the field of ultra-trail running. In this vein, Ashwill can be seen as an amateur, making his experience and approach to an extreme challenge different from Alex's. I believe this differentiation emphasises the accessibility of ultra-trail running. In *Free Solo,* only Alex, a professional athlete, has been able to climb El Capitan, free solo, whereas, in *One Mind,* Ashwill is one of thirty athletes attempting to complete the 100km race. I further believe the fact that Ashwill, still new in the sport, creates a sense of relatability with anyone who considers entering the field of ultra-trail running. Even though *One Mind* is a one-person story, it becomes representative of the experience of all runners entering the ultra-trail running community in South Africa.

Similar to the film *Free Solo*, *The Alpinist* follows Marc-André Leclerc on his journey of free soloing dangerous mountains, that consist not only of rock, but ice sections, too (Feldberg, 2021). I have chosen to analyse this film because of the main character's interesting approach to the filmmaking process, and how he perceives the 'challenge' of free soloing. For Marc-André, free soloing is not a difficult task that he has to overcome, but rather something he does to become calm and tranquil – allowing his body and mind to become in harmony (Feldberg, 2021). Climbing isn't a physical obstacle, but rather a spiritual process that allows him to become grounded. In the case of *One Mind*, the act of running is both physically and mentally challenging for Ashwill. For Marc-André, climbing can be seen as a necessity that allows him to become calm and grounded, whereas, for Ashwill, running is a way to challenge himself by facing physically and mentally difficult circumstances. In the film, Ashwill states that he likes to challenge himself, not only when running but also in his personal life. One can thus say, how he handles the obstacles he faced in the race, becomes an example of how he deals with difficult tasks in real life. This not only gives the viewer more insight into who Ashwill is as an ultra-trail runner, but also what he is like outside the running world, emphasising the sense of relatability with someone who might only be starting their trail-runner career. In the case of *The Alpinist*, Marc-André can be seen as an outsider, making it hard for the viewer to form a connection with him.

An interesting question *The Alpinist* introduces is, who benefits from the making of the film? When using the observational mode, informed consent plays an important role when considering the subject's right to privacy and anonymity (Nichols, 2017:135). Marc-André does not show any interest in being filmed, and there is a part in the middle of the film where he completely disappears off the grid (Feldberg, 2021). The film crew had to track him down, in order to rediscuss the filming process and to get his consent and approval before they could continue filming him. It should be noted that with the participatory mode, the negotiation of 'control and shared responsibility' consistently occurs. The relationship between filmmaker and subject becomes an important element to establish the tone of a film (Nichols, 2017:140). One can assume that if it is not Marc-André that benefits from the film, it must be the producers of the film. This introduces an unequal balance in the power relation between subject and filmmaker, which is an ethical consideration of the participatory mode of representation.

By utilizing relational filmmaking in conjunction with the participatory and observational modes of representation, I am able to circumvent the issue of unequal power relations in *One Mind*. When Ashwill is given the opportunity to become a co-filmmaker, it not only leads to a sense of co-creation but also equalizes the power balance between him and myself. The participatory mode of representation gives the viewer a more reflective view on the filmmaker's experience in a certain situation (Nichols, 2017:145). The filmmaker's voice, and how they perceive a certain experience, plays an important role in the narrative structure of the film. The use of the participatory mode allowed Ashwill to give a first-hand account of the physical and mental challenges he faced during his race. In addition to this, Ashwill

also gives an account of his experience, through the use of voice-over narration, thus becoming an important narrative device in *One Mind*.

