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A photograph capturing a person's silhouette from behind, standing on a rocky shore. The person is looking out at a large, curling wave in the ocean. The sky is a deep blue, and the water is a lighter blue with white foam from the wave. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Becoming-man

Becoming-wave

(Photo: Aichner, STAB Magazin)

# **Becoming-man**

# **Becoming-wave**

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in the Department of Gender Studies  
at the University of Sydney

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## Abstract

This thesis analyses the complex experience of masculinity by men who surf. Norms, rituals, codes, histories, habits, ideals, and beliefs in the surfing field are mapped to recognise how they are lived, and come about, as men become surfers. My analysis mobilises concepts drawn from the work of Elspeth Probyn, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Marcel Mauss, Moira Gatens, and Silvan S. Tomkins. The engagement with these theorists produces a critique of masculinity and surfing that relates, and unravels, how men who surf make sense of their lives.

A focus of my thesis is to promote an openness to new possibilities for doing masculinity. To accomplish this I begin by arguing for an analysis that specifically involves white heterosexual men who surf. My aim is to produce a questioning of the ground from which they speak. There is a political impetus here to encourage a self-reflexivity amongst men who surf that is not currently common. I then question current approaches to studying masculinity and extend upon them. Leaving behind the prominent use of a sex-gender ideology, I theorise bodies, surfing, and masculinity as performances that involve a tripartite relationship between sociology, psychology, and biology. My analysis attends to an affective economy that enables men to negotiate performances in the surfing field. I demonstrate throughout the thesis men feeling and doing masculinity, and how performances change depending on situations. Finally, I offer a consideration of several moments of disjuncture that re-align how masculinity and surfing are done. To this end, the contingency of surfing and masculinity are concretely realised.

The approaches, discourses and ideologies currently used to explain men, privileges panoramic views that do not get at how masculinity is actually done and feels. What marks this thesis as different to other studies of masculinity is that a key focus is on practices and feelings. My case in this thesis is for studies of masculinity to be more aware of how it is embodied, dynamic, and sensuous.

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**For Katarina**  
**My perfect wave**

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Storm Surf (Photo: Ugo, [www.aquabumps.com](http://www.aquabumps.com))

### Becoming-Wave

There are *dynamic features*: if moving forward, climbing and descending are dynamisms of conceptual personae, then leaping like Kierkegaard, dancing like Nietzsche and diving like Melville are others for philosophical athletes irreducible to one another. And if today our sports are completely changing, if the old energy-producing activities are giving way to exercises that, on the contrary, insert themselves on existing energetic networks, this is not just a change in type but yet other dynamic features that enter a thought that “slides” with new substances of being, with wave or snow and turn the thinker into a sort of surfer as conceptual persona: we renounce then the energetic value of the sporting type in order to pick out the pure dynamic difference expressed in a new conceptual persona.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *What is Philosophy?*

It was on a warm morning a few years ago when something happened to spark my interest regarding the relationship between surfing and masculinity. The sun was heating my back as I waited to paddle out into the surf with some friends. We were noting how the waves broke, the bounce of the white-water, the strength of the wind, which surfers were catching the most waves, and how fast the tide was flowing. It only took us a moment. Two local children, a boy and a girl, were drawing waves with chalk on the black boulders that lined the shore. The water would rush up then sweep back over their feet and the many anemones. The children laughed as the wet waves washed over the ones they coloured in. My friends told the young boy to go get his surfboard and come surfing with us. He returned quickly and was excited to be paddling out with my mates –

“the boys”. The young girl looked on earnestly but was told the waves were too big for her.

The girl paddled out later regardless of the warning, but sat at the edge of the pack of boys who were yelling at the young bloke to take-off on a wave. I watched her edge closer to the group until I told her to go back to the beach. She ignored me, turned, and paddled into one of the biggest waves of the morning. None of my friends were paying attention. I watched her drop down the face, turn in a sharp arc, and slide to shore. She surfed well. I felt ashamed at how I had told her to go into the beach.

This moment of shame was productive because it prompted me to consider how particular ideas about gender construct how I do and think about surfing and surfer's bodies. Many norms and assumptions inform my policing of what bodies can and cannot do, and what I connect with in the surfing field. Surfer's lives are gendered in ways that shape possibilities. After that surf session I began to question assumptions about masculinity that dominate the surfing field and what I perpetuate by my behaviour and beliefs. Idealised gendered representations had made their way into my flesh to establish particular characteristics, boundaries, and definitions of surfing.

In this thesis I work through arrangements of surfing, surfer's bodies, waves, and masculinity. Myths, legends, rituals, and laws of the surfing site are explored to see how men who surf do masculinity. This thesis provides a mapping of male surfing bodies whereby fibreglass meshes with flesh, wax, fear, excitement, economics, sweat, politics,

gender and representations, to see how men who surf make sense of their lives. Rather than assume I know how masculinity is done in the surfing field I look at some of the ways in which the thoughts, actions, and feelings of surfers are regulated and come about. By doing this I hope to unsettle assumptions about masculinity that dominate the surfing field and demand a self-reflexivity about how gender informs surfer's expectations.

To that end my surfing life research actively engages in an unsettling self-reflexivity, such as realising how I exclude others from enjoying a morning surf because my view of surfing, gender, and bodies does not allow them to belong like I do. But I think this unsettling can lessen my complacency and force me to register other kinds of relations. So one of my aims in this thesis is to see if making visible how masculinity is done means norms can then be challenged. My critique will begin to open up surfing so belonging and participating are not so assumed, restricted, or defined.

In chapter one I will explain how blokes consider surfing and masculinity. These men who surf assume that their way of knowing is common-sense, and they do not like the normative relationships being questioned. The content of this chapter attempts to explain why it is important to begin discussing what has long been considered self-evident or not worth querying. Historically, the study of gender has meant the study of femininities but this leaves unquestioned the masculine norms that have become "just how things are". But there is a need to approach such a critique of masculinity and surfing with care so as to avoid a guarded retreat by men who surf because they feel like their way of life is

being attacked. This chapter also involves an introduction of how I involve my mates so they begin to wonder about their own assumed inhabiting of the world.

In chapter one I also take time to address the legitimate concern that by focussing on white heterosexual men who surf I will continue to silence, or send into the beach, others who surf. I explain why my site of study focuses on white heterosexual men who surf.

One of my concerns is that if this study becomes too broad and abstract it will over-write other's experiences, such as women who surf. Yet the study may also silence others because I do not speak of them.

Using the work of Elspeth Probyn and Giorgio Agamben I mobilise the concepts of specificity and singularity to deal with such an impasse. These concepts offer me a way to avoid making over-arching claims and problematise the discourses and ideologies that make up the ground from which I speak and do things. The idea is to move away from generalities because they don't allow for how at particular times and under certain circumstances class, gender, generation, sex, ethnicity, and race can assemble differently. My specific critique will amplify the diversity of what can come together during any given moment as opposed to what I assume should connect.

In the second chapter I begin by considering how blokes understand the concept of "masculinity". According to the masculinity theorist Steve Biddulph, masculinity is an essential inner essence that all male bodies have. While at the other end of the masculinity studies spectrum sociologist Robert Connell argues gender is an over-arching

social structure that acts upon bodies. I critique and extend both these approaches and discuss how my work contests them. My main concern is that these approaches often treat bodies as either essential or separate to the social. In both cases masculinity is simply imposed upon us. As such, neither approach sufficiently allow for the movement of doing masculinity. Furthermore, both theorists invoke a sex-gender ideology that limits how we might understand masculinity working. The sex-gender ideology being a process by which we assign masculinity to a male body and femininity to a female body.

Using the work of Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler I will show how the sex-gender ideology becomes accepted and how we perform according to expectations informed by it. To move away from a sex-gender ideology Butler's productive concept of "performativity" is used to suggest that gender is an expression of discourses and ideologies through bodies at a particular moment, and not a fixed identity position determined by a male or female body. Butler offers my analysis a degree of openness because it identifies a discursive process of gender that is always contested and not a structure or essence simply imposed upon us.

But I want to go further than a discursive analysis of gender and get into the very grain of bodies doing masculinity in the surfing field. To do this I paddle into the surf with the sociologist Marcel Mauss. His concept of the "Total Man" refers to a tripartite relation between the biological, sociological, and psychological, and allows me to comprehend how these parts of human life intermingle during any event. With Mauss in the surf with me the analysis moves from the discursive emphasis of performativity to unpacking

“performances”. I understand these performances as milieus of biology, sociology, and psychology assembling. My research proceeds through their ongoing interactivity.

To reveal performances and their visceral nature I will attest to the importance of affects. Affects are how bodies feel performances and what make them matter. For example, in the surfing field fear, shame, joy, anger, and so on play important roles when surfing. The psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins provides a systematic analysis of this physiological and sensorial economy of human life. By attending to the work of Tomkins I will account for our sensual way of moving through the world and seek to outline the importance of feelings to performing masculinity in the surfing field. This means I place an emphasis on bodies as affective rather than instrumental or essential. This re-configured body is one that proceeds through connections, mutations, affects, emotions, attitudes, passions, activities, and all other networks. Reading affective bodies will allow me to engage with an ethological analysis of masculinity. Ethological analysis is a way of looking at bodies as performances and does not prescribe what bodies will do. Rather, an ethological approach begins with the premise that capabilities of bodies are never set. As such I move towards a version of masculinity that is always in process and where bodies contribute to it in surprising ways.

To attend to the dynamic connections, details, feelings, and activities of men who surf I mobilise a methodology in chapter three that appreciates these affective bodies and performances. I argue that by using my body as a research tool I can provide insights that account for the body’s texture, feelings, and movement when doing gender. My mates



relate to such a method that re-members bodies as involved because they can see and feel it happening. It is important that my mates relate because it means they feel that they are involved with the research rather than being spoken to or about. Since I have surfed all my life chapter three also outlines my case for using techniques of learning that I have grown up with, such as engaging with surf stories, to do research. These stories make my work accessible to the blokes I am studying. There is also an open, involving and affective nature to stories that can take those who have never surfed into the sensations of the field.

As a surfer I realise that articulating winds, tides, swell speeds, reefs, and sand are all integral to surf stories, but also to actually going surfing. So chapter three registers the importance for my method to appreciate modes of assembling. It is here that my approach puts to work an ethological reading whereby bodies are read as rhythms and styles. My ethological approach appreciates how bodies move with the environment, with feelings, and with the social. Appreciating bodies in this way can tell me a lot about what bodies do and how we make sense of our lives because it allows for movement and avoids presumptive research, that is, the wonder of how bodies surf isn't lost.

Revealing how men who surf move through the surfing field is important. However, so is a tracing of important ideas through surfing's history that facilitate particular styles and rhythms. In chapter four my focus turns to past performances of freedom, rebelliousness, adventure, strength, bravery, and so on. I look at how these performances come to enable or contain how masculinity is now done in the surfing field. My mates and I have become

familiar with certain performances that have circulated through surfing's history so that they now seem second nature to us. My aim in this chapter is to reveal how these performances are not natural in any way but a result of dominant discourses and ideologies on sexuality, gender, ethnicity, age, and race being expressed. This chapter pursues an alternative history that is aware of how micro-processes establish representations and practices of surfing, not to further entrench them but to make obvious how they come about. My study of performances such as surf rage, localism, big-wave surfing, and so on in this chapter will reveal power-knowledge relations that discipline the bodies of men who surf and develop their habits.

Chapter five builds on the previous chapter by providing a ficto-critical story that attends to how a couple of surfers on the Gold Coast of Australia live, reproduce, and assign meaning to particular representations and expectations. By detailing and connecting with everyday knowledges and activities of these surfers as they are done I begin to identify how some performances marginalise alternatives. This chapter will also catch glimpses of how sometimes men who surf negotiate expectations in new and transgressive ways. The details and affective nature of the story will point towards the social working through affective bodies that are actually hard to contain. The story will show how arrangements of the biological, psychological, and sociological are always in process and full of contradictions. This means masculinity is open to contestation and not essential in any way.

It is on this point of contestation that chapter six will extend. What is clear already is that social conventions regulate what men who surf feel and how their bodies act. But my constant thematic that bodies and feelings do escape such regulation will reveal how masculinity and surfing are done differently everyday, even though hegemonic social arrangements try to smooth over such rogue waves. In this concluding chapter I pay attention to several moments where normative performances of masculinity in the surfing field have been challenged and re-aligned. I want to show how there is sometimes a degree of self-reflexivity amongst men who surf regarding cultural expectations and how they attribute them to others.

To evidence such self-reflexivity and re-alignment I explore how some surfers have set up community services and humanitarian aid organisations. My challenge in chapter six is to see if alternative performances gain any momentum and how they emerge from current hegemonic conditions. I do not try to solve problems in the surfing field, such as sexism and violence, but want to draw attention to how some blokes are already troubling assumed norms and even subverting the status quo as ideas about care intersect with their surfing. This is a chapter that confronts me with all sorts of feelings, some very difficult, that I try to work through so as to promote a different approach to studying masculinity.

A frustrating aspect of reading across studies of masculinity is their tendency to speak in general terms or through implied objectivity. I often feel at some distance from what is being said and wonder why that needs to be the case? My aim is to get across what particular performances felt like and how they were negotiated. It is important to me to

try and make other people's bodies feel anger, joy, shame, fear, or pride as I relate what living with localism is like. I want to get across an affective research that captures how each re-reading of my opening description of sending a young girl into the beach causes my face to flush in shame. An attentiveness to how bodies feel, assemble, and affect can be productive in promoting conditions for appreciating new ways of going surfing and doing masculinity. What is exciting about an affective analysis of surfing and masculinity is that there is a fruitful leaving behind of assumptions that determine, rather than open up, possibilities. But it also attends to what my mates call: "keeping it real".

My project here is an extension of my honours thesis in which I began to think about a politics of surfing and masculinity that did not privilege foundations, hierarchies, and identity but rather a responsiveness to alterity and infinite contestation. It's a question of entering into relation with and surfing according to an ambiguity about riding the wave. In no way do I suggest "a" new and ideal way to be a man who surfs or way to surf but refuse such an ideal. Such surfing already occurs and I aim to recognise this. When working on new conceptions of bodies and how they interact with the environment the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994) suggests understanding the body 'as a series of processes, organs, flows and matter ... a set of operational linkages and connections with other things' (120), or what I like to think of as a body that surfs. There are, according to Grosz, in every body a thousand tiny bodies moving, mutating, and becoming. Borrowing from Grosz we might see surfing as a thousand tiny surfs, each moment of a wave consisting of changing styles of riding. It's a surfing-gender relationship that escapes into heterogeneity rather than homogenising experience. A surfing of self-reflexivity,

difference, and potential would be surfing like a wave, a becoming-wave. It is a question of trying to “capture of the code” of the wave which is fluid, transformable, and always on its own edge of disaster.

A photograph of rolling hills under a blue sky. The hills are covered in green grass and are arranged in a series of gentle, undulating slopes that recede into the distance. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall mood is serene and hopeful. The word "Potential" is overlaid in white text at the bottom center of the image.

Potential (Photo: Drew Kampion)

### 'Who wants to Surf?'

At the seaside ... a new world of  
sensations was growing.

Alain Corbin: *The Lure of the Sea: The  
Discovery of the Seaside in the  
Western World 1750-1840.*

#### Introduction

I'm talking to my mates – the boys – but the lines of swell that sweep into the bay distract them. A surfer weighs down on the tail of a surfboard and pulls himself into the wave-face. The surfboard is an “old-school” single-fin. The vintage of the board and skill of the rider elicit discussion. Such surfing piques interest because it displays a different picture of equipment and how to ride waves. There are many styles of surfing, differing perceptions of them, and hierarchies that determine their acceptance. It's on this point of differing perceptions that the boys talk about my research on surfing and masculinity. Our opinions differ and some question whether the research is accurate because it doesn't always reinforce what they perceive as acceptable. I recount the history of surfing, explain observations of cultural sites, and describe experiences with stories. The boys laugh as their bodies register past surf sessions.

I then offer a critique of surfing and masculinity. The boys spit out disagreement like the sea purges 'its monsters along the beach' (Marie and Viard in Urbain, 2003: 28). Buggsy expresses disgust at my claim that his dislike for gay surfers is homophobic; Michael's face

reddens in anger when I suggest violence is unnecessary when policing the line-up; and Chris resists my argument that there is sexism in the water because we expect girls to surf like we do.

The discussion heats up. Buggsy stands, exhales loudly, and yells, “surfing is common-sense”. I continue to wonder aloud about assumptions we make and annoy these male bodies who seem to belong so naturally within surf culture and in the line-up. Chris tells me I’m all “hot air”. Buggsy says it’s lucky I’m one of the crew otherwise he wouldn’t listen. This is a caution for me not to disagree too much with how surfing and masculinity work together. In other words, the boys will make the line-up uncomfortable for me.

The boys don’t like critiques of surfing and masculinity. It is considered okay to discuss surfing and masculinity as objects but inappropriate to question the “common-sense” that informs them. If surfing and masculinity are objectified it maintains the boys’ authority because they determine what the common-sense is. To question their experience undermines authority because the men’s understandings and assumptions that allow them to belong become unstable. For me the practices and knowledge that constitute surfing and masculinity are not considered to be objective facts or common-sense. I don’t intend to legitimise or leave unquestioned the dominant discourses the boys embody and perform.

Chris suggests going surfing before the sun goes down. We pull on wetsuits, hide keys under the front wheel arch of the car, and wax boards as the conversation turns to what the tide will do to the waves. I walk to the water’s edge. Michael ambles along next to me while continuing to disagree, but now it’s my turn to be distracted by waves that look like blown-glass.



My mates' perspective on my research of masculinity and surfing is challenging but so too are the critiques I get from academic audiences. At a cultural studies conference in New Zealand I present a paper that explains how I research homosocial surfing moments.<sup>1</sup> After a few general questions about surfing a woman in the audience stands and speaks with vigour. Her claim is that in my accounts of men who surf I discount women's involvement. The woman asking the question explains that she surfs and in my descriptions it's difficult for her to feel like she belongs. There's passion in her voice, perhaps brought on by being excluded once again from the surfing milieu. Everyday surfing experiences of women are often silenced or ignored. Leanne Stedman (1997) discusses gender in her work on surfing magazines. I will return to Stedman in chapter three suffice to say at this point that she claims the silencing and lack of recognition of women's surfing entrenches homosocial arrangements and masculine myths of the surfing culture.

The claim that my paper silences other experiences disturbs me and I shuffle behind the lectern, feel heat in my face, and avert my gaze. My uncomfortable body disrupts my ability to respond to the claim of being complicit with current gender arrangements. I provide a bumbling response to explain that my paper is about men who surf, not surfing in general, or women and surfing.

To calm down I catch a bus to a grey sand beach. Clouds block the sun and a strong wind blows through the spinifex grass that clings to the sand dunes. A teenage girl struggles to catch a wave amongst the male crowd and lacklustre swell. I begin to wonder about that girl's experience of surfing and whether I should account for it. I make a weak commitment to do so in further descriptions of surfing. My lack of conviction is because I am not sure whether I am capable of, or should be trying to, account for all bodies, behaviours, and feelings in my

study. Being all-encompassing can also colonise other experiences. My hegemonic interpretation would silence different voices and representations even though my intention is to include them. But I also seem to be silencing other experiences if I focus on white heterosexual men who surf.

The vast majority of those who hear or read my research don't float on surfboards. Some colleagues like to watch wetsuit-clad bodies drift. Others think they know about surf culture because they grew up in a beachside town. During an arts faculty seminar these perceptions of surfing collide with mine. The paper is different to, but takes into account, the one I presented in New Zealand. It's a story about a day in the life of two men who surf the Gold Coast.

When I finish reading the paper a fellow postgraduate expresses joy at the lyrical flow of the story because she senses what surfing is like for these men. But another student argues in a forceful manner that the story is heroic and entrenches particular masculine assumptions of appropriate behaviour. I hear a hostile tone in her voice as she asks where are the outright criticisms of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and violence that she knows constituted surfing culture in the coastal town she grew up in.

I am angry this time and reply that the story is not heroic but attempts to remain faithful to the complicated culture these men belong to. If some men try to live up to heroic myths then I cannot ignore that aspect. I say that her experience of the culture is very different to the men when they are out in the waves. The student and the surfers may encounter each other in the same physical space, but they nevertheless experience very different performances. Furthermore, what her surfing friends tell her about and what they practice in homosocial settings can be very different.

I am offended at her implication that she knows what male surfers' perceptions are and that practices of misogyny, sexism, violence, and homophobia move freely with surfing experiences. Just because one guy is sexist doesn't mean all the other guys are. Some might be ashamed at such practices but may not speak up for fear of violent retribution. Misogyny, sexism, violence, and homophobia are negotiated, and not essential performances of men who surf. My interest is in how some men experience surfing rather than essentialist or general statements that might somehow fix the culture as a whole. What emerges from my colleague's criticism is a concern that my work is complicit with practices that are unethical. Since the work comes through me I take the claim to mean I am unethical, hence, the anger, resentment, and guilt that colour my animated body during my response.

These anecdotes about my mates and colleagues demonstrate that perceptions of surfing culture are strikingly different. But they all seem to want to either preserve a hegemonic version of surfing or an over-arching critique. Either way, we seem to end up with a general surfing picture that legitimises a model based on totality and abstraction. Such a model destroys alterity because the specific and actual lived interaction of women who surf, Aboriginals who surf, gay men who surf, and white men who surf are over-coded and over-determined if I use, or attempt to get, a general surfing picture. I could engage in the ritual function of distinguishing clearly defined social identities to make sure I include everyone thereby smoothing over their complicated interactivity. However, a general picture of surfing, no matter how many identities I include, actually reduces possibilities because it moves away from the actual living of ongoing and complex surfing performances.

## **Specificity**

My thesis maps specific and affective performances in order to dismantle a general model of surfing. This model entrenches a way of thinking about surfing that relies on conditions of belonging, assumptions, definitive social groups, hegemonies, authority, norms, and hierarchies that white heterosexual men determine. At the moment the boys use a mode of representation that presents a general picture. This mode of representation is treated as a second-hand mirror that reflects some truth of how things are: that men are like this, that women are like that, and so on. However, I interrupt the dominant mode of representation and rework it so that there is an appreciation of how we are actually within representations.

According to communications theorist Stuart Hall (1997) representation is not a second-hand mirror that gives us access to raw information but is a process of producing meaning. Among other things, Hall studied how people construct meaning using representational systems informed by particular discourses and ideologies. The general model of surfing currently being represented is a highly structured process that regulates how meaning is generated: circulation, distribution, production, consumption, and reproduction.

A general representation of surfing sets in motion certain power-knowledge relations by which surfers come to know about, amongst other things, sexual difference, gender, and sexuality. Utilising a general model of surfing that treats representation as a second-hand mirror would be to participate in a particular strategy of normalisation without questioning the very process that enables such regulation. To use the current model of representation would be to argue that some surfers are simply oppressed and that all we need to do is increase representation of them. So I challenge the current mode of representation through a personally inflected analysis in which I problematise the discourses and ideologies that inform and regulate the representations that make up the ground from which I speak and do things as a

white heterosexual male surfer. By researching through my “self” I scramble any sense of the “ordinary”, wonder about the arrangements of my everyday, dismiss generality, and thereby interrupt any simple reproduction of dominant representations. By being specific I appreciate that our differences – age, ethnicity, class, race, gender, sexuality – affect how we come to understand representations and live them. I could just argue for a representation of the surfing culture that includes numerous identities that are not misogynistic, homophobic, violent, and sexist. However, this would mean perpetuating the problematic mode of representation. It’s more effective to rework representation so that it’s recognised as a messy, complicated, negotiated, and constructed process. By doing this the boys and I will not be able to claim surfing is common-sense and have to begin asking questions Elspeth Probyn (1992) has identified in her work that deconstructs how we make sense of our lives: “who am I?”; “who is she?”; “who is he?”; and so on (503).

My research is premised on the concept of specificity that occurs when we recognise ourselves as within processes of meaning whereby representations can always come together differently. I want to relay to the boys that the representations we are familiar with are not understood in the same way by others and the “realities” of surfing are always mediated differently. By stimulating an awareness of specificity I also hope to encourage a reading of surfing that creates a space for others to speak rather than speaking for them.

While many have argued about specificity, in this thesis I’m influenced by Probyn’s account of singularity in *Outside Belongings* (1996). Probyn wants to understand how individuals make sense of their lives through complex allegiances rather than the categorical logic of identity (5, 10). She questions modes of belonging from outside hegemonic norms through a collection of accounts about lesbian experiences, stories, novels, and films. To do this, Probyn

engages with an alternative form of theoretical practice that makes evident 'the movement together of different distinct elements' (6). She argues that there are always 'zones of specificity' that are the 'changing configurations of social relations' (11). Experience is always moving, within, and between social relations and representations that overpowers any generality. Singular moments that always differ emerge from the commingling of specific conditions of race, class, sexuality, and gender (23). Singularity is how at different times and under certain circumstances differing zones of specificity (belonging) intermingle.

Drawing on the work of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1993) her understanding of singularity promotes an appreciation of the concept of "whatever". This "whatever" is not whatever so that it doesn't matter but "whatever" so that it always matters.<sup>ii</sup> Every detail, relation, representation, and practice affects and is affected during a singular passage of movement. Singularity is a vanishing point of zones of specificity intermingling. As Probyn explains; 'What I want to get at are the ways in which the range of specificities that we may inhabit come together in singularity' (1996: 24).

By mobilising the concepts of singularity and specificity Probyn aims to 'disrupt the sequencing of the dominant order' (27). Paying attention to specific conditions of belonging and the singularity of experience means paying attention to the 'minute, meticulous and mundane' (35). The interruption to the assumed normative connections allows glimpses of unexpected examples and experiences. Such attention to specificity and singularity misrecognises and upsets structures or clearly defined differences. We are constantly at the edge of ourselves involved with a sociological, biological, and psychological world that is complex and moving. As Probyn writes: 'Lines of class, gender, sex, generation, ethnicity and race intermingle as people hang out' (5).

Belonging in this sense is a process that favours certain mobile connections rather than a given identity. As a white heterosexual man who surfs, I perform and understand the world according to particular discourses interacting and regulating representations. Recounting differing zones of specificity works as a constant adding-to that renders incomprehensible some idea of a general surfing culture or authentic perception. It also puts the process of constructing meaning and representations on display in ways that enable alternatives to interrupt and contest them.

### **Women and Surfing**

To expand on the theoretical exigency of specificity lets return to the question of women and surfing. As the interlocutor in New Zealand pointed out, women's bodies are very involved with surfing performances. While that is obvious, her remark made me reflect on the women in my life as a young surfer: my sisters waiting in a car while I surf; mum keeping dinner warm until the afternoon surf-session is over; watching sun-kissed girls put on coconut oil when sunbaking; teaching "chicks" to surf.

Surfing has a long history in my family, it touched all of us but it was only the men who actually surfed. Family holidays were at camping grounds where the swell was good.

Barbeques were cancelled when a low-pressure weather system spun off the coast. Money went to surfboards, wax, legropes, and surf trips. I did little housework because the surf was always "going off". My dad used to round up my friends and me, give us some money, and send us surfing for a few days on the islands off south-east Queensland. My sisters resented not being allowed to go camping with the girls because it wasn't "safe".

My mother, sisters and girlfriends have become used to such scenarios but don't necessarily like them: they have adapted. I remember going on a family trip and my younger sister complaining that she wished we could go inland just once. She said she'd never date a surfer again. She had already dated a few mates of mine who surfed but became upset with how she always had to go to the beach, their insistence that she lose weight for summer, and how movie nights meant surfing videos. My mother didn't like it when I hung out with the "trouble-makers who smoked pot", and surfed instead of worked. When these women recount their experiences of passages of surfing I wonder about my own. Their voices make me realise the specificity and the privilege of my experience. I embody dominant masculine discourses and reproduce hegemonic representations, so my research shakes up my assumptions and interrupts any simple reproduction of those representations. Learning to listen to other experiences prompts reflection on one's own in unexpected ways.

During the course of researching this thesis I've noticed that the waves have attracted ever-increasing numbers of women surfers. A woman going surfing is by no means a recent phenomenon. A teenage girl, by the name of Isabelle Latham, who paddled out at Freshwater Beach in Sydney in 1915 was one of the first documented experiences of surfing by an Australian. But it's only recently that large numbers of girls have occupied the line-up. One of the reasons for increased numbers of women surfing is the growth of commercial surf schools. My mates and I always found it annoying to have to formally teach someone to surf. We thought you had to learn through experience how to hang out in the line-up. Of course the homosociality of this space in the past meant that girls didn't feel comfortable to hang with us and we didn't encourage them to. But the surf schools saw the chance for an expanded market and it made good economic sense to include the women. Surf companies caught on and now there is a booming "surf chick" market encouraging participation.<sup>iii</sup>



Once the girls hit the water they come back for more. I assume that it's for the same reasons as the boys – the joys of riding waves, mateships, and the challenges. It must be tough for the girls with the line-ups clogged with blokes who don't appreciate the increase in crowds or think the girls get in the way. However, some women are praised for their abilities because they're said to surf like men and are considered "one of the boys". These women surfers' actions and skills in the water reproduce styles determined by the masculine discourses of surfing. But they also have to be careful not to transgress the liminal gendered zone or else they'll be considered butch and lesbian, two terms used to insult gendered behaviour considered inappropriate according to the hetero-normative discourses. This hetero-normativity informs expectations of bodies by establishing a sex-gender ideology. The sex-gender ideology is where bodies are assumed to have a sex such as male or female, and these sexes are ascribed a particular gender: masculinity-male; femininity-female. I'll discuss the sex-gender ideology in more detail in chapter two.

In a recent contest at Maroubra known as *The Snickers Challenge* four-times world women's surfing champion Layne Beachley competed against the men. She lost in the first round. The commentary from many was that Beachley should stick to the women's tour and that she wasn't good enough for the men's tour. Let's be clear that that women's bodies are physiologically capable of doing the same as the men's in the surf.<sup>iv</sup> Professional women's surfer Keala Kennelly from Hawaii is building a reputation for herself at the surf-spot of Teahupo'o. Kennelly has ridden some of the biggest waves to ever hit this treacherous reef, but she's considered different to other women surfers. Huge storms spin through the Pacific Ocean sending powerful swells to this reef pass in Tahiti. The shallow formation of the reef means that the wave doesn't stand up like regular waves but "bottoms out". This means that the trench of the wave drops below sea level and the wave pitches out a long way with the

weight of the ocean behind it. According to some of my mates women are supposed to approach the waves in a gentle way rather than with brute strength like Kennelly does. This is an ironic and uncomfortable position for women surfers: the only way to gain respect is to surf like a man. But they can't be too like the boys.

Amy was one of the first women to be seen regularly in the line-up at my local break. She explained to me that she finds it interesting that when people find out she surfs, they're supportive but surprised. Amy went on to explain that she must have been quite naive when learning because she had learned with some other girls and thought it was perfectly natural for chicks to surf. It wasn't until she started surfing further afield that different expectations began to emerge.

I've asked the boys about Amy's surfing. The reply from Buggsy was that, "Anyone with half a brain knows that women cannot and do not surf at the same level as men". My mate Scat disagreed exclaiming that he doesn't get the whole chicks can't surf thing. Here's what he said:

Who are we measuring Amy against? Professional surfers? Fuck if that's the case I shouldn't be surfing either. How about simply the top 1000 surfers in the world? Damn, that's still not me. Imagine if professional surfers such as Kelly Slater or Mark Occhilupo said "you punters are a bunch of kooks – we can't take your surfing seriously." Seems to me us bottom-feeders have to take the piss out of people that don't surf better than us. It's so lame. I've seen Amy charge double-overhead reef-breaks that plenty of the boys wouldn't have touched.

Scat's comment is an example of how things are slowly changing in the surf. On recent trips to the Gold Coast I have noticed that some of the boys wait for Amy to get waves, but if they

don't she returns the drop-in. A drop-in is where a surfer slides down the wave in front of another; it's a form of insult.

There are some women surfers who it would be very inappropriate to drop-in on. Rell Sunn (1998), a revered Hawaiian surfer and pioneer of women's professional surfing, writes about her experience of spear fishing and surfing. She was hunting a forty-five-pound ulua (parrotfish) on her longboard. Fishing from a surfboard is considered a waterman skill.<sup>v</sup> At one point Sunn sees fishermen waving and yelling:

I turned my head seaward just in time to see a 14-foot tiger shark sliding under the surface barely 50 feet away, knifing toward my board, my 65 pounds of octopus and fish, my ulua and my legs ... A million heartbreaking thoughts and possibilities flashed into my mind, yet I had but two solutions to them all: pulling myself into the less-exposed knee-paddling position and scuttling the ulua off the side ... I didn't have the heart to do the "panic-paddle" in and so from a safe distance I watched my dream fish begin to sink. He wasn't even a foot under when the tiger grabbed him and tore into the midsection ... I paddled away from the snapping, churning orgy ... Though I was running late, I stopped along the way and picked some hinahina for my hule sisters' leis. The succulent flowers grow along the arid Kaena coast road, living on the thick sea spray. Not exactly ulua steaks, but ... the girls would be stoked (3).

This is one surfer who you'd be careful not to insult. According to Sunn's husband, ex-professional surfer Dave Parmenter, no-one dropped-in on her. Sunn's place in the pecking-order of the area was well-established, until she died of cancer at the age of forty-seven.

Women such as Sunn and the other professional surfers don't ask to belong, rather their bodies occupy the beaches, the pecking-orders, and the waves. What occurs is a specific and embodied intervention rather than a sweeping change to a general surfing picture. Their

bodies say, “we’re here and are going to surf (or fish) so get used to it”. These women don’t need me to critique surfing on their behalf and are quite capable of negotiating surfing on their own.

The increased involvement of these types of bodies challenges the boys’ assumptions about what bodies can or should do. When relating a story about a recent professional women’s surfing contest, my friend Drew expresses surprise at how some girls punched-on to establish their place in the pecking-order. The altercation happened during the 2000 *Roxy Pro* at Snapper Rocks on the Gold Coast. Visiting female surfer Sam Cornish annoyed local surfer Trudy Todd because Cornish hadn’t obeyed the local hierarchy of the surf-spot, so Todd attacked Cornish on the beach. Drew isn’t used to seeing girls fight over waves, but the increased presence of women in the line-up challenges his assumptions of gender. He was also surprised that Trudy subscribed to all the rules of localism and exclusion even though as a woman she had been on the receiving end for so long. Localism is a claim to ownership of a certain field of surfing by a group of surfers who have lived and surfed in an area for a long time.

The presence of women’s bodies should not be homogenised, separated out, and used to represent a clear-cut surfing identity. Such a picture threatens to group women surfers together as some coherent social identity that perpetuates assumptions about “what women surfers are like”. Rather, what we need are specific analyses of milieus where discourses of gender, sexuality, race, age, class, and ethnicity interact in ways that unsettle assumptions. While it is important for women’s experiences of surfing to be heard, the objective of my thesis is perforce different. As I have argued, a general surfing picture runs the risk of silencing other versions. Being specific doesn’t necessarily silence other voices but

undermines the very model that relies on and determines regulation of inclusion, exclusion, assumptions, norms, authority, and generality. I refuse to welcome, abuse, defend, analyse, or measure others and thereby construct them as passive objects. As anthropologist Ghassan Hage (1998) suggests in his work on racism, multiculturalism, and tolerance: I don't give myself the right to 'worry over them' (17). To argue for inclusion or exclusion of others' experiences, no matter how sincere I try to be, relies on the conviction that it is up to me to 'direct the traffic, as it were' (17).

### **Men Who Surf**

After discussing Amy's surfing I'd asked the boys what they thought about masculinity and surfing. I received bewildered expressions and vague comments about how to surf big waves; how a particular guy's handshake is weak like a girl's; about backing up one's mates during a fight; how to pick up chicks. While my mates are quick to pick up on "women's surfing", they can only talk in general about men who do this and don't do that. The boys don't recognise themselves as gendered, they perceive and represent themselves as surfers.

As I explain further in chapter two, the boys think of themselves as "men", which they experience as "natural" embodied practices. Manners, postures, habits, representations and feelings are crucial elements in constructing themselves as a man. "Men" are formed and informed at the level of their bodies doing things while "masculinity" is seen as something abstract, totally ignored, or understood as some mythical essence inside them. What men do with their bodies matters when they are determining whether one is a man or not, even though many of them understand such activity as just human or neutral. However, performances of bodies differentiate the boys from what other bodies do thereby establishing certain belongings or zones of specificities.

Since the boys know themselves as men through their bodies it is important to not think of gender only in cognitive terms. The body is a crucial way of knowing about gender, and this necessitates getting at the matter of bodies as they go surfing and do masculinity. Following on from the work of the sociologist Marcel Mauss I understand that our practices for living emerge from the sociological, psychological and biological interacting. This interactivity means I don't understand gender as either innate in a body or an abstract social structure that bears down upon us. Using Mauss's understanding of practices alongside the work of the feminist philosopher Judith Butler I look at gender through performances. According to Butler gendered discourses are embodied so they come to appear as "natural". These gendered discourses inform what we do, how we do it, and how we produce meaning. The performances of gender and surfing I will analyse show that the interactivity is dynamic, ongoing, and not always what we expect it to be. Discourses, feelings, practices and bodies can come together differently, even though there is a process of regulating representations that hides this movement. This thesis moves towards a version of gender that is always in process and where bodies adapt to differing conditions.