The use of voice-over narration is often linked to the expository mode of representation. Nichols states that the expository mode relies on the spoken word or titles to inform the viewer what the opinion, perspective or story is (2017:121). The spoken word or voice-over narration is used to make sense of the visuals, rather than to contribute or emphasise it; it serves to create a sense of credibility and objectivity, leading the spoken word to represent the film's perspective (Nichols, 2017:122). In the film *One Mind,* I believe the use of voice-over narration emphasises the use of the participatory and observational modes of representation, as well as Perini's notion of relational filmmaking. Ashwill's voice-over narration gives a subjective and reflective account of what is happening in the film, rather than an objective one that can be linked with the expository mode of representation. This subjectivity is emphasised by the fact that Ashwill is given the opportunity to film his own, subjective, experiences during the race, leading him to not only be the main protagonist of the film, but also co-filmmaker. When considering the expository mode there is often no interaction between the filmmaker and subject, in order to keep a sense of objectivity (Nichols, 2017:132). Contrastively, Nichols states that the participatory and the observational modes of representation depend on the relationship between the filmmaker and their subject (Nichols, 2017:111). This further emphasises a sense of co-creation between myself and Ashwill, as filmmakers. This co-creation forms a connection with relational filmmaking, in how filmmakers make films with their subjects rather than about them (2011:9).

Even though *One Mind* has certain expository qualities, I believe the use of voice-over narration does not try to convince the viewer of a specific viewpoint, but rather gives the viewer more insight into who the protagonist is and what he is thinking and feeling. David Parkinson states that voice-overs can give clarification as to what is happening, provide character insights and intensify intimacy (2012:125). This more subjective approach to filmmaking, rather than the objective and argumentative perspective the expository mode proposes, allows for a better representation of the physical and mental challenges Ashwill experienced during his race. If I had been the one narrating the film in voice-over, it would have denied Ashwill the opportunity to tell his own story, making the film primarily of the expository mode of representation. This would have allowed me to impose my own views and perspective on Ashwill's experience, instead of giving him a voice of his own. Although my subjectivity as the filmmaker can be seen in the film, it is used, hopefully, to create an honest representation of Ashwill's experience of running his first 100km race.

In the film *Solace,* Karel Sabbe attempts to run 2,650km via the Alpina Trail in thirty days (Souter, 2022). In order to accomplish this task, it means he must run at least two marathons (i.e. 84km) in one day. *One Mind* features the main protagonist in a race setting, whereas *Solace* showcases Karel, as he attempts to set a new fastest known time (FKT). Both films, however, can be seen as a representation

of each athlete's individual journey to achieve their goals. The use of sound and visuals to enhance the physical and mental challenges Karel faces during his FKT attempt inspired me to use this film for analysis in relation to *One Mind*.

In conjunction with the expository mode, *Solace* also makes use of the poetic mode of representation to capture Karel's journey. Nichols states that the poetic mode of documentary filmmaking focuses on 'associations and patterns that include temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions' (2017:120). It, for the most part, disregards the conventional approach of continuity editing that focuses on a specific time and space. In this sense, it gives the viewer the opportunity to find familiarity in the unknown. Even if the film is not necessarily rooted in a specific time and space, it still features familiar and known experiences and moments that the viewer can relate to. In *Solace*, visuals and added music and nondiegetic sounds are used to convey how Karel is feeling at specific moments during his attempt to run 2,650 km in thirty days. Some of the scenes appear vague and ambiguous, contributing to Karel's voice-over narration that aims to give the viewer an artistic, emotive and rhythmic account of Karel's running experience. Even though the visuals are visually pleasing, and, in most cases, succeed in showcasing Karel's thoughts and feelings, as he is faced with a difficult task, I believe the use of external sound and music becomes overpowering in certain scenes. For example, in one scene where Karel is running in extreme weather conditions, the use of external music and sounds lead to the experience and situation seeming less dangerous than it actually was. I believe a more successful way to showcase these extreme conditions would have been to use the actual sound of thunder and rain, leading to a more immersive and authentic experience. In this sense, the observational mode might have been a more successful approach to portray Karel's experience.

In contrast to both the poetic and expository modes of representation, that involve a certain amount of control over how scenes are arranged or composed, the observational mode only showcases the lived experience (Nichols, 2017:132). An example of this in *One Mind* is a scene where Ashwill runs in the forest on his own, without any voice-over narration or music. Here, the lack of external music and sounds emphasise the rhythm and sound of Ashwill's footfall and breathing. I believe this scene successfully simulates how Ashwill must have felt running on his own in the isolated and mountainous environments. This observational manner of filming also has an introspective quality to it, emphasising Ashwill's vulnerability. The scene, featured just after the race starts in *One Mind*, becomes a metaphor for the unknown journey that still lies ahead for Ashwill, creating a sense of anticipation and expectation. In this case, I believe the use of external music would have detracted from the moment, making it less powerful. Here, the use of the observational mode of representation successfully showcases the loneliness and isolation Ashwill experienced during his race.