Interactivity, performances, and specificity challenge me to stop thinking surfing and masculinity as self-evident. This is not an easy thing to do because as I have indicated the boys and I are in the habit of seeing the surf and masculinity as ours and as "normal". We experience our everyday without thinking about it as if it provides no information, questions, and answers. What this thesis does is break from the usual attitude that trivialises everyday experience. What the boys and I take for granted is re-visited as strange and intriguing. I treat performances of surfing and masculinity as complex, negotiated, moving, visceral, felt and specific rather than clear, general, given, definable, or abstract. Analysing performances of men who surf brings them into public discourse rather than leaving them arbiters of it.

Following on from a strategy employed by Probyn (2004) I try to unsettle assumptions and I do this by showing the boys how their bodies generate and carry, 'much more meaning than we have tended to see' (331).

By making visible how the boys negotiate representations, discourses, ideologies, feelings, and so on takes them away from hegemony and puts them into contestation. The men relate to such an analysis because it's grounded and concrete – they can see and feel it happening. Part of the aim of my thesis is to make the critique matter to these men in a way that can't be dismissed easily. An over-arching criticism of a general surfing culture can fuel a politics of resentment. The guys take the critique as a personal attack because the discourses are in their bodies and they take them as natural. And they resent being made to feel guilty about who they think they are. Condemnation can result in a guarded retreat to normative assumptions that maintain the dominant mode of representation because this is what they are used to. Generalised criticism of anyone's familiar world-view will make them defensive because such a critique tars everyone with the same brush and does not allow for the complexity of living. This position is raised in chapter two with a discussion of the rise of men's groups. These groups encourage a return to dominant practices, hegemonies, and discourses because they claim to feel embattled, beleaguered, and borne down upon by feminist criticism.

Over-arching condemnation of the boys as misogynist, sexist, racist, violent, and homophobic may work in a classroom (although not in mine) but the reality down the beach is very different. Outsider criticism can sometimes entrench the hegemonic performances because the guys are not encouraged to participate in the critique, in deconstructing the dominant mode of representation. I endeavour to perform differently in front of the other guys and reveal the construction of meaning so a discussion ensues. As a participant I question assumptions the

boys and I often make and this involved care means a more ready acceptance of critique, and can also mean that they may hesitate when performing next time or determining what an event “really” means. As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) explains, analysing specific experiences and representation as an ongoing constructed process begins to reveal ways of knowing and practices that many times don’t unfold as spectacle but are an assumed inhabiting of the world.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis then, is to register moments of change, to catch glimpses of alternative performances of masculinity and surfing. I use stories to do this; stories traversed by a plurality of voices. The surfers in the stories are composites of many bodies, waves, discourses, cyclones, stories, and surfboards I have engaged with during my life as a surfer. The stories reflect an honest self-reflexivity of how some moments were done and felt. I also use stories because of the importance of them to the surfing lifestyle. This allows the boys to feel familiar with the process and opens the study to accessibility. Stories are an effective way of making sense for outsiders and encouraging negotiation of representations by the boys who belong. Such a voice is a way of affecting and being affected, of getting across what an experience feels like while allowing for difference. I explain my use of stories in more detail in chapter three. What I wish to get across at this point is my hope is that a textual voice with an intention to move the reader can inspire, incite, and motivate thereby spreading investment in debates and broadening participation. Cultural theorist Melissa Gregg (2004) concludes in her thesis on modes of criticism in academic writing that to relate moments of wonder has the potential to spread new knowledge and practices while deflating assumptions and polemics.



What I'm trying to do with such writing is generate a space of exchange and negotiation while attempting to forge new connections. To use stories is to make contact with other voices, experiences, and interpretations without subsuming them into a dominant model. Stories allow for points of contestation. Such a voice can highlight local movements and invite other stories to splinter off. There's no provision for a defined set of attributes to be established but negotiation. The boys are used to surfing stories being fields of contestation. After surfing we sit in the car-park and scream to be heard – "and my wave"; "it wasn't that big"; "I was surfing great"; "you were surfing like a kook".

My hope is that the specificity, details, difference, and sensuality that emerge from stories display the distinctive, ambiguous, changing, and multi-faceted timbres of surfing and masculinity performances. The stories I relay attempt to be generous and involving. This generosity appreciates the multiplicity of how things are experienced and the affective investment these men have in the field. But at the same time it invites men who surf to be sensitive to how surfing and masculinity could always be felt, represented, or done otherwise. My aim is to go beyond the limited concept of tolerance with its reliance on types and clear-cut identities. What I favour is heightening sensitivity in a way that might enable the boys to be captured by specificity and representation as a process.

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<sup>i</sup> By homosocial I am referring to my research on situations that only involve men. According to gender theorist Eve Sedgwick: "'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual', and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'. In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding', which may, as in our society, be characterised by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality' (1985: 1).

<sup>ii</sup> Giorgio Agamben makes clear that "'whatever' refers to precisely that which is neither particular nor general, neither individual nor generic' (Probyn, 1996: 22). For a definition of "whatever", see *The Coming Community* (1993): Section I 'Whatever' and Section III 'Example'.

<sup>iii</sup> The amateur surfing association called Surfing Australia and surf companies have ongoing learn to surf programs. Examples are Rip Curl's "Girls Go Surfing" and Billabong's "Girls Get Out There Tour".

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<sup>iv</sup> According to Susan Birrell and Cheryl Cole's (1994) research on gender and sport many women sports players live their bodies as skilled and forceful subjects rather than as objects of the male gaze. Birrell and Cole argue that when women develop increased mobility and muscular strength these activities are self-affirming and challenge perceptions of women as weak and passive. Ethnographic studies of women, physicality, and sport by Amanda Roth and Susan Basow (2004), as well as Collette Dowling (2000), challenge expectations of bodies and argue against accepted myths regarding the supposed weakness and limitations of what women's bodies can do. Some authors such as Nancy Theberge (1997) and Susan Cahn (1994) focus on the historical construction of women's sporting bodies. Such studies question the historical association between gender, physicality, and power. Using analyses of contact sport these studies examine material and ideological conditions that structure the experience of physicality. Iris Young (1980) attends to measurements of the motor performance of women's bodies and how Western culture socialises women and girls to adopt a third-person perspective of their bodies. Studies of what women's bodies can do and how they challenge norms or expectations of bodies are reasonably numerous, with seminal versions being Nancy Theberge's (1997) study of ice hockey and Christy Halbert's (1997) look at boxing. For an excellent summation of debates about, and research into, women and sport see *Women, Sport and Culture* (1994) edited by Cheryl Cole and Susan Birrell.

<sup>v</sup> I discuss the image of the Waterman in chapter two, suffice to say at this point it is the figure of person at home in the ocean and respected by all other surfers.



Surf Check (Photo: Sean Davey)

### He`enalu – Bodies that Surf

#### Hawai'ian for surfing – he`enalu

**Hee (he`e)**, n. 1. A flowing, as of liquid. 2. The menses. 3. A flight, as of a routed army. 4. the squid, so-called from his slippery qualities.

**Hee (he`e)**, v. 1. To melt; to run or flow, as a liquid. 2. To slip or glide along. 3. To ride on a surfboard. 4. To flee; through fear.

**Nalu (na`-lu)**, adj. 1. Roaring; surfing; rolling in, as the surf of the sea.

**Nalu (na`-lu)**, n.1. The surf as it rolls in upon the beach; a sea; a wave; a billow. 2. The slimy liquid on the body of a new-born infant.

**Nalu (na`-lu)**, v. 1. To be in doubt or suspense; to suspend one's judgement. 2. To talk or confer together concerning a thing. 4. To think; to search after any truth or fact.

Lorrin Andrew's *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* (1865)  
(in Lueras. 1984: 12).

#### Introduction

I'm sitting on the fence railing at the beach and a group of girls run past with boards underarm. I've noticed an increasing amount of them out in the line-up. Here's what the boys say: that they get in the way and cannot surf like guys can. The girls who can surf well are argued to be never as good as the best guys. The "chicks" hang out at their car after the surf and punch each other, clown about, put on board-shorts, and wrestle. A friend explains how he likes paddling out behind them watching their asses go up and down in the air and their bikini bottoms ride up.

When my mates think about the chick surfers they're thinking about gender. "That's what chicks are like" and "a man doesn't act like that" are not unusual remarks

amongst the surfing community. The chicks are meant to be the opposite of the guys. The lads sometimes use what the women do to demarcate what they don't want to be or to surf like. To surf like a chick isn't cool. These men are positioned within the relational logic of gender but they don't recognise it. They see the women as having a gender in relation to themselves, however, in a strange twist they don't recognise themselves as gendered.

Masculinity researcher Stephen Whitehead (2002) argues that men don't think of themselves as having a gender. When Whitehead asked a group of men who work in academia whether they think of themselves as having a gender the men replied that they do not. They seem to consider themselves as neutral subjects. Following on from Whitehead I asked my mates about "gender" and "masculinity" and I received looks of bewilderment or comments like, "you mean, what do I think fags and chicks are like?" So I changed tack and began to use the term "men" and there was a different response. The boys had a clear sense of what I meant, giving rise to discussions around bravery, respect, how to hit the lip hard enough, how to treat women, how some guy walking past walks like a poof, how real men charge big waves, or how grommets are turning into pussies from too much mothering.

As I prefaced in chapter one, what begins to emerge is that men think of themselves as "men" when this label is understood as a set of embodied practices. Men consider how to dress, how to walk, how to dance, how to surf, how to perform sexually, among many other practices. My claim is that men are formed and informed at the level of their bodies doing things. Scholarship on masculinity often treats bodies as separate to the social, as instruments, as objects, and biologically essential. The

problem with such a treatment of bodies is that it does not allow sufficiently for how biology, feelings, and actions contribute to how we know ourselves as men or masculine. Some theorists of masculinity have balked at involving the biology of bodies fearing charges of essentialism. But such essentialism is only possible if biological bodies are understood as separate to the lived complexity of the social. In this chapter I will negotiate an interesting space between corporeality and sociality rather than favouring either.

There is little consideration among my mates as to how embodied practices come about through the ongoing negotiated intermingling of biology, the social, and psychology. My mates suggest that one should just learn the manners, postures, habits, and feelings. If you are one of the boys you should be savvy enough to pick up on these nuances because, after all, you are a man. Practices of men are considered to be second nature and how they come about is rarely, if ever, thought about.

My surfing mates tend to make an essential link between sex and gender in a way that assumes sex is given and this is directly related to a gender order. These men are using a sex-gender ideology to make sense of their bodies and practices. That is, we are assigned a gender according to having a certain biological body – our sex. Teresa de Lauretis conducts a study of how gender and sex are ideological constructions in her seminal text *Technologies of Gender* (1987). According to de Lauretis ‘gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings’ but is a set of effects defined and reproduced by ‘technologies of sex’ such as television, schools, the state, or workplaces (4). Such institutions socialise us into accepting certain representations produced by the sex-gender ideology because we act out them out.

Interpellation is a process where representations “hail us” and we respond by positioning ourselves according to them – our subjectivity is established as a gender and sex. De Lauretis gives a good example of this when we are faced with selecting a male or female box on application forms. When we tick either box we are taking on the representations those boxes carry, identifying ourselves as a type of sex and gender. So when I ask my friends about being men they assume that there are men and women; they have essential practices, ways of thinking, and bodies. Men know they are men by being part of concrete performances that involve the intermingling of ideologies, biology, psychology, and discourses through a process of interpellation.

I use the concept of “performance” a lot in this thesis, and this suggests a connection with ideas developed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990). According to Butler’s argument the body is tied to gender in all situations and cannot be theorised outside of culture. Gender is a mechanism through which sexed bodies are produced. Butler explains how sex is a discursive effect and not essential, determined by discourses on gender and sexuality – namely hetero-normativity. Interestingly, the popular discursive process comes to present sex as the cause and not the effect of gender. Since sex is not the cause of gender, but actually a discursive effect, there’s no gender proper to one sex.

According to Butler all gender is performative; what you do rather than who you are. There is no pre-discursive subject who pre-exists activity but a performative subject who is a part of gestures and acts determined by gendered discourses that circulate via legal, medical, pedagogical, psychiatric, social, and media bodies. Butler contends that ‘gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a

highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, a natural sort of being' (33). Acts and gestures 'are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive mean' (136). According to Butler we perform gender as gaits and habits. Repetition and recitation establish some of these as "proper", but they are not fixed.

Performativity is not about the actual gestures or acts but about the discursive process that presents them as male or female, masculine and feminine.

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler stresses that performativity is not performance because gender is not some cohesive pattern that a body can put on and take off at will like some theatre. Bodies are always-already a part of the discourses and ideologies that inform the representations they are within. Butler understands the subject to be an effect of performing, rather than an "I" who acts. The performativity of masculinity through the expressions of recognised rules and conventions is crucial. If we made no reference to discursively established groups of statements or meanings our practices would be unintelligible. While gender is said to be performative, Butler also wants to stress that certain cultural configurations of gender always become more powerful than others. Through reiteration, gendered practices repeat ritualised sets of norms to the point that they are accepted as natural and their discursive foundations forgotten. It is important to note that performativity allows for how gender is continually remade as discourses on gender, sex, and sexuality change. This does not mean gender is a matter of choice because it is always more than the performer. The importance of the concept of performativity for my work is the way in which it reveals how gender is a process that interacts with bodies and doesn't stem from fixed



sexed bodies. However, Butler's theory can suggest that bodies are written upon by discourses and ground down by ideologies, while their biology basically remains the same. Using the anthropologist Marcel Mauss' (1979) concept of "The Total Man" I'll promote an argument that favours the term "performances". The sociologist Alexander Goffman (1998) explains that for Mauss the total man is a 'triple alliance of biology, psychology and sociology' (66). I understand performances in the same integrated manner. Like Butler I do not mean that performances are like the theatre, we are always-already a part of a complex and active milieu.

The body is not simply inscribed by historical, social and cultural exigencies. Nature isn't subordinate to the social or social to nature, as there is no clear separation between them. Biology and the social are like a mobius strip, entwined and emerging from performances that involve performativity, but are not determined by it. These performances involve gaits, gestures, clothing, representations, habits, and other variable details. What we have are complex arrangements. Gender emerges from a social and organic milieu of bodies performing ideologies, feelings, and discourses. Following on from a study of how bodies perceive, think and sense, by the philosopher Brian Massumi (2002), I use emergence in a way that implies dynamism and not a binary of nature and culture. By wedding cultural and scientific theory Massumi works through how bodies register cultural formations such as sport, television, film, and so on. Massumi reaches an understanding of emergence that treats it as a flow where nature and culture blur and actualise. Emerging suggests a distinction pertaining 'to continuities under qualitative transformations' (8). The movement of life means performances always mutate, are re-negotiated, and emerge differently; and thus, so do bodies. Think about how seeing a body fall from a

surfboard can escape being called masculine and feminine because it's different each time as limbs, white-water and fibreglass blur into a "falling body". Sometimes there is no way to read the gestures and action as gendered. Performativity suggests a predetermining of what may happen. While it does play a role in performances, I want to account for the dynamism of what happens during any performance and how bodies contribute in sometimes surprising ways. I approach gendered performances in a rhizomatic way whereby they are not linear, such as social to biological.

The botanic term "rhizome" – borrowed from theoretical work by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari (1988) – refers to the mobility of connections and disconnections. Unlike the seed of a tree, a rhizome is a network of multiple branching roots and shoots with no central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth:

The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple ... It is not multiple derived from the One, or to which the One is added ( $n + 1$ ). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather, directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle ... from which it grows and overflows ... The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots ... The rhizome is acentred, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system (21).

According to Probyn (2004), the rhizome ought 'not to be thought of as metaphor. It is, rather, a figuration, a way of figuring and tracing movement and connection' (216). Rhizomatic figuring provides an exciting way to map bodies as they connect and disconnect. When my mates and I move within surfing spaces we become enmeshed in arrangements that branch off, multiply, proliferate, and head elsewhere. Waves mutate, moving the provisional alignment that existed prior to their arrival on. There

is not movement from one fixed rhizome to another but a directional multiplicity of performances passing, adding to and transforming, depending on waves being caught or missed. And this means that sometimes gender has to play catch up to qualify and contain what happens. This does not mean gender is not involved in some performances, but it does mean it is not the foundation of performances that performativity could suggest.

As I have said, questioning the sex-gender ideology and its role in everyday performances is not common amongst the boys. The current gender order favours my mates and I – white, heterosexual, able-bodied, male surfers. There's been little need for us to consider the interaction of ideologies, discourses, and bodies. Analysing what informs how we do things and produce meaning has been pushed to the side in favour of assumptions about who and what we are. My mates understand bodies as instrumental and as essential. But these performing bodies make discourses and ideologies of gender visible. Surfers use performing bodies to determine whether they belong as men even if they do not pause to reflect on this fact.

Male surfers are very much in their bodies. Shirts are off in summer, wetsuits changed into and out of in plain view, tanned bodies contort and flex along waves, big shoulders stroke, powerful chests heave, weather-beaten faces survey line-ups, and dicks are hung out to upset people who invade our space.<sup>i</sup> This body is very visible and I am aware of being a male surfing body. My body is crucial to me as a male surfer. It is how I am a surfer: it identifies me, allows me to perform, it feels masculinity; it makes visible what sort of man I am, that I'm a male surfer. The visibility of my body draws from me an awareness of gender even if this is not

deconstructed. I register myself as a man through a performing body.

Rather than favour analysing gender through the social and therefore abstraction, or in the light of the sex-gender ideology, I will be recognising the importance of performing bodies in constructing gender. I want to avoid the dominant focus on gender as a function of the mind. This chapter approaches men, gender, and surfing through the body, which is our main cognitive vessel for “thinking” gender. I want to bring bodies back into discussion of men and masculinity in a way that unsettles the sex-gender ideology. There is a difference to analysing masculinity in this way because while men are aware of their bodies they do not often speak about them in relation to gender. Normally it is women’s bodies that are the object of such discourse. By increasing the visibility of the processes involved I can break down assumptions my mates and I have. In turn, re-conceptualising how we understand gendered bodies might disturb dominant, and sometimes problematic, modes of how my mates and I perform as men who surf.

There are many, often competing, theories of gender, masculinity, and men. Yet they all draw upon sex-gender assumptions. Two of the most popular theories are those of the mythopoetic movement and that of masculinity scholar Robert Connell. For the mytho-poetic movement masculinity is an archetype that is historically embedded within essential male bodies. Sex, gender, and masculinity are collapsed into each other, and there is a deep masculinity that each man should develop. Robert Connell’s model establishes gender in terms of two different groups: men and women, masculinity and femininity. Gender is not in our genes for this model but comes into being with discourses. Connell proposes that there are patterns of “masculinities” and

these are 'defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions' (2000: 12). According to Connell, gender is social and orders our biologically sexed bodies to do things in particular ways. I begin by critiquing the above two theories and then I discuss what we can do with them.

Drawing on the work of the psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins I look at how affects are how bodies feel and are what make performances matter for men. The work of Tomkins (1962; 1963; 1991; 1992; 1995) identifies nine primary affects: interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, distress-anguish, fear-terror, shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, anger-rage, and dissmell. His account of the nine affects postulates that the body is knowledge of the world understood as an affective modality. When researching masculinity it is important to appreciate bodily cognition of performances. How I know I am a man and perform masculinity proceeds through an affective body – a body that affects and is affected. There's a sensorial economy that is important to performing masculinity in the surfing field.

These affects influence how we learn to do masculinity. The importance of re-conceptualising men in terms of affectivity lies in the way this draws attention to the richness of bodies feeling and performing. When performing, bodies shiver, blush, sweat, cower, heat up, cool down, and make mistakes. That is, bodies are triggers for performing in certain ways, and are a way of thinking. What we have are affective bodies, rather than bodies as given or instrumental.

Rather than a system where biology is essential and where patterns of masculinities are socially produced, an alternative understanding of bodies and feelings is then

suggested, using ethology rather than the sex-gender ideology as a conceptual guide. The feminist philosopher Moira Gatens (1996) promotes ethology as a way of re-reading how bodies perform with their environment. I will return to Gatens in chapter four. At this point I want to emphasise that she recognises promising possibilities in how ethology highlights 'bodies not in terms of a sex/gender dualism – or what bodies are – but in terms of ethology – or what they can do' (1). This entails a shift to a more embodied and felt experience of activity, belonging, and knowledge. Using ethology will help me to suggest a more creative experience of how I know I am a man. Understood in the light of ethology, the body is a vehicle for connection where we do not yet know what it can do (9)

### **Mytho-poetics**

Steve Biddulph's *Raising Boys* (2002) and *Manhood: An action plan for changing men's lives* (1995/2002) have been important to the mytho-poetic men's movement in Australia. The mytho-poetic men's movement is a loose categorisation of men who adhere to the idea that males have a fixed natural masculinity that has evolved from a warrior/hunter tradition. Biddulph draws on the work of Robert Bly, author of a seminal mytho-poetic text *Iron John* (1990). Bly suggests that 'The structure at the bottom of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago' (230). Masculinity is seen as a psychological archetype and it is argued that we require specific rituals for it to emerge correctly. Men are: strong, providers, protectors, guides, givers, confidants, and not-women. Conversely, women are intimate, expressive, softer, look after our children, have a sense of wholeness, understand their bodies, are more skilled in verbal debate, and love us. Biddulph argues that these archetypes are complimentary but fundamentally different. According to Biddulph the

male archetype is being corrupted by such social phenomena as capitalism, consumerism, feminism and the mass media. He offers step-by-step instructions to offset these “toxins” and allow this deep masculinity to be realised.

There is something comforting for a man to be given a simple how-to guide. If masculinity is inside me then it is only a matter of bringing it out. My body relaxes as Biddulph explains that there is a blueprint for how to be like a “Sioux hunter”, “Masai warrior”, and “Aboriginal elder”, who live ‘glorious and multi-dimensional lives – creative, sensual, spirited and integrated around the care and protection of their people and of the natural world’ (2002: 15).<sup>ii</sup> With the right rituals I should be able to:

Work less, play more. Earn less, spend less. Parent more, stay married longer. Live longer. Be safer to be around ... Watch less sport and play more sport ... Be better in bed, more alive in their bodies, but also more confident ... Wear handmade and decorative but distinctively masculine clothes ... Drive old but classy cars ... Role-models will be people in their fifties ... Locally organised and well trained groups of men will confront and work with child-abusers, rapists and wife-beaters, in caring but extremely tough monitoring networks ... In a sense, you won’t have to choose whether to ‘join’ the Men’s Movement ... It will be as natural as breathing (214-215).

There are numerous problems with the mytho-poetic approach to masculinity. One glaring issue is the way in which we cannot do anything with such a conception because it forecloses on the complexity of life. Furthermore, this theory ignores how bodies develop and avoids discussing constructions of sport, ethnicity, sexualities, class, race, power, social structures, institutions, discourses, ideologies, and so on, all of which are important to our experience of activity as men. Biddulph’s understanding of men is static, while life is moving, constructed, discordant, and

relational. To suggest that there is “a” way to be a man that is stable would mean a homogenous existence that representations simply reflect. However, any considered reflection on men demonstrates that masculinity isn’t a homogenous, isolated, and simple state of being. Biddulph’s simplification is a way to not consider gender and bodies at all. Rather, he provides overarching definitions, a pursuit of sameness, and an entrenching of some common-sense understanding that collapses gender into sex. Biddulph ignores the ways that gender has come to be seen as a defining and fixed aspect of a particular body’s identity. That is, he takes as a given that a penis means masculinity, re-entrenching a hermeneutics of gender that limits it to one’s sex. Biddulph ignores how power-knowledge relations construct bodies and gender.

The mytho-poetic theory of masculinity Biddulph uses encourages those who have always had access to the privileges of normative power-knowledge relationships to ensure their continuity by encouraging them to take these as a “timeless truth”. While some of his common-sense claims have a basis in everyday realities, the problem is that the lists Biddulph provides shuts down what men do and defines what performances constitute a real man. His model cannot allow for change and performances that may emerge from bodies encountering new cultural conditions, biological demands, and environments. Biddulph unwittingly engages in a policing of normative discourses and ideologies that regulate hegemonic practices and representations. This normative policing, re-entrenching, and reproduction of particular ideologies and discourses is at the expense of others that inform different performances. Biddulph’s approach has the effect of promoting alternative performances of gender as “wrong” and thus he sets out to fix them, rather than expanding and appreciating emergent possibilities for how masculinity can be done.



## Robert Connell

An alternative to Biddulph and his mytho-poetic explanation of gender is Robert Connell's model. Connell provides a sophisticated model that aims to accommodate power relations, discourses, history, institutions, ethnicity, class, globalisation, sexuality, bodies, and other factors. The model arrives at a more diversified understanding of men than Biddulph produces. Connell's approach recognises both hegemony and marginalisation, can accommodate psychoanalytic theories, and is influenced by a collection of empirical research.

Connell's works *Gender and Power* (1987), *Masculinities* (1995), *The Men and the Boys* (2000), and *Gender* (2003) are influential. One of the key concepts to come out of Connell's work is his argument for patterns of masculinities. This concept was developed to account for the shifting relations of hegemony and marginalisation between groups of men (2003). Connell explains that:

masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and social change (1995: 44).

According to Connell institutions, labour structures, economics, and emotional relations lead to the development of a hegemonic masculinity that has 'other masculinities arrayed around it' (2). This hegemonic masculinity can differ depending on cultural and historical conditions. To determine what forms of masculinity are available and how they change, Connell uses interview and life history methods of research. Researchers document men's representations of types of masculinities in institutions, on sporting fields, in the home, and at work. This provides an overview of

how patterns endure and change. It is important to note that these masculinities are made up of contradictions and tensions both 'within and without' (13). Institutions need not have one pattern of masculinity, there may be many patterns operating at once.

Connell understands gender as an over-arching 'structuring mechanism' (2003: 81). The patterns and representations this structure provides govern how bodies practice masculinity and femininity in three ways. First, through a power relation where men are dominant and women subordinated. Second, through gendered relations of production, including the gendering of labour roles, gendered character of capital, and unequal gendered access to product. These gendered relations of production confine people to certain jobs and unequal incomes. The third influence of the governing structure can be seen in the structuring of sexual desire, what Connell refers to as "cathexis". This refers to how sexuality and associated desires arrange how people interact. How one belongs as masculine or feminine is within the confines of this gender structure, which is itself not fixed: 'The strategic question is not "can gender change?" but "in what direction is gender changing?"' (51).

Bodies are drawn into arenas set up by the current gender order. Men have a male body and these bodies are what we enter into gendered social arrangements with.

Connell points out that:

We should not be afraid of biology, nor so refined or tricky in our theorising of gender that we have no place for sweaty bodies ... masculinities are embodied without ceasing to be social ... we experience masculinities (in part) as certain muscular tensions, postures, physical skills, ways of moving and so on (1995: 2).

According to Connell bodies are disciplined through such practices as sports training, the military, and office arrangements. These are gender regimes that establish arrangements that bodies reckon with (2003).

Connell argues that the body and the social cannot be collapsed into one another. The body and social constitute a process of body-reflexivity. Body-reflexivity is a loop where social structures that address bodies provide arrangements by which they are conditioned and influenced. Institutions and markets do not just impose but can be called into being by the needs of bodies. An example might be particular medical facilities (49). What Connell suggests is a 'social-biological-social' circuit (39-47). The gender order can change influenced by the materiality of bodies that might demand new conditions, economics, new labour conditions, new emotional relations, and institutions. For Connell, our subjectivity is an ongoing project and men do not remain as a masculinity but move into and out of masculinities (2000: 20).

Having acknowledged its significance, Connell's model seems limiting because it suggests a gender super-structure hovering over a male body. Any change seems to require large-scale social re-organisation. In other words, Connell's approach keeps gender abstracted from the confused, moving, and felt experience of bodies doing things here and now. The conceptions of gender remains "out there" when it is, in fact, part of every man's everyday existence. Connell's approach systemises masculine experience into patterns so that he can get our understanding of boys, men, and gender 'straight' (5).

Connell takes an over-view of the social, trying to establish a model instead of working through his participation with men registering the moving and felt intricacies that occur. Men become phantoms where their investments, faces, bodies, movement, and manners disappear, are missed, or are taken out of context. Reading Connell is frustrating because he does not sufficiently describe the feelings and intricate actions men engage with when performing masculinity. It is difficult to hear the living of masculinity in his work.

Connell's work provides generalised and abstracted explanations. Even in Connell's research on education and sport he seeks to identify patterns, how social structures are working, and what a mode of masculinity *is* rather than trying to describe how gender is done, how self-representations come about, and what performing masculinity feels like. He is more interested in an abstracted social structure rather than the lived experiences of masculinity.

Connell treats the body as a biological instrument of the social. But the body is not instrumental but lived. A lived body recognises how occasions of experience are not rooted in some unified ego where I can claim a body as my own and move into and out of masculinities. The lived body never proceeds as some identical state as it is always emerging and intermingling with new elements. We need only think of how bodies are made up of billions of molecules and we lose and gain them continuously. In Connell's model it is as if the waves are the social and my body surfs on them. This could provide a mechanical reading of surfing, but a good surfer feels waves, is not separate from them, and rides with them. They are part of our bodies and our bodies are part of them producing surfing bodies, a surfing performance. As Deleuze

(1992) writes, a body can be 'an animal, a body of sounds ... a social body, or a collectivity' (626). The lived body is an affective assemblage. Assemblages are the way that '(fragments) of bodies come together with or align themselves to other things' (Grosz, 1994: 120). When deep in a tube – the hollow part of the wave – with the spray in my eyes I do not just undertake muscular movements and postures to make the wave; rather, I must feel my way through the tube. I am not separate from the wave but part of its forces and my body is finely attuned to those forces. I surf with my body as an affective entity, not as an instrumental object. The surfing body is an exchange of forces. I feel those forces and interact with them, in a form of "thinking" being felt, but not necessarily cognitive.

Connell's reflexive loop of social-body-social is too reductive an approach to understanding how we know ourselves as men, perform as men, and how we belong as men. Rather than taking in discursive and institutional rules of gender through Cartesian mind/body reasoning I argue for an embodied cognition and performance of gender. As Butler (1990) suggests:

The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism. As a result, any uncritical reproduction of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained and rationalized (33).

Connell's use of mind/body reasoning posits gender coming to us through a mind that is attached to a body that carries out actions. The mind is assumed to be where the subject learns about life while the body is just used. However, as Grosz reminds us,

bodies and minds are not two separate pieces that form a subject but the subject is an activity somewhere between the mind and body (1994: xii).

In other words men are grounded, performing, and feeling. There is no simple progressive movement from social to body to social. The subject and body emerge through complex performances. The sociological, psychological, and biological transform each other. This process is not linear but rhizomatic. Bodies do not enact performances but *are* such activities and milieus. While Connell accommodates practices of men he, just like Biddulph, limits them by tying them to a particular body and simplified patterns. Yet the movement and complicated living of everyday experience means performances and their bodies always emerge differently. And these performances, as Butler explains, are compulsory because we are always-already a part of them. This means that I cannot move into and out of masculinities like Connell suggests and I cannot 'hold on to a certain subject position, adopt or reject the possibility of movement' (2000: 20). I am never outside gender as it intermingles with my body as it emerges during any performance; it comes to constitute my body as male and colours my habits. Hence, I am always performing and always already moving – we are part of movement instead of being the origin of an effort (Deleuze, 1990).

### **Masculinity through Bodies**

Feminist sociology has had similar problems about re-cuperating bodies. Anne Witz in her article *Whose Body Matters? Feminist Sociology and the Corporeal Turn in Sociology and Feminism* (2000) offers some cautions. Witz claims we must be wary of establishing a sociology of the body rather than embodying sociology. There has

been a problematic turn in sociology to bring back in corporeality in terms of how bodies are disciplined, exploited, and controlled – a sociology of the body. A sociology of the body treats the body as a screen for the social. Masculinity is seen as mapped on to bodies where those biological bodies are containers for the social. Gender and masculinity are not mapped on to bodies but come to constitute how we represent bodies to ourselves. As Witz argues, feminist sociology suggests we ‘think about the body through gender ... gender precedes sex’ (7).

When considering how we study the body sociologist Michele Barrett (2000) urges us to involve them so that our insights are, ‘imaginative, sensual even, in that they speak to experience, which includes the senses rather than simply cognition’ (19). My study of gender does not treat bodies as given but as affective, moving, involved, doing, and living. I question male bodies, deal with their contributions, their viscosity, their leakiness, their movement, their affects, their fluids, their relations, their capabilities, how they come about, and their relations to other bodies. Bodies have their own logics and as difficult as it may be we need to reckon with these. Studies of masculinity should not just accommodate bodies in a way that pushes them aside again in a move that would avoid dealing with the non-social and non-cognitive.

### **The Total Man**

A sociology that did recognise the body in a way that did not separate biology from the social is evident in the work of Marcel Mauss. An anthropologist/sociologist during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Mauss was the nephew of the famous sociologist Emile Durkheim and the chair of sociology in the College de France in 1930. Durkheim took the body as a physical concern, a vehicle that

subjects occupied. Durkheim suggested understanding the body with the concept of 'homo-duplex', where a human being is part of two forms of existence: the biological and the sociological.

Recounting how he learnt to swim Mauss (1979) notes how he could not do away with his habit of swallowing water even though he trained to do otherwise. His technique was a product of a time when 'swimmers thought of themselves as a kind of steamboat' (99). What this suggested to him was that the body is not just trained but has a complex tripartite relationship with sociological and psychological elements whereby these cannot be separated. As living beings we know that mistakes, stupidity, and the process of trial and error are crucial to experience. There is no stably ordered functioning of life but moving negotiations that are never straight.

This attitude towards the body and sociality pointed toward a concept of the "Total Man". In *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute Study of Mauss* (1998) editor Wendy James introduces the total man as a concept Mauss used to accommodate 'the local connectedness of form and content ... the tangible aspects of human life ... in relation to the body and its material experience, the techniques of work, and the rhythmic enactment of ritual and symbolic performance' (15). It is important to note that "total" here isn't an all-inclusive, self-referential whole. On the contrary, it's fragmentary. Mauss suggests that the total refers to the integration of a normally partitioned reality: '[We] converge with physiology, the phenomena of bodily life, for it seems that between the social and the bodily the layer of individual consciousness is very thin' (1979: 10). For Mauss, the body is crucial to human life because it highlights what happens on the ground and how the social is evident through the body performing and



feeling. He offers a way of considering the body with the social without over-valourising the corporeal or ignoring how bodies are part of the processes of sociality.

This concept of the total man does not specify a particular way to model arrangements but is a tool to trace connections between what happens as we live in society. It is a view of what happens from below rather than from above, emphasising details and examples rather than abstracted patterns. Bruno Karsenti (1998) explores how Mauss shifted his understanding of the social from homo-duplex to a more integrated account. Karsenti writes:

the social is theorised, not as some original and substantial foundation keeping itself in the background in relation to the individual, but simply as a constellation of events whose regulated connections we must strive to reveal at the level of what is really given (78).

What this proposes is not a causal relationship that keeps the social outside of the corporeal but dynamic performances of social phenomena that fuse the sociological – psychological – physiological nexus whereby these are the fabric of everyday life.

The total man is deciphered in action and the meanings of this action are decipherable only in a lived context. Mauss' sociology thus investigates the social in action. To flesh out such concerns it was important for Mauss to analyse techniques of practice. Mauss' idea of techniques refers to how human beings learn to utilise and value certain material practices and skills. These techniques involve the movement of meaning and power and are our tactics for living. Claiming to follow in Mauss' footsteps

anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1987) explains how he became aware when studying culture that ‘nothing is gratuitous, or superfluous ... gestures convey memory, traditions, feelings, beliefs’. Mauss (1935) stresses that we must remember that ‘forms, postures, gestures, movements are, fundamentally, acts that are social ... we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of action’ (123). By these techniques one can understand:

the ways in which human beings ... know how to use their bodies ... These ‘habits’ do not simply vary from one individual to another ... they vary especially between societies, educations, properties ... and fashions ... We have a set of permissible or impermissible, natural or unnatural attitudes (214-215).

The performing body, then, is how we feel we are men, how we know we are men, how we validate our belonging. These performances can be walking, eating, sleeping – our most “natural” daily actions. The social is ‘not merely internalised, but truly internal, natural in the strongest sense of the word, the production of the social must henceforward be envisaged within the structure of the individual subject, conceived as a socialised living being’ (Karsenti, 1998: 77). This economy of actions is an ongoing construction of sociality charged by physicality as moments happen and re-happen differently.