Nichols states that the observational mode has 'a sense of commitment or engagement with the immediate, intimate, and personal, as it occurs' (2017:136). For example, there are moments in *One*

Mind where it seems like Ashwill is not aware that he is being filmed. Standing at the starting line, unaware of the camera, Ashwill seems like he is only focused on the race ahead. The observational mode allows the viewer to see small glimpses of Ashwill's nervousness, which, I believe, allows the viewer to gain a better understanding of Ashwill as a person. With the observational mode, social actors tend to ignore the filmmaker and go about their everyday lives as if there is no camera. This manner of filming often reveals certain details of the character's individuality (Nichols, 2017:133). Nichols (2017:112) states: 'The individuality of specific social actors matters greatly.' The observational mode allows the viewer to form their own opinion and perspective about what they are observing or witnessing (Nichols, 2017:133). This leads the filmmaker to being a passive observer while the viewer becomes a more active observer, having to decide for themselves what they make of the characters in the film (Nichols, 2017:133).

Nichols (2017:146) poses that when using the participatory mode of representation, the use of interviews can be seen as an important method of engagement. In *Solace*, the use of informal interviews introduces the viewer to Karel's friends and family, who can be seen as fellow social actors in the film. In addition to being social actors, they also take turns to "be filmmakers" as they follow Karel on his journey to complete his goal. This leads to a subjective and participatory approach of filmmaking that emphasises the lived experience between filmmaker and subject (Nichols, 2017:142). In *One Mind*, the only other social actor, in addition to myself and Ashwill, who features in the film, is my partner, Mentz Germishuis. Mentz, a fellow athlete, friend and producer, features as a supporting actor throughout the film. In relation to the participatory mode of representation, I believe both *Solace* and *One Mind* can also be seen as examples of relational films, as the process of filmmaking is 'characterized or constituted by relations' (Perini, 2011:8). Relational filmmaking is not only characterized by the lived or embodied experience, but also by the intangible relationships the process of making the film creates and explores. It can be seen as co-creation between producers and participants of the film, allowing reality to be constructed through collaboration. Relational filmmaking, further discussed in Chapter Three, can also be seen as the perfect representation of the ultra-trail community of South Africa, and how the community is built around its relationships with one another.

Chapter 3: THE FINISH LINE

Creating One Mind

How did I do this?

Perini (2011:9) poses that relational filmmakers do not know what the end result of their film will look like. Certain aspects, like the aesthetics, technical and ethical problems are addressed during the production of the film. Relational filmmakers may have a style or methodology in mind, that they are planning to use, but the final decisions regarding the overall aesthetic of the film are generated through the experience of producing the film. In the case study of producing *One Mind*, an example of this can be seen in the way the early complications, encountered in the making of the film, led to the use of the participatory and the observational modes of representation. Before starting the filming process, I considered making use of the poetic mode of representation, to portray Ashwill's experience of running his first 100km race on a more abstract and creative level. Coming from a visual communication design background, I believe that the more artistic approach of the poetic mode would suit me best. However, in the process of producing and filming *One Mind*, there were a few key instances that led to the use of the participatory and observational modes of representation.

The fact that the Outeniqua mountains are, for the most part, isolated and lonely (Boulle, 2022), introduced the first key challenge: How am I going to document Ashwill running his first 100km race if I am not able to film him? To add to this challenge, I was also racing my own 25km race on the same day. This led to the use of participatory and observational modes of representation. Ashwill becomes a co-creator by filming his thoughts and experiences during his race. He gets the opportunity to film his lived experience in real-time. Nichols explains that the observational mode has the quality to give a sense of the actual duration of events (Nichols, 2017:135), which is different to the expository and the poetic mode. The observational mode breaks away from fast-paced dramatic scenes to give the viewer an idea of the time frame in which the events really happened.