Conceived of in the light of the total man, how I know I am a man proceeds through an affective body – a body that affects and is affected. Affects are a bodily level of connection and locomotion, the resonation of bodies performing and feeling (Massumi, 2002). So far I’ve argued for a version of masculinity that is total and performing. Now I would like to focus on how affects motivate what happens, how

performances of masculinity are sensorial. So I'll establish what I mean by affect, how affect works, and by doing so I will establish its importance to performances of masculinity.

What my digression on affect will show is that doing masculinity is a "learning-in-interaction" that leads to bodies being motivated to develop a repertoire of adaptable habits and techniques over time. This interaction and learning during performances places the body and its interactivity with other affective bodies as a crucial juncture of doing masculinity. This focus on learning and doing gender through embodied and affective interactivity is a shift from directive and instructional tropes relied upon by other masculinity theorists. During any performance there is a complex and ongoing assembling of bodies. Boys learn as they feel their way through each affective interaction and perform accordingly. The affective process of knowing and doing gender that I promote here allows for improvisation, potentials, and the new; not just repetition and prediction. Each affective interaction is always felt differently. Using affect to understand how we do and learn masculinity focuses us in on how we are moving and in-relation, affecting and affected by others. There is, in this sense, always the potential for people to be motivated to do or learn masculinity differently.

What led me to consider affects and feelings was the way my mates speak about surf sessions. They talk about how the performances feel good, feel shameful, feel proud, feel terrifying, feel disgusting, and so on. Lawrence Grossberg suggests the same when discussing the economy of rock music. In his work *Dancing in Spite of Myself* (1997) Grossberg writes that there is always more than musical exchange during a concert, there are also bodily, linguistic, feeling, and visual movements that help to

establish a sonorial economy, an economy based on affects rather than simply representations (16). When at concerts we feel performances and these feelings are bodies affecting and being affected (43). What I have come to realise is that affects such as joy, fear, shame, excitement, disgust, and so on establish our relations to objects, initiate interest in certain movements, and amplify our experiences (Tomkins, 1995). So what are these affects that play such a crucial role in motivating, initiating, bringing together, and producing performances of masculinity?

### **Silvan S. Tomkins and Affect**

To establish a working understanding of affect I will focus here on the work of Silvan S. Tomkins. Tomkins' systematic 4-volume study *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962-1992) discusses what affects are, how they operate, their influence, and how we engage with them on a day-to-day basis. The benefit of this will be to begin recognising what it means when we say we "feel like a bloke".

When I first began reading Tomkins I felt like I was going surfing with him. It was like hanging out with one of the wise old crew down at the point. Through the way he wrote, the nature of his enquiries, and the complexity of his ideas I felt like I was engaging with an ocean. Imagine my delight when I discovered that he was a avid body-surfer. Many features of Tomkins' work started to make sense. Tomkins utilises such terms as moods, swings, ebbs, tides, and flows. I began to imagine him surfing near his home in New Jersey with many of these ideas running through his head and, after a particular wave had triggered an affective resonance, running back in to scrawl one of the pages of seven or eight lines that he became renowned for, saltwater dripping from his nose. But my focus on Tomkins, besides his being a surfer, is the

way he emphasises bodies when discussing affect. Tomkins' approach parallels my arguments about how men know that they are men and do masculinity. Like Mauss' concept of the "total man", Tomkins supposes 'the person to be a bio-psycho-social entity at the intersection of both more complex higher social systems and lower biological systems' (1995: 33); intersections amplified by the affect mechanism.

Tomkins accounts for nine affects:

1. Interest – excitement.
2. Enjoyment – joy.
3. Surprise – startle.
4. Distress – anguish.
5. Fear – terror.
6. Shame – humiliation.
7. Contempt – disgust.
8. Anger – rage.
9. Dissmell.

[The affects are paired because they vary in intensity along a continuum].

Affects are bodily based, not cognitively. The body is knowledge of the world understood as affective modality. In her study on the rising importance of accounting for affects when doing social research Kathleen Woodward (1996) recognises that they are the background of feeling and the 'feeling of life itself, the sense of being' (150).

Likewise, when explaining the feelings people reckon with in relation to Australian political issues Anna Gibbs (2002) argues that acknowledging how affects work reveals that this background is itself contagious because affects leap from body to body:

Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear – in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable type of passion (1).

The fluidity of affects, and the performances it helps bodies to realise, creates problems for perceptions of masculinity and male bodies that rely upon a structural definition. Doing masculinity is movement as the capacity to move and rest with forces – the ability to emerge as affective performances and intensive experience (Massumi, 2002: 15). The ongoing process of belonging as a man and performing masculinity is linked to affects.

Tomkins shifted away from abstract theorising and based his study of affects on observations of everyday practices. This was a shift away from cognitivist and representational theories of affects. Such theories privileged abstract recognition, consciousness of learning, and emotions over how these happen, or are felt at the bodily level. The body in such accounts was considered more of a blank slate or empty container to be filled after interpretation by the mind. However, Tomkins' account of affect understands that the felt centre of emotion comes from information sent by the body.

What is important about this is the way it discredits the claim that men are unemotional. Everyone feels affects and these translate into emotions, but what has been lacking is a dialogue about men, affects, and emotions. Men live out and reproduce self-representations that deny this feeling process, and this means there is a lack of resources for discussing how we feel. Hence, my mates often find it difficult to express how they are feeling, return to the claim that men “aren’t emotional anyway”, and change the subject. Or alternately, blokes learn to astutely read their mates’ bodies to determine when they are feeling uncomfortable, happy, ashamed, and so on, because they know he lacks, or is unfamiliar with, representations to communicate this. My discussion of men and affects breaks the reproduction of this dominant mode of representation whereby men are said to be unemotional. As such we can begin to develop ways of speaking about men and feelings by offering new representations that appreciate the relationship between men, affects, and emotions.

When dealing with affect it is easy to confuse them with emotions. However, Tomkins makes a clear demarcation between emotion and affects. For Tomkins we feel our body and then we experience emotion. Affects are not emotion but we must remember that they are related. Both emotion and affects rely on one another to organise and to register our experience with the world. A simple separation might ally affect with the purely physiological and emotion with cognition, but such a separation would re-entrench a mind/body dualism that my argument for the total man denies. According to Tomkins, emotions and affects work with each other and are ‘in no way polarised’ (1963: 72). Emotion is when an affect is recognised as being intensely felt and registered internally, akin to organising the affect. Emotion may be considered a qualification of affect or the way we pin down how we are feeling such as when we

might make 'happy "happy" or sad "sad"' (Massumi, 2001: 27). Affects are free flowing and do not know the boundaries of organisation. I regularly try to control my emotions and, in fact it is considered hegemonically correct to do so for the boys. There is a subjective content to emotions, however, and affects stream across subjectivity. By this I mean that there is immediacy to affects whereby they are felt prior to me thinking of myself as a subject, a gender, a sex, or a surfer. Emotions are what happens when we attempt to own what performances feel like.

Affect is an autonomic bodily interaction that means our bodies feel performances. We then qualify these as masculine or male according to available discourses and ideologies. Ideologies and discourses rush in to sort out and organise the uncertainty and complexity of embodied experience. But there is an immediacy to affect that the body feels, and the importance of the physiological aspect of affect cannot be ignored. Tomkins' point is that bodies enable us to know affect, to experience, and to do. This is one of the key advantages of Tomkins' work with affect, in that he draws the body back into consideration. Tomkins explains that the body betrays affects and communicates them readily. The skin is 'exquisitely sensitive and motivating' (1995: 42): goosebumps of excitement, coldness of skin through fear, the flushing of the face. The skin is not seen as "expression" of inner workings but is where the intensity of affect marks the emergence of a performance of bodies (Massumi, 2002).

For Tomkins 'the prime organ of affect' is the face (1963: 224). It is in the muscular facial expressions that we notice or see affects most clearly at work. While we may experience quickened heartbeats and shallow breathing when affected, the face displays most readily the immediacy of performance.



Tomkins provides a list of relations between certain affects and certain facial actions:

Positive

1. Interest – excitement: eyebrows down, track, look, listen.
2. Enjoyment – joy: smile, lips widened up and out.

Resetting

3. Surprise – startle: eyebrows up, eye blink.

Negative

4. Distress – anguish: cry, arched eyebrow, mouth down, tears, rhythmic sobbing.
5. Fear – terror: eyes frozen open, pale, cold, sweaty, facial trembling, with hair erect.
6. Shame – humiliation: eyes down, head down.
7. Contempt – disgust: sneer, upper lip up.
8. Anger – rage: frown, clenched jaw, red face.

(1995: 74).

However, ‘the face is not simply a set of muscles. It is also the site of breathing and vocalization of affect’ (42). As such when considering the face of affect there is a need to think about how there are ‘cries of joy, cries of distress, cries of anger, cries of excitement, cries of fear and so on’ (42). The facial expressions associated with affect are the result of embodied interaction – catching waves, missing work, changing into wetsuits, driving a van, and crafting a surfboard.

I will be discussing affects at work with surfing and men in chapters four and five, but at present I want to stress that affective bodies highlight a complication of men as “men-in-relation”. One need only glance around a line-up to see a vast array of facial expressions when a sneaker set appears on the horizon. A sneaker set is a group of waves considerably larger than the previous groups. Lips widen up and out, eyes blink, eyebrows arch, and faces tremble. These features are infective and the lips that

widen up and out may quickly become a sneer of disgust upon seeing the fear in another surfer's face.

To include affect in studies of masculinity means appreciating our connection with numerous bodies during any given performance of masculinity – masculinity is not one body but an affective performance involving the relation of many. This has implications for the common-sense belief that we can control or own how we feel, and the idea that controlling how we feel is presumed to be critical to being and doing masculinity. To be masculine has often meant to conquer fear or emotion. However, Tomkins writes that control of affects is always illusory as we cannot 'intend to feel love or fear or anger ... or turn them off at will' (62). According to Tomkins, affect is not an experience based in command and control. Rather, the registration of 'affect is autonomic', affects are not owned and cannot be controlled (Massumi, 2002). Since affects cannot be owned I suggest that we should understand masculinity as not "proper to" or owned by a particular body, structure, or ideology because it's an affective performance. The actualisation of masculine performances that takes place is direct in the most radical sense of the word, often meaning unexpected experiences.

Take, for example, my early competitive experience as a surfer. Having grown up in a particular area I was expected to join the local board-rider club – the "Main Beach Pirates". The Pirates were a loosely organised group of surfers who held irregular competitions at a popular surf-break. For the first few years I was coached to stay calm and surf to a formula during heats. The formula was three concentrated turns to the beach without falling. These heats involved four surfers attempting to catch the

best waves and perform the most manoeuvres during a twenty minute period. The frantic hassling and desire to do well in front of the older crew made the task of staying cool, calm, and collected difficult, but the formula helped.

During one year the stakes became higher as a sponsor had offered a trip to Hawaii for the best junior surfer. One of the older guys advised me, “don’t get too excited and remember the formula”. I paddled out attempting to control my actions and nerves. However, the pounding surf, the parallel nervousness of the other grommets, and the gaze of the older crew swelled into shaking muscles, heat in my temples, and an agitated gaze. The four of us surfed poorly. No-one managed to ride a wave successfully as excitement about Hawaii overwhelmed us to the point where we were jumping on each other and laughing – these aren’t considered actions conducive to a successful competitive career. At first we all tried to perform according to our formulas and expected roles, but we couldn’t control the intense excitement of one of us getting to travel to the “surfing mecca”. We fell off our surfboards repeatedly. The older guys packed up in disgust, saying that we, “behaved like hysterical schoolgirls”.

The directness of affects maintains openness, because we could feel any affect at any time. Tomkins argues that the directness of affects does not allow control and command, so we may ‘learn not to show our anger or grief or fear in external behaviour, but we find it difficult not to feel angry if someone affronts us; we find it difficult not to feel afraid when we are in danger’ (1995: 62). Our skin still burns, shivers, and tingles after surf sessions. Such a reading of affect opens up how we know ourselves and feel as men, and moves beyond masculinity and male bodies as in control, as dominant, and as an all-consuming configuring of the world.

Affects feel so intimate yet they are no more personal than they're public (Probyn, 2002). Performances and feelings of masculinity are always more than me. For instance, a good four-foot swell along the coast and offshore winds would leave large groups of grommets with sore muscles and smiles spread across sunburnt faces. In this situation the affect of joy is not personal, however, this is not to neglect the importance of personal memory. Donald Nathanson (1996) is a psychologist who uses Tomkins' understanding of affects to explain to his patients why they react to certain situations in their lives in particular ways. Nathanson stresses the importance of affects to making sense of the world at large when he explains that in terms of the brain and stimuli, 'so much is going on in the brain that nothing gains attention unless it triggers an affect' (12). And it is this 'affective amplification [that] gets into the limited channel we call consciousness' (12).

Tomkins proceeds to argue that the human organism recollects earlier affective experiences and those recollected performances become affective scripts. These scripts are only loosely organised and do not constitute a definitive role-play but rather the body's ability to connect the memory of past affective experience with new performances. While memory is often associated with internal and private experience, Tomkins' idea of recalling affective scripts emphasises that the memory of affect moves with the public and relies on new engagements to emerge.<sup>iii</sup> Due to the accumulation of past affective experience, men may be more affected or less affected. Having experienced many good swells my body now demands larger swells and even more perfect conditions to elicit the same levels of joy and excitement I felt as a grommet. Such memory accumulation of past affective experience can mean that men become either habituated or more sensitive to specific affects. Such recalled scripts do

not activate past affects but modify affect. As Tomkins explains:

The memory of the past experience of affect with respect to any object which has been linked with that affect makes the individual the slave of his own constructions. It is not that he necessarily repeats the past experience on the basis of stimulus substitution in the classical Pavlovian sense. No one laughs twice at the same joke or is equally afraid of the same threat the second time. One is either more afraid or less afraid depending on the relationship between the memory of the past and the present construction (1995: 65-66).

Past affective experiences mix with current performances, resulting in a mutation of affects by way of intensification, diminishment, or altered duration. Considering affect carefully emphasises that there is no pre-determined private behaviour, feeling, or performance, but only what is felt and done here and now. This "here and now" means men can experience unexpected and unintended affects and thus perform in an improvisational capacity. There is no "true" way to feel like or do masculinity but an ongoing adaptation. Every context has an excess of potential affects that means chance and contingency play roles in the movement of affect, in how men feel and what they do. Unintended affects thus play crucial roles in determining where we might move, what we might feel, and what we might do.

Affects are the motivational system that moves us. Which doesn't mean that affects push or pull us into responses. Motivation is 'rather a very crude, loose, approximate conceptual net we throw over human beings as she or he lives in her or his social habitat' (52). Such motivation is not located in the affects, or in the environment, or in the subject, but 'is everywhere and nowhere and never the same in one place for very long' (52). Motivation emerges when the boys notice that a performance already

taking place matters, because 'Without affect amplification nothing else matters, and with its amplification anything can matter' (54). Affects motivate not because they push and pull but because they make things matter. By making some performances matter we enter an embodied learning process that is an interaffective experience that produces scripts. Learning how to do masculinity is thus not necessarily through the mind but through the body's affective repertoire of negotiating and interacting with the world, we learn masculinity as we do it. I learn via the dynamics of affects and actions. Sometimes negative affects motivate withdrawal, positive affects motivate continuation, negative affects motivate continuation, and positive affects motivate withdrawal. Learning takes place in contexts and through an affective mediation of psychology, biology, and sociology.

My point here is that affects do things to people, to histories, to cultures, to groups, and so on. Affects are intricately enmeshed with the social and cultural. Consider how Tomkins differentiates between shame and contempt by discussing what they do to and with intimacy. Contempt can lead to barriers between people and establish boundaries between groups – a rejection of intimate interaction. However, shame is linked with 'identification' (139). While my identification with other surfers was at times painful and humiliating it stimulated a desire for mutuality, to know what they knew hence strengthening a particular social group and community (150). As

Tomkins elaborates:

If shame is dependant on barriers to excitement and enjoyment, then the pluralism of desires must be matched by a pluralism of shame ... The pluralism of excitement and enjoyment are without limit, and hence shame, too, knows no bounds (150).

Affects motivate and make performances matter but because they “know no bounds”; affects are sometimes confusing and vague (Massumi, 2002). This vagueness stems from the fact that affective experience not only includes what happens but also what potentially might happen. There is always the potentiality of feeling otherwise.

By the word “potential” I am referring to an exposure to variance, to the way in which belonging and feelings are never settled. One must re-feel and re-perform to maintain a sense of belonging as a man.<sup>iv</sup> We’re never part of one cluster of affects and relations and not another; joy is always different, fear is always different. We think we know what feelings are, but they refuse to settle. This transience makes it difficult for an individual to explain how they’re feeling and what the mood of a performance is, why it matters, or what their body is doing. The experience of masculinity and the male body, understood through this vagueness of affects, is ‘the felt reality of relation’ (16). We experience affects such as joy, fear, shame, or interest and these “amplify” performances that help us to belong. However, in this ongoing process we only ever register belonging in passing, without any definitive finality. Affects amplify and motivate masculinity but they do not define it.

Now that I have established the role of affects we can see the importance of a lived and affective body to how we know we are men, how we do masculinity, and how we belong. Affects allow us to understand bodies, masculinity, and men in an open-ended and intimate manner. The intimacy results from felt connections to other bodies. There is political potential in realising affective performances and relations.

As Lawrence Grossberg puts it:

The openings and closings of our bodies constantly rearrange our dealings with others ... this produces the body as 'an articulated plane whose organization defines its own relations of power and sites of struggle', which 'points to the existence of another politics, a politics of feeling' (in Probyn, 2000: 72).

Probyn cites Grossberg to highlight how affects, such as shame, can bring experiences into the open. This means we have to deal with and reflect upon what informs them. Affects draw attention to interactivity, movement, and relations rather than sameness or abstracted patterns. To get a better understanding of masculinity I map the doing of masculinity by following moments of affectivity – the way that the individual or event has the ability to affect and be affected – how masculinity, male bodies, and their affects merge.

### **An Ethological Shift**

To study the affects of men and masculinity as affective performances I appreciate how bodies are dynamic, felt, moving, and visceral. This is done with an ethological understanding of bodies and performances. Traditionally, and popularly, ethology has dealt with the biological behaviour of animals. Using ethology to understand bodies and gender is useful as it keeps them unsettled, active, and full of blood. To use ethology to re-conceptualise men, masculinity, and bodies is to recognise that affective mediation is important to how we belong, how we know ourselves as men, how we decide what performances matter or not, and how we do masculinity.



According to ethology, behaviour is not assumed to be the same for every performance but is determined by ongoing biological-psychological-sociological relations. Ethology deals with the biological behaviour of animals. Karl von Frisch, Nikolaas Tinbergen, and Konrad Lorenz are noted as being leading ethologists and a lot of their work revolved around animal communication whereby that could be chemical, mechanical, visual, or learnt through imprinting.

Ethology emerged from Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). Darwin's work focused on how species evolved. He argued that small differences in individuals allow those individuals to better adapt to variable environments. Poorly adaptable individuals do not survive according to Darwin. The adaptations that allow survival are passed onto future generations and underlying this process is biological transformation. Hence, for ethology bodies are about proliferation, multiplication, variability, mutation, and replication. That is, bodies negotiate culture and the environment by communicating what they are feeling through expressions that result from feeling what is happening. There is an affective economy of culture, biology, and environment that is felt and expressed as joy, anger, fear, astonishment, pain, and so on.

Much ethology claims that behaviour is innate which seems at odds with the mutable findings of Darwin. However, this dispute is not my concern because what I am interested in is the way some ethology does not isolate behaviour to an animal. There is an appreciation of the dynamism of performances with no attempt to straighten out the multiplicity of techniques that occur into some order. An ethologist would see complex performances rather than set patterns.

Consider the work of Von Frisch (1993; 1956) on bees. According to Von Frisch, bees have a dance language and can distinguish many different floral scents. Distance, direction, and quantity of food are communicated by facing the sun while dancing or by turning away with a certain number of waggles. Touching the pollen filled hairs on the body of the messenger bee indicates the type of flower. Many bodies come together during any such performance – the pollen, other bees, the sun – with performances always varying depending on conditions. The interaction of bodies doing things and the adaptability to variations means reading performances as a collection of powers and capacities. The bees recognise each other, communicate, and belong not because of what they are but because of what they do.

This reading of bodies as performances, expressions, and as affective means appreciating how capabilities of bodies are never set, but are ongoing performances that vary depending on situations. An ethological understanding of activity and behaviour moves away from patterns and structures that ‘account for all cases of a certain type, rather than merely this case or that case’ (Gatens, 1996: 34-35). Effective consideration of masculinity would think about masculinity in terms of such expression and activity. In Gatens’ helpful elucidation:

ethology does not claim to know, in advance, what a body is capable of doing or becoming ... What can this body do? What are its typical relations with other bodies and what are its typical powers? What makes it weaker? What make it stronger? (99).

## Conclusion

Looking at men through affective performances can upset our picture of what the male body and masculinity are supposed to be. My aim in this is to de-privilege the use of a gender structure to straighten out what we understand to constitute men and masculinity, leaving behind an epistemological system that does not add any new knowledge but rather aims to confirm what we already think we know. Rather than looking for types of male bodies and patterns of masculinity, it is more appropriate to map what goes on at particular moments of constituting masculinity with a sense of astonishment at the multiplicity it involves. The ethologist Niko Tinbergen (1972) argues that he was:

drawn to study events that seem to contradict what we have been taught to expect on the basis of our knowledge of nonliving things. It is this discrepancy between what an animal 'ought to do' and what is actually seen to do that make us wonder (20).

The study of gender, men, and bodies is a messy business. We are too inclined to relegate confusion to the margins, to clear the air of those messy bodies. By appreciating gender as performances, the total man, ethology, and affects we can pull lived bodies back into how we know and belong as men. These concepts and approaches allow me to think through performances of masculinity and surfing as exposed to their potential to vary.

The concepts of gender, male bodies, and masculinity remain confused and uncertain for me, and I think this is just as well. By not "getting them straight" I avoid knowing

what a man is, and from claiming what men should do, should feel, or how to belong. This is not to suggest that there are not resilient codes, practices, techniques, discourses, power relations, and so on, but by tracing these as we live and feel complex everyday performances I can promote a version of masculinity that is open, dynamic, and creative.

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<sup>i</sup> Refer to my discussion of Tracy Moffat's film *Heaven* (1997) in chapter four to see how this is done.

<sup>ii</sup> No evidence is provided for any claims to the deep masculinity that all men are supposed to have access to except reference to mythical warrior archetypes that ignore the very real and material histories of those. There's no consideration of the histories, ways of being, differing logics, problems, societal interactions, and power relations of the Aboriginal elders, Sioux warriors, and Masai hunters he lauds. Biddulph's restrictive take on history provides a romantic poetics for him to push his claims. It is a colonising move by a middle-class, white, heterosexual, middle-aged man. One might ask where are the other histories and societies men have been part of, including his own? It is as if Biddulph undertook a "lucky dip" of history without considering what those selections might ignore and this includes how his relation to power came about.

<sup>iii</sup> For a complete and in-depth discussion of script theory and the work of Silvan S. Tomkins see Donald Nathanson's *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (1992).

<sup>iv</sup> Potential has a direct relation to immanence. I distinguish potential from "possibility". Possibility refers more explicitly to a set of choices that are limited. Possibility is like having a list of relations pre-figured and considered. Potential refuses such "sets" as it is variation as ever-productive (Massumi, 2002).

Jake picks up his board and... when his shoulder.  
'Can you give me some...  
'Hinx?'  
'On how it's done. Like it... by a to-ey on a left-  
hander, which foot should...  
Jake smiles slowly.  
'The day you do a to-ey... to have reading? Surfing...  
is five easy steps? If you... how your books away.'

### Introduction

My legs are strained... each track. I can hear intermittent  
clumping as if... amongst the trees. The sound of the  
crashing waves... an hour before dawn with sticks  
falling from... as an isolated stretch of coast in  
New South Wales. The... national parks that border the coast line  
and... travelling down the Pacific Highway. Such a...  
... like Duran, Bowley, Mullumbidgee...

Floating Bodies (Photo: Uge, [www.aquabumps.com](http://www.aquabumps.com))

### Learning to Surf

Jake picks up his board and is about to head off when Hannah touches his shoulder.

'Can you give me some hints.'

'Hints?'

'On how it's done. Like if I want to do a cutback followed by a re-entry on a left-hander, which foot should I have forward?'

Jake smiles slowly.

'The day you do a re-entry I'll be fucked. What have you been reading? Surfing in five easy steps? If you want to get real about surfing throw your books away.'

Fiona Capp: *Night Surfing*.

#### Introduction

*My legs are straining as I make my way down the bush track. I can hear intermittent thumping as a frightened kangaroo bounds off amongst the trees. The sound of the crashing waves echoes down the valley. I wake an hour before dawn with sticks falling from gum trees onto my tent. I'm camping on an isolated stretch of coast in New South Wales. The South Coast has huge national parks that border the coastline and protect it from prying eyes travelling down the Pacific Highway. Surfers turn off towards towns with odd names like Durras, Bawley, Mollymook, and Congo.*

*Once at the beach, I look at old photocopied maps from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife. I'm trying to see if there's another beach around that headland in the distance, but the map in my hands is so torn it's useless. I walk over hot sand and through scrub. With sunburnt eyes I watch a swell build fifty-metres offshore and my*

*heart races as the wave rises. The snatches of conversation about this coastline that I overheard last night at the Ulladulla pub have proved useful. Back at the car I take my board off the roof.*

*I spend a week at the campsite and surf the "secret spot" every day. The following week the boys in Sydney ask if there is anything in Murramarang National Park and I answer, "nothing." I keep the location of good empty waves to myself. If others want to find secret waves a code of surfing is that they have to learn to do the research.*

In this chapter I discuss how I research and write about surfing, surf-spots, surfing bodies, masculinity, and cultural rules. My writing and method are based on my familiarity with my field of study. I'm a surfer learning how to research and write up experiences of men who surf. This chapter will explain several surf research techniques I use, as well as how I adapt these techniques so that they work alongside the traditional rigour of ethnography and ethological analysis. I have found that adapting techniques I have grown up with as a surfer are useful for accessing information from fellow male surfers, for making my research comprehensible to the group I am studying, and for taking those who have never surfed into the sensations of the field.

As I have argued, my aim is to account for the open-ended motion of surfing and masculinity that discredits a definitive interpretation of their meaning and of how they are done. I explain my use of stories and how they remain faithful to the surfing lifestyle because they're an integral part of relaying information amongst surfers. I also attend to how I use my body as a research tool to do research and write the

stories. Through the use of stories and attention to bodies I want to help people visualise and feel what it would be like if they paddled out with me, and for fellow surfers to nod in recognition. Revisiting the ideas about ethology introduced in chapter two, I want to capture and convey the details, bodies, and feelings that assemble when men surf to reveal a grounded analysis of masculinity. This research method and storytelling means getting across what the first surfing World Champion Midget Farrelly (1968) claims:

makes surfing mean so much. People might think that surfing's a limited thing, but surfing's not limited ... Your [sic] all the time learning how to do things, discovering better ways of surfing and more ways of enjoying it (23-24).

### **Magazines, Surf Stories, and Campfires**

I am 11 years old. I love to surf. I always read your magazines. They are great. They are not full of shit.

(Cameron Gardiner in Murdoch, 2004: 4).

When I began researching surfing and masculinity I revisited the numerous surfing magazines I'd read throughout my life. This specialist media has played a role in the construction of my subcultural capital – the knowledge that the boys and I share about what's "sick", "filthy", or worth "frothing over". In her work on how cultural values are produced and circulated in youth and music cultures Sarah Thornton (1995) explains subcultural capital as knowledge of appropriate behaviours, tastes, equipment, beliefs, and images. This subcultural capital 'confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder...subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being "in the know"' (11).<sup>i</sup>



One of the ways that surfers and non-surfers access subcultural capital is through specialist magazines such as *Surfing World*, *Stab*, *Waves*, *Surf Girl*, *Pacific Longboarder*, *Tracks*, and *Australia's Surfing Life*. The specialist media are 'a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge' (14). This network relies on a process of representation. As I explained in chapter one, the representation of the surfing culture is not some second-hand mirror that reflects some truth of how things are. Rather, representation involves the production of meaning and this is a mediated process that we live. We are within representations and by this I mean that we use representational systems informed by particular discourses and ideologies to understand the magazines and develop subcultural capital. This representational process is complicated, negotiated, and contested. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) writes:

Representation is a practice, a kind of "work" which uses material objects (sounds. Words, images, etc) and effects. But meaning depends not on the material quality of the sign, but on its symbolic function (25).

Particular class, ethnic, sexual, gendered, racial, and aged inflections inform my subcultural capital and self-representation of surfing. This means I interact with the texts in a particular way. The way I look at magazines and am "in the know" is constructed and connected to broader social arrangements. Since I am familiar with dominant discourses and the established subcultural capital, my use of the magazines and what I see is particular, and more often than not the author's intended reading, since they too are surfers with similar inflections to their self-representation.

While I use magazines to consider subcultural knowledge, what bodies do, what tastes are popular, and how some bodies feel, I am aware that this representation of surfing is constructed, as do many of my mates who constantly contest how the magazines portray surfing. As one of my mates said: "I used to always relate to the magazines, but now with their focus on professional surfing the stories sometimes don't feel right" – even the boys' dominant self-representation does not allow some smooth representation. Hall calls this process "double articulation". This is where we take up the structure of cultural and symbolic representations in our world, negotiate it within ourselves, and then give it back in a different way (rearticulate it). So while magazines can reveal subcultural capital and the state of surfing at a particular place and time it is important to remember that meaning is contested or negotiated.

Leanne Stedman's study of surfing magazines *From Gidget to Gonad Man: Surfers, Feminists and Postmodernisation* (1997) provides an account of gendered surfing representations. The analysis stresses the importance of the surfing magazines in structuring the subculture and providing a framework to critique male surfer representation. Stedman examines the language used, lack of representation of women surfers, and how women are objectified. The importance of specialist surfing magazines is not understated here: 'the process of editorial selection in surf magazines is not the distortion of "reality" but the creation of it' (76). A further study of *Tracks* magazine was undertaken in Margaret Henderson's *A Shifting Line Up: Men, Women, and Tracks Surfing Magazine* (2001). In this study, Henderson looks at five stages of *Tracks*' development that parallel the development of surfing in Australia. Unlike Stedman, she does not claim that *Tracks* constructs the subculture, rather consumers of the media play a creative and active role in the construction of meaning.

Henderson's approach means that the specialist media does not co-opt subcultures, nor is there some authentic participant perspective. Magazines disseminate and create symbols and meanings but do so in exchange with surfers, and non-surfers, who consume them. There is a network of texts, images, codes of behaviour, narratives, bodies, audiences, and modes of consumption. The process is not some simple media effect on, or mirror-like representation of, a surfing culture.

I also draw upon documentaries, experimental films, and company-sponsored videos. These vary from George Greenough's art-house cult film *The Innermost level of Pure Fun* (1970) through to Dana Brown's documentary-method *Step into Liquid* (2003) as well as hand-held "punk" videos with grainy images. Keith Beattie's (2001) article, *Sick, Filthy, and Delirious: surf film and video and the documentary mode*, analyses a collection of surf films and videos to explain how surfing footage is shot, identify production techniques, and provide a study of audience interaction. Beattie observes that when surf films were shown during the 1960s and 70s in community halls, the audience was very active: 'The intensity of viewers' identification resulted in rowdy, occasionally violent, behaviour' (337).<sup>ii</sup> The audience's bodies tended to re-enact many of the manoeuvres on the screen, screaming with joy as their bodies recognised what to do. Bob Condon, a surf film producer, explains to semiotician Pierce Flynn (1987) about audience reactions to his surfing films. Condon says that participation would extend to the crew in the audience 'leaning for a bottom turn and pushing back in their seats for a cutback' (397). What this reveals is that the discourses and ideologies that inform our self-representations make their way into our bodies so that there is a fleshy recognition, reaction to, and cognition of the re-presentation. Surf films and videos can provide an experience of the stoke that is felt when surfing. In a

conversation with journalist Paul Gross, surf filmmaker George Greenough (1999) explains how he ‘wanted to get the feel of surfing ... not just what it looked like from the beach’, and so decided to shoot with a camera strapped to his back as he surfed, producing footage from a surfer’s perspective on a wave (81).

What my brief digression into surfing media suggests is that an analysis of surfing can include the specialist surfing media without suggesting that they paint some definitive picture of what surfing is and what men do in this field. I remember sitting on the bonnet of a car reading the latest edition of *Tracks* when a profound six-year-old grommet, with sunscreen smeared all over his face, jogged past yelling, “Don’t read about it, do it!” We shoved his head in a garbage bin, but the grommet – young surfer – had a point. So I focus on what bodies do and feel in the surfing field in a way that appreciates that we are within representations not just when we read magazines and watch surf film/videos but also when we are in the water, on the beach, and driving through towns with odd names looking for secret waves.

Beyond magazines, it is important to note how storytelling influences men who surf. In his semiotic analysis of surfing culture Flynn writes that surfing stories are in a conversational style ‘expressive of a strong degree of involvement and rapport’ (1987: 398). Surfing stories as a genre involve highly personal topics, participatory listenership, personal experiential contours, marked amplitude shifts, and dramatic narrative strategies (398).

Alex Leonard's insightful honours thesis *What Surfing Feels Like* (1997) explains that surfers:

Return with fuzzy photos, which they pass around and about which they relate: Nobody but the locals know about this place, we're telling you. To get it you have to trek over cow paddocks for miles. It's a bullshit wave: see how shallow it is in the photo? There's six inches of water under there. Johnny's first wave, he had no idea, he just went for it and it pitched him. When he came up his face was grazed and he was kneeling in water up to his waist, with his legrope wrapped around his neck and seaweed in his hair (12).

Leonard argues for the incorporation of stories into relating what surfing feels like (10-13). The boys do sit around in lounge-rooms and relate how that wave was, "ten-foot at least". Yarns about surfing are useful for surfing research as they speak of moods and variation as surfers try to make sense of what happens.

The best story around any given campfire is like David Abram (1996) pursues when researching the place of animistic conventions and magic in modern culture.<sup>iii</sup> Abram conceives of the best stories as being:

[The] one that stirs the senses from their slumber, one that opens the eyes and the ears to their real surroundings, tuning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To make sense is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one's felt awareness of the world (265).

This is what I want to do when I recount the findings of my surfing research.

According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1998), stories about what happens do not provide a defined set of attributes that might claim to be exact, rather, each event is a constructed performance that enables others who might not be there to see and feel the field (16).

Importantly, stories allow for diversions and digressions that move my process away from a sovereign ethnographic voice to appreciating an affective exchange. Krim Benterak, Stephen Muecke, and Paddy Roe (1984) argue in their postcolonial writing against a 'singular authority or over-arching general theory', rather, they suggest 'local and strategic movements, where one person's story ends the other one takes off' (22). What I end up with is writing that tells others a lot about me and a lot about the waves I've ridden, or what I've 'picked up on the way' (23). It is as if the stories allow others to read the tracks I have made on waves long since washed away. As novelist and beginner surfer Andy Martin (1992) explains in a tale of learning to surf in Hawaii: 'You cannot point to a wave and say, "that is the wave I rode", the way you can say, "that is the mountain I climbed"' (63). But I can begin to relay the complexity of these passing experiences by using the openness of stories. An interesting feature of surfing stories is that they always involve explicit negotiation. My use of storytelling means events of surfing and masculinity can be contested in the same way – "bullshit, I've been there and the wave doesn't get to ten-feet!"

The use of storytelling is a way for me to get across the importance of affective, different, invested, and detailed descriptions for surfers. When one of my mates returns from a surfing sojourn I want to know the colour of the water, the shape of the

reef, who he met, whether he got hurt, what he slept on, what boards he rode, the direction of the trade winds, the speed of the waves, what he ate, and what he drank. I want him to take me into the sensations of the field, to go surfing with him.

These stories are about connection and about power. Postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe argues in his work on territoriality, identity, and cultural networks in Africa, that power circulates 'in all the minor circumstances of daily life, such as social networks ... culinary practices, leisure activities, modes of consumption, dress styles, rhetorical devices and the political economy of the body' (in Probyn, 1996: 30). By relaying stories about the distinctive, changing, and multi-faceted timbres of doing masculinity in the surfing field I can relate power working, even when I record the ache in my side as I laugh in delight around a campfire as someone explains how they stumbled upon a new surf-spot where there was not supposed to be one.

### **Surfing an Ethological Wave**

This physiological inflection of stories sits well with my ethological analysis, a process I discussed in chapter two. To briefly recap, ethological analysis re-conceptualises men, masculinity, and bodies as an affective mediation, where what bodies do is also important to how we belong, how we know, how we decide what performances matter or not, and how we do gender. According to ethology, ongoing biological-psychological-sociological relations determine performances. Ethology's emphasis on looking at bodies as performances necessitates a micro-analysis of how the social interacts with bits of bodies, including my own researching body. My ethological analysis appreciates the dynamism of performances and I do not attempt to straighten out the multiplicity of what occurs into some order. I negotiate meaning

in a lived context and it is not simply imposed upon me from an over-arching structure or as set patterns. Ethological analysis is a useful way for researching surfing and men as it parallels my concern for including bodies, detail, and movement in studies of masculinity. To do an ethological analysis is to rework representation so that the boys and I are recognised as within it. That is, there is a process of interactivity between representations, discourses, ideologies, bodies, and feelings.

Importantly, my ethological analysis attempts to get across how I assemble with the field. I sit at a desk, hold a notebook, buy food, grip a pen, sweat in the tropics, squirm from sunburn, shake from fear, and dig coral out of cuts suffered during wipe-outs. My surfing analysis is my embodied self engaged with and felt as 'everyday practices' (Rabinow, 1977: 154). The way I feel and what I do affects what the other surfers around me feel and do, and vice versa. Research is a contagious, productive, and affective exchange. When a particular surf spot and its surfers have experienced a notable swell the local pubs fill with bodies and feelings, and as a surfing body doing an ethological analysis I assemble with these.

*It's the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2001 and cyclone Sose spins through the Pacific. It caused heavy rain and gale force winds throughout the western isles of Vanuatu. An inter-island vessel, the M.V. Omale, sank in heavy seas and flooding damaged crops, particularly bananas, yams, and taro. While the people of Vanuatu deal with shock, fear, and sadness the Cyclone has now moved further into the Pacific Ocean. Sose travels slowly allowing a fetch to develop and push waves towards Australia. Some surfers excitedly ride the swells that crash into boulder-strewn headlands that line the Gold Coast in south-east Queensland. One surfer hoots and hollers with joy as he slides*



*down the face of a very large wave, while another surfer stands on the boulders wondering whether to paddle out or turn back and face the ridicule of his mates who are watching.*

*That evening a collection of surfers gather at the local pub. Bodies still tense and sore from surfing all day start to relax around glasses of beer. Some bodies slouch back, legs stretched, and eyes glazed as someone relates yet another surf yarn from the swell: where they surfed; how big the swell was; who rode the best waves; how they were held under for numerous waves; and how they negotiated their way through the rocks as the white-water crashed around them. Bodies are animated, replaying manoeuvres on top of the pool table until the publican tells them to get off. Swinging arms are exclamation points demonstrating how someone dealt with fear during a late drop down the face of a wave. Then one particular surfer stands and begins to relate his experience. He's drunk. His body is hunched, eyes averted, and his feet shuffle. Some of us know he doesn't surf the powerful cyclone swells. Some of the boys aren't impressed and even look disgusted. The rawness of stoke in the room dissipates. The disinterested chatter amplifies the surfer's anxiety. Stress leaps around the room. To keep the discussion going I say how hard the local break is to surf – how even the experienced blokes get nervous. The mood changes and the stoke comes back. The shamed surfer slips out of the room.*

Bodies generate moods. It is then a question of how to relate them or even relay them. Joy, shame, fear, and disgust are abstract entities, but they are crucial to understanding the experience of surfing. My body coming together with other bodies while doing an ethological analysis takes the capital letters off Shame, Pride, Anger,

Disgust, Interest, Excitement, Dismissal, and so on. Allowing for how bodies feel, including my own, as they interact during any event allows me to detail affects emerging with my storytelling. Hence, my research is a pragmatic attempt to relay what it feels like to be a surfer without resorting to abstract and “inner” personal feeling.

In the pub after surfing cyclone Sose I participated as a surfer doing an ethnological analysis. When I engage with the performances in this way new connections can form. This participation also moves away from any idea of sovereign ethnographic research. There’s no question that my body interacts with those around me and means the research is done by the boys and I, our interaction is how I access what a performance means and feels like. My analysis involves an intimate intermingling. By researching through my experiences I mean to show how an involved researching body can connect with and relay experiences that make up male surfers’ everyday performances.

My belonging to the surfing field is useful because it gives me access to certain discussions, allows me to tell stories in ways the boys are used to, to paddle around line-ups, and connect with what other surfers feel. However, to belong as a surfer one must go surfing. This “going surfing” has been important to my research. That is, part of surfing research involves paddling out, searching national parks, getting a shiver down the spine after a good wave, and feeling the water wash over my skin. There is a famous slogan in the surfing world that claims: “only a surfer knows the feeling”, and this slogan haunts me when I attempt to research and write surfing.<sup>iv</sup> Bodies learn how to surf because they accumulate sensuous knowledge in the waves and currents.

*What if I were to take you surfing?*

*First of all we'd walk into a shaper's shed - not one of those boutique surf fashion shops. Walking into the factory there's an overwhelming smell of acetone, fibreglass, resin, paint, rotten lunches, and half empty beer cans. You may feel disgusted but I feel quite at home. We see Gaz, the surfboard shaper, covered in foam dust spinning a yarn to a still wet surfer. I tell Gaz how you want a board so you can learn to surf. He can tell by the way you are dressed, the way you walk, and the uncertainty in your eyes that you're not familiar with the rhythmic pulse of swells. He looks at you with a glass eye and a toothless grin; toxic fumes can do weird things to bodies. Fragments of fibreglass float through the air and the tiny specks embed into your skin so you start to itch. The way the smells go into your clothes and fibreglass sprinkles over your hands makes you feel as if you're the one shaping the board. We return two weeks later, still itching, and are told to "come back next week". Frustration courses through your body and six weeks later the board is ready.*

*You ride in a rusted old car with the boys and I. There's a frown on your face as you try to understand what we're talking about - offshore, pin-tail, thruster, Express Point. We get to the beach and explain to you how to note rips, how the swell is moving, how to jump to your feet, how to paddle, and how the lesson is going to cost you a few beers later that night. Your cheeks flush with embarrassment as you practice getting to your feet on the sand in full view of experienced surfers who laugh as they walk past. In the water, your body gets knocked about by the white-water, hit in the head with the surfboard, and is sent flailing down into the depths.*

*Your arms feel like they want to fall off and you dip your head in shame as a surfer berates you for getting in the way. "Come on," I scream. "How? I can't do it, tell me how to do it?" you beg. I shrug and claim, "You think too much. Can't you feel it?" You manage to get to your feet and the boys scream encouragement. By the end of summer you begin to get to your feet regularly but not gracefully. Your surfing body becomes familiar with the motion and force of waves and wind. We go home one night after surfing and I hear you laughing as you lie on the tattered couch. "What are you laughing at?" You reply that you can still feel your body surfing. "Now you're getting it".*

Paddling out is a visceral and intensely felt research. However, I can't take everyone surfing, yet I want the research to make tangible the intricacies of going surfing in a way that has the same effect as teaching someone to surf. My body contributes generously to this process, trained by many years of surfing experiences.

Allowing for such a method of learning is not without precedent. As explained in chapter two the sociologist Marcel Mauss claims that the body is a key contributor to what we learn and how we learn, that the physiological pervades our learning. Like Mauss, my understanding of learning is as embodied, so I emphasise the contribution of the organic, of feelings, and of instincts to my research. The implication of this embodiment of my research method is that I now register myself as a surfer doing an ethological analysis and not just a surfer; my body becomes attuned to doing research as I surf rather than attuned to surfing as I research. My surfing and researching body records every wave, every shiver, and every flush. Each detail matters and brings to the analysis a particular sensuality.

This particularity is important, just as every wave feels different, and is different in shape. There is no final over-arching picture of men who surf. The particularity means the examples move away from being generic to being ‘whatever’ (Agamben, 1993: 1). And recalling my discussion in chapter one, this “whatever” doesn’t imply that the situation doesn’t matter but that it always matters (1). Every detail, relation, technique, feeling, and practice affects and is affected during a singular performance. These singular moments always differ and are how, at different times and under certain circumstances, differing zones of specificity (belonging) intermingle. Zones of specificity include the environment, race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, gender, and class. This interruption to generality promotes unexpected examples and experiences because the researcher and research are constantly at the edge of themselves by being involved with a social, biological, and psychological field that is slippery, sliding, skipping, skidding – surfing.

Researching the numerous details of surfing through my body emphasises the particularity of a wave without divorcing it from the motion that is inherent to all waves. A wave passes but I can still recall it by remembering what the ride felt like and how I surfed. Immersion in the detail, feelings, and movement allows me to research what certain moments were like without claiming they represent some essential experience of being a surfer. What occurs is research that varies according to circumstances. This is evidenced by my research at the fifty-year-old “Marlin Hotel” in Ulladulla, a renowned surfing and fishing town on the south coast of New South Wales.

*The walls of the pub are brown brick and a stuffed shark is mounted on one. Two TVs broadcast a replay of the day's cricket and one doesn't work very well, so it's fuzzy. The windows that overlook the beach are covered in salt spray so it isn't easy to appreciate the view. A jukebox whines in the corner: some country artist singing her heart out. A bain-marie stands in the corner, overseen by a young bloke with a bored look on his face as he stirs the bubbling curries on special tonight. Some old men sit silently and watch the better TV screen. A tradesman who didn't go back to work after a midday drink stands and stumbles; his arms are covered in tattoos and he's wearing a fluoro yellow vest.*

*I want to overhear some surfers, so I move to the bar near the pool tables, where the local boys hang-out. I know they're local surfers by the way they speak, all have sun-bleached hair, and wear a regional label called Southern Man Surf. I don't read my surfing magazine. If they see me reading the magazine the conversation will stall. I lean against the bar and look interested in the pool game, nodding at good shots. One of the surfers asks if I play. "Yeah, how about a game?" I reply. As the challenger pays I insert coins into the table and the game begins. They want to know what I'm doing in Ulladulla. 'With the family to go fishing', I lie. They believe me and continue to talk about a surf session last week in Murramarang National Park. I listen and catch snatches of the conversation, but the descriptions of and directions to the surf-spots are vague. I drink my beer slowly so I won't forget what I hear. "Your shot", one says and passes the pool cue. I deliberately lose the pool game and I'm invited to hang around for a chat and pay for a few more games.*

This is all part of my method. It is a sort of liminal conversation, I use this term to include practices as diverse as playing pool, bodies, autobiography, cultural rules, and participant-observation. They all work together in different ways on different occasions. The point is to remain as open as possible to the contextual nature of situations. Like surfing a barrel, I feel my way through the moving exchange of forces as every part of my researching body senses what to do and when to do it. A slight buck of the wave and my body adjusts accordingly. Afterwards, a barrel is remembered with wide-open eyes and ecstatic description. As surf journalist Nick Carroll explains:

during seconds like that, you as a being don't exist ... you're actually inside everything that's happening, the wave, the surfboard ... you're inside the landscape and the ocean and its surging, you get totally inside the moment and it's so intense that ... you disappear, you're totally unified with everything that's happening (in Jones, 1997: 17).

Barrels are always different and require an adaptable technique. Exchanges between my body and others mean the research I do has become a thrill that I come to ache for. The feelings my body goes through such as blushing in embarrassment, smiling in surprise, or squirming from shame, keeps me interested in the research. My research transforms the social conditions in which I live, making activities that used to be all-too-familiar fresh and exciting again.

Since becoming a surfing researcher I find it increasingly difficult to relax during an after-surf hang-out. I no longer silently sit on the warm bonnet of my car with friends during summer with ease, but engage in lengthy arguments and discussions about

surfing and men. The carpark has become a classroom where I am asked to explain my theories in “plain English”; where I learn how other blokes do things; where interest is initiated; where debates take place; where my abstract ramblings are grounded; where examples are discovered; where gender politics is no longer foreign to some male surfers; and so on. Where the beach carpark and after-surf hang-out used to be about relaxation they are now a frenzied intensifying of affect. It’s reached the point where I really have to try and “switch off” my researching body. I often fail dismally as I smile with joy after noticing another event that had slipped by unnoticed for so long or get angry because I can’t explain the work of Judith Butler in simple language to the boys.

The boys are involved in this research performance and invest in re-imagining masculinity. Our ongoing contestation of stories means we have noticed that masculinity is always felt and done differently depending on what comes together at any given moment. What is emerging is an embodied sensitivity to how there is no essential way to do and feel surfing and no patterns of masculinities. Our research performance has meant allowing for how bodies and the social work together in dynamic ways. What I have come to realise is that I am always intermingling with the boys, with the research, and with the waves.

This “with” extends to being part of the complexity of a wave. In Fiona Capp’s (1996) novel about becoming a surfer in Victoria she suggests that this wave is:

more than water. It carries a whole universe inside it. What is tossed up from the sea churns with the debris of the land as the inundation gains momentum. Shells, jellyfish, driftwood (4).



Waves, sand, and wind are very much a part of surfing research. A good surfer rides with the twists of forces not “on” a wave. In his article ‘Constructions of Surfing Space at Durban, South Africa’ (2002) Robert Preston-Whyte explains that analyses of surfers seldom consider ‘their [surfers] relationship with the ever-changing wave environment as it conforms to wind, weather and modifications in coastal morphology’ (308).

As a geographer, Preston-Whyte’s article demonstrates how surfers make sense of the material spaces they move through. By looking at how surfers interact with altered coastlines, sea-floors, and beaches in South Africa, Preston-Whyte argues that negotiating these spaces involves sensory problem-solving skills. Sea-floors, jetties, and rock walls that shape particular waves also influence social arrangements whereby ownership and exclusion become social norms for surfers. For instance, knowing the intricacies of how a wave will peel along a reef means belonging to a particular group who in turn claim, and enforce, “local rights” on crowded days. Material concerns influence how we act and this means paying attention to neglected physical aspects that can escape abstract theoretical discussion.

*It's important to allow for how the river and sand at the surf-break of Duranbah produce punchy little wedges. A surfer glides out of the trench of a wave and heads for the lip. The wave is travelling fast and twists into a shape allowing an attempt at an aerial. He adjusts his hips, crouches, lines up his shoulders, and launches. Soaring through the air the surfer presses down on the back foot using the wind that pushes back to stabilise the movement with a counter-force. He hovers, hands on rails, trying to arrive at where the wave breaks – the explosion of white-water will cushion the*

*landing. The flying surfer's body stretches out but the surfboard fins fail to grab.*

*Sliding out in front of the wave the surfboard slips and the wave spins him into a 360-degree turn. The movement felt good and the surfer paddles back to the take-off spot with chest puffed out.*

Such physical concerns draw my research into specific relations that are sometimes surprising but always affective. For instance, when sandbanks are optimal I cannot interview the boys because all they want to do is go surfing, so I paddle out with them and observe what happens out-the-back. To interview the boys I must wait for the onshore winds and a deterioration of the sand to a deep-water gutter that fattens the waves into "slop". The diversity of forces and physical concerns means a messy sort of research, but this messiness heightens anticipation and draws attention to the interactivity of feelings, bodies, spaces, and the social. Doing an ethological analysis helps me to register the messiness of bodies as they assemble, affect, and change because behaviour is treated as part of broader arrangements, and this includes interaction with the environment.

The powers and capacities of male surfers doing things and what they assemble with can seem trivial and common, but doing an ethological analysis means documenting exactly this. A boy runs past with his body-board on his way to the water's edge. His mother asks him "what are you running for?" The answer is "because all the surfers are doing it". Upon observation, and reflecting upon my own processes, I'm amazed at our many techniques of running and walking. For example, I run fast when the surf is six-feet and pumping, but when I was younger I would stroll so as to delay entering the water, fearing the size of the swell. In this way, the mundane becomes remarkable

and tells us a lot about why, where, and how things happen. The intricate variation of performances once again stresses that research into men and surfing requires description not with some ordered structure in mind but with detailed attention to the movements, feelings, and techniques taking place in the heat of the moment (Tinbergen, 1972).

### **A Bit of Style**

During the heat of the moment, performances are often not what we expect them to be. Each performance emerges from a new assemblage of relations that demands creative movements. For instance, there is no normal way to surf as the waves travel differently, pitch faster or slower, curl awkwardly, 'edged with a multiplicity of smaller waves' (Serres, 1995: 33). So when researching what is happening out-the-back, it's more effective to pay attention to style rather than form. Style evokes not some given way of doing something but how bodies negotiate, create, and contribute. Style is open-ended and how bodies adapt with flows rather than act out a fixed set of attributes.

Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) is a good reference point for discussing style at work. Hebdige argues that subcultures constitute expressive forms that disturb and block dominant systems of representations. Style is a collection of gestures, speech, fashion, rituals, modes of confrontation, and so on that become 'maps of meaning', or a system of signification (18). Hebdige understands style as an expression of political resistance to, and a marker of difference between, 'those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives' (132). In Hebdige's understanding of style, it resists being read by outsiders. Those in

subcultures are not necessarily political but their different representations reflect a politics of class. Through an analysis of subcultures in the 1960s, such as punks, rude boys, and skinheads Hebdige demonstrates how style works as a signifying process. His work is an attempt to begin reading the meanings inscribed on bodies that are part of such subcultures.

Hebdige shows how practices, actions, and habits of bodies in subcultures are made sense of. That is, they become a communication of the knowledge of a particular group. This highlights how the boys and I are within representations and actively negotiate or reproduce them. My style of riding a wave is part of a system of representation that determines what the techniques I use mean: rather than raising my hands above my head after exiting a deep tube, decried by surfers as “claiming”, I bow my head and dangle my arms by my side meaning I’m happy with the ride and which communicates a cool nonchalance. Being inside this process helps me, as a surfer, to make sense of what’s happening when an outsider would be left scratching their head.

While Hebdige addresses how bodies are implicated in processes of signification he treats them as mechanical. That is, he doesn’t allow for the contribution of the physical and how sometimes bodies surf in new ways that are not consistent with current cultural rules and norms. Hebdige frames the body as organised by the social thereby limiting the parameters of its activity, he defines and codifies the body’s role. However, the wave demands a body open to potentials, this is a body that can escape established codes or maps of meaning.

Hebdige's semiotic understanding of style is useful, but what I am concerned with here is how material bodies express this potential. What I mean is that rather than understanding bodies as just expressing a semiotic system, I concur with Massumi who appreciates how the matter of bodies have an immanence, and are in constant re-arrangement with other bodies (2002). Style reflects how the interactivity of biological, sociological, and psychological is not already constituted but an activity of constant change. Bodies are always evolving, taking on elements and discarding them. While style can be read as per Hebdige, I also read it as the visceral variation of bodies during any given performance.

I am using the concept of "style" in an ethological way to get at how bodies are a dynamic system where I don't assume to know what they mean or are capable of doing. In this way style can display how bodies think through and affectively negotiate performances, not just what certain techniques mean. The body is not an empty screen onto which meanings are projected. Rather, the body is active and has its own way of moving through the surf. I cannot paddle into a wave knowing exactly how I'm going to ride it as the wave and my body affect each other, meaning my intended style is always compromised. Sometimes I may use the technique of arching my back and sliding gracefully into a bottom turn to signify that I am "soul surfing", however, the wave may jack suddenly causing me to crouch. My body registers an affective exchange prior to my making sense of it or knowing what that action might communicate.

A stylish surfer is one whose body adapts spontaneously with a wave because their body is used to feeling the dynamic affective exchange. The stylish surfer "becomes-

wave” rather than rides on a wave with a set bag of tricks. In becoming-wave a stylish surfer reveals a lack of uniform procedure or definitive meaning. My ethological analysis of style appreciates how bodies are always adapting, affect and are affected, connect and disconnect, and creatively negotiate through situations.

While considering how skateboarders’ bodies intermingle with roads, park benches, and cement Ian Borden (2001) proposes that style is a fluid manner of connecting, ‘an economy of motion’ (120). Force, grace, and fluidity make up style, qualities that go ‘beyond a set of physical acts’ (121). Style is where a body is not a personally remembered physical co-ordination but the adoption of randomness, where that randomness is an awareness of the body as communication, energy, relations, and movement.

Such randomness is made to work in the surf so as to be able to ride the distortions of any wave. An ethological analysis of style recognises how male surfers and their bodies take on the rhythms of any given area or experience, how bodies are not mechanical but affective. Surfers from different regions develop different styles. The Gold Coast surfer paddles with powerful strokes and has a relaxed posture when riding. He languidly moves with the warm water and long peeling point waves of Burleigh Heads, Kirra, and Currumbin. Bodies are dark brown and hair lightened from the tropical sun, chests are broad from paddling against the ferocious rips. Surfers saunter in boardshorts and thongs. Their arms hang loosely. I’m one of a second and third-generation of “Goldie” surfers. I may even have inherited an affective body attuned to surfing. Watch a born and bred Goldie boy make adjustments to the board, and for the wave as he slides about inside a barrel [tube].

You will see him mould his body to fit the barrel as if it's instinctive – the waves of this region are very hollow and a lot of time is spent barrel-riding.

The ethological approach to researching bodies offers the opportunity to become familiar with styles and begin to articulate them. Surfers are minimal in their movements and don't talk for long periods as we sit on our boards, stare at the horizon, and wait for approaching waves. Sometimes there's not much dialogue to record, so appreciating style means recounting rhythms emerging during a particular session with a sense of wonder at the diversity of what bodies do. When I watch surfers riding a wave I do not simply see people twisting bodies or paddling but a display of interacting forces, by which the surfing slides, glides, falls, rises, swirls, tumbles, drives, and is driven.

Ashley, an aged, locally revered and experienced surfer, drew my attention to rhythm when he explained its importance to his life spent chasing waves. The following is an account of how he explained the importance of rhythm with a story about surfing his favourite wave called "Crystals"

*I sit at a picnic bench on the east coast of Australia and watch the southerly change sweep through. The water changes from a golden hue to dark and choppy. The wind comes in rhythms, winter winds tend to come from the south and west, in summer winds come from the north and east. The tide is high and I have to wait for it to go out before Crystals begins to break; tides are rhythms. I stand and walk slowly back to the car, there's no rush as low tide is hours away. I always check the nautical buoy reports. Today they indicate lots of oceanic action with a fourteen-second period. This*

*means it's a powerful ground swell. Short six-second wind swells annoy me. With a larger period smaller waves can be more powerful than larger waves. The afternoon session at Crystals means I tap into the fourteen-second period. Because of the period the waves are long, my turns can be more drawn out, and my pintail surfboard will be the best for the barrels. I use the period – time is split into negotiating rocks, paddling out, duckdiving, doing manoeuvres, waiting for sets of waves to pass, and so on. If I'm in rhythm I'll be in position to get the best waves as they arrive, if not I miss waves, fall awkwardly, and go home frustrated.*

What emerges from the ethological turn is affective and embodied research that remains connected to how blokes like Ashley perform in different ways, as different rhythms, and with different environments.

### **Doing Research**

I've demonstrated throughout this chapter that my body is very much a part of my method. Furthermore, this method stresses research that accounts for bodies, feelings and detail, whereby these features are written in a manner that elicit affects experienced and remain faithful to the openness of liminal conversation. The felt intensity of going surfing as research is integral to finding new breaks where you wouldn't expect them. It also means a researching body that is penetrated by the field it investigates. I will make a turn now to demonstrate what I have been discussing at work. My aim is to draw into focus how researching men who surf is not an abstraction but remains in contact with the lived reality of its practice.



*At one stage my research took me to some "secret" islands off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. These islands are a surfing mecca where empty waves peel, adventures are undertaken, surf-breaks discovered, mateships forged, and malaria caught. My mate and I are in a beat up old van full of chickens, pigs, and too many passengers. A little kid keeps staring at my mate in a bewildered manner and we assume it is because of his white skin. Later we find out he was preoccupied with my mate's coconut breadroll. I hang out the window for more room. We get to a fishing port to hire a leaky fishing boat to ferry us to the islands. Getting something to eat from a "cholera" cart on the side of the road a policeman approaches. He fines us for something or other, and, in what we took for a joke, asks us about the rebel GAM group.<sup>v</sup> Pissed off at the fine, my mate Andy replies "bagus sekali" – they're the bees knees. To which the reply is machine-gun coming off the shoulder of the policeman. A scuffle ensues where locals jump in to settle the situation. Thankful for their help but not willing to hang around, we rush off to the boat.*

*Once on the boat we proceed to bail water for four hours until we get to the "hardcore" surfing area. It won't stop raining and caked in mud, we stumble onto a beach. Andy looks me straight in the eye and with the utmost intimacy says, "We did it". We find a hut to store our gear and go surfing. That night I check my camera but the batteries are dead. So Andy and I begin a long trek across the island for a rumoured trading point. It's a forty-five-minute walk each way and we follow a trail through some very rugged terrain. We stupidly set out on dusk without a torch believing we'll make it back before dark. Walking blindly we slip and slide our way over rocky hills and through thick vegetation. We discover that the trading post hasn't been open for a long time.*

*I pull out my journal when we return to our shack and it's soaking wet. I light the kerosene lantern as mosquitos buzz around my head. I have a bit of a fever and wonder if I'm about to experience a malaria-induced coma. I'm high on the anti-malarial drug chloroquine so my skin has burnt easily, but I can't take the shirt off for fear of those mosquitos. I squirm on the dirt floor as I try to find a comfortable position and my pen blots due to the humidity. I hurl the notebook and pen into the darkness.*

*The other surfers on the islands walk by warily. We hang on the edge of the crew but are slowly accepted. If I'd just arrived, walked into the makeshift bar, and sat amongst the surfers to ask questions, everyone would have walked off. Surfers are superstitious, respect-orientated, and can be a closed crew to "outsiders", and such codes are intensified in remote surfing locales. Without any respect, I was on the outer because I still had to show that I belonged in the surf.*

*In these Islands, swells sweep up from South Africa generated by the wind pattern of the "Roaring Forties". These swells travel thousands of miles across a deep Indian Ocean to crash heavily into well-formed reefs. To gain respect as well as research I paddle out into ten to twelve-foot swells that plunge onto shallow coral reefs.*

*So how do I do the research? I wipeout, I take off on the heaviest waves I can find, trek through jungles, upset machine-gun totting policemen, and leave my skin on the reef. I prove to the boys that I know how they feel. A large wave approaches and I paddle into it. It heaves off the reef and I hang precariously in the lip. I contemplate pulling back but don't because that would mean shame and ridicule -- as well as the*

*end of the research in this field. I drop over the ledge. "Fucking nice drop mate", a surfer growls.*

*This surfer hasn't shaved for months, is wiry from lack of food, and seems crazed from bouts of malaria. His voice is gravelly and suggests he's been smoking a lot of Guarams – the high nicotine local cigarettes. Later that night I walk with my chest out and head high, proud of that wave. The feral comes over for a chat and a few warm beers to talk about how surfing feels for him.*

There's no getting around my body's felt participation. It allows me to belong and detail what the boys do, say, feel, and believe. Not only does the visceral nature of the research allow me to belong but it allows me to remember to detail some occurrences while others remain oblique. My felt participation makes certain details matter.

*It was during a surf at "Cloudbreak" that the reef really brought this home to me. Cloudbreak is a shallow reef in Fiji that peels left. Storms in the Pacific Ocean push thick swells over a ledge of fire coral. This coral is sharp and alive. After catching a few waves I heard someone screaming for help in the impact zone. I paddled to see what was happening. A guy had fallen and hit the reef hard. I could see blood spilling into the water. I paddled in, while keeping a watch for approaching sets. Putting him on the front of my board we both held on as we were swept across the ledge into the safety of the still water. Scratched and shaking I had a look at his back. Deep fissures trailed down his back with the inside muscles showing. I felt sick. They were bad wounds. Worried about the guy we rushed back to the mainland. A trip to the hospital and the surfer was flown out for his home in America.*

*Later that evening when I wrote about the event in my journal I had to stop writing as my own cuts were burning from the bits of coral that remained embedded. Using some antiseptic and a scrubbing brush, my friend scoured the coral out. I was given a few drinks of strong alcohol to numb the pain. I went back to writing later, but struggled as my hand shook with the memory of fear in that surfer's eyes, my pride at having helped, my disgust at those who didn't, and the pain from my cuts. It took me a few days for my body to settle but this unsettled body meant the writing of this experience in a specific way.*

### **Conclusion**

A common method of researching surfing is through representations circulated, produced, reproduced, and distributed through the specialist surfing media. While appreciating the complex set of relations that regulate meanings when we take this approach attention also needs to be paid to how men who surf live within representations as they paddle out, sit around campfires, and search for waves. This is a will to connect with bodies and appreciate how we learn through them. Since learning to surf is a very embodied process it made me think that my research can be done in a similar way. In this way my work strives to intervene or interrupt the boys' self-representations as they negotiate or reproduce them.

Story-telling plays a crucial role in relaying representations yet they also reveal the process of construction as the boys contest what any story may mean or what took place. The method of writing as stories leads to a more open style of research. This is a research that is flexible in that it mobilises new ideas, new insights, and other voices. Such a method works on an affective register and relays ways the world can

be thought and is represented at a particular moment. I have found that this type of research creates wonder, connection, and can move people rather than frame or define masculinity and surfing. The stories encourage an investment in the research by those being researched, and in turn can lead to a questioning of assumed norms and dominant representations.

While my method is an experiment in trying to open up research, adopt an affective address, and broaden participation what is certain is that bodies record sensual data that visual observation sometimes lacks. That is, the affects and the reef embed themselves in my body to be recalled later – our bodies remember. As a surfing and researching body I have a response to the proximity of pride, disgust, coral, fear, and their physical states. I surf with waves that feel good, feel proud, and feel disgusting. My research comes through an affective body that goes surfing.

This bodily method has interesting possibilities for researching and recounting what a surfer feels like because it opens the process up. Going surfing and doing masculinity are lived texts where these are fluid and felt, and I have attempted to appreciate this by taking on a stylistic bent that is blocked when one tries to master it in terms of formal methods. This method I propose does not mean there is no planning involved in research, but a more open mode of planning, one based on contingency and an appreciation of how affects enable bodies to think, learn, feel, and make performances matter (Tomkins, 1995). Researching through bodies can widen our repertoire when researching cultural fields and facilitate discussion between the researcher and those being researched.

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<sup>i</sup> In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (1984) Pierre Bourdieu develops the concept of “cultural capital” to account for how class influences what we know, what our tastes are, and how we move through society. According to Bourdieu, through how we use our bodies, what and how we eat, how we dress, how we talk, and so on we classify ourselves and display our cultural capital. Thornton extends cultural capital beyond class to suggest that subcultures develop their own particular [sub]cultural capital to communicate, display their taste, determine what is “hip” or “cool”, and how to act in certain spaces.

<sup>ii</sup> In recent years there has been a re-emergence of showing films in community halls. See surfing cinematographer Jack McCoy’s film tours and Quicksilver’s “Australian Surf Movie Festival”.

<sup>iii</sup> Animism is the belief that a soul exists in every object even if it is inanimate, such as trees.

<sup>iv</sup> This slogan came from an advertising campaign by “Billabong”, one of Australia’s largest surfing companies.

<sup>v</sup> The province of Aceh on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia is currently in the grip of a twenty-year civil war between government forces and the Free Aceh Movement.

## Going Surfing

From the minute I got the board, I went surfing behind our house, only landing on the beach and creek.

Not Young, Not a Not and This is The ...

### Introduction

It's five o'clock in the morning. I wake up, roll out of bed, grab my board, the  
 and grab a banana. It's cool this morning. The wind is offshore and consistent. I  
 a mid-sized board off the rack near back my garage. The sound of the engine of my  
 old car started. Wait? Forgotten. I quickly check the rear view mirror and see a  
 stopped sign. Try to start the engine. Engine is as dead. Start fails. I have to  
 breakfast speed up the road. Pull into the car-park at my local surf-break. I  
 large for this spot. Judge the wind direction, swell direction, swell speed, and  
 how the sandbanks are formed at other spots. Pick another location - get there.  
 I run over the squeaky sand and it's cold. The sun is starting to come up and  
 my back. Waves peak and peel with perfect u-frame symmetry. Now, before it  
 I paddle out. A seagull swoops low to check me out. I make it out. The ride off  
 as it returns, I turn, paddle, and drop down the face.

I've done this hundreds of times, maybe thousands. Bodies, waves, surfboards,  
 regularly ...  
**Board and Wax (Photo: Single Fin Yellow Productions)**  
 people who don't surf, surfing is a sport, something to do on weekends, during

### Going Surfing

From the minute I got the board, I went surfing behind our house, only coming in for food and drink.

Nat Young: *Nat's Nat and That's That: A Surfing Legend.*

#### Introduction

*It's five o'clock in the morning. I wake up, roll out of bed, slip into my board-shorts, and grab a banana. It's cool this morning. The wind is offshore so I'm stoked! I grab a mid-sized board off the rack that holds my quiver; the swell is big. I try to get my old car started. Wax? Forgotten. A quick dash inside the house and I find a half melted blob. Try to start car again. Engine turns over. Rust falls away as I drive at breakneck speed up the road. Pull into the car-park at my local surf-break. Surf is too large for this spot. Judge the wind direction, swell direction, swell speed, and recall how the sandbanks are formed at other spots. Pick another location – get there quick! I run over the squeaky sand and it's cold. The sun is starting to come up and stings my back. Waves peak and peel with perfect a-frame symmetry. Nobody else is here so I paddle out. A seagull swoops low to check me out. I make it out to the take-off zone as a set looms, I turn, paddle, and drop down the face.*

I've done this hundreds of times, maybe thousands. Bodies, waves, surfboards, seagulls, and winds spin together to create familiar experiences for surfers. To many people who don't surf, surfing is a sport, something to do on weekends, during



summer, a fun hobby or pastime to get through those lazy Sundays. Is that surfing? In some ways yes, but many surfers would say that you have to surf whenever the swell is big, through the cold of winter, and most days of the year to prove that you belong. With this immersed participation comes experiences and bodily habits that translate into an authority to define surfing as something apart from those kooks who surf rarely or the general public who just doesn't get it.<sup>ii</sup> The male surfers that I study see themselves as a group in opposition to social norms, dividing the world into those who surf and those who are missing out. As one magazine writer argues 'We should encourage surfing to be publicly damned ... people don't have to fear us – they just have to not want to be us, not want to identify with a label that spells sick, perverted deviant' (*Underground Surf*, Spring, 1994: 4). As a surfer I immerse myself in a world of rituals, myths, representations, feelings, bodies, and experiences where the riding of a wave is more than an act. To "become-surfer" is a complex lived experience.

In Mark Stranger's doctoral thesis (2001) on surfing, commodification, and risk he argues that surfing may be losing its status as counter-cultural as it becomes increasingly commercialised and mainstream. All sorts of people go to the beach with new surfboards and surf-clothing from surf-shops, eager to give this surfing thing a try. The surfing industry has pushed for the popularisation of surfing to sell more products. Surfing competitions are now beamed live via the internet, surf-films are released in cinemas, surf culture paraphernalia has become collectable, and surf-clothing is paraded at fashion shows. Surf-companies sell products that signify freedom, adventure, nature, and fitness. Popular morning television chat shows on commercial stations are broadcast from contest sites and provide surf reports.<sup>iii</sup> The

take-away food industry, beer companies, and the motor-vehicle industry also attach themselves to this picture of surfing, knowing that it appeals to many people.

In this chapter I trace how particular ideas about hierarchies, respect, freedom, strength, sexuality, rebelliousness, and adventure have intermingled with masculinity to become established as self-representations of men who surf. I begin with an insider's account of surfing history – a collection of performances prized by surfers – and move on to an account of current cultural rules and norms, fed by these past experiences, that surfers perform now. The history I relate is drawn from personal experience, tales from the old surfers down at the local beach, and surfing history books.

In her article 'Sex, Gender, Sexuality: Can Ethologists Practice Genealogy?' (1996) Moira Gatens argues for a micro-analysis of live bodies and their performances. Reflecting upon what bodies connect with or don't, Gatens challenges us to think about what has to be in place for certain compositions to take place. 'Past compositions will affect the future possibilities of what may become' (12). Gatens provides an outline for an ethological account of performances which also considers their conditions of possibility. Bodies learn from past compositions how to do things but this learning is ongoing whereby new discourses, environmental factors, bodies, and so on may challenge traditions. There is not a private body with a linear history that goes out and acts on the world in the same manner each time, but a performance of discourses and bodies, each with diverse histories, which affect and are affected by each other. There is no way of knowing exactly what will happen during any given encounter or combination, often the same material can work differently in different

situations (Deleuze, 1992: 628). However, dominant discourses and ideologies on sexuality, gender, ethnicity, age, race, and sex will regulate, enable, and normalise how performances come together and which are circulated as surfing's history. For Gatens, any ethological analysis must account for conditions of possibility that have been passed on and normalised by past performances so as not to systemise them and thereby allow them to be considered "natural". These conditions of possibility produce dominant values, consent, consensus, and embed particular ways of making sense of the surfing field.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, masculinity is a process that is never fixed because of the dynamic interactivity of the biological, psychological, and sociological. My history of how a certain collection of performances and their dominant representations have travelled moves toward thinking about them like Gatens does: '[as] products of microprocesses rather than as points of origin' (1996: 9). For example, the sex-gender ideology and the discourses it perpetuates regarding gender roles and bodily expectations regulate and normalise male surfers' capacities. Alternative experiences and performances are silenced and marginalised by what we think men are, what we think masculinity is, what we think women are, what we think femininity is, what we think sexuality should be, and so on. As explained in chapter two, the boys and I are implicated in a process whereby we accept and absorb social representations that seem essential/natural even though they are the product of ideologies and discourses.