Nichols discusses that, in contrast to the observational mode, the participatory mode allows for interaction between filmmaker and subject (2017:137). It gives the viewer a sense of how the presence of the filmmaker alters a certain situation or experience, allowing the filmmaker to become a social actor, too (Nichols, 2017:139). In *One Mind,* an example of where I also become a social actor can be seen in the scenes showcasing Ashwill's preparation the day before the race. In the preparation scenes, I, as filmmaker, can also be seen preparing for my own race and the filming of *One Mind*. The fact that I was participating in my own race and have been part of South Africa's trail running community for the past two years, not only helped me in the process of creating the film, but also gave me a better understanding of the physical and mental challenges Ashwill faced during his race.

Perini discusses that a characteristic of relational filmmaking is that the filmmakers do not create films about people but rather with people (2011:9). This means that the power dynamic between the

filmmaker and the characters in the film are equal, leading to a more collaborative and participatory means of filmmaking. In the case of *One Mind,* one can say that relational filmmaking was used to create a sense of co-creation between myself and Ashwill. It gave him the opportunity to showcase and express the physical and mental challenges he faced, when running, preparing, and competing in his first 100km race. This also led to a way of addressing the ethical issue of unequal power dynamics that can arise when using the participatory mode of representation (Nichols, 2017:140). Rather than me trying to represent the way Ashwill must have felt during his race, I gave him the opportunity to tell and showcase the viewers himself.

Brace, George & Lovell (2020:1) state that some of the physical conditions faced by athletes during an ultra-marathon event include cramping, difficulty eating, injuries, weather, altitude and terrain. Along with these physical challenges, athletes are also faced with psychological factors. Brace, George & Lovell (2020:2) describe mental fortitude as the capacity to consistently perform at a high level, for an extended time period, despite external factors or challenges making the task at hand difficult. In the film *One Mind,* Ashwill states that 'you must be mentally strong to complete one hundred kilometres' (2022). This also inspired the title of the film, *One Mind,* as it emphasises that only the person facing the difficult challenge can complete the task. It takes 'one mind', mental fortitude and determination, to complete the task.

The title further highlights the fact that the only company you have during an ultra-trail race is your own thoughts. There might be other athletes competing against you, but, because of the distance and difficult terrain, there are often long sections during the race where you run by yourself (Boulle, 2022). In *One Mind,* Ashwill mentions that the runners were spread nicely, leading him to run most of the race on his own. In this sense, the lack of the external filmmaker/person emphasises the loneliness Ashwill experienced when running, for the most part, on his own. Here, Ashwill's filming style can be seen as observational, in how he films the lived experience (Nichols, 2017:132). His account of the race gives the viewer insight as to how it must have felt being in that specific moment. The fact that Ashwill has no control over how the race will go, leads to a truthful and observational representation of his experience and the challenges he faced during racing.

Nichols also states that the observational mode remains objective by not emphasizing the presence of the filmmaker (Nichols, 2017:133). The filmmaker becomes secondary to the social actors featured in the film, leading the viewer to playing a more active role in establishing what is being said or done. When documenting his race, there are moments when Ashwill deliberately turns the camera on himself, emphasising his presence as filmmaker. Nichols explains that the use of the participatory mode of representation, often characterised by the presence and visibility of the filmmaker, adds an element of subjectivity, showcasing how the filmmaker must have felt during a certain moment or experience (2017:139). Despite this potentially juxtaposing the observational mode of representation (characterized

by the absence of the filmmaker), it adds an introspective layer to Ashwill's filming style. I believe the combination of the participatory and observational modes of representation give both the viewer *and* Ashwill opportunities to make sense of the physical and mental challenges he endures. This is offered through the observation of his surroundings, and himself, as an athlete, on a more subjective, intimate level.

Another challenge I faced during the creation of the film was when Ashwill decided not to document the last 40km of the race, including the section he ran on his own in the dark. Based on Ashwill's description, I had to recreate his journey of running in the night, something I had not anticipated at the start of making the film. Here, the question of the role of the camera, discussed in Chapter Two, features again. How much does the presence of the camera alter certain moments in the film, and did this potentially lead Ashwill to decide not to film himself during the last section of the race? Nichols explains that in contrast to the observational mode of representation, the participatory mode gives the viewer a sense of how the presence of the filmmaker alters a specific situation or scene in a film (2017:139). Post-race Ashwill expressed that the camera had become an extra challenge and obstacle he had to face, and he didn't want to make the challenge of running in the night more difficult than it already was. In this sense, he decided to step back from his role as filmmaker and to rather become, solely, the primary protagonist of the film again.