Experiences of surfing are often relayed with raucous laughter and interspersed with tales of bravery, all-day surf sessions, lack of organisation, mateships, drunken adventures, sexual conquests, or lack thereof (it's okay to fail at getting sex as long as you have a go). And the boys and I soak these representations into our skins. Take, for instance, the following account of a boys' own surf trip by surf writer Graeme Murdoch:

I've slept like a baby under the full moon on the grassy knolls of Johanna Beach, a mind full of Anglesea's finest hash my sedative ... I've slept like a king under the picnic table at Ulladulla's Golf-Course reef, on a bench at Wollongong's beachfront park ... With each successful sleepover I became more dismissive of mates ... who would not consider a weekend getaway or overnight hit down the coast without lining up some sort of night shelter ... it was without a second thought that I piled into one of two old golden Holdens with Morgy, Adsy and Dave ... There followed many hours of senseless drinking, during which I scored the greatest denial from a girl that I – or perhaps all of mankind – have ever experienced ... Hungry after adventure we grabbed a late-night pizza, a bottle of coke, a shopping trolley ... Like a cross between the chariot race in Ben Hur, the X-treme Games, and early '80's TV event *Almost Anything Goes* we galloped our plucky little street-luge through the night ... so a particularly noisy little party developed. Me, Adsy and the Trolley ... Adsy went to crash in a car, and I loitered with the trolley 'til I was sure there would be no late surge of party guests ... We had picked the wrong place for a party. A huge irate fisher-type bloke ... erupted ... I believed his threats of violence. I believed I was about to find out how it felt to be in that shark cage scene in *Jaws 2* ... He's got two dogs and murder in his eyes ... We bailed. Suffolk [a surf spot] was pumping (in *Australia's Surfing Life*, March, 2004: 61-62).

The boys often use, relay, and perform such representations. The idea is often to be “an animal” who “takes the world on”.<sup>iv</sup> The point of this chapter is to get across how such representations of masculinity, and the conditions of possibility that produce

them, dominate surfing's history so as to now be considered what a man who surfs really is. A normative relation between masculinity, freedom, rebelliousness, adventure, and so on is defined.

I want to emphasise that past lived experiences that men who surf relay are full of fleshy bodies that pass on the discourses and ideologies. Very particular performances, and the bodies that constitute them, now dominate the field by regulating how people can move through and make sense of surfing. Male surfing bodies performing particular ideologies and discourses on sex, gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, and so on is what passes conditions on so that they continue to be pervasive in the rules and cultural norms that dominate now. In this chapter I will be focussing on gender but I will briefly address the importance of class and sexuality in chapter five prior to a fictocritical account of a day in the life of two surfers.

In Australia the history of surfing tends towards panoramic over-view. Historical work includes Nat Young and Craig McGregor's *The History of Surfing* (1983); Nick Carroll's *The Next Wave: A Survey of World Surfing* (1991); as well as critical work such as Leanne Stedman's (1997) work on surfing magazines; Mark Stranger's (2001) doctoral thesis on surfing, commodification, and risk; and Ken Pearson's *Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand* (1979). These accounts of Australian surfing use broad functionalist descriptions to treat the surfing community as a collective whole. While the above investigations provide comprehensive descriptions of surfing they don't articulate visceral surfing bodies living and feeling their way *within* representations and the conditions of possibility that regulate them.

Prominent Australian sports author Jack Pollard, in *The Australian Surfrider* (1963),

was aware of the importance of what surfing bodies feel and what they could reveal claiming that:

An expert can virtually read a surfer's character from the way he handles a wave. It is this feeling of intense elation that ensnares a board rider and unless you appreciate this you will never understand surfers. If you want real emotional kicks, this is it (9-10).

My alternative history, with its recognition of how micro-processes establish social representations and practices of surfing, is an account of how a surfer's "intense elation" is constructed. The current cultural norms, performances, and rules I articulate here are hegemonic, and still block alternative compositions. But I hope to interrupt their smooth circulation by making clear that they are not essential in any way but the effects of conditions of possibility that actually limit the "intense elation" in the surfing field and how men who surf may do masculinity.'

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### **Wave-sliding in Hawai'i**

Ku mai! Ku mai! Ka nalu nui mai Kahiki mai,  
`Alo po`i pu! Kū mai ka pohuehue,  
Hu! Kaiko`o loa.

'Arise! Arise! Ye great surfs from Kahiki,  
The powerful curling waves, arise with pohuehue,  
Well up, long raging surf'.

The above is a Hawai'ian surf prayer to bring up waves. The surfers of Waikiki chant to an ocean that has been flat for too long. They cry for opportunities to streak across breakers that offer pleasure, the chance to make some money, and perhaps to seduce the girls who watch from the shade of the coconut palms. Maybe too, the chief will see their prowess and offer them the use of one of his beautiful Olo surfboards.

This scenario is several hundred years old, or is it 1000 years? Missionaries, sailors, and explorers recorded how Peruvian fisherman would kneel and surf to shore on their tiny fishing craft known as "caballitos". Surfing historians Ben Finney and James Houston (1996) document how people rode waves in their canoes on the West African coast, such as at Ghana and Senegal. While surfing has developed the world over, Hawai'i is regarded as the birthplace of riding waves for pleasure and honour. Captain James Cook observed that children in Hawai'i rode waves with palm fronds and planks of wood, a 4000 year-old form of surfing known in Hawai'i as "paipo".

*A people who do not trust the white-skinned men and their colourful suits have speared Captain James Cook on the beach. As the waves wash the blood away the exploratory expedition moves on. It's early in the morning and warm trade winds blow across the Sandwich Islands. Lieutenant James King, a British Naval Officer on Captain Cook's third expedition to the Pacific, watches a collection of Hawai'ians scream and holler as they glide along on the blue rollers that keep his boat anchored out to sea. His table rocks to the increasing swell and the candle seems highly inadequate as the trade winds blow through the starboard window snuffing it out.*

In another surfing historical project Frank Margan and Ben Finney established that surfing for Hawai'ians was fun, a rite of passage, initiation, sacred ritual, and a form of courtship (1970). In *The History of Surfing* (1983) the authors Nat Young and Craig Macgregor note that Hawai'ians used the word "he'enalu" to represent surfing. "he'e" meant to 'change from a solid to a liquid substance' or 'run as liquid'; nalu ... can refer to the surfing motion of a wave' (31).

*The chant has worked and the swells roar down from the Aleutian Island chain far to the north. The swells separate and pick up speed, tempting the Hawai'ian surfers to paddle out. A young man waits for his board to be finished. He has asked the Kahuna, the expert craftsman, to shape him an Alaia – a commoner's surfboard. It has cost him many months of work, but he has been lucky. During the last swell he gambled on a very good friend of his to win a surfing contest against another surfer. His friend rode the biggest and longest waves.*

*The young surfer's board is to be twelve-feet long and the Kahuna has completed the rituals and laid gifts for the koa tree to be carved. As the young surfer waits, he looks across at the magnificent Olo board that stands outside the chief's family home. The young surfer is a commoner so he cannot have one of those well-balanced and magnificently shaped boards. The Olo is much longer and thicker than his own but also much better for the chief because it catches waves early and allows the chief to dominate the surf-break.<sup>vi</sup> Perhaps if the young surfer proved himself one day when the rollers broke on the outer reefs, he could be honoured with one. Good surfers are afforded privileges and status that other commoners are forbidden (Margan and Finney, 1970: 57).*



The missionaries managed to influence Hawai'ian chiefs to decree that surfing led to physical injury, idleness, gambling, and sexual promiscuity. The Hawai'ian "kapu" system of priestly prohibitions was co-opted (Finney, 1970). Wave-sliding didn't disappear altogether, but its participation levels waned. A few isolated pockets continued to surf on the islands of Maui, Kauai, and Oahu.

Leonard Lueras' (1984) instructional book on surfing has a section on how surfing began to be resurrected in Hawai'i. In 1908 the Hawai'ian Outrigger club was formed at Waikiki Beach on Oahu. An entrepreneur by the name of Alexander Hume Ford claimed he wanted 'to give an added and permanent attraction to Hawai'i and make Waikiki always the home of the surfer' (68). Hawai'ian surfer Duke Kahanamoku (1968) writes that in 1911 an inability to afford the "white man fees" for the club led to local Hawai'ians forming the *Hui Nalu* club (32).

### **California Goes Surfing**

In 1885, three Hawai'ian princes surfed at Santa Cruz, California. In 1908 an Irish-Hawai'ian surfer, George Freeth, was hired by a railroad company to display his surfing skills around Redondo Beach and Venice, California (Finney and Houston, 1996; Young and McGregor, 1983). But the most significant contributor to the rejuvenation of surfing was Duke Kahanamoku. Born in 1890, Kahanamoku was an Olympic champion swimmer who toured the world displaying his swimming prowess.<sup>vii</sup> As he toured, he went surfing and his exhibitions influenced many (Lueras, 1984: 96). Kahanamoku surfed a heavy redwood board. However, it was new surfers such as Tom Blake who experimented with designs that made surfing easier and more accessible to people who wanted to feel what Kahanamoku was feeling.

*Imagine a sunny day in 1926. Tom Blake has finished his morning juice and is looking at some of the ancient Hawai'ian surfboards he's been restoring. Bulky as they are he caresses one or two. He knows them intimately. Every bump, every curve, and every grain of the wood has experienced his touch. The briny smell embedded in the timber carries his memories back to his last surf.*

*Picking his replica Olo board up, Tom reflects on how heavy and cumbersome the board seems. Inspired by the ingenuity of the ancient Hawai'ian surfers he decides to hollow out his surfboard. Blake drills hundreds of holes in the board and seals them. This alters the weight dramatically. His first few waves on the new surfboard feel great! The board is much faster and catching the waves is easier. Inspired, he returns to the shed. Light shines out through a broken window into the tropical night air and rain patters on the tin roof as Blake sweats, carves, and creates. His new "hollow" boards have been going fast but also keep sliding out. To correct this he makes a fin to attach to the bottom of the board.*

*Some time later Blake is out at his favourite surf-break. Other surfers who haven't seen the board surfed yet smirk as he makes his way across the sand. First wave he swoops off the bottom back to the top of the wave. His friend, Tom Reid, catches the next wave of the set and flounders to turn his own solid wood board. "Tom, can I get one like you have?"<sup>viii</sup>*

In California, the lighter surfboards saw surfing 'surge in popularity' (Young and McGregor, 1983: 49). Californian surfers began cruising the coast's surfing spots such as Malibu, Rincon, and Wind'n'Sea. Riding waves, music, beachgirls,

“woodies” – station-wagons with wooden panelling – began to mark out a Californian surf culture. But ‘it was the Gidget movies, books and magazines that did as much as anything to bring surfing to the masses’ (82). ““For Chrissake,” mumbled Tubesteak, “it’s a midget, a girl midget, a goddamn gidget!”” (82).

Frederick Kohner wrote *Gidget* about his daughter Kathryn’s coming-of-age adventures while surfing at Malibu. The novel was commercialised in a big budget Hollywood production in 1957 starring James Darren as “Moondoggie” and Sandra Dee as the passionate surfing addict “Gidget”.<sup>ix</sup> In Sydney, *Gidget* was screened for the first time in late 1959 at the Lyceum Theatre.

Before *Gidget*, surfing had been depicted as the exclusive domain of wild, adventurous, and delinquent men. While *Gidget* seemed to promise a shift in surfing’s gender politics, the film largely re-entrenches stereotypical gender roles. Gidget nearly drowns but is pulled from the water by Moondoggie. When Gidget surfs, she’s represented as needing a man to cling to. She’s weak and needs protection. As Moondoggie claims: ‘A girl like you – you’re a real responsibility’. Not surprisingly, men do the majority of surfing in the film. The leader of the surfing crew is Kahuna (acted by Cliff Robertson) who sleeps on the beach, avoids work, and travels the world’s surf spots. In her study of beach movies Joan Ormrod writes that in many ways, the film represents surfers in a dominant masculine stereotype of ‘adventure’, ‘rebellion’, and ‘non-comformity’ (2002: para. 13).

Surfers of the time resented the film’s popularity, media, business attention, and the suggestion that surfing was just a passing teenage experiment. As an alternative to

Gidget many Californian surfers looked towards Mickey “Da Cat” Dora as representing authentic surfing. In the film *Surfers: The Movie* (1989) Dora is represented as an inventive surfer, as having experienced considerable competitive success, and as having surfed Malibu before surfing became popular. After Gidget, Dora stopped competing, claimed to be disillusioned with the marketing of surfing as a commodity, and travelled to isolated coastlines to escape the crowds. Dora epitomised the mythical idea of a rebellious surfer. When asked about his lifestyle Dora said:

My whole life is this escape, my whole life is this wave. I drop into ‘em, set the whole thing up, pull out the bottom turn, pull up into it and shoot for my life, going for broke man, behind me, all the shit goes over my back. The screaming parents, teachers, police, priests, politicians, kneeboarders, wind-surfers, they’re all going over the falls into the reef – head first into the fucking reef – and I’m shooting for my life, and when it starts to close out, I pull out the bottom, out to the back, and I pick up another one, and do the same goddamn thing

(in *Surfers: The Movie*, 1989).

So where Kathryn represents a domesticated and conformist idea of surfing, Dora represents the rebel surfer still favoured by many surfers, surf journalists, and surf filmmakers today.<sup>x</sup> Both representations are deeply gendered. The film *Gidget* depicts Kathryn as passive and her character provokes action by the men. Kathryn does surf but this ability plays a minimal role as everything she does is meant to inspire love, fear, and so on by various heroic males. In this way the men control what actually happens and are the ones viewers are meant to identify with. Kathryn becomes an image onto which men’s stories and adventures can be imposed upon. She has no real importance even though the film is supposed to be about a teenage girl surfer. In

contrast, *Surfers: the Movie* depicts Dora in all his glory. He is not an image upon which stories are imposed upon but “the” story. His role is to make a meaning of surfing and pass it on to the viewer. What Dora does and what this means is conveyed by technical means. He is the one always surfing. The film is in a documentary mode to depict “realness”. We’re supposed to watch him surf to see how to be a real surfer. Dora drives the film and is not there simply to provoke the actions of others. He *is* the action. We are also meant to listen to what he has to say when he looks directly at the camera during interviews. The interviews are shot with a bland background so as to not distract the viewer from the weight of his words.

While such representations of surfing were being lived in the United States first they also floated on the tides west over Pacific Ocean waters to Australia. Local conditions led to similar stereotypes created from our waves and social milieu.

### **Aussie Surfers**

John Bloomfield (1959) wrote one of the earliest instructional books on surfing. He notes that swimming in the Australian surf began with a sense of rebellion. During the Victorian era it was pronounced that ‘no person was to bathe “in waters exposed to view from any wharf, street, public place or dwelling house between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 p.m.”’ (2). To get around such prohibitions some people would go for a swim amongst the waves early in the morning. Amongst them a Pacific Islander by the name of Tommy Tamma soon came to public notice for ‘the way in which he could throw himself in the path of a wave and go hurtling towards the beach’ (3). Manly Council allowed all-day bathing in November 1903:

*It's 1905 and Frank and Charlie Bell are bored with just swimming. "What do ya reckon Charlie, we take the outhouse door into the surf and ride the foam?" Charlie looks at his brother with a mad glint to his eye, "yeah, the girls'll think were crazy". A few of their mates help them pull the narrow door off its hinges. Frank and Charlie tip toe hurriedly across the hot sand, the sun has been up for awhile now. The wind is blowing hard from the south and makes the door hard to carry. "Hold onto it will ya Frank, bloody hell!" The white-water crashes into them. Charlie manages to jump onto the door and lie down as a wave approaches. Made of heavy timber and being flat the door pearls so he tumbles in the white-water. Charlie pops up from the turbulence and his shorts have nearly been ripped off. The onlookers roar with laughter. Frank ties his pants tighter and grabs the door to have a go.*

While the door didn't work, in 1912 C. D. Patterson of Manly went surfing on a solid wood Alaia board he brought from Hawai'i. But he couldn't make the board trim like the Hawai'ians did (Martin, 1991). Les Hinds of North Steyne made replicas of the Alaia so his mates and him could do what Patterson couldn't. The lucky few who had access to the boards stood up in the white-water and rode straight to shore, often on their knees. On the fifteenth of January 1915, Duke Kahanamoku, in Australia as a guest of the New South Wales Swimming Association, paddled out at Freshwater Beach. Kahanamoku reflected:

I must have put on a show that more than tapped their fancy, for the crowds on shore applauded me long and loud. There had been no way of knowing that they would go for it in the manner in which they did. I soared and glided, drifted and sideslipped, with that blending of flying and sailing which only experienced surfers can know and fully appreciate. The Aussies became instant converts. Nothing would do but that I must instruct them in board building – a thing I did with

pleasure. Before I left that fabulous land, the Australians had already turned to making their own boards and practicing what I had shown them in the surf (1968: 35-36).

It must have been an amazing spectacle. Waves roll in slow at Freshwater. A gradual incline and sand bottom dissipates the energy. The clear water allows people to see dolphins streak through the waves. Can you imagine the astonishment as a man paddles out on a plank of wood and stands up as if to emulate nature? Isabelle Latham – one of Australia’s first surfers – hit the waves for the first time with Kahanamoku on his board. She must have been stoked.

Some surf lifesavers took to the new surfboard riding with vigour. Surf lifesaving had been established around the turn of the century due to an increase in drowning when all-day bathing was legalised. The first surf lifesaving club was formed in 1906 by a group of free bathing activists in Bondi who campaigned to overturn the previous restrictions and laws.<sup>xi</sup> The 1930s saw the construction of many clubhouses at beaches like Dee Why, Palm Beach, Harbord, and Curl Curl. The clubs were regimented, had by-laws, and members abided by a constitution. While documenting the rise of surf clubs Jack Wilson (1979) draws attention to how the clubs quickly expanded from 5000 members in 1929 to 8000 by 1936, and prospective recruits had to be turned away. The surf life saver and his bronzed body quickly became an icon of Australian manhood. An author, Ian Moffit (1973), remembers the grandeur of the times:

Vic Rushby, surf club captain, was my first Australian Hero: tall and grey as a digger monument, straight as steel, iced salt water in his veins ... strong as granite: austere, inviolate ... like a Viking in the surfboat (50).

Magazines, advertising campaigns, and tourist promotion all pursued the theme of manhood. Four women had gained the Bronze medallion, a qualification for surf rescue, by 1910 and teams of women life savers had been formed at Manly and Coogee in the same year, but by 1912 they had been barred from further attempts, under the “rationale” of danger and physical inability. So strong was the growing relationship between the surf and masculinity that women were only allowed to patrol beaches again from 1979. Surf journalist Tim Baker notes how the surf lifesavers having fun riding surfboards also stopped going on patrol, albeit due to their own decision (in Carroll, 1991).

*So whenever the headland comes alive with the roar of the ocean some men, who are supposed to be on patrol, carry long wooden planks across the dried up creek in front of the surf-clubhouse, over a coarse gravel road, and past the bent eucalypt tree. The club captain hears snatches of conversation. “The wind is good,” “Check Larry’s tracks on that last wave,” “Where did you get that board?” What do these blokes think they’re doing, the clubhouse isn’t a storehouse for their toys. The captain decides to say something. “Hey you! Where do ya think you’re goin’?” he asks. “Bugger patrol, we’re goin’ surfing,” replies one of the surfers. The captain’s face is bright red.*

Such surfers were considered non-conformist troublemakers by surf club officials as they were seen to lack discipline and an ethic of public service. Surfers initially remained attached to surf life saving clubs because of the weight of the surfboards. The sixty-five-pounds of solid wood made it too hard to transport the boards very far. It was easier to keep them at the clubhouse. In Australia the first hollow boards to



resemble those of Tom Blake in California were made by Frank Adler of Maroubra in 1934, followed by Bill Wallace, Norm Casey, and Gordon Woods in the 1940s (www.surfresearch.com.au). The board's weight was reduced to forty-five pounds.

The disciplined nature of the clubs was compromised by surfing's reputation as a leisure activity, which caused a split between surfers and the Surf Life Saving Association. Ken Pearson in his *Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand* (1979) explains that:

There was a big change in the manner of the [Surf Life Saving Members] after the War. They were restless and hard to control ... small groups of long plywood board riders were turning away from their home beaches to try other surfs nearby (11).

A visit by American Lifeguards in 1956 contributed to the split between surf life saving clubs and surfers. Sponsored by the oil company Ampol, the lifeguards arrived in Australia as part of the Melbourne Olympics and were asked to display their surfing. The Americans paddled out on "malibus" which were much lighter than most Australian boards of the time. Many Australian surfers changed to malibus.

Competition was fierce among board manufacturers who all relied upon Ampol petroleum products for raw materials to produce the new boards. 1500 boards were made in 1959, and by 1962 it had increased five-fold (Pollard, 1963: 56).

During the 1950s and 1960s those who were surfing attended surf films such as *The Big Surf* (1957), *Big Wednesday* (1961), *Surfing Holidays* (1962), and *Endless Summer* (1964) that were screened in Australian cinemas. The first Australian surf-movie, *Surf Trek to Hawai'i* (1960) was made by Bob Evans and he dominated the Australian surf-movie scene for a decade. Evans would show his films up and down

the coast, screening at picture theatres, surf clubs, and local halls. These films helped to establish surfing as an independent subculture by disseminating stereotyped images of surfers – the “surfie” type had shaggy sun bleached hair, tanned bodies, adventurous personas, and were always men. These stereotypes were not unlike Moffit’s description of Vic Rushby, the surf club captain. A big difference, however, was that the surfers didn’t have to work their way up through the official hierarchy of the surf clubs. Surfers developed their own hierarchy, one that did not require living according to formal “rules set by others”. Men from the “virgin” era of Australian surfing, documented by Evans et al, are still treated with awe and respect on beaches and in magazine articles, films, and books which refer to them as the “pioneers”. Some of them have taken on the role of “old man on the point” and many younger surfers listen to their stories with rapt attention.

In 1966 Bob McTavish, a surfboard shaper, wasn’t convinced the pioneers new everything about surfing and decided that their malibus were too long. He wanted a surfboard which could handle the wide variety of Australian waves and that would stay near the curl – where he thought the excitement and speed was. According to surf filmmaker and cultural enthusiast Alby Thoms (2000), McTavish and lobster-fisherman George Greenough chopped several feet off a surfboard, made it thinner, called it the “Fantastic Plastic Machine”, and initiated a ‘short-board revolution’ (95). Rather than gliding along waves, McTavish, Greenough, and their mates were swinging off the base of the wave and aggressively hitting the lip – the top part of the wave. McTavish and his mates now thought surfing felt more exciting. Radical direction changes were possible as were deep tube rides. This was no surprise for Greenough who spent a lot of time on his front verandah inventing a range of new

surfing technology, such as a very short fibreglass saucer that was ridden on the knees, which he called a spoon, and 'flexible fins modelled after dolphin dorsal fins' (96).

Greenough also shot a film, *The Innermost Limits of Pure Fun* (1970), which, in a breakthrough for surf filmmaking, was shot from inside the hollow of the breaking wave. To do this he needed a lightweight camera inside a watertight housing. No such equipment was available so Greenough bought an old high-speed Air Force movie camera, pulled it apart, and put it back together inside a fibreglass shell he made out of surfboard resin. He also fitted a fish-eye lens to the camera. This lens creates a hemispherical field of view providing 180-degree vision. The image it delivers distorts the geography but provides a broad field of view. In this way the whole curvature of a wave could be seen, including the falling lip when he was filming inside the tube. Strapping his home-made camera to his back and riding an inflatable surf mate he would slide along wave lying down which enabled him to fit inside the wave easier. This was the first ever footage of waves while riding them, and the first ever footage of inside a wave breaking. The response was a plethora of excitement and respect from board-builders, Hollywood cinematographers, surf filmmakers, writers, surfers, sailors, and so on. Retrospections are held of his work and he continues to make new films and build "inspired" surfboards today.

During the late 1960s and 1970s blokes riding boards like those of McTavish and Greenough were aggressively surfing the waves of city surfing strongholds like Dee Why, Newcastle, the Gold Coast, and Cronulla. Blokes were legends as they rode these new boards during the huge 1974 swell that battered the east coast, hung out the

front of local bakeries heckling tourists, and ran amok at pubs in their working-class suburbs. These same blokes now lament how the swells aren't as big now that trendy cafes have replaced the bakeries, and the suburbs have been gentrified. Some surfers were influenced by the Vietnam war and the "flower power" movement of the hippies in Haight-Ashbury from 1966 to the end of the decade. These blokes left the cities for uncrowded organic havens of northern New South Wales where the air was cleaner and the pace slower. A surfing icon Nat Young (2002) explains, previously low-populated towns such as Angourie, Byron Bay, and Lennox Head filled with surfers. Marijuana, hashish, acid, and magic mushrooms became a part of many surfers' experiences during this period.

Albie Falzon was immersed in this "hippie" surfing lifestyle and documented it in his cult film *Morning of the Earth* (1972). Falzon's unique photography captures the ocean in morning sunlight, his friends travelling to and living in small coastal towns, blokes shaping surfboards in their backyards, surfboards covered in murals, men trekking through Asia in search of "exotic" waves, and the cooking of home-grown vegetable soup, all to a soundtrack of folk music. This aesthetic sense and these experiences were challenged by the rise of professional competitive surfing.

During the 1970s a new surfing anti-hero emerged from Falzon's films. Michael Peterson was a surfer who rode the new shortboards in Falzon's films in ways the surfing community hadn't seen before. Images of his surfing in the film were different to the rest of the surfers and have become archetypal of what was to become an alternative to the hippies. His surfing was very aggressive and he did large carves in the wave-face; it was like he was angry with the waves.

Michael Peterson's biographer Sean Doherty (2005) documents how during the early 1970s and the birth of professional surfing, Peterson won every major surf contest. The significant difference was Peterson's attitude to competition. Stories circulate about how he would paddle out late for a heat, arriving from around the headland riding a wave to psyche out his competitor. He was known for the way he would bump into his competitor as he paddled out for his heat. Peterson was an imposing figure with his long limbs, muscled physique, and focussed stare. He shaped his own boards and refused to contribute to the emerging corporate surfing industry. He also refused to accommodate the emergent surfing media by refusing all interviews. During award ceremonies he wouldn't turn up to accept prizes, and when he did he was sometimes drunk or on drugs. In 1975 at Bells Beach he hid in the bushes rather than accept his trophy. Peterson became the ultimate anti-hero who was represented as rejecting society while other pro surfers tried to make surfing popular and sponsor friendly.

In 1975 Peterson went to the Stubbies surfing contest at Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast. This surfing contest had rock concerts, lots of media exposure, huge crowds, and a man-on-man format. This format is where two surfers had to jockey for position and surf the waves in an aggressive style. Peterson won the contest and, in a shock to the surfing community, stopped competing, and became a recluse. Soon after he stopped surfing altogether. In 1983 he was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic after being arrested by police for a car chase. He remains a revered figure in Australian surfing mythology because he managed to compete without "selling his soul". When asked about why he stopped competing Peterson explained that the

“twin-fin” (a surfboard with two fins) had arrived on the scene. This was a surfboard that required new techniques (Doherty, 2005).

*My dad told me stories about seeing Peterson surf at Kirra, a famous surf-break on the Gold Coast. But it was when I saw Storm Riders (1982) at the town hall at Burleigh Heads that the counter-culture surfing representations Peterson embodied really took a hold of my life. This film by Dick Hoole and Jack McCoy captured aggressive surfing on film and the soundtrack was Australian pub rock such as Split Enz, Australian Crawl, and Men at Work. Blokes snuck in to watch it, smoked marijuana, drank beer in the back seat, and tried to score sex with the girls they'd brought along. I went with some of the older boys who had been taking me surfing. The waves on the screen were massive. A surfer flew along a wave, arms swinging, and then swooped into a turn that left streaks of water suspended in the air. After awhile I whinged for some refreshments and was punched in the arm by some grommets a few years older than me. Screams came from the back of the hall and the audience howled with laughter when somebody fell, either on the filmed wave, or because someone in the audience was too drunk to sit still. The very next morning the blokes carrying surfboards packed the surf. A few surfboards had surfboards with a single fin. There were quite a few twinnys (two fins), and even a small amount of thrusters (three fins). A surfboard in the local surf shop window had a field of stars on it that formed the shape of a wave, with a little fluoro alien man flying down the face beneath a strange spaceship. It was a brand new twinnie. My body wasn't ready for that board and neither was my milk-run money, so I returned to my coolite. A coolite is a plain foam surfboard that leaves rashes on your belly.<sup>xiii</sup> But I would get a twinnie soon because I wanted to surf like the blokes who rode them did.*

As surfing became more popular some surfers wanted to establish it as a professional sport, early competitions were amateur affairs. The International Professional Surfing Circuit was established during the 1970s, gained momentum during the 1980s, and has since become the Association of Surfing Professionals.<sup>xiii</sup> The growth of competitive surfing saw surfing spread to many different countries as the Tour went to surf-breaks around the world.<sup>xiv</sup> While surfing competitions were becoming professional surfing still had a counter-culture image associated with the representations Falzon reproduced or Peterson embodied. Surf commentator and journalist Derek Hynd argues many surfers rejected professional competitions as prostitution (in Carroll, 1991: 48). For these “soul surfers”, contests with their surfing corporations, garish clothes, urban focus, and media exposure, took the surfer away from what “surfing really is” – is a chance to express yourself and be part of nature.<sup>xv</sup> The dialectic that was developing became very clear to me one day as I sat in the back of a panel van.

*Black-and-white cows, rolling grass hills, and snippets of unmolested bushland drifted by. The inside of the van was plastered with stickers for Survival Surf Wax, Line-Up magazine, Crystal Cylinders surf-wear, and one saying “plumbers are good with their tools”. We headed down past then rural Byron Bay. A series of beach breaks awaited and it was my first opportunity to sample their delights. We pulled into a car-park. I jumped out with my fluoro green Zappa board, snug in my yellow Ripcurl wetsuit. It’s the early 1980s. “Turtle”, the driver of the van, hesitated as a group of guys in black wetsuits with salt encrusted long hair approached. “What the fuck are you boys doin’ here, fuck off?” I looked up at Turtle. I waited for him to punch them in the head. “What’s that poofy little thing you got there, grommet?” one*

*asked.<sup>xvi</sup> I looked over to their boards, which lay beside an old ute. They were sleek, narrow, and yellowed from over-exposure to the sun. These boards had seen a lot of waves. I stammered something about the board being a "Zappa" and I got ... laughter. Turtle mumbled apologies and told them we're leaving. "Bloody oath you're leaving!" We grommies climbed into the car and Turtle drove us along the winding road back past black-and-white cows and rolling grass hills to the contested city beaches of the Gold Coast. Reclining on my still dry surfboard I decided never to go surfing with Turtle again. He didn't seem as cool as those "soul" surfers because he was a wimp who backed down. I remember thinking that MP (Michael Peterson) wouldn't have backed down.<sup>xvii</sup>*

Surfers decry each other for either supporting the surfing industry or for not doing enough to turn surfing into a world-class sport. Young laments some of the changes that occurred to surfing with professionalisation and the disintegrating soul, stating:

When they asked us what surfing was we should have called it a spiritual activity and not just a sport, because that is what put us on the wrong track. We made a mistake when we called it a sport (in Bystrom, 1998: 9).

This dialectic between competition and soul surfing is still prominent today. Modern marketing techniques use this dialectic. Products are marketed to both sides of this opposition with different high-profile surfers being given credibility depending on the presumed market.

The surfer I most looked up to during the 1970s and 1980s wasn't a "bloody hippy". We would buy products promoted by Mark Richards, a four-times world champ.



Richards helped popularise twinnys. He would compete against blokes on single-fins but his twin-fin allowed him to gain more speed across small waves and turn sharply. His arms were always outstretched and bent at the elbow, hence he was nick-named the wounded seagull. We all got twinnys. But when the surf got bigger these twinnys would spin-out. Then in the early 1980s Simon Anderson, a competitive surfer from Sydney's Narrabeen Beach, put three fins on a surfboard. Anderson used the design to win the 1981 Bells Beach, Coke Surfabout, and Pipeline Masters surfing competitions.

My dad remembers the first exposure of the thruster clearly and reminds me of how when he first got one he had trouble adjusting his surfing to suit the way the surfboard rode. When riding previous designs the surfer's front foot steered the board. Thruster surfing emphasises a different weight distribution, with greater back foot pressure. My dad never got the hang of riding thrusters, blaming his incompetence on his weak knees, passed the surfboard onto me, and went back to surfing his single-fin. By the late 1980s everyone, except my dad, had a thruster. In recent years there has also been a "renaissance" of long-board surfing (malibus) with older blokes returning to and promoting the style of surfing these surfboard require – grace, smoothness, and straight lines (trim). There's now a professional long-board contest circuit and specialised magazines.

While Anderson didn't patent his design, many other surfers were not so generous. During the 1980s and 90s surfing became more commercialised as surf companies listed on stock exchanges and as a specialist surf media became established. Surfing is now happening on every continent. Surf competitions are held at premium, and

sometimes remote, wave locations and I watch them live on the internet. This growth of communication technology and the freedom it gives the contests to go to beautiful, and often dangerous, waves has meant the securing of sponsorship agreements worth millions of dollars. Such sponsors represent surfing as an “X-treme sport” populated by x-treme men.

The 1990s has seen the entrenchment of professional “free-surfers”, surfers who are paid to tour the world and surf, but do not compete against other surfers. Like the American Ampol surfers who toured Australia in the 1950s, they are exhibition surfers whose surfing is documented on film and disseminated by promotional DVDs. Blokes like David Rastovich, Dylan Longbottom, and Brendan Margieson are used to reinforce surf clothing company credibility by aligning them with the mythologised traditions of adventure and soul surfers. There’s been a recent resurgence of footage, starring these free-surfers, that emphasises the soul surfing aesthetic. To promote surfing as spiritual enlightenment, and the need for surfing products that signify this, the footage is shot on grainy high-eight film, blokes ride a variety of different surfboards they shaped themselves, “new” surf folk music such as Jack Johnson is the soundtrack, and images are like those that Falzon favoured. These free-surfers also promote specialist surf tourism, a new industry where tour companies take surfers, mostly affluent industrialised country nationals, to luxury “surf camps”, or on yachts, that have access to excellent waves. As a result many of my mates have been inspired to “get on the search”, as the surfing company Rip Curl suggests.

The stories, feelings, and experiences that constitute surfing’s history are an important part of the bodies that go surfing, and pack for surf trips, today. What has been felt

and done in the past passes through our bodies. We grow up sitting around campfires listening to such histories and soaking the conditions of possibility into our skins. Bodies pass on past surfing experiences that then provide cultural rules we're meant to abide by now, establish approved personas, develop norms, reproduce certain representations, relay what should constitute intense elation during a ride, and entrench traditions that we're expected to live up to. I'll make a shift now to having a look at how the boys' self-representations of masculinity and surfing continue to play out dominant relations established by conditions of possibility such as the sex-gender ideology that this history passes on. The prominence of certain past surfing performances and the flow of representations they enable have given rise to particular cultural rules, ways of negotiating them, and maps of meaning.

### **Surfing Now**

*The swell is up today as a low-pressure system spins off New Zealand. The swell has a fair bit of east in it and there's no wind. After a frustrating drive through traffic – why can't people understand the surf's up? – I get to Maroubra. This beach is in Sydney and picks up plenty of today's north-east swell. The swells are stretched out to the horizon. It's a grey morning so only a few others stand on sand dunes nearby, their jumper hoods pulled over their heads. I shiver from cold and anticipation. The reef off the headland is doing a fair impersonation of a point-break as waves peel down its flanks. Some twist and hollow out into barrels.<sup>xviii</sup> Everyone's keen to get one of those.*

*The sound of a V8 engine echoes through the car-park behind us. It's the "Bra Boys", local guys who've grown up in the area.<sup>xix</sup> This is a working-class district that has a reputation of boys who work hard, play hard, and can fight. I'm not a local. The Bra*

*Boys step to the middle of the line of surfers on the sand dune. Feet shuffle away. Eyes stay fixed on the surf with the occasional glance at the locals. I go back to my car to get my board. I lock the car.*

*Out in the line-up I pick off a few waves as the swell size and frequency increases. The Bra Boys are picking off most of the good waves because they get priority. I get called off by a local as I paddle for a wave, but I take-off anyway. Kicking off at the end of the ride, I stroke towards the take-off area. He paddles past me staring into my eyes. I sit up on my board, grab the rails, tense, and prepare for a confrontation. Nothing eventuates so my body relaxes. I take off on another wave and contort my body to fit inside a barrel. Dragging my hand and pumping my legs I exit smoothly. A few nods of approval. I paddle with confidence back into the line-up. Next surf session here should be easier. I'd given respect by not paddling to the inside take-off position. But I'd disrespected the local by taking off on a wave he wanted. Then the respect had moved again because of my ability. Respect given equals respect gained, but it's not as simple as that formula suggests. In the car-park, I strip off my rubber wetsuit, limbs askew, and without concern for nudity. Later I head down the coast for a relaxed afternoon surf. City surfing involves hassling. It's easier to surf alone.*

When I surfed at Maroubra I didn't belong to the local crew. I had to negotiate "respect". I managed to get some respect by moving out of the locals' way when checking the surf. Maybe I could have gotten more respect by not moving. But I also locked my car so they couldn't get in – I don't trust them. I changed in the open, but that was cool, since I assumed no-one would have paid any attention. I felt stoked after the surf, even though I shared it with some greedy locals who took most of the

waves, but I wouldn't call them greedy to their face. According to big-wave legend and surf journalist Rod Kirsop any behaviour in the surf or on the beach must remember respect:

Respect for the waves and the ocean, for against them man is nothing. Respect for other surfers; for the man on the inside, for the old timer who has been surfing Sunset for 20 years; respect for the Hawai'ians who allow us to ride their waves, respect for the locals at their breaks, respect for the hottest surfers in the line-up. If a surfer intends on surfing the North Shore it is very important that he understands about respect.

(in *Waves*, March, 1992: 40).

Many bodies and social relations drop in to formulate respect at "the Bra". Going surfing at Maroubra is a moving negotiation, rather than a set of hard and fast rules. There's a multiplicity to negotiating performances.<sup>xx</sup> The multiplicity of surfing performances helps us to think about them in a different way. What my body comprehends are the ideologies and discourses that informed past performances and how these enable me to adapt my expectations and behaviour depending on what is coming together. There's no stable masculine surfing identity and no surfing culture as a collective whole, but an ongoing negotiation and construction that, at the moment, relies on my body being familiar with gendered conditions of possibility. Fear, the desire not to destroy the joy of my morning surf with violence, and my awareness that this was "their" surf-break all washed up the beach together on this particular morning at Maroubra. The Bra boys' muscles, tattoos, and posture left me in no doubt as to my position in the masculine surfing hierarchy, although at least I was higher than the kooks who stood nearby. I could tell they were beginners from their wide fun-boards and lack of a leg-rope tan line around their ankle. Such

idiosyncratic manoeuvres were not so clear to me when I was younger. My body, habits, feelings, and surfing equipment have developed over time with such nuance that I can now arrive at any beach and slip smoothly into the line-up and reproduce the dominant representations so as to not stand out.

My body's habitual ways of knowing demonstrates how masculinity, bodies, and feelings move and re-negotiate the relationships of which they are a part. The longer I negotiate these relations the more familiar my body becomes with working its way through the complex arrangements of rituals, representations, and rules in a particular manner. Yet the intricacies of how different performances in different places always require some adaptation reveal how hierarchies of respect are twisted to create new combinations of joy, disappointment, attitudes, and behaviours. But these are always regulated by a particular map of meaning that determines what a man in this field should or shouldn't do. Quite simply, at Maroubra I don't squeal in delight, always try to maintain a *nonchalance*, don't try to "make friends" with the local boys, and so on. Performances of masculinity may shift but they're rarely free flowing so that they may exceed expectations produced by the sex-gender ideology as a condition of possibility.

There's always movement and an excess of detail that spills over boundaries that would establish a single way to do masculinity or a single way to surf. My body develops an ability to slide through social arrangements somewhere. The varying contexts of this "somewhere" foregrounds 'the space of movement – the changing configurations of social relations – and the movement across space' (Probyn, 1996: 11). Different beaches have different hierarchies and histories.

Where I go surfing is very important. Topographical relations constrain and enable what surfing bodies connect with. The waves along which surfers move are not static, neutral, or passive but *he'enalu* remembering that *he'e* means to “run as liquid” and *nalu* refers to the motion of a wave. I am emphasising the way space connects with, and is constitutive of, surfing and masculine performances. Space is not simply a mirror or backdrop for reflecting masculinity but central to bodies, ideologies, discourses, and representations interacting.

Coastal car-parks provide a good example of spaces connecting with masculinity and surfing. For people familiar with surfing beaches, the car-park can conjure up images of muscular bodies moist with the saltwater of the ocean. Cold winter winds snatch at my skin. I know not to look at others when changing, so I stretch the wetsuit from my body with no concern for the gaze of others. At Maroubra I strip off my wetsuit in a space deeply inscribed with performances that pass on hetero-normative and gendered discourses. I know these performances intimately and often it's as if, as a surfer and man, I own the car-park. For the semi-naked surfer these lines protect him from homoeroticism. As Elspeth Probyn describes in relation to the gym changing room, there are always ‘a welter of codes about how and where to look, nonetheless strangers dress and undress, wash themselves ... breasts and bums in close proximity’ (Probyn, 2000: 21).

### **Tracey Moffatt Plays With Surfers**

Tracey Moffatt's short film *Heaven* (1997) challenges and transgresses dominant codes, conditions, and rituals in the car-parks of surfing beaches. Moffatt is a contemporary Aboriginal artist whose work is renown around the world. The images

she produces comment on the history of dominant types of representations. These representations often invert hegemonic racial and gendered representations and ways of looking.

To make *Heaven* Moffat films surfers as they change in and out of wetsuits, the images set to background music of tribal beats. Shooting with a hand held camera, Moffat gradually gets closer to the action. The first scenes are shot from a window in a coastal home. Seduced by surfers' changing rituals in the wet black rubber and the arrogance of an uninhibited display of their bodies Moffat edges in closer and closer, to the point where we can nearly reach out and touch their salty chests, bums, and faces. The wetsuit performance is specific and we see slight variation depending on whether the surfer is on an open street or in a car-park. A prominent code that informs the performance is the one whereby I don't watch others change. A surfer will also often wrap a towel around the waist and manoeuvre into the skin-tight suits. Some guys go through the process with a languid manner if at a familiar car-park. Car doors or standing in-between vehicles can offer some protection from the gaze at busy and unfamiliar car-parks, however, even then a quick strip in the open often suffices. Getting up close and personal with the surfers' bodies reverses the gendered structure of the cinematic gaze.

While women have typically been the subject of the male gaze, in *Heaven*, Moffat could be said to objectify the bodies of the male surfers. Zooming in on their buttocks and groins, some of the surfers react to the gaze – hers/ours – by clowning about. In doing so they aim to deflect the cinematic gaze, reclaiming the situation as under their control by dictating what can be filmed, what may be represented, and how. This



clowning about acts as a reassertion of conditions of possibility that normally regulate what may come together in the car-park and what may not. As the camera gets closer to the surfers' bodies the tribal beats increase in volume and tempo. Whenever Moffat gets too intrusive there's an angry response. The challenge to the dominant arrangement of performances makes some of the men feel uncomfortable. But Moffat persists and films penises that are not hard but vulnerable and soft.

What Moffat manages to do in this film is invert the usual relationships that connect with this space, both in a gendered and racial context. The men are confronted in a zone which they usually consider their own. Their authority and gaze is challenged. It's rare for women to change in such plain view in these car-parks and a lot of this has to do with these very same blokes controlling the gaze and their representations and bodies determining what may happen. A girl will get lewd comments, wolf whistles, and stares, while the guys tend to feel that such activity isn't to be returned. Moffat draws attention to this. As a surfer who regularly uses car-parks in this way, I reacted with amazement at this attempt to interrupt my normal routines. Equally, I was certain that this wouldn't happen at some beaches. The beaches Moffat films are city tourist beaches. At places like Maroubra and Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast, it's likely she would have been challenged in a direct manner. Such spaces do not allow such interruptions to dominant arrangements as the local surfers' authority is strictly controlled.

*Yesterday, I surfed at Bondi. The car-park at Bondi Beach is very different to Maroubra. Bondi is a tourist beach, packed with people in the morning. I change in a side street – you have to pay to park on the beachfront. The scenario of hanging at the*

*beachside car-park with my friends has diminished in frequency because of the cost involved. Using the car door as cover I slip into my board-shorts. A few joggers go by and watch me go through the process. I feel self-conscious as my gut hangs over my shorts, it's getting bigger as I get older. People lounge in cafes that line the footpath. A guy whistles, I flush, grab my board, and run to the beach. Changing in the Bondi car-park means I'm not so protected by the codes. The large non-surfing populace and the lack of a free beachside cuts into the "no looking" rule and hierarchies of surfing.*

Moffat's film encourages us recognise how certain spaces connect with particular conditions of possibility, allowing some bodies to move freely while others are restricted. Space is part of the dynamic performances of bodily, social, and affective relations. Within these spaces power struggles occur as ideologies, discourses, rules, representations, and regulations are negotiated. Yet, as Moffat demonstrates these can come together in new ways. The beach-side car-park is an interface whereby we see performances of masculinity composing and dispersing rather than some fixed and unified practice occurring in a space that is neutral. *Heaven* brings to the fore how surfing and masculinity performances move depending on where I go surfing but our bodies carry, and pass on, the gendered discourses that contain what may happen.

### **This surf-spot's fickle**

There's a process of connections and disconnections and this process is open to mobility, even though the boys and I tend to simply reproduce dominant arrangements. The process is not linear but rhizomatic. Recalling my discussion in chapter two, a rhizome is a network of multiple branching roots and shoots with no

central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth. When my mates and I men move within surfing spaces we become enmeshed in arrangements that branch off, multiply, proliferate, and head elsewhere. At the moment, because we're so immersed in conditions of possibility that we take as given or natural, we fail to recognise the possibilities.

Rhizomatic figuring is not unfamiliar to surfers. It's crucial for going surfing. Winds, tides, sandbanks, swell shape, and swell speed must all come together for good surf to occur. The rhizomatic transforming of contingencies is what surfers call fickleness. Figuring surfing and masculinity in a rhizomatic manner can help us to appreciate how the variation and movement of the contingencies contribute to the addiction of surfing. There are always new relations, arrangements, and other ways of coming together.

While I've described rhizomatic figuring, I don't mean that masculinity, bodies, and surfing move freely. There are many restrictions and blockages due the dominance of the sex-gender ideology as well as other conditions of possibility. For example, hierarchies are established and smoothly reproduce dominant representations of what male surfers' are supposed to be like. Each surfer in the hierarchy has the power to dominate and punish those below and the duty to obey those above. Punishment and domination can take the form of dropping in, group/local ganging up, physical violence, and ostracism. Power is treated as repressive and associated with sovereignty of the field.

To transgress or attempt to perform in a way that doesn't simply reproduce dominant conditions can result in violence. Violence sometimes holds together what would otherwise fray and is used to exercise control. As explained earlier, locals get priority for catching waves at most surf-spots and violence enables the preservation of the pecking-order being known in this way. Surf Journalist Derek Reilly considers the presence of surf violence at surf-spots he's been to and writes:

At Burleigh heads, on Queensland's Gold Coast, surfers are punched for trying to catch the same wave as a local, accidentally getting in the way, falling off or riding a longboard ... In Bali, foreigners are regularly ordered from the surf by the 'Black Shorts, a gang of local surfers who've modelled themselves on the infamous Hawai'ian surfing club Hui O Hee Nalu and are set upon by two or three if they argue the point ... Rocks are thrown at surfers and their cars vandalised in the Canary Islands. Mess up in Brazil and you'll be given a personal jujitsu demonstration (in Young, 2000: 2).

The group identification that comes from "ganging-up" and administering "the law" shapes masculinity at local surf spots in terms of machismo and unity. The unity brought about by participating in the policing of local spots with violence can motivate participation. Violence acts as establishing a particular way of knowing what true mate-ship is. If one is willing to put their body on the line for the boys, of allowing the pecking-order to become part of their body, then they're considered worthy of belonging.

Such power arrangements are documented in Nat Young's (2000) book *Surf Rage*. Young discusses the experience of surf rage – as surf violence is known – with psychologists, surf journalists, and surfing stars. Some argue for the need to maintain

order in the water by using the fear of violence as a deterrent to inappropriate surf etiquette. Others claim that violence damages surfing's reputation and that the promotion of role models offers a less painful form of regulation. Yet all emphasise that regulation is required in an overcrowded surfing world. The discussions in this book treat power as repressive.

However, the French philosopher Michel Foucault offers a different way of approaching the circulation of power than the authors of *Surf Rage*. Foucault denies the sovereign version of power, instead conceptualising power as a 'complex strategical situation as a multiplicity of force relations' (in Smart, 1985: 77). Foucault identifies a power-knowledge relationship whereby knowledge involves the disciplining of bodies, the development of habits, and the production of representations. Certain representations of masculinity and surfing have developed throughout surfing's history, and these are embodied and entrench particular conditions of possibility that define how we act now as male surfers. The disciplining of bodies isn't a social construction of passive male bodies but constitutes an interaction with their moving materiality – performances.

Foucault stresses the importance of the rhizomatic travelling of power and bodies when he writes:

[I]n thinking the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives (1980: 39).

Rearticulating power in light of Foucault draws attention to how power works. As a male surfer, I police my performances according to dominant experiences, feelings, and discourses that travel with surfing's history. This has led to several laws being engraved on plaques and set up at prominent surf locations throughout Australia.

Experienced surfers know these rules, plaque or no plaque. They form a "tribal law" for activity in the surf – a surfrider's code of ethics:

Furthest out or who is waiting longest for the wave [gets a wave].

Furthest inside or closest to the peak [gets the wave].

First to their feet or first on the wave [gets the wave].

Call, communicate left or right.

Do not drop in or snake.

Paddle wide using rip.

If caught inside stay in the whitewater.

Do not throw board in the water.

Respect the beach, respect the ocean.

Give respect to gain respect.

*(The Australian, Monday, June 19, 2000).*

What seems like a simple set of rules is anything but, these ten rules do not begin to describe the idiosyncrasies that I have to negotiate. However, they provide an introduction to the way knowledge and power circulate. A beginner would not know what to "snake" or "drop in" were; they only learn this knowledge as it becomes material, as it is performed. It's difficult to categorically explain what "snaking" or "dropping in" are as they vary depending on the situation.

The act of riding the wave, like performing masculinity, is regulated in ways that determine how well you are making your way through idiosyncratic expectations. On city beaches, I surf aggressively because if I don't, I won't be getting any waves. There's a "smashing of lips", a "carving up" of the wave face, a "belting" of the end section, and an emphasis on "making the wave". The way I surf in the city is in direct relation to my lived experience of dominant power-knowledge relations there.

New surfers may be taught how to surf but the cultural rules are never explained with any clarity. The complex variations and movement does not allow for clear-cut rules. My body must become familiar with particular relations and conditions of possibility that are then treated as second-nature, rather than the rules. So mistakes are common and picking up on slight variations is difficult and takes time to learn. In *Male Fantasies* (1989) Klaus Theweleit engages in a two-volume study of soldiers who circulated Germany after World War One. He documents the training of young German boys' bodies and explains how every newcomer repeats mistakes made by others, allowing some to torment these transgressors 'as they themselves had been tormented' (306). Likewise, surfers only learn when they mess up whether by checking the surf from a place designated for the Bra Boys, or by not taking off on a wave deemed too good to let go during an epic swell.

If punishment tends to follow from transgression of the epistemic practices of surfing it can still be inflicted on grommets without any obvious transgression. Grommets may be "grommet bashed". Theweleit demonstrates similar processes when he explains that the soldier's bodies were trained, abused, and controlled to become hardened machines.

He draws attention to how cadets are:

emptied out, punched into shape and refilled. Younger boys courageous enough to defend themselves gain respect. But even if they win the occasional fist fight with older boys, punishment always remains the prerogative of their elders (1998: 307).

Such performances are not dissimilar to those experienced when growing up at many surf spots. Grommet bashing is performed as a rite-of-passage and is part of learning how to “become-surfer”. This particular knowledge of respect becomes part of your body, establishes what certain social arrangements mean, and in turn regulates what you may connect with.

*Watch a grommet as he pulls off a footy jumper, stuffs it in his bag, waxes up his board, pick his way across the boulders that line the shore, and hits the waves. Half an hour into the surf and he's frustrated. The pack of older (and larger) surfers is not letting him get any waves. A wave spins off and he drops down the face. You can hear someone yelling “fuck off!” behind him – he's “dropped in”. The grommet travels for a while in front of the surfer then kicks off. A finger points him in to the beach but he refuses to go. Several of the older surfers paddle over to deal out the punishment. He sees this coming and lashes out. A punch lands on the eye of one of the would-be attackers. Fear rushes in as he realises it was a mistake he would come to regret. One by one they land punches on him. One of the surfers grabs his hair and pushes him underwater. He struggles for air. Blackness. He's dragged up onto the beach. “Stay out of the fucking water, grommet,” a voice says. He doesn't cry or complain even though the cut above his lip oozes. He deals with the beating “like a man.” To do anything else would mean being labelled a “pussy” a label that would do him no*



*good later. A pussy could never surf here again, while if he toughs it out he will. Such grommet bashings keep "aberrant" rides in check and they infuse bodies with what relations may come together and what may not.*

The young surfer learns his place and moves his way through the hierarchy as he begins to know what's expected. He becomes a local and gets to dominate the take-off position. Often locals maintain an ever-present threat of physical pain not just for grommets but for many not familiar with the required manoeuvres. Prominent surf journalist Nick Carroll claims that relating such experiences is an over-exaggeration (in Young, 2000). Even to relate such stories can indicate a certain weakness.

However the pain needn't occur to you for its influence to be potent. A grommet will see friends suffer the pain of a fist hitting their arm or head. They don't easily forget the tears on their friends' faces.

As a beginner – more often known as a “kook” – I came to appreciate and observe in awe the skill levels capabilities of the older surfers and how they just knew what to do. But gradually I grew up with negotiations and training that led to belonging. I now belong in a way that I don't anywhere else. By this I mean that I experienced the grommet bashings, became a member of the regional board-riders' club, intimately know the way the local wave peels, only buy boards off the local shaper, surf the biggest days, know the back roads to secret surf-spots, know which parking bays are ours on crowded summer days, recognise my mates' styles of surfing from a distance, have barbeques at my place for the boys, and back up other local guys during fights.

My local mates with whom I dominate waves, make me feel strong, comfortable, and in command. Our bodies' way of knowing bonds us but it also provides us with a sense of authority in the water that we don't have in other places. For instance, at work the boss may have more authority, on the sporting field other blokes may be better, or those "yuppies" may have more money but if any of these people paddle out they listen to us. As a local group we share morning toast, borrow wax under melaleuca trees, talk of waves, sit together in otherwise empty seas, and search for rumoured perfect surf-breaks. The conditions of possibility suit us the most.

*There are palm trees, coral beaches, palm-thatched shacks on stilts, and sewerage that swills in the gutters. Hairless and scabbed mongrel dogs patrol the central and only street, remarkable for its patched and potholed paving work. The street winds down the edge of an island somewhere in the Indian Ocean – a "secret spot." The bay stretches around in a half moon that has been stretched oblong to allow the waves to wrap in that much more perfect. A set of waves cracks off the inside reef, their eight-foot high and barrelling forever. I scream out a loud hoot and receive a slap on the back from my mate. We've just got out of the thick malaria-infested jungle that we have trekked through. A shiver runs down my spine. We dump our gear and run. Joy is not an appropriate word ... "stoke" is.*

Such surfing adventures bond my body to my mates' bodies. What these adventures re-enforce and perpetuate are ways of coming together, ways of knowing, and flows of feelings that afford me privileges if I become familiar with them. I experience alone affects such as joy, fear, excitement, shame, and pride, until with a sideways glance we relay the feelings thereby signalling that there's a connection. I've earned

the right to connect in certain ways with other surfers, the waves, certain beaches, and so on. This is obviously because I can; being of a different ethnicity, race, age, sex, gender, and sexuality would change the accessibility to belonging. I belong easier because the representations that I live favour me and provide an ease of access.

The process of belonging I've experienced is resilient and hard to shake. Yet such belonging can never be taken-for-granted. I must constantly reinforce the belonging by performing and reproducing dominant representations, and I must accept certain conditions of possibility as the norm. Actually, I must take them as natural and this is unlike Moffatt who attempts to transgress them. If I transgress them, or challenge their normativity, I'll be shamed.

The affect of shame plays an implicit role in policing what sort of male is allowed to belong and what bodies are allowed to develop further as a surfer. The shame one feels in failing to meet the requirements of certain waves, 'must itself be hidden as an ugly scar is hidden, lest it offends the one who looks' (Probyn, 2000: 22). The shame experienced when I fail to take-off on certain waves forces me to confront my body. I might be overweight, unfit, not surfing enough, or scared of getting hurt. Shame burns into how surfing bodies are conceived. Perhaps it makes you train more, surf more, or work on overcoming fear. 'In short, shame refigures the body and its conceptual possibilities' (12).

The mirror image of shame is pride. 'Pride is dependant on shame; pride is predicated on the – sometimes conscious – denial of its own ostracized corollary, shame' (25).

Pride in surfing indicates that I measure up, that my body and its comportments

negotiate arrangements of representations, bodies, ritual, and traditions “correctly”. In the surf, others ridicule the boy who hesitates. The boy who grabs a wave before his turn either gets nothing or is positioned so he gets no more. At the bottom of the pecking order, there remain the little waves on the “inside”. Pain is supposed to become pleasure and fear is meant to be conquered. Big wave riding is deified and those who fulfil the expectations sit at the top of the hierarchy of surfing as “Watermen”. When it’s agreed that someone has matched this mythical image they’re treated with respect. A small wave surfer is called a trickster, a “girl” afraid of the real deal – who should be ashamed. The male surfer should reach the point where pain and fear turn to pleasure and pride.

The concept of the Waterman is an ideal masculine stereotype who moves smoothly with dominant conditions, and as we have seen the history of surfing is littered with Watermen experiences. Some surfers try to live up to such an ideal and many do not. Surfers are not necessarily rebellious, adventurous, or warriors although some are very brave and surf fifty to seventy feet waves that can kill. The vast majority do not aim to become Watermen and prefer surfing to be fun rather than dangerous. Hence, many will watch from shore as those who try to live up to the image paddle out in huge swells thinking they are being “real” surfers because they reproduce the myth of surfer-as-warrior. Many surfers get as much joy riding four-foot glassy waves peeling along headlands during Christmas holidays. But they still value particular hegemonic representations and the conditions that inform them. Magazines, movies, theses, and books of surfing constantly legitimate the feats of the few who are classed as Watermen.

Take for instance the following description of what's claimed to be one of the most dangerous surf-session of all time:

At 10.25 Laird is ready to hit the water again for his second session ... once again the ocean raised its energy level to throw what it could at this man born and bred to ride these waves. The man who helped create this sport so that what was once seen as un-rideable is now his own playground. He rode flawlessly again and again ... Laird Hamilton will take his place in surfing history as a living legend in the tradition of the classic waterman. I believe he will be up there with Tom Blake, Pete Peterson and maybe right up there with the Duke himself. In my opinion, he is definitely in that exclusive class of people. For the 27 of us fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time, I think I can speak for all of them when I say we all felt very humbled and proud. Proud to have been there and proud of what Laird did, it was easily, the greatest show on earth (*Australia's Surfing Life*, October, 2000: 79).

There is no shortage of such tales of risk and some sublime experience of powerful waves. And the boys, the media, and the "old men of the point" argue that the Waterman experience is "the" authentic experience because it entrenches surfing as a risk-taking and radical activity thereby maintaining an imagined separation from the conformity and safety of "everyday" people. Having always heard stories from older surfers, read tales of men conquering huge waves, and watching others ride big waves I buy into the myth and paddle out during large swells. I claim it's to experience the adrenalin and some sublime experience of nature but the reality is that the myth has become so ingrained in my body I feel like it's inappropriate to call myself a surfer and not "have a go". While it's beyond me to become a Waterman the myth is so much a part of my body now that it will push to takes risks I'd otherwise never consider doing.

*A large swell arrives. I'm trying to ride the monsters. It's winter and I'm surfing Cathedral Rock in Victoria. A large wave approaches. My heart moves to my throat and heat rises in my temples. I stroke up the wave – it's that big. Although in the water I sweat. I'm scared, laugh, shiver, and tremble. I take-off. The lip pitches out and looks thick and mean, and I fall. The wave rushes past me and spins me like a rag doll and down I go. I struggle for air, but this panic passes because this is the ocean and it will let me up when it wants to. "Relax", I tell myself. Finally, the wave releases and I shoot upwards. I look up at the next wave then dive deep.*

Such wipe-outs rip at my flesh and contort my body into all sorts of strange positions. My lungs grow as my body becomes used to the process. The body deals with tumbling after tumbling and the exertion and fear enhances experiences that become familiar and addictive. Arms can tire and scream for you to stop – muscles spasm, your chest strains to catch a breath, and one can feel the confused beating of their heart but they don't turn back. Shame and pride motivate. White-water washes, reefs rip, swells sweep, and there's a body that seems more than a body. Each collision becomes another battering my body has endured, but I believe that's what makes me worthy of being a surfer. Surfer's bodies adapt to the waves and the waves do things to my body – strengthening my shoulders and broadening my chest. My body, the board, my pride, the reef, and the wind all travel with conditions of possibility that influence how these may come together or may not. Hence, particular self-representations perpetuate surfing and masculinity's association with freedom, adventure, rebelliousness, strength, hierarchy, and so on.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun mapping performances of masculinity and surfing by showing the development of certain norms, rules, and ways of knowing during past experiences throughout surfing history. This mapping begins to demonstrate that performances of masculinity and surfing are the product of micro-processes and not essential in any way. But these micro-processes are not some abstract social structure that simply disciplines passive bodies but are grounded, real, and deeply ingrained through everyday performances that make up the surfing field. Experiences of car-parks, various sized swells, politics, power, waves, bodies, stoke, stories, histories, surfboards, and so on come together in varying ways with some connections being more regular, and thus more powerful, than others.

What we end up with through such mapping is not some functional description that defines what surfing, surfing culture, male surfers, and surfing history are but demonstration of these as dynamic and visceral processes. And rather than this process being fixed, given, or straight-forward we can see that it's constructed and can be disrupted. What men who surf have to do is begin recognising alternative arrangements and interrupting their smooth reproductions of certain conditions that actually limit, regulate, and contain surfing and masculinity. It is a surfing-gender relationship that escapes into heterogeneity rather than reproducing the homogenising conditions we currently do.

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<sup>i</sup> Stoke is the surfing term for joy.

<sup>ii</sup> A kook is a beginner or occasional surfer. These kooks do not yet know the cultural rules, have a low surfing ability, and will look awkward in the line-up with their cumbersome surfboards and flailing arms. Often surfers will refer to anyone of lesser ability than them as a kook, unless it is a mate.

<sup>iii</sup> An example of this is the broadcasting of Channel Nine's "The Today Show" from the Quicksilver Pro contest site at Snapper Rocks on Queensland's Gold Coast.

<sup>iv</sup> For stories and an account of such beliefs see surfer Nat Young's autobiography *Nat's Nat and that's that* (1998). Nat Young was referred to as "the animal".

<sup>v</sup> As I have argued throughout this thesis, psychological-biological-sociological can always come together differently. This may happen when bodies refuse to co-operate, when we make mistakes, do something stupid, or when we connect with counter-discourses. At the moment other compositions of surfing, gender, sexuality, and bodies remain unexamined or blocked because certain conditions of possibility, such as the sex-gender ideology, are left unquestioned and taken as given.

<sup>vi</sup> For a beautiful account of the ritual of making surfboards in Hawai'i see Duke Kahanamoku and Joe Brennan's *Duke Kahanamoku's World of Surfing* (1968).

<sup>vii</sup> Duke Kahanamoku came to embody surfing. His displays rejuvenated the sport, spreading it to the USA and Australia. Duke was recruited for Hollywood movies, met Presidents, rescued lives when a boat capsized in California and became Hawai'i's unofficial ambassador. Duke also reportedly rode a wave for a mile and a half off the south coast of Oahu, Hawai'i. Andy Martin describes Duke as:

the origin, the first cause, the primordial father of all. He created the cult of the beach boy.

Surfers traced themselves back to the Duke as if he were Adam. He seemed to embody in his person the entire history of the sport: he symbolized the Hawai'ian spirit (1992: 139).

<sup>viii</sup> For a full account of the surfing life of Tom Blake see Lynch and Gault-Williams (2001).

<sup>ix</sup> *Gidget* was also made into a television series broadcast through the 1950s and 60s.

<sup>x</sup> For readings regarding surfing development in the USA see Irwin, J (1973); Lueras, L (1984); Young, N and McGregor, C (1983).

<sup>xi</sup> Bronte Surf Lifesaving Club contests the Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club's claim of being the first. Bronte members claim to have formed a club in 1903. No records are available but their website claims that minutes of a meeting were sighted at Waverley Library in 1982 ([www.brontesurfclub.com.au](http://www.brontesurfclub.com.au)).

<sup>xii</sup> Shane Stedman manufactured the first foam surfboard from material supplied by Frank Hordern. Wanting a safe board for Hordern's daughter to surf on he made the boards from esky foam. The design was so popular Kentucky Fried Chicken began giving away similar boards with their family meals. That summer in Australia the kids rode the Kentucky Fried Chicken boards (*Australia's Surfing Life*, March, 2002: 46).

<sup>xiii</sup> A crucial point in the establishment of professional surfing was the 1977 *Stubbies Classic* at Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast, Queensland. Blokes like Mark Richards, Shaun Thompson, Wayne "Rabbit" Bartholomew, and Michael Peterson ripped it up. Extensive television coverage was organised and as luck would have it viewers saw perfect waves peel down the classic tropical headland. Professional surfing had arrived in a significant way and it continued to grow through the 1980s and 90s as more and more contests were established.

<sup>xiv</sup> For a full account of this professionalisation see Nick Carroll's *The Next Wave: The World of Surfing* (1991) Carroll explains that competitive surfing has meant increased investment in surfing design, more travel to new destinations in search of waves, and the emergence of a surf media and their charters for the surfing public.

<sup>xv</sup> Such rhetoric about being close to nature is problematic. Andy Martin (1992) visits a boardmaker and recounts:

'There's an ugliness to boards,' [the boardmaker] said, 'an extreme ugliness'. And I'll tell you why. The material. This idea of being in harmony with nature on the wave – isn't that the biggest crock of shit you ever heard?'

'So you don't think surfers are in harmony with nature?'

'With a polyurethane board? Impossible. You're destroying nature ... The whole thing is toxic. You breathe a burning surfboard and you die. To me it's a crock of shit to go out and harmonize with nature on a resin polyurethane surfboard' (1992: 127).

<sup>xvi</sup> A "grommet" is a young surfer.

<sup>xvii</sup> Plain white surfboards, black wetsuits, and rural surfing are often associated with soul surfing.

<sup>xviii</sup> A "barrel" is a modern term for a tube. This is where one rides behind the curtain and inside the wave.

<sup>xix</sup> The "Bra Boys" are a group of surfers who dominate Maroubra Beach. After proving themselves in large waves and fighting, among other trials, they are permitted to tattoo "Bra Boy" on their body. This is sometimes accompanied with a postcode or small map of the beach. This group has been documented as a "gang" involved in stand-over tactics, crime, and "bashings" (*The Daily Telegraph*, April 28, 2003).

<sup>xx</sup> This is a multiplicity formed of relations which connect and disconnect differently. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, such a multiplicity moves:

beyond the merely doubling or multicentering [the individual] ... a multiplicity is not a pluralized notion of identity (identity multiplied by *n* locations), but is rather as everchanging,



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non-totalisable collectivity, an assemblage defined, not by its abiding identity or principle of sameness over time, but through its capacity to undergo permutations and transformations (1994b: 192).



Out the Back (Photo: Uge, [www.aquabumps.com](http://www.aquabumps.com))

### The Season of Cyclones

Just off Australia's Gold Coast lies one of the most magical piles of sand the surfing world has ever seen. On the right swell, rides of over a kilometre are not inconceivable. The tubes go on forever

Andrew Kidman in *The Surfers Path*, Dec/Jan, 2003.

Surfers wait all year for the season of cyclones that runs from late January until the end of April. During winter and autumn southerly swells provide medium-sized and well-shaped waves for Gold Coast surfers. Yet they often struggle to refract around the most easterly point in Australia known as Cape Byron. In spring the doldrums hit the crew. Long weeks of onshore winds and weak swells prevail. Sea lice nibble at skin and blue-bottle jellyfish sting bronzed arms. The mood in the water when waves do arrive is menacing as everyone tries to get a piece of the scraps on offer.

Many surfers live on the Gold Coast for world-famous right-hand point-breaks such as Kirra, Greenmount, Burleigh, Currumbin, and Snapper Rocks. A right-hand point-break is where waves peel off sandbanks formed by a rocky headland. These waves travel right to left if observed looking out to sea and can peel for hundreds of metres. The point-breaks are revered places where an ancient volcano, known as *Wollumbin* to the local Aborigines, has seeped into the ocean steadying the flow of sand along the eastern

seaboard.<sup>1</sup> Oceanographer Danny Butts explains that the result has been the arrangement of silica to produce excellent bathymetry (sea-floor contours) for the production of well-shaped rideable waves (in *Surfers Path*, Dec/Jan, 2004: 48-51). Each point has its own moods, local crew, histories, wave-shape, and arm-wrenching sweep – a rip running parallel to the coast.

What “lights up” the points are tropical low-pressure systems born in the cyclone nursery of the Coral Sea. These low-pressure systems sometimes intensify into cyclones that track irrationally toward the Pacific Islands wreaking destruction on property and lives. In his description of how big-wave surfers determine when to go surfing Matt Warshaw (2003) explains that cyclones produce waves because warm air and cool air meet and corkscrew into a ‘turbinate union’ (11). Waves are formed as the speeding wind creates friction with the water. The resulting ripples are small waves that collect other small waves that grow bigger and become organised as they radiate outward. This process is known as radial dispersion. The best cyclones travel slowly allowing larger swells to form as the wind blows for a longer period over the same stretch of water. The longer the swells travel the more uniform and corrugated they become. The best conditions arise when cyclones spin some distance off the coast and the coastline to be surfed is benign. ‘The further away from the storm centre the waves propagate, the cleaner and more rideable they become ... However, at the same time they suffer a reduction in size as they spread over a progressively wider area’ (Butt in *Surfers Path*, Dec/Jan 2004: 50). Cyclones often try to hide behind New Caledonia to the east but on occasion they drift south toward New Zealand. When swells roll into the “Superbank” they pound beaches,

reshape sand-dunes, and generate stories. The Superbank is a stretch of sand that has connected a collection of points at the southern end of the sweep of coast that is “The Goldie”.

In 2002 the New South Wales and Queensland governments finished installing a sand bypass system to the south of the Tweed River to shift millions of cubic metres of sand. The system had to be built to overcome the halt to the natural sand flow imposed by two large rock walls built from 1962 to 1965 that extend from the mouth of the river. Sand is collected via eleven pumps that are twelve to fifteen metres deep and pumped along a jetty to sand outlets on the other side of the river. These pumps empty sand into a little bay called “froggies”, where currents sweep the sand around the rocky corner and along the points. In an article on the mechanics of the Superbank surf journalist Tim Baker writes that the return of this sand to its ancient run has left the longest right-hand angular bank anyone remembers seeing here since the days before man intervened with those rock walls (in *Surfers Path*, Dec/Jan, 2003: 96).<sup>ii</sup> The sand has built up to such a degree that it connects originally separated surf-breaks.

This chapter is an ethological analysis about what happens when waves, cyclones, the Superbank, masculinity, bodies, surfboards, and so on spin together during a day surfing the Superbank on the Gold Coast. The analysis is written as a story about two white, heterosexual, working-class, male Gold Coast surfers as they surf a cyclone swell. I use a storytelling approach to write up my research because it allows for details, complexity, movement, and feelings. Storytelling is important to men who surf. It’s also a move away

from a sovereign ethnographic voice. Ethology is useful for my study of these men who surf because it understands bodies as dynamic performances of techniques, gestures, feelings, and meanings. These surfers are composite characters, bodies that I have participated with during the research and my life as a surfer. The surfing characters in no way reflect some essential truth of two men who surf. Paying attention to what surfing bodies do and feel I begin to account for a dynamic version of masculinity.

In chapter four, I addressed the conditions of possibility that regulate what may come together and what may not during any event. The sex-gender ideology and gendered discourses are crucial conditions of possibility that influence how masculinity has travelled through surfing's history and how it is done now. These discourses and ideologies form hierarchies, values, consensus, rules, traits, and cultural performances that surfer's negotiate and perform. The men who are the subject of this chapter have learnt from and absorbed into their skin past negotiations and performances. Normative relations between masculinity, freedom, adventurousness, rebelliousness, strength, respect, heterosexuality, and so on operate and are assumed to move smoothly. While the sex-gender ideology is significant so too is class.