I realise the fact that Ashwill had decided not to film the last section of the race might raise the question of whether he was committed to the project of making the film. From my own experience of trail running, especially at night, I can say that one becomes so immersed and in tune with one's surroundings, that it is extremely difficult to have the capacity to focus on anything else than running. For every person it's a different experience, and in the case of Ashwill he knew that running at night was going to be extra challenging. He therefore decided to rather focus all his attention on running instead of filming. Upon reflection, I regret that I hadn't encourage him to film the night section, but I also didn't want to be the reason something happened to him should he had become distracted with the act of filming.

The recreation of the night section, that can be seen near the end of the film, was, for the most part, based on Ashwill's subsequent account of what happened that night. Nichols states that the participatory mode reveals 'the reality of what happens in the presence of a camera' (2017:142). It leads to an experience that would not have existed if it weren't for the camera or the filmmaker (143). One can therefore say, it was up to me, as filmmaker and producer, to recreate footage that not only matches Ashwill's description of that night, but also does it justice. According to Nichols, the performative mode of representation emphasises one's personal knowledge and understanding of the world, making it a predominantly subjective mode of filmmaking (Nichols, 2017:149). The recreation process led me to use some of my own subjective experiences as a trail runner to help me in the process. The visuals in

this scene are ambiguous and uncertain, hoping to convey the unease Ashwill experienced, and to give a truthful account of his lived experience. The ambiguous scenes of the recreated night section can also be characterised by the poetic mode of representation. Both the performative and the poetic modes of representation try to make sense of certain situations or experiences through sensory and visual reenactments, that are not always entirely identifiable (149). Nichols (150) states that emphasis is on the "subjective qualities of experience and memory." To emphasise the sensory, often ambiguous, visuals of the night section, Ashwill provides a voice-over narration of how he was feeling at specific moments in the race.

Another characteristic of relational filmmaking is how filmmakers have conversations with the participants in the film, instead of formal interviews (Perini, 2011:9). An example of this in *One Mind* can be seen during a scene where Ashwill and I are both preparing for our individual races. While preparing, Ashwill and I have a conversation about how he is feeling and if he is ready for the race ahead. It creates a sense of natural conversation instead of a formal interview. According to Nichols, when using the participatory mode, the filmmaker often enters the world of their subject, creating a sense of equality between filmmaker and subject (2017:111). My own voice, that can be heard in these scenes, further emphasises my presence as filmmaker, along with the use of the participatory mode of representation. The use of the participatory mode forms a connection with Perini's statement, that relational films hope to reveal 'new knowledge and transform the present moment' (2011:10) through artistic inquiry. The filmmaker takes part in the difficult experiences with their subjects, leading to a sense of joined subjectivity. In the case of *One Mind,* even though the viewer gets a glimpse of my own subjectivity and presences as filmmaker, I hope that this will not change or alter Ashwill's personal documentation of his journey.

Perini states, 'Relational filmmakers believe that reality is the consequence of what we do together' (2011:10). Relational films are co-creations between the people who produce and take part in the film – the construction of reality becomes a collaboration. Filmmakers who do not acknowledge this relationality may find themselves creating oppressive and alienating structures. Perini further explains that it is important to experiment and challenge, in order to successfully co-create new realities that make us realize that we cannot live disconnected from each other (2011:10). I believe this notion of connected realities forms a strong relation with the trail running community in South Africa. Even though one participates in a race on one's own, one has the comfort knowing that there are still people supporting and participating one, even from afar.

Chapter 4: CONCLUSION

You don't have to be fast. But you'd better be fearless.

- Christopher McDougall (*Born to Run*, 2010:61).