As I have mentioned, the surfers in the story of this chapter are working-class. Their cultural capital influences the way they inhabit the surfing field, generating certain habits, connections, and performances. Borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital is the possession of knowledge, accomplishments, formal, and informal qualifications by which a person may gain entry and secure a position in particular social circles. Bourdieu

was a French sociologist who studied how class, gender, and background are incorporated into the body. During the 1960s and 70s Bourdieu discussed how our cultural capital limits our ability to move across different social circles. This cultural capital is gained from education, the family, media, and so on. It informs our tastes and behaviours. Bourdieu discusses how classed cultural capital is learned when individuals are very young, hence, it appears “natural”. How one learns their cultural capital is crucial and Bourdieu focuses on how individuals gain their way of knowing and social rules, such as by formal explorations in theatre, aesthetics, ideas, and so on. At one point Bourdieu emphasises that middle-class sensibilities are supposed to enable those who belong to this social circle to disconnect understanding from practical experiences of the social world. For example, Bourdieu argues that the represented image in works of art presented as “popular aesthetic” are always made real by connecting the image to knowledge and practice in the “real” world (42).

Certain class dispositions facilitate a process of encoding and decoding what things signify. For instance, when my mate purchased a new watch he chose one with a tide gauge and velcro strap. Other surfers recognise his taste which classifies him as a surfer and is informed by working-class functionalism. Bourdieu emphasises that taste works relationally; that is to say it works by relating the properties and characteristics of one class to those of another. Bourdieu writes:

Being the product of the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way,

since taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others (56).

Cultural capital enables the judgement of others to work out if they belong or not to particular groups. The disposition we develop according to our cultural capital is the vehicle by which we move within social spaces. And this disposition is always in process as we become invested or disinvested in different fields.

Discourses and ideologies of class form conditions of possibility that are an active presence in the ways the men I surf with perceive, think, and act. The boys do class, and it's become part of their bodies, the difference being the privileging of working-class knowledge, habits, gestures, tastes, and values. In the water blokes who are carpenters, brickies, take-away drivers, dishwashers, cooks, sales assistants, electricians, and so on can dominate. In recent years a lot of surfers have also been working in new working-class office employment, such as in call-centres or as casual information technology data entry officers. These blokes tend to be better surfers and dominate the line-ups because they arrange their jobs around swells, they accept employment depending on how much surf-time it allows. They are often higher up the pecking order in the water than the blokes who have to, or prefer to, work long hours to further their careers.



These blokes emphasise a “hands-on” learning process by which you must regularly participate in the line-up to gain cultural capital. This is a markedly different approach to gaining cultural capital than learning to surf from formal explorations or educational structures. To move freely between different line-ups that produce similar classed conditions of possibility one must have learnt the value of certain items, places, and knowledge by actually going surfing – to learn from a book is considered inadequate. A functional and practical disposition is encouraged.

When I wake up bleary eyed and dishevelled to check the surf from my car’s back seat I’ll give a disdainful look if a group of surfers pull up in a prestige sports car. The driver wouldn’t have such a car if they were real surfers and dedicated to surfing and not their careers. Arriving at a surf-break in a rusty ute, station-wagon, or four-wheel-drive is acceptable as these are “surf-cars” that the boys can sleep in and put their boards in. Those who own such surf-cars prefer them because of their experiences of turning up too late at many locales to find accommodation, having little money to pay for such “luxuries”, and knowing that many premium surf-breaks are down dirt tracks far from any hotel. We also know all the best spots to park along the coast and not get caught by the rangers for illegal camping.

In recent years tow-in surfing has become popular so cars have been arriving at beaches with jet-skis, Wave-runners, and tow-boards. This activity involves surfers towing behind these motorised watercraft and sling-shotting into waves. The idea is that the surfer gets more speed to ride waves too big to paddle into and perform radical manoeuvres. The

equipment is very expensive. My mates say they would love to tow-in sometime but shake their heads at the costs involved and remark that it's for professional surfers or those rich bastards. They also argue that many of those who use them don't have the skill to paddle into big surf so they shouldn't be out there. Learning to surf big waves by paddling out is considered authentic and surfer's are supposed to prove themselves by this method first before they can gain respect when towing-in. These blokes with the expensive equipment will be heckled even though they are going to surf big waves. Evidence of how they learnt will be in the way they talk about the surf, note where to get out, and when they tow-in – to tow into surf that is able to be paddled into is often considered a wimps way out.

To have the working-class knowledge and taste I've drawn attention to is considered superior to middle-class cultural capital. Such working-class surfers aren't represented as immature, irresponsible, and requiring supervision but as "salt-of-the-earth" blokes who are respected because of their life experiences that give them insights into the real world. How these blokes gained their cultural capital is as important as what they have. It's often said that surfing is classless – that it evens men out. But as we can see, this isn't the case even though the boys take their working-class cultural capital as natural or given.

Hetero-normative discourses also play a crucial role in making "natural" certain experiences and performances of the surfers in the story. Take, for instance, what are claimed to be some essential elements of a good surf trip. There is a famous Californian surf song written by Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys and sung by Jan and Dean. It is

from 1963 and called *Surf City*. I first listened to the song on a tired old cassette some of the older guys, influenced by Californian surf culture, had from their days of going up the coast. The song captures a fantasy that many surfers have tried to live up to:

I got a '34 wagon and I call it a Woody  
Surf City here we come  
You know its not very cherry, it's an oldie but a goodie  
Surf City here we come  
Well it ain't got a back seat or a rear window  
But it still gets me where I want to go.

(Chorus)

Well we're going to Surf City where it's two to one  
Yeah we're going to Surf City and a-have some fun  
(Repeat)

Two girls for every boy

Well there's never any tension cause there's always  
something goin'

Surf City ...

You know they're either out surfin' or they got a party

Growin'

Surf City ...

Well there's two swingin' honeys for every guy

And all you gotta do is just wink your eye

(Chorus)

And if my Woody breaks down on me somewhere on the surf  
route

Surf City ....

I'll strap my board to my back and hitch a ride in my wet  
suit  
Surf City...  
And when I get to Surf City I'll be shootin' the curl  
And checkin' out the party for a surfer girl

The lyrics of such "surf music" cater to an image of the surfing field conducive to the heterosexual matrix. The male surfers of that generation often tell stories that re-entrench representations of the song and perform accordingly, thereby passing such heteronormativity on to many young male surfers. Women were included in these trips on rare occasions as after-surf distractions, and were often measured in terms of attractiveness:

Beautiful Birds, walking, swinging by, smiling, laughing, sad, wise, petulant.  
Rippling brown flesh in the summer sun. Makes you glad you're a young man and  
free in this fantastic country of ours (*Surf International*, January, 1969: 5).

If any of the younger blokes are having difficulty in a relationship with a girl the boys will take him on a surf trip. These trips often are focussed on surfing, drinking and "picking up chicks" – it is a homosocial bonding exercise and reiteration of what it is to be a male surfer. My mates claim such trips are essential performances if one wishes to be a surfer. While I sometimes take my girlfriend along on coastal runs to chase waves, it never quite feels like a real surf trip. Trips with the girlfriend/wife are spoken about matter-of-factly with the other guys: Tales of hotels, scenery, markets, and quick surf sessions (trips with a boyfriend are silenced completely by hetero-normative assumptions and homophobia).<sup>iii</sup>

The surfer's bodies pass on hegemonic conditions of possibility and normative relations but they also challenge them. While I want to show how men actually live and perform according to hegemonic conditions and normative relations I also want to relay how these marginalise and silence other alternative performances of men who surf. Surfers sometimes make their way through expectations in ways that that transgress dominant representations and produce new relations. There is an ongoing construction of self-representations even though hegemonic conditions of possibility hide this movement.

This chapter will pay attention to how the biological-sociological-psychological come together, intermingle, and perform during performances of masculinity. I will also attend to the interruptions to the smooth circulation of dominant representations and conditions of possibility. What becomes clear is that the micro-processes that construct and assign meaning to representations, cultural rules, norms, identities, values, prestige, hierarchies, and expectations are continually re-made and re-produced. By paying close attention to performances of masculinity we can see contradictions and critiques even as they are smoothed over by dominant social arrangements. Performances of masculinity constantly affect subjectivity and self-representations of men who surf because they're full of contradictions and critiques. I hope to show how performances of masculinity in the surfing field are often excessive and full of affective bodies that are actually hard to contain.

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## **The Superbank**

Andy's arms ache from paddling against the rip and around the crowd that lines the Superbank. He duck-dives as white-water bursts. He holds onto the edge of the board and pushes down. By dipping his head and arching his back in one motion he travels deep. He then digs his knee into the tail of the board and this projects him upward after the turbulence has passed. The crew are beginning to thin out as it is late in the day and darkness makes it hard to see. Andy manages to catch a set wave that rises with the backwash off a craggy outcrop of igneous stone known as "Snapper Rocks". Dropping into the wave he blocks the ride of another guy behind him who wipes-out because of the interference. This wave twists at high speed along the sandbank. Andy pumps his legs to get the surfboard moving faster.

As the swell pushes up onto the sandbank it hits the shallows and the lip surges out. Andy presses the rail of his surfboard into the wall of water, crouches, and pulls into a barrel. He weaves through the hollow part of the wave. His fingertips skip the surface of the water. Another surfer out on the shoulder is paddling for "his" wave. "Oi!" Andy screams. The surfer backs off but pushes the feathering lip over so that the barrel begins to collapse. Andy moves through the foam-ball, drives out in front of the wave, bangs down with his back foot, and swings into the barrel again. The sensations become duller as his body struggles to keep up with a wave that seems endless. The wave flares and he senses an opportunity to exit, moves forward on his board, and is spat out of the barrel to flop on his face. The colours, patterns, and tones of the moonlight on the water somehow seem softer as he floats with the current into shore.

The knowledge of that wave, the sandbank, and his ability to ride the barrel are what make Andy a “Goldie” surfer. The ride encapsulates how histories of relations between spaces, sociality, psychology, and biology produce what we do. These features of life play out and adapt according to the rhythms of performances and aren’t fixed. Some assemblages are more regular and thus form habits in that they mould bodies, skills, and feelings. Those habits can’t be too rigid because every wave is different.

The endorphins are coursing through Andy’s body when he arrives back at his rusty car. A few of his friends are pulling out of the car-park. “Did ya get one Andy?” they ask. “Fucking oath!” he roars back. The boys exit with a squeal of tires and howls of laughter. Later that night he sits with his girlfriend in a surfed-out bliss. The salt and sunburn lull his body into a surfing comfort. His muscles are sore with satisfaction. Andy is watching the weather report on Prime TV and thinks the weather chick is sexy. The presenter explains that, “Cyclone Sose will continue to intensify with moderate south-east winds and a building swell. High tide will be at 7.00 a.m”. “You OK?” asks Toni. Andy doesn’t answer as his concentration is on the weather map and weather woman presenting. He doesn’t even register the question. Toni never hassles Andy about surfing. She even provides surf reports for him on her way to work at Pacific Fair shopping centre.

Andy’s last girlfriend left him on the beach after he’d been surfing for a few hours. At the time he’d been spending a lot of time with her and doing little surfing. His mates had started complaining that they never saw him out in the waves, so he surfed for a long time

that day. If he spends too much time with a girlfriend the guys will take him surfing down the coast to remind him of his homosocial obligations. Many male surfers fit surfing around family and partner duties. Some surfers appreciate how family life, employment, and relationships offer their own collection of sensations. These surfers will sometimes suggest that prioritising hanging with the boys is just a youthful phase. But they'll also reminisce about how they used to be able to go on trips just with the boys before they became burdened with, or invited, responsibility. Once a year they will organise a "boys own" excursion that demonstrates their commitment to their mates. Surfing then takes on the role of an escape from the demands that they feel they are meant to fulfil. John Severson notes the importance to surfers of this particular idea of "escape" when he suggests: 'In this crowded world the surfer can still seek and find the perfect day, the perfect wave, and be alone with the surf and his thoughts' (in Colburn et al., 2002: 145).

Twenty-nine-year-old Justin is a very good mate of Andy and has to negotiate the responsibilities of work that drag him away from surfing with the boys. In the marine production office where he works Justin logs onto his favourite website: [www.stormsurf.com.au](http://www.stormsurf.com.au). In recent years there has been a proliferation of websites such as [realsurf.com.au](http://realsurf.com.au), [coastalwatch.com.au](http://coastalwatch.com.au), [surfalert.com.au](http://surfalert.com.au), [burleighcam.com.au](http://burleighcam.com.au), and [swellnet.com.au](http://swellnet.com.au) that provide surf-reports supported by live webcams, chat forums, and photographs.<sup>iv</sup> Justin isn't sure what a lot of the models and graphs mean but he does know that when the Wave Action Model is yellow, green, and red the swell is significant.



Today the Wave Action Model shows a tight-knit group of concentric circles with a red centre spinning toward the northern tip of New Zealand. When Justin knocks-off work he drives to his favoured headland to feel the cyclonic conditions arrive at the coastline.

Waves pound rocks and wash away sandcastles. There are plumes of spray drifting into the sky. Rain and wind swirl about. The windscreen wipers squeak back and forth annoying him. He gets out of the car and walks to the shoreline. It feels good to have the weather against his skin. Justin shifts his attention from one wave to another in a tracking motion. He concentrates so intensely that he doesn't feel the rain getting harder.

Justin has grown up on the Gold Coast and having felt many cyclones his body is astute to subtle changes. If his skin drips with sweat there's a dreary onshore north-east wind blowing and only a slight chance of weak swell. His body loves the days when after weeks of being uncomfortable the turbulent cyclone winds blow in through the factory door. Swell will follow and the apprentices who he's been snapping at breathe a sigh of relief. Justin's body has become tied to cyclones and they determine his moods during the season.

That night Justin enters a converted bedroom where a quiver of surfboards is kept. A rack made of pinewood holds boards upright, tail down and along the far wall. Each board means something to him recalling collections of sense-impressions, and of stories. The boards are extensions of what Justin has felt while surfing. He watched their birth while itching in shaping bays under clouds of shaven foam-dust. There stands his 6'8 thruster. He picks up this semi-gun, a board used for medium to large waves, and caresses its

outline. This board has taken him through numerous dangerous situations and held firm in the turbulence. The texture of the surfboard is smooth in his hands. The board ceases to be an object as its form dissolves into his touch. Guns tend to feel sleek and look like speed as they are narrow and longer for more edge to bite into the wave. The larger the waves the longer and thicker the surfboard.

This particular gun has some extra foam volume for comfortable paddling. Justin has put on weight from working in an office and the board was built to compensate for this. The weight gain is embarrassing and his face flushes when changing in front of the fit younger guys. He tends to converse and wait to get into his wetsuit until the others have rushed down to the shore-break. A surfer is meant to have a fit and hard body so they can surf longer, survive in large waves, and overcome dangerous conditions. Justin compensates for his soft body by being funny.<sup>vi</sup> But he'll also use his size to intimidate other guys if they make too much fun of him.

The image of the surfer's body is physically able, muscles sculpted, and strong. Many magazines promote this "perfect" body, and many surfing bodies have some of its features. But as guys surf less due to work, suffer illness or injury, or age, their muscles, bones, nerves, gristle, joints, and skin connect with different demands and surfing bodies become something other than the assumed definition. But this doesn't mean that these guys can't surf or surf worse. Some turn to different shaped surfboards, some take advantage of the added weight turning it into an ability to power through manoeuvres, others ride bigger waves that will carry their size, while some style on long-boards in

gentler waves that will be less demanding on their joints. The distance from the hegemonic self-representation of their body does not necessarily convert to a cultural inferiority. Techniques and technology can shift expectations. A good example is that of elder men who still surf. Their weathered bodies are not looked down upon but revered as they make their way into the line-up for another wave. These bodies are not expected to smash-the-lip but just to surf. The movements of these bodies as they ride waves are stylish, some even say graceful. They're tied to a history of a body knowing the movements, techniques, and skill of riding waves drawn over many decades.<sup>vii</sup> As long as their bodies move as if surfing is second nature they will be allowed a degree of inclusion. But the transition to being an older surfer isn't seamless, hence Justin's shame at gaining weight.

At five a.m. the next morning Justin gets out of bed and ambles to the kitchen. Eating toast and drinking hot coffee wakes his body up as caffeine makes its way into his blood. Justin loads his surfboard into the back of his four-wheel-drive ute. He likes this car as it allows him to escape crowds by accessing isolated stretches of coast. It also sits higher than other cars on the road so it feels tough. Justin speeds along suburban roads to arrive at Burleigh Heads. The headland is covered in a forest of pandanus palms and big round black boulders. There are grassy patches where families kick footballs, ride pushbikes, and eat sandwiches on plaid rugs. The best waves peel down the flank of the boulders. Justin parks at the picnic benches halfway up the point. He knows that a group of local surfers called the "Burleigh Boys" can sometimes hassle crew for checking the surf from their spot. There are no Burleigh Boys here at the moment so he decides to run the risk.

Justin checks the waves while leaning against one of the many pine trees. Concentrating on the surf he doesn't hear the commotion. A close-knit crew of surfers has arrived. Car doors slam and friendly jibes are thrown back and forth. Justin feels a pine-cone hit him. He turns to see where it came from and is confronted by a guy wearing the local board-riding club's red and white boardshorts. "What the hell you doin'?" this bloke asks. Justin answers with a disinterested shrug. "Nail him Sheriff !" one of the other lads yells. Justin glares into Sheriff's eyes and turns his body to face him while puffing up to his full size. Sheriff averts his gaze, hesitates and then screams, "I'll see you in the fucking water ya cunt!" Justin slowly walks back to his car, hops in, and drives up the point to another car-park. He moves slowly to suggest he isn't intimidated but parks elsewhere to show respect to their local status. Confident body-language is an important technique when dealing with confrontations. The other guy isn't sure if you can fight and may back down. Sometimes they call the bluff and if you lack fighting ability you can be beaten into a bloody pulp, so this technique needs to be used in a judicious manner.

Justin gets his surfboard out of the car and waxes it. He rubs the wax onto the surfboard first in a diagonal motion and then in a circular manner, this method builds little mounds that are good for traction. The wax has little smell and he prefers this. He avoids the wax that smells like coconut because it triggers memories of grommet abuse, such as being locked up in a cage by the older blokes, then having blocks of wax thrown at him, and being blasted with water from a high-powered hose. Grommet abuse is an initiation process that positions young surfers in the pecking order.

He paddles out into the mass of bobbing heads that are beginning to dot the line-up around the cove.<sup>viii</sup> Justin says a few g'days and smiles to ease the tension with Sheriff's mates but they nod back warily. As he tries to catch waves the local boys stroke to the inside taking the right of way time and again. Justin's jaw clenches, face reddens, and he breathes faster.

Justin isn't quite sure whether he's angry at not getting waves, or at getting hit by the pine-cone, or because he isn't doing anything about it. Whatever, his surf is being ruined. Maybe aggression could help. A fight in the water can establish a place in the pecking order. Then he remembered that former world champion surfer Nat Young had been beaten up at Angourie in March 2002. Justin doesn't want to contribute to a culture that beats up its heroes. Surf journalist Derek Reilly explains:

As for the existence of a surfing brotherhood, that disappeared long ago in any mass sense – around the same time the industry and competition bodies completed their successful lunge for mainstream – and world-wide – acceptance, and overcrowding in the surf became endemic. Increasingly, surfers are losing it. Fists are thrown, knives are brandished, out-of-towners are ganged up on, cars are vandalised and boards speared at heads (Reilly, 2000: 330).

In a study of how the law could deal with surf violence Brian Fitzgerald and Geoffrey Clark (2001) note how it's got to the point where lawyers write tort laws to cope with its specific form. In a dictionary of surfing terms edited by Trevor Cralle (2001) it's suggested that the overcrowding of line-ups due to its ever-increasing popularity has seen a backlash by those who view themselves as original, anyone who has been surfing a spot

longer than you. Surf-media researcher Paul Scott (2003) writes that, 'Surfing magazines and films often encourage the siege-like tribalism and aggressive expression of localism through advocating "the rights" of local surfers: for example, the magazines will often not reveal the source location of surfing photographs "out of respect for the locals"' (para. 7).

Violence wouldn't set a good example to the grommets, thinks Justin. "Heavy" Burleigh local Dwayne Harris disagrees, arguing that it's all part of teaching the kids respect and that they have to pay their dues (in Rielly, 2000: 42). The argument goes that when you're a grommet you get bumped around and learn your place in the world. Then you mature as a surfer with all the knowledge of how to get around a crowded line-up.

Violent practices become entrenched and embodied as the norm. This particular discourse of knowing the line-up and approved violence makes its way into the skills, techniques, beliefs, and bodies of the younger surfers. Harris believes in this mode of policing the water:

If it's over four foot I try and sort it out in the water, if it's under four foot I just go in. I don't like getting angry in the water anymore. I do get angry and get into fights, but you need that, you need that out there. After you see a good bit of biffos go down, the line-up clears itself a bit. It does it good. It really needs it some days. You need a fight to sort it out (in Rielly, 2000: 43).

This "sorting out" involves determining who can surf and who cannot. Justin's friend Andy calls surf rage just plain old aggro. He figures that if you can surf you will get

respect. He argues that the problems are people who surf a spot above their ability, show no respect for the locals, waste waves, and are just copying what they saw in a magazine. He also claims that surf rage is blown out of proportion by the media.

But Justin can surf well and here he is getting hassled. Mind you, he's done the same. Justin once slapped a kid who had dropped-in. Afterwards he'd felt ridiculous at getting worked up over what was an ordinary wave. He let go of the young surfer who was struggling in fear, and apologised. He remembers the eyes of the grommet. Rather than get violent this time Justin uses a different tactic. One of the better local surfers starts stroking for a set wave. Justin is in the prime position to catch it. "Oi" he yells so other surfers pull back. The local looks at him as they paddle side-by-side. Even though he could take-off Justin calls the local into the wave. For this generosity, the guy allows him to get a few waves. The tension eases and a different mood settles over the crowd. Justin has surfed the points for a long time and thinks he knows how to deal with the local boys. Just give a bit of respect, he thinks.

While changing out of his wetsuit Justin is still thinking about the Burleigh Boys. He thinks about how they imagine they're the originals but they're so recent. A moment comes back to him where he went to Fleay's Wildlife Park to go on a cultural tour that helps educate about the indigenous history of the Gold Coast. The tour guide Ernie Williams explained to indigenous historian Rory O'Connor (1997) that the Kombumerri people know Burleigh Heads as Jellural. The headland came about long ago when Jabreen, the creation spirit, woke up and stretched. O'connor writes that, 'Jabreen was

huge – as big as Jellurgal itself. His giant rocky fingers can still be seen protruding from the top of the headland, reaching up to the sky’ (11). The stories the Burleigh Boys tell themselves to establish their roles as the men of the point obliterate many other stories. These stories marginalised are of women who collected shellfish and black bodies sitting in Bora rings. However, as novelist Kim Scott (2000) explains: the stories, although interrupted by massacres, social absorption, stolen families, and surfing men ‘are still here, Benang’ (497). Justin feels better knowing that the white surfing boys on those picnic benches aren’t the only locals. But there is complicity tied to this awareness, as he does not question the power he has to disappear these stories, to often not think of them at all. Such stories enable him to feel better but they remain marginalised and drawn upon only when it suits his own purposes. His encounter with them was as an interesting cultural “past” recounted in a tourist park and now as an excuse to make him feel better about being excluded. Justin makes the mistaken assumption that he understands completely how the Kombumerri must feel.

The sun is high now and fully lights up the fingers of Jabreen. Justin can see that the ribbons of swell are getting bigger by the hour. A guy with thongs on his feet flips and flops up next to him. They exchange a few words about the rising swell. Justin spits in a violent manner as the toxicity of the mornings experience floods in. “Looks like a good twelve-feet plus now,” the other surfer exclaims with a nervous stutter. Justin answers with a jutting chin and a nonchalant claim that it’s “eight to ten-feet”. Judging wave height is an imprecise art and can have more to do with playing it cool than with exact measurement.<sup>ix</sup> This isn’t to say that one can’t measure wave height. Justin knows



oceanographers do it all the time on computer models. But standing on a headland in the morning light requires different techniques.

Non-surfers tend to judge the wave height from crest to trough as a wave rears up. While some surfers adopt this method many measure waves by judging how high the back slope of a wave is from the surface of the ocean.<sup>x</sup> Some of Justin's mates say it's shoulder high, head high, over-head, or well-overhead. Justin doesn't over-emphasise wave height because this indicates a lack of experience and fear.

Proud surfers are the crew whose bodies have adapted to the swirling of adrenalin and fear. Big-wave bodies tend to under-size waves. They measure wave height on what pioneering big-wave rider Buzzy Trent calls 'increments of fear' (Warshaw, 2003: xi). A twenty-foot wave measured trough to crest by a layperson will be called ten-feet by big-wave surfers.<sup>xi</sup>

Justin has surfed overhead waves in Western Australia, Indonesia, and Fiji. But his body still trembles and becomes short of breath when surfing big waves. Living on the Gold Coast with its infrequent large surf means his adaptation is slow. However, Justin's adept at hiding the uncertainty and under-sizing is one such method for doing so. There's something romantic about playing down what to others seems hostile, out-of-control, and frightening (x).<sup>xii</sup> Justin's interpretation of wave size has a lot to do with shame and pride.

The swell is now getting too big for Burleigh as waves wash wide of the black boulders. This means that the Superbank could be great. Justin climbs into his car and drives down the coast as his mobile phone rings. It's Andy. "What's Burleigh like?" asks a voice that is shrill due to excitement. "Burleigh's out-of-control. See you at the Superbank." Dialtone. Andy's a good mate and their bodies have been through a lot together. Past experiences and the shared feelings bond their bodies to the point that when they are drunk Andy will throw his arm around Justin and call him his brother. Sometimes he adds, "I love you man." They also talk each other's feats up to crew they converse with at the pub.<sup>xiii</sup>

Justin drives around the bend in the road that circles Kirra and has the statue of a steel eagle overlooking it. He proceeds up Coolangatta beach, over Greenmount hill, through Rainbow Bay, past Snapper, and parks at the top of Point Danger. Point Danger is a peninsula that has the Tweed River to the south and the Gold Coast points to the north. Below him the Tweed River is flowing fast and he can see the sand-pumping jetty on the south side of the river. Trawlers pitch and roll between the rock walls as they rush into safe water and away from the wild seas. And Justin is always nervous about what might be following them as fish guts are washed from their decks. The boys hassle him about his fear of sharks. Some even grab his leg-rope from behind giving him a fright. Justin reckons they do that to calm their own nerves, but the boys just laugh louder and call him a wuss. Humour eases tensions and it voices anxieties.

Andy arrives with smoke spewing out of the exhaust of his old car. Andy and Justin clasp hands but it's not a regular handshake. Their hands are gnarled but feeling passes easily. The touch is reciprocal. Attached to the roof of Andy's cars are two seven-foot and six-inch guns – big wave boards. The waves now tower and flutter before exploding. Andy is loud and boisterous in the car-park. Nervous excitement materialises as animated movements and discussion. Such expression is permitted in the car-park from Andy because he's a local.<sup>xiv</sup> A non-local would be a "fucking tourist making a scene".<sup>xv</sup> Justin's more reserved because he's not a local, is getting scared by surf conditions. His actions and conversation are inhibited.

At the Superbank Andy knows the winds, swells, and tides that bring out the best in the place and so do many of the other local boys. These men surf it at similar times. They remember and talk about different swells, best barrels, and worst wipe-outs. Andy has boards made for this wave and knows how it will twist, hollow out, and fold. Familiar with the sandbank here he manages to take-off deep with the side-wash off the rocks. Long ago an older local by the name of Drew explained to Andy that it's important for one's body to know what to do and where to sit in the surf to establish a place in the hierarchy. Journalist Andrew Kidman asked revered local surfer Wayne Bartholomew how he catches so many waves at the Superbank and he replied: 'It's all about positioning around here' (in *Surfer's Path*, Dec/Jan, 2003: 86). Surfing the large waves today will enhance Andy's reputation for taking on dangerous conditions and knowledge of the surf-break.

Drew is a legend in this area. Andy grew up taking note of his style including his head inclination while paddling, turns, and even the way he carries his board. When Drew limps with his bad leg, damaged from a fishing boat accident, into the car-park crew crowd around. A compliment from him can make Andy feel good for days. Other surfers afford Drew respect and this is passed onto Andy when he pats him on the back.

Drew says that being a good surfer is inside a person. He thinks it's his role to make a man out of Andy. Andy doesn't mind the role-model scenario because it establishes a rite-of-passage that makes him feel good. It also means he doesn't have to reflect on how to perform as a good surfer and man. If Andy follows Drew's rules and goes through the approved rituals he's offered the pride of belonging. It's much easier to go with the flow. Drew passes on through his performances and stories what's natural and how to achieve it. His insistence on the rituals, and that masculinity and surfing be practiced in a prescribed way, is ironic – what Drew assumes to be stable and unified must be policed. One doesn't have to manage and constantly re-iterate a fixed and inner essence if it's truly fixed.

Misogyny is prevalent in the discourse of some of the role-models perpetuated in the surfing community. Grommets are constantly told they are turning soft. Softness in the male grommets is linked with excessive connection to women and this stigmatises certain feminine qualities such as: that all women are soft, whinging, get in the way of your surfing, and so on. Drew's role-model limits the possibilities of doing masculinity and surfing by tying them to essential and normative discourses of gender and sex that he

polices himself with, and that inform his embodied history. This limits the possibilities for Andy to do things differently. New performances that would not be like the elders, and they wouldn't like it. It would be disrespectful and Andy wouldn't get those pats on the back and the transferred respect in the line-up. Andy wouldn't get waves.

Positioning and respect will be an issue today as the swell is getting bigger with each set.<sup>xvi</sup> Justin watches while sitting on the roof of the car. He loves the heat digging into his back. Andy's laughing a lot. "You have a bong this morning?" Justin asks. He's not sure Andy has heard him. Andy has Surfer's Ear: the bone in his ear canal has started growing and in time will block the hole. His doctor said it was from the cold morning offshore breezes blowing into the ear. His body is protecting itself from the elements. The doctor wants to operate soon. This operation involves cutting at the back of the ear from top to bottom and folding the ear forward to drill the bone out. Andy isn't too keen on this process as it means six weeks out of the water. He can still hear in that ear, sort of.

A group of blokes pull up with a trailer carrying a Wave-runner. A Wave-runner is a small motorised vehicle that skims across the water at high speeds. This one can carry up to three people and has a jet engine in its hull. The Wave-runner has a tow-rope attached to the tail. Those boys are going to tow into the waves that Andy and Justin are going to attempt to paddle into. The swell is still rising. The Gold Coast gets big but not massive.

Other waves dwarf the biggest that surge onto the Superbank today. Places like Teahupoo in Tahiti, Jaws in Hawaii, Killers in Mexico, and the Cortes Banks in northern California

deliver massive waves. Some of these spots reach well over sixty-feet measured on the conservative scale of big-wave bodies. A culture of big wave riding has emerged and “Watermen” are paid to travel and surf mountains of water.<sup>xvii</sup> Sensational tales of bravery, courage, fear, and conquest are disseminated via magazines, mainstream newspapers, biographies, news broadcasts, and films. These Watermen have training regimes that include developing one’s lungs to the point of being able to swim many kilometres through the open ocean and holding one’s breath for minutes at a time. Justin and Andy have just finished a meat-pie and chocolate milk from the local bakery.

Laird Hamilton, Buzzy Kerbox, and Darrick Doerner are part of a select group who took surfing big waves to the next realm. These revered Watermen began using an inflatable zodiac boat to tow each other into large waves like water skiers.<sup>xviii</sup> The speed of the boat acts like a slingshot with the momentum allowing them to catch waves they could never have caught without the mechanical aid. The zodiac boat has now been joined by jet-skis and Wave-runners. Jet-skis and Wave-runners tow surfers into massive waves on boards that are more like heavy water skis than the common surfboard. They have straps to put your feet into. Tow-in surfing is growing in popularity and machines buzz any coast where surfers try to defy the physics of giant waves that are too fast and too big to paddle into.<sup>xix</sup> The speed generated by tow-in surfing has seen the use of the technology in small waves so as to perform spectacular gymnastic manoeuvres. Magazines produce and disseminate images of these technologically assisted manoeuvres and surfers increasingly realise they can’t surf like the professionals because of cost.

While the swell washing through the Superbank today isn't massive, there's no deep-water channel to access the line-up and avoid breaking waves. There's a ferocious sweep moving fast along the coastline. Unresolved fear left from previous big-wave experiences flows through Justin's body as he attaches an extra-long leg-rope and fits extra-large fins to his board. Andy's eyes dart, he cannot sit still, and his muscles tingle when the surf keeps getting bigger. The feelings are addictive, and the 'fear attractive and contagious' (Leonard, 1988: 35). As Australian big-wave surfer Rod Kirsop (1985) writes:

For some strange reason when the swell gets big someone will have to paddle out. I know, because I'm hopelessly addicted to big waves ... When the swell comes up my body comes alive. I must get out there (16).

For Andy it's his body that drives him to ride big waves. As Hawaiian surfer Ricky Grigg explains, 'There comes a point where you're completely committed and nothing and no-one can pluck you out of the that situation, where you're not so much a god as an animal. You're all instinct' (in Martin, 1992: 183). Some argue it is a transcendental experience of nature and aesthetic assessment of risk that inspires surfers to ride dangerous waves. There isn't a cognitive, romantic, and reasoned risk-taking but a claim by the body for experience. That is, bodily affects are the manner through which we come to know the world (Tomkins, 1995). Andy's body demonstrates the importance of sensual immanence to doing things as a man. There's an addiction to the varying combinations and intensities of affects such as fear, joy, excitement, and pride. Affective scripts evolve depending on experience.

Andy also likes surfing in big waves with a mate. There's an affective bonding as both pairs of eyes can scan the horizon for large sets of waves and the boys can help each other if one gets into trouble. Solitary surfing in big waves is "hard-core". When you're alone it's more intense. But surfing with a mate means you both can make jokes and not let imagination and fear flow smoothly.

Justin's watching the sets roll in as he pulls on his wetsuit. His body is trembling, perspiring in a cold sweat, and his eyes are wide open. Fear begins to seep out through his pores as the biggest set he's seen explodes. But he knows that he has to go out because the shame would be overwhelming if he didn't. Justin sometimes comes across as a macho tough bloke but he truly feels he's a bit of a chicken. He regularly paddles out in large surf just to prove to the boys that he can ride big waves. Today he 's paddling out because he doesn't want to let Andy down and thus infect his reputation with his local crew.

The fear's hard to deal with and gets tiring and Justin tries to hide it as much as possible. Justin prepares his gear as indifferently as he's able. The movements are deliberate and slow. He takes a few deep breaths as Andy asks him if he's ready. "Yeah, no sweat," he lies as he runs his right hand through his hair. Justin's body is an instrument of remembering and recalls the fear from Cyclone Betsy when he nearly drowned. Andy has the idea to ask the boys with the Wave-runner for a lift out-the-back for him and Justin. The guys respond, "no worries." The boys drive down the hill and put the Wave-runner in the water at the Tweed Heads boat ramp. The fumes from the fuel have a strong smell



and seagulls streak the sky. A group of Japanese surfers are also putting a wave-runner into the water.<sup>xx</sup> They offer Andy and Justin a lift, who reply with a dismissive wave.

The boys speed out the mouth of the Tweed River. Justin and Andy hold on behind Matt, the driver. The Tweed Bar is a mass of white-water swirling, churning, and surging. Matt does small loops in the safe water inside the river-mouth. He spots a safe route as a set dwindles, twists the throttle, and steers out past currents that would flush away any paddler. They're soon around the shaggy girth of Point Danger. All three hearts are pumping fast and palms clammy.

Across the bay Andy can see the cluster of vertical shapes that are the high-rises of Surfers Paradise. When Andy stands on the upper floor balconies of these buildings he can feel them sway. It is also disorientating to look over the edge. Andy feels the same now as a small black blur impinges on his field of vision. He looks down into the trough as they travel over a large wave to see a cascading waterfall smash a surfer as his hands grasp at the water. Paddling in big surf feels scary. You're often separated from other surfers and swept about at the will of the ocean. If out of position, otherwise known as "caught inside", duck-diving is fruitless. The turbulence can rip the surfboard board out of hands. If the leg-rope snaps it will mean a long swim in. Andy has a lot of respect for this surfer attempting to paddle-out. Justin and Andy jump off the back of the wave-runner, thank Matt, and offer to buy beers for him tonight at the local pub. Then they paddle away through deep water to the take-off zone.