Ultra-trail running is a slow yet daring sport. In the documentary film, *One Mind,* Ashwill Petersen accomplished his first 100km race in seventeen hours and forty-eight minutes. This achievement, however, did not come without its mental and physical challenges. The aim of this study was to reflect on how the use of Bill Nichols' participatory and observational modes of representation portrayed the physical and mental challenges Ashwill encountered while preparing and competing in his first 100km ultra-trail race at George MUT 2022.

I believe using Bill Nichols' participatory and observational modes of representation enabled me to successfully portray the mental and physical challenges my main protagonist faced in *One Mind*. Although Nichols has received criticism in the past concerning the use of a combination of modes when analysing documentary film, I have used this critique to strengthen my approach to both producing and analysing *One Mind*. Nichols explains that each mode portrays different qualities of filmmaking, providing one with a loose framework for analysing documentary films (2017:114). A film does not only consist of one mode but should rather be seen as a combination of different modes.

To showcase my acceptance of the fluidity of modes, I also touched on the poetic and expository modes of representation in this paper. I establish that even though voice-over narration is usually associated with the expository mode, in the case of *One Mind*, it emphasises the use of the participatory and observational modes of representation. The narration offers a personal and more subjective account of Ashwill's lived experience, rather than an objective perspective that tries to persuade the viewer of a predetermined discourse. When considering the use of the poetic mode, accompanied by added nondiegetic sound used in the film *Solace*, I concluded that the use of sound can take away from the seriousness of a situation. I therefore decided to showcase certain parts of Ashwill's race using only diegetic sound. Here Ashwill's breathing and footfall lead to an observational manner of filming that creates an immersive experience allowing the viewer more insight into how it must have felt running a 100km mostly alone.

The analysis of three existing sports documentaries made me aware of how differently the protagonists in each film handled their 'individual challenge' (Halford, 2020) they were confronted with. When considering *One Mind* in relation to the three existing sports documentaries, I established that Ashwill approaches his everyday life and challenges similarly to how he approached the challenges he faced in his 100km race. This creates not only a relatability and connection with Ashwill as an athlete but also as a person. In relation to this, I believe the observational, subjective, and introspective manner of

Ashwill's filming style gave not only the viewer, but also Ashwill more insight into his character and what he was feeling during certain moments in the race.

When reflecting on the creative processes involved in the creation of *One Mind*, Julie Perini's notion of relational filmmaking played a significant role. Perini (2011:9) explains that filmmakers do not know what the end result of their film will look like. At the start of the production process, I didn't have a set filming style in mind, but instead decided to let the creative process guide me. I believe this allowed for freedom and spontaneity that can also be linked to feelings associated with trail running. It can, however, lead to uncertainty when one is presented with too many possibilities. I do, however, believe the use of Perini's relational filmmaking, in relation to the participatory and observational modes of representation, helped me in the process of creating *One Mind*. The use of relational filmmaking led to a co-creation between myself and Ashwill, where he can be seen as not only the main protagonist, but also co-filmmaker. The fact that Ashwill becomes co-filmmaker overcomes the potential ethical issue of an unequal power balance between filmmaker and subject when two modes of representation are employed. The co-creation between myself and Ashwill led to a coequal power relationship, which gave him the opportunity to document and voice his experience from his own subjective perspective.

Upon reflection of my own filming practices, I would have encouraged Ashwill to re-account his experience of the race in present tense, instead of a past tense voice-over narration of his story. I believe this would have led to a more accurate representation of the intense and difficult challenges Ashwill had to face during his race, as well as contributed to the dramatic tension of the film. I also would have encouraged Ashwill to record the last 40km of the race, even though I am happy the circumstances had allowed me to add a more poetic aspect to the film during the recreation of the night section. With trail running being one of the fastest growing sports in South Africa presently, I believe there is scope to document future ultra-trail running events. At the end of the film, the viewer is informed that Ashwill already completed his next 100km race, a mere two months later. Here I had the opportunity to film Ashwill again, emphasising our ongoing relationship of co-creators. During this filming I have decided to focus more on the poetic mode of representation, as I think it can lead to an interesting and different way of depicting the ultra-trail running sport. I believe creating a second film will not only further emphasise the accessibility of the sport but can also showcase that there is a future in South Africa for ultra-trail running.

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