Now that Justin and Andy are paddling they have priority for wave-choice over the tow-in surfers Matt is going to retrieve. Paddling is associated with a rawness unaided by motorised technology. The paddling surfer is supposedly more aware of the ocean and immersed within its control. It's that traditional trope of the surfer at one with nature. While this sounds ideological there is a different feeling when catching a large wave paddling under one's own steam. The drop into the wave is usually later, steeper, and can take on more significance than the rest of the ride. A "heavy" drop is considered to be technically superior.<sup>xxi</sup>

Justin paddles hard with even and deliberate strokes. His shoulders hunched, eyebrows furrowed, and lips tight together. Andy's muscles are taut and his knuckles go white as he grabs the rails on his surfboard and sits upright. People watch from the headland. Andy wonders if Bear is watching as he yells to Justin to keep an eye out for "sneaker sets" – larger groups of waves that appear sporadically during powerful swells. He trusts Justin's eyesight. Andy has had trouble with his eyes recently and objects at a distance appear blurry. Andy's body is not keeping up with his desire to surf big waves and this sometimes depresses him, but he keeps chasing the thrill of large waves so as not to let that depression overcome him. If he can still catch these waves he still feels like a real surfer.

Andy's trust in Justin is crucial. He knows Justin is unsure in big waves but he trusts him anyway. Justin has never let him down in the past. The trust has its own momentum building upon itself as more acts of trust between them take place. Such trust is

intoxicating as it binds them together, helps them to surf larger waves each time, and to deal with the unknown. It also enables Justin and Andy to deal with fear. According to philosopher Alphonso Lingis (2002), in his accounts of travelling in Africa, fear tends to gain force when allowed to gather momentum and overcome trust (99). It's as if the two bodies can share and diminish the intensity of the fear that threatens the boys surf now.

Justin spots a wave and calls out to Andy. Andy paddles and pushes himself over the edge as the rush of water folds. His mouth is wide open as he slides down the face. He wants to scream but has to breathe. Andy spits out salt water. He braces for what is to come. The trim is high and fast. Andy angles to the bottom of the wave before it is too steep. The board bounces but his legs absorb the shock and he tries to appear casual. Leaning into the bottom turn he angles up as white-water slides down. His feet are spread wide as he skirts near the pitching lip. The wave evens up and begins to collapse in a uniform movement. Andy gasps and is pushed down, head first, into the quiet of the depths. He hits the Superbank flipping and feels his skin go tight in shock while struggling for the top. One side of his body is stunned and feels numb from the impact. His lip splits from the pressure of the implosion and blood leaks into the seawater of which it is more or less interchangeable. In his studies on perception, physiology, and cognition psychologist Nicholas Humphrey (2000) has found that:

When our fish ancestors were evolving four hundred million years ago in the Devonian seas, it was essential that the salt composition of their blood should closely resemble the external sea water, so that they would not lose water by

osmosis across their gills. Once our ancestors moved on to the land, however, and started breathing air, this particular feature of blood was no longer of critical importance. Nevertheless, since other aspects of vertebrate physiology had developed to fit in with it and any change would have been at least temporarily disadvantageous, we were left alone. The result is that human blood is still today more or less interchangeable with sea water (247-248).

After some moments of not getting anywhere Andy's body tells him to slow down. The breathing eases into a hyperventilating approach to cope with being deep in the water. Andy re-circulates his air. Bubbles and streaks of white are fluttering in front of his eyes. He feels foolish for not making the wave but stoked at the same time for taking-off on what was a radical wave. It feels thrilling to be part of the experience but scary also. Andy can't determine up or down so he climbs his stretched leg-rope for the surface, eyes bulging, lungs searching. His board is silhouetted above him because it always floats. The next wave hits, clawing him deeper. His body attempts to breathe and water travels down his throat so he convulses. Then, without warning, the ocean lets him go. He gets a tiny breath of salty foam and air, briefly goes under again, and then resurfaces.

Another wave looms but Andy climbs onto his surfboard, strokes for deep water, and pushes over the shoulder as he is showered with salt spray. Andy's arm is shaking as Justin grabs it and asks with something like tenderness if he's okay, Justin just sucks in deep breaths. He's disorientated and nauseous. Andy gazes at the horizon in a daze until his shaking body flags the present and snaps his consciousness back to the here and now.

“You know, some people will say we cheated by using the machine,” Justin exclaims over the wind that is blowing hard now. Andy growls as he says, “what would those girls know, look at ‘em in there, sittin’ on the beach”. How dare those who don’t ride waves like this attempt to shame him. Shame is what has got Andy here in the first place. Once when he had trouble surfing the “big stuff” the boys had ridiculed him. From that time on he practiced until he could do it. Shame isn’t necessarily negative, it can elicit interest and move us to explore new ways to do things (Probyn, 2003).

The boys look each other in the eyes. It’s intense. Then Justin cracks a joke about a girl he met in Surfers Paradise and had sex with. He’d rushed her out of the house so his flatmates couldn’t see how fat she was. They laugh. The laughter short-circuits the flow of fear. Another set bears down upon them. They count their strokes through the water, trying to build up a rhythm for speed. As the swells stand up on the sandbank Andy yells for Justin to take-off. Justin does a sharp turn and attempts to enter into the momentum of the wave but his arms slow as they refuse to relinquish the safety of the deep water. The danger of the situation compounds his fear until his muscles freeze in terror. ‘Next one!’ Andy yells. As another set wave approaches Justin again aborts his paddling. “What was wrong with that one?” questions Andy. “Couldn’t get into it,” Justin lies, “anyway, it was too steep”. To escape ridicule, he blames the waves and technique. But Andy knows that the timing was perfect. Justin’s lack of conviction, blinking eyes, and averted gaze when making the excuse is telling. Eventually Justin catches a few smaller inside waves.

The sets continue to roll through and only Andy catches them. Between waves Justin's head is drooping and he stares at the water. "What the fuck are you doing Justin? You look like an idiot," Andy thinks. The scowl on Andy's face tells Justin that he is not impressed and is losing respect for him. No matter how much he wills himself, Justin's body will not push over the edge of the biggest waves. Justin is silent, speechless. The boys bob up and down as they drift along the Super-bank with the sweep. Justin's stoke leaks into the water.

A sneaker set rears up, peaking twenty-metres beyond where they have been catching waves. Two sets of eyes widen before the explosion catches both bodies. Andy skips along the surface before penetrating on the third bounce. Justin feels Andy's board brush past as he ditches his surfboard and dives deep. Both bodies are agitated toward shore. The waves deposit Andy, choking on sea foam, in a gutter of deep water. He can't see Justin and looks about in panic and concern. A flash of colour catches his eye and he can see Justin ducking under exploding lines of white-water and dodging whirlpools.

On shore the boys take deep breaths, spit out seawater and bile, and sit on the sand for a while, exhausted. After a few minutes they walk aback toward Point Danger along Coolangatta beach, past the pandanus palms of Greenmount Point, and through the Snapper Rocks car-park. Some of the local crew are waxing their boards while loud music that invigorates their bodies and psyches them up blares from a car stereo. Bear is amongst them. They chatter to Andy who looks a bit ragged after the swim in but stands tall. "Fuck, you caught some solid ones," mentions Bear with a broad smile. The rush of

the rides felt good but the added praise makes Andy feel even better. He smiles broadly. Justin exclaims that the waves out the back are larger than they appear from shore. He's ignored until one of the locals says, "Yeah mate, and you were ripping them". Everyone, except Justin, laughs. Justin feels humiliated. He experiences an inner tension between wanting to reduce the painful experience by explaining himself and saying nothing to shrink from attention. Justin's not thinking clearly and his body is in a state of confusion. He casts his eyes down and blushes. Andy looks over and watches Justin squirm in distress under the gaze of the others.

Once the boards are back on the roof of the car Andy comes over. Justin was relegated the task of packing up alone. Andy's disappointment in Justin has waned and been replaced by empathy. Justin is still uncertain, his body shakes, and his temples throb. If they weren't locals he would have tried to fight them. He doesn't blame Andy because he knows it's just how things are, he surfs this spot all the time and has to maintain his familiarity to get waves. The experiences of surfing big waves together are always collaborative. You can't break the bonds of trust. But the collaborative effort that requires an intertwining of self and other can be uncomfortable. The waves, Superbank, wind, Justin, and Andy are a complex composition. These performances of sensoria are a mixed assortment of touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste that spill all over each other (Leonard, 1997: 6). Andy begins to feel that Justin's shame is his. He's ashamed that Justin didn't catch the large waves but he's also ashamed at not speaking up for his friend who had paddled out with him.

During the drive home Justin tries to ignore the memory of disdainful looks and mocking laughter, but his body won't let the humiliation go yet. As he drives, the humiliation turns into anger. "Fuck those assholes," he thinks while his body burns. Justin grinds his teeth and stares vacantly to try and deactivate his body while speeding down the highway faster and faster. But the senses invade him. Surfing today wasn't what he hoped for last night standing on the weathered headland. Andy won't talk about the session in any detail until some time later. This way they can colour the experience so that Justin won't have to be upset. All he says is, "Next time bro, next time". Andy has a sincere grin on his face and Justin the beginnings of one. Justin doesn't complain about the local crew. Andy can complain because he's part of this crew but Justin can't – it's all about respect.

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<sup>i</sup> "Wollumbin" means cloud or rain gatherer. During summer north-east sea-breezes rush into a crater that is 30 kilometres across building up electrical charges. The resulting electricity develops into storms that rush down green valleys. These storms spark flashes of lightning over the points.

<sup>ii</sup> For a technical account of the sand-pumping process and by-pass system see [www.wrl.unsw.edu.au/coastalimaging/public/tweed/index.html](http://www.wrl.unsw.edu.au/coastalimaging/public/tweed/index.html)

<sup>iii</sup> I do not continue my discussion on homosexuality and surfing because my research is focussed on heterosexual men. A study of surfing and homosexuality is an area lacking research and requires a dedicated approach to do it justice. For a discussion of homosexuality, sexual desire, and sport see Brian Pronger's (1990) *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, homosexuality and the meaning of sex* and 'Outta My Endzone; Sport and the Territorial Anus'(1999).

<sup>iv</sup> The book *Mavericks: The Story of Big-Wave Surfing* (2003) by Matt Warshaw explains how the information on websites involves '... tide measurements, open-ocean wave height, wind speed, current speed, isobar charts, atmospheric weather maps, tide charts, nonograms, wave trains, wave period, wave refraction, wave fetch, capillary waves, wave vectors, wave group velocity, and wave phase speed' (Warshaw, 2003: 42-43).

<sup>v</sup> Surfboards are measured in feet and inches.

<sup>vi</sup> Lee Monaghan's article 'Big Handsome men, Bears and Others' (2005) is a useful analysis of how "fat" men can use particular techniques to counter hegemonic expectations. Focussing on how "bears" [big and hairy men] negotiate gay online communities Monaghan discusses how they develop a space for alternative definitions and expectations of fat male embodiment. In contrast to normalised attempts to emasculate such male bodies new meanings develop that eroticise "fatness". These meanings move away from fat as symbolising lack of self-discipline or not being a "real" – active and in-control – man.

<sup>vii</sup> United States filmmaker David Brown made a documentary about active surfers from sixty to ninety years-old. In *Surfing for Life* (2000) he attempts to capture, and pay homage to, ten characters for whom surfing is an all-consuming passion. Tracing their lives in parallel to surfing history Brown tries to capture what has kept them enthralled for so long and how they deal with the youth focus of present marketing of surfing. These blokes continue to be stoked with surfing. As Eve Fletcher, one of the surfers, remarks, "I don't think you can ever be too old to be stoked."

<sup>viii</sup> Burleigh has several different sections. Out off the cove is "Sharkies". This part of the wave is at the pinnacle of the big black boulders and is not often good. But when there is enough sand waves run down



into the cove, a distance of twenty-five-metres or so. The size at Sharkies tends to be bigger and the take-off is steep and critical. The next section is the cove. Here the waves break in shallow water and hollow out. The barrels are short but thick and you can see everyone paddling out down the point. Sometimes people scream encouragement and look in as he rides deep. The barrel here is hard to make as it can peel too quick. Justin sits down the line at "the point" knowing not to paddle straight to the inside take-off position. The wave here slows up but is rhythmic in its progression. The barrels are not as deep but you can travel a long way in them by weighting and un-weighting on your back foot. The pocket, right next to the curl, stands up very steep and is good for manoeuvres.

<sup>ix</sup> In an article by Rick Griggs entitled 'How to Measure a Wave' Justin read how there is a history to the technique of measuring a wave from the back that goes beyond being cool by under-calling the size. According to Griggs (2003) during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s some surfers began to underestimate wave size. The situation deteriorated until twenty-foot waves were being called ten-feet. Radio and newspaper surf reports passed on these conservative figures. The effect was less people bothering to go surfing on any given day so local guys had waves to themselves.

<sup>x</sup> Both these methods have the problem of accounting for movement. Waves change as they peel over uneven bottoms. The height of the wave might be ten-feet at the point where it rears up but down-the-line it will drop to six-feet. Sometimes waves also grow as they travel. A wave will surge onto a rock at the top of the reef at four-feet to morph into eight-feet as it peels.

<sup>xi</sup> Furthermore, different regions and the rhythms of local bodies mean waves are measured according to regional experience. Take a ten-foot wave from the Gold Coast and put it "down south" in Western Australia and it becomes eight-feet. The bodies of some Western Australian surfers are used to taking-off on large Indian Ocean waves pushed by the wind fetch known as the Roaring Forties.

<sup>xii</sup> What heightens nervous energy in many surfing bodies is not wave-height but wave-thickness. Some waves may be big but they lack power. The more powerful the wave the more volume the amount of water pushed by the energy. A wave that might measure six-feet can be thick-lipped and break very quick onto a shallow sea-bottom. This can mean a "heavier", more dangerous, wipe-out than one on a ten-foot wave that folds slowly into deep water.

<sup>xiii</sup> There is no embarrassment at such propagation of feelings as the boys are protected from homoeroticism because crew know they both have had sex with lots of women. It's important for the boys to police their sexuality as homosexuality is considered to be a threat to homosocial arrangements in surfing communities. One is allowed to be with the boys but not to want the boys. Justin will make comment to distance himself from homosexuality when someone exhibits behaviours stereotyped as gay such as limp-wrists, kissing, prolonged hugs and so on. If one of the boys fails to acknowledge an attractive girl Justin and the rest of the boys sometimes tease. Justin and his mates often refer to "boy's adventures down the coast". On such adventures the exclusion of homoerotic flow from the homosocial environment relies on nuanced actions. Any lingering while performing an activity, such as touching for too long and taking too long to get ready for the pub, has the "danger" of being referred to as gay. Justin hates being called a poofter and gets angry if it happens. Homosexuality panics some male surfer's naturalised heterosexual idealisation.

<sup>xiv</sup> To become a local you have to live at next to a particular break for many years. In fact it's sometimes important to have been born in close proximity. Anything less than twenty years and you could be considered a "blow-in". Andy was born in the local hospital and attended the regional school.

<sup>xv</sup> The hardline localism Justin confronted at Burleigh isn't as common here. The sheer numbers of surfers moving to this region makes policing the line-up by a small group increasingly impossible. The "Snapper Crew" are active at the Superbank and one of their enforcers Bruce Lee claims, 'They think that just because it is so crowded there are no rules - well I'm here to tell you, there are' (in *Tracks*, Dec 2003: 27).

<sup>xvi</sup> The Superbank is not at its best when the swell gets over six-feet. The Superbank breaks differently in the varying swells. East swells mean there is little sweep and the waves run along the bank in sections. More south to the swell and the waves taper off. The best size for exquisite waves is about four-to-six-feet. However, at the moment the swell is at least ten-feet.

<sup>xvii</sup> Billabong's *Odyssey: the search for the 100-foot wave* and the *XXL Big-Wave Challenge* are two projects that paid surfers to chase massive waves and ride them. The sponsored Watermen surf the biggest and most dangerous waves. Experts such as Mark Foo and Todd Chesser from Hawaii and Donnie Solomon from California have drowned (Warshaw, 2003). Big-wave riders are expected to give one hundred percent to their surfing. Such a surfer is revered.

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<sup>xviii</sup> In the mid-seventies Jim Neece of Hawaii had attempted to tow surfers into waves, as had Herbie Fletcher of California in 1987. However, it was Kerbox, Doerner, and Hamilton who recognised the potential and required techniques (Warshaw, 2003).

<sup>xix</sup> For an excellent account of the history of big wave riding and its current culture see Matt Warshaw's *Mavericks: the story of big wave surfing* (2003).

<sup>xx</sup> White men dominate the Superbank and marginalise other race and ethnic performances of masculinity. But there are many surfers of different races, ethnicities, and histories on the Gold Coast. Stories about the perfection of the points have spread throughout the surfing world. Outsider surfers must negotiate the racism that happens on the Gold Coast. Take, for instance, a lot of Japanese surfers visiting and residing on the Gold Coast sit on the lowest rungs of the pecking order. Some Japanese surfers are highly skilled and will be given some freedom in the line-up, but a white Gold Coast surfer with even limited ability will claim priority over them. While some gain acceptance and become good friends with many white surfers on the Gold Coast racism is common in the line-up. When line-ups are crowded people will sometimes use race to establish a place in the pecking order and Asian surfers are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. It's assumed that they're tourists. My mate remarks, "he looks Japanese so I'll catch this wave anyway".

The Japanese surfers learn to negotiate the line-ups by adopting the slang, riding the right boards, and dressing according to white male surfer's expectations. While the Japanese surfers take on some mannerisms of the men who dominate the Superbank there is no adaptation by the white male surfers to accommodate how these Japanese men may do masculinity differently.

*Bondi Tsunami* (2004) by Rachael Lucas is a Japanese road surfing movie that documents Japanese surfers as they travel the East Coast of Australia surfing and partying until they reach the Gold Coast. Using an iconic Australian surf car, the 1961 EK Holden, the characters camp, surf, and undertake adventures much like the excerpt from Australia's Surfing Life I addressed in the previous chapter.

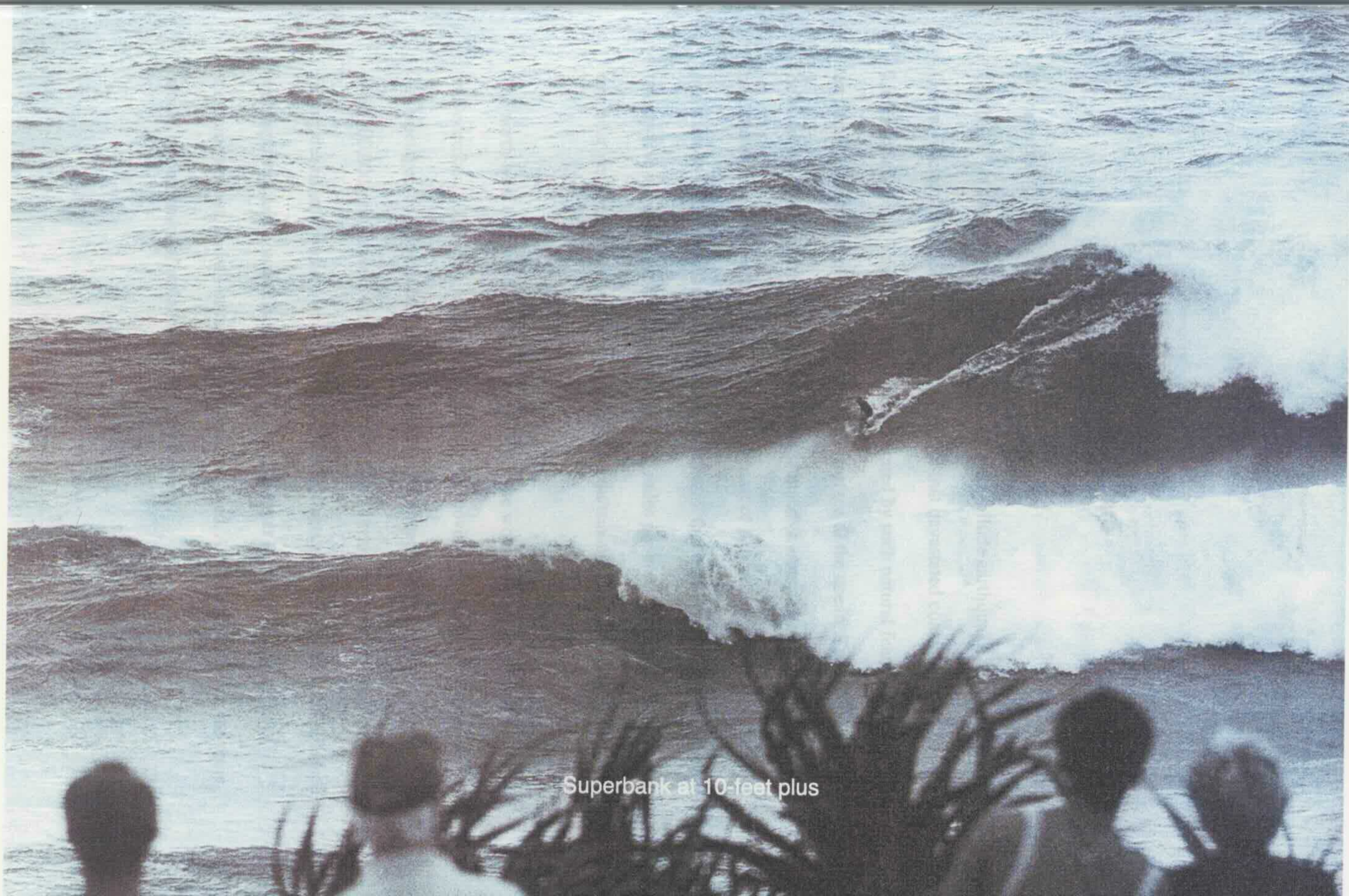
On the Gold Coast there has been a growth of surfing industry focussed on visiting Japanese surfers. There is a *Nev Surfboards Japanese Surfing Competition* open only to visiting Japanese surfers, and several surf shops owned and operated by Japanese surfer/businessmen. The comparative cheapness of the surfboards and living expenses in Australia add to the attraction. As a result Gold Coast based surfing companies have forged strong import and export connections.

A more considered discussion of the whiteness of Gold Coast surfing is required, as is articulation of the Japanese surfing experience. However, I lack the space to undertake such factors in any detail at this point. However, Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (2004) is an excellent introduction to whiteness and how it affects social life in Australia.

<sup>xxi</sup> This is changing as surfers recognise the skill involved with towing-in. The best tow-in surfers have to have significant technological skill to operate the Wave-runner. Their masculinity is tied to one's capability to use technology. The tow-in surfers must time the whip of the tow-rope to send their partner into a wave. Too early and the one surfing will be caught by the following waves as their speed dissipates. Too late and the wave will swallow the surfer. Furthermore, the rider has to be able to negotiate rescues. If your mate falls you have to time the run into the impact zone to collect them otherwise machine, rider, and surfer can end up under volumes of white-water or swept onto rocks. Limbs break, machines smash, and lives can be lost.



Superbank at a fun 4-feet (Photo: Joli, The Surfers Path)



Superbank at 10-feet plus

### Waves of Care

#### Devastation

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, 2004 there was a 9.3 magnitude earthquake in the Indian Ocean. The tectonic plate shift created tsunami that devastated coastal towns from Sri Lanka to Indonesia. Tsunami are waves generated by such natural features as offshore earthquakes and volcanic explosions near the surface of the ocean. Their wave crests can be hundreds of kilometres apart and this means massive amounts of energy and water constitute them. An average wave on the east coast of Australia is about three-feet and has a ten-second period between crests. The tsunami that hit Sumatra reached heights of twenty-five-metres, travelled between 400-600 miles per hour, and had a period of up to one hour per crest (<http://www.ess.washington.edu/tsunami/Sumatra.htm>).

The north-west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia was the worst hit by the tsunami on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, 2004. This region encompasses the province of Aceh, the Mentawai Archipelago, the Banyak Islands, Nias Island, and Simeulue Island. In this area alone over 100,000 people were killed by the wave. People were drowned in mud, crushed by falling debris, and washed into the ocean. Fishing fleets were destroyed, cars upturned, reefs uplifted, and houses flattened. The drinking water became saline, stocks of medicine ran out, and all infrastructure was destroyed. Aid organisations feared there would be outbreaks of malaria, tetanus, and cholera.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2005 there had been 84 aftershocks with magnitudes ranging from 5.0-7.0 on the richter scale (<http://earthquake.usgs.gov>). The people of the region refused to return to what was left of their homes. On the 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2005 there was another powerful earthquake measuring 8.7 and this triggered another tsunami along some parts of the coastline. Up to 2000 people were killed by the earthquake on the islands of Nias and Simeulue (<http://earthquake.usgs.gov>).

It's hard to imagine what the lived reality for the locals has been like. Mothers and fathers would have felt the ground shake during the earthquakes, grabbed their children, and ran for higher ground. They might have remembered stories the elders had told them about large waves that came when the ground shook. A similar event happened in 1907. After the recent earthquakes nights were spent eating coconuts and sleeping on the ground. People didn't know where husbands, wives, children, relatives, and friends were. Some found each other again while others never did. Ibu Dainya, a mother who believes her children died in school when the tsunami hit Banda Aceh, the capital of the region, welcomed the immunising of children by an aid organisation in her village: 'I am happy to see these children being immunised. I just wish mine could have been among them' ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)).

Several Australian surfers were in the region when the tsunami hit Sumatra. David Lines, an ex-pat surfer who lives on the coast just east of Banda Aceh, managed to escape the tsunami but remembers:

I saw that thing starting to break, and it would be 12m high. I'm looking at this big green barrel and it was actually barrelling, and part of me was saying that's not a bad looking wave. But of course we had to get out, and immediately got into the car and went ( in *Australia's Surfing Life*, March, 2005: 39).

Sam Green, a surfer from Adelaide who was on a surf-trip in the area, couldn't be contacted for ten-days so his brother flew to Nias to see if he could find him. A few days later the Australian Consulate let Sam's family know that he'd been found alive.

### **Devastated**

*It's late in the day and the sun is going down. I've been surfing with the Christmas crowds. I wish I hadn't paddled out because all beginners in the water have taken the fun out of the session. As I arrive home a few of the boys are there. I say g'day and complain about the kooks in the water. The boys' faces are blank and pale. "What's up?" I ask. Andy, who is visiting from the Gold Coast, replies, "you know that family we lived with in the Banyaks when we went surfing there, well they're probably dead". "What are you talking about?" I ask as the triviality of my earlier complaint creeps up on me. Andy goes on to explain about the earthquake and the tsunami.*

*"The tsunami were huge mate, not like the ten-foot waves we rode there. The whole weight of the Indian Ocean was behind these waves. Trillions of litres of water have just blasted those islands. There's nothing left. Fuck mate, it's heavy and all over the news! Remember that little girl with the big smile, the one who used to always get us fresh water, watch us surf, and who I gave those stickers to? She's probably dead. Her family's hut was on the beach that faced directly into the path of the tidal wave."*

*Turning to the other boys he continues as his tone moves from gentle to aggressive.*

*"We used to eat on their verandah that overlooked the reef – fish, rice, banana pancakes – cooked by the little girl and her mum. Cost next to nothing too, about two-bucks Aussie money. They had nothing, just an old shack, not very well built either. But they looked after us unreal anyway. They were fucking legends, but now this goes and happens. It's not fucking right!"*

*Andy is shaking his head as he talks and is blinking a lot because he's trying to hold back tears. I can feel my chest go tight. Richie, one of the other boys, suggests that we grab some beers to watch tonight's news with. "We're gunna need them," he says.*

*That evening the TV screen flickers with horrific images of surging water filled with bodies, debris, and terror. One image is of a huge spiralling wave crashing into a resort. It's spectacular but an aberrance because tsunamis behave more like a huge tide.*

*"They're treating it like disaster porn," Andy growls. Another TV station shows footage*



*of the water rushing out to sea before the arrival of the tsunami, leaving reefs and bays empty. People stand on the beaches watching the strange phenomena or collect stranded flapping fish.*

*We watch the curiosity of the people on the beaches turn to panic as people climb trees or run. Foam and water rush inland at great speed to slam into seawalls, restaurants, and homes. This infrastructure collapses on impact. We can't hear the screams as one mother clutches her baby as the ocean tries to sweep her off the car she's standing on. The camera pans away and we don't see what happens to them. When the ocean surges back out it takes people with it. One struggling swimmer appears above the swirling surface, disappears, appears, and then disappears.*

*The hand-held camera of a western tourist in Thailand, where the tsunami also hit, pans across the outer reefs where water is bubbling and boiling in a weird way. "Never seen the ocean do that," I say. Again, people mill about on the beach to watch the phenomena.*

*"Look, they haven't got a clue. If the ocean starts acting weird like that you get the fuck out. They're just standing there. Look at the white-water lines in the distance, they're about 500-600 metres beyond the break, that's psycho. That white-water is huge. It's the whole Indian Ocean coming back at 'em for fucks sake!" Richie asserts.*

*Even though I've never seen what the ocean is doing on the screen I try to comprehend the scenario. "They don't know mate. We surf so we've got an idea about waves and the*

*ocean, those tourists and shopkeepers wouldn't have a clue. Check out the bloke getting out of that fishing boat, he's running, he knows something's not right."*

*When the news stops we log onto internet news-sites and scroll through pictures of rubble with hundreds of bodies twisted amongst it. I feel sick and retch. We listen to the radio for updates. We can't fathom what's happened. None of the boys are speaking.*

*For the next few days the devastation dominates the news and the talk at the beach. The boys' bodies seem to be moving slower out in the line-up, as if they are uncertain about going surfing and having fun after what's happened. "What can we do? We gotta do something, like donate to an aid organisation or something?" asks Andy. He's staring at the water and avoids our gaze. He hasn't caught a wave yet during this session and we're half-an-hour into it. The boys are shaken up. There's a gap between what we want to do, such as travel to the region and help, and what we feel is a very tokenistic thing we can do, such as donate money to an aid organisation. I float on my board realising that nothing we can do will provide much comfort for the people suffering, the same people who had provided us with so much kindness and generosity. Surfing seems trite and shallow right now.*

*We donate money and clog up the email with earnest inquiry. We don't find out enough and almost drown in our own unknowing and sense of helplessness.*

## **Reflection**

Describing our reactions seems self-indulgent but it is also a moment of care. I want to be very clear here that my aim in this concluding chapter is to relay how a particular type of relation between respect and care emerges from current conditions of possibility in the surfing field, including, but not limited to, recent events in Sumatra. What I find interesting at this point is how the conditions that inform and produce hierarchies, violence, othering, and so on can also mobilise a particular intersection of care and respect at the same time. I won't go into an in-depth analysis of care in the surfing field. Rather, I will describe how blokes in the surfing field are doing care within current conditions in a way that opens up questions about alternative performances of masculinity.

In previous chapters my study of performances of masculinity in the surfing field has allowed me to assess how men who surf live within and reproduce particular representations. The dominant representations are informed by hegemonic conditions of possibility. I've particularly focussed on unpacking the sex-gender ideology to show how it informs how men who surf do and interpret masculinity. This has involved showing how current cultural rules and normative behaviour play out as misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, violence, and hierarchies.

Beyond these abstractions I've looked at how masculinity is done during specific moments in the line-up, on the beach, and in car-parks. These performances are singular arrangements of the biological, psychological, and sociological that are always in process

and full of contradictions. This means performances of gender are open to contestation and are not given or natural in any way.

My discussion of everyday performances has demonstrated the importance of bodies and feelings to doing masculinity. Social conventions attempt to channel and contain what the boys feel and how their bodies act. But I've shown that affective bodies regularly escape such regulation to connect us with others. As I explained in chapter three, affects leap from body to body and evoke tenderness, incite shame, and excite fear (Gibbs, 2002).

Bodies and feelings are crucial to how we do masculinity. This fluidity of affects, and the performances it helps bodies to realise, re-align how masculinity and surfing are done everyday. In this concluding chapter I'm going to voice, mobilise, imagine, and pay attention to what happens when some waves of care sweep over the bodies of men who surf to challenge, and extend upon, prevailing cultural performances, attitudes, and meanings.

During my research I have become more aware of, and seen glimpses of, self-reflexivity amongst the boys regarding cultural expectations of them: who they think they are as men, and how they attribute gendered expectations to others. I have asked myself if other relations are possible; I believe they are because they are already taking place. The challenge seems to lie in an ongoing attempt to create spaces where these alternative performances, even as they emerge from current conditions of possibility, can be heard and seen.

My political investment in this temporal and spatial inquiry is in an opening up of discussion and affective contagion so that feelings and imagination may spread. My commitment is to a task of countering the boys' complacency in the surfing field. In this concluding chapter I do not engage with a restitutive politics that might attempt to solve problems in the surfing field. In contrast, my project is to draw attention to how some male surfers act in dissonance with the dominant model. In this way I hope to mobilise hopeful performances that might trouble assumed norms and subvert the status quo.

### **Respect**

In chapter four, I explained how the boys negotiate current conditions of possibility to gain respect or give it. Throughout the thesis numerous examples have shown how shame, humiliation, and pride play important roles in how respect works in the surfing field, be it as seemingly insignificant as when someone is expected to take off on a dangerous wave to earn it or knowing how to negotiate localism to give it. Discourses and ideologies construct respect in the surfing field, which means it's often macho but this isn't always the case.

Respect is never straight-forward because it's constantly in process and depends on the situation. For example, if I'm at a particular beach I must give respect to the locals but can earn respect from my abilities. This arrangement may shift again if I drop-in on a local, but if I'm a noted big-wave surfer I can get away with such behaviour.

Performances of masculinity in the surfing field that involve respect are negotiated and re-worked depending on the bodies involved. Respect regulates how the boys connect

with other bodies in some situations that energise and draw attention to more caring performances of masculinity.

Respect has played a large role in the boys' response to the disastrous events in Sumatra. We have respect for the family who looked after us on that island in Indonesia and contributed so much to our surfing experience. And out of respect we want to give something back to the people of the region who now suffer after the earthquakes and tsunami. Just as we bond with our mates during surf-trips we also bonded with these bodies that helped us to find waves and live out our surfing adventure imaginary. Many of the boys feel a connection to the region and people because of the friendships that had formed and the stoke we'd experienced. This affective flow produces a particular relation between respect and care. Care carries feminine connotations and it's not surprising that the boys don't use it. For instance, when I reacted to the boys' response of care to the suffering in Sumatra, a bloke told me: "It's just respect, let's not get carried away now."

Following the tragic events in Sumatra, bodies, feelings, care, cultures, politics, tsunami, respect, and tectonic plates have come together to produce performances in the surfing field that emphasise this particular relation between care and respect. The responses by some surfers to hardships in the region provide glimpses of alternative performances of masculinity in the surfing field. But even before the recent suffering some blokes who visited the region connected with local bodies in a way that triggered a self-reflexive moment about belonging, and how they make sense of their lives, as surfers.

## Surfing Sumatra

In 2002 I went on a surf-trip with Andy through this region in Sumatra, Indonesia. I'd been to this part of the world before, to look for and ride waves. Swept up in the romantic myths of surfing adventure we went looking for a wave we'd seen in the background of a photo in *National Geographic* magazine, part of a story on the indigenous cultures off the coast of Sumatra.

The islands off the west coast of Sumatra are a long way from the mainland and often covered in dense jungle. Local villages are economically poor and rely on coconut harvesting, palm oil production, subsistence fishing, and rubber production. Glenn Reeves (2000) conducted in-depth anthropological research in the Mentawai Archipelago to establish how the local people are coping with Western influence, and imagine their cultural differences. Locals' contact with people from beyond their island shores was minimal until sixty years ago. Reeves explains that the Mentawai Archipelago were the last to be affected by contact and were well steeped in ancient traditions. For example, many locals still favour sikeireis (shamans) and animism to recent medical and religious imports. In an explanation of shamanism and meditations on how to belong as one, Serge Kahili King (1990) attests to how a shaman is a valued person who has detailed medical, mediator, religious, cultural, and warrior knowledge. Animism is the belief that a soul exists in every object even if it is inanimate, such as trees.

Before leaving on our surf adventure Andy and I made a list of what we'd need: several strong surfboards of different sizes; reef booties so we could walk on the sharp coral; spare legropes; sunscreen; a few blocks of wax; a pair of boardshorts; a ding-repair kit; malaria tablets; and plenty of medical supplies because we'd be a long way from help if we got sick or hurt ourselves surfing. We didn't have much money and decided to go "feral". Feral surfers shun professional travel operations and use local facilities for economic and surf-political reasons – such as those ascribing to the imaginary of soul surfing.

It would've been easier to travel to the famous surf-resort on Tavarua Island, Fiji. This surf-resort has exclusive rights to the waves of the region and you must be a guest to ride the surf-breaks. David Clark, an entrepreneur from California, instigated the arrangement in 1979. But we wanted experiences like surf adventurer Peter Troy, an Australian surfer who is lionised in stories as one of the first globally nomadic surfers. Troy was a leading figure on the international surfing circuit in the 1960s but opted out and went in search of new surf-breaks by riding a motor-bike, with a surfboard strapped to the side, around the world. The stories about surfers like Troy still epitomise the "hard-core" way to do surf-trips. As I introduced in chapter 4, the relations between surfing and adventure have a long and particular history.

We weren't the first to surf this coastline that stretches from Banda Aceh to the Mentawai Archipelago. It's an area frequented by many surfers for its bathymetry and plentiful swells that form perfect waves. The season for the best surf runs from May to November.



Many yacht-charter businesses provide facilities and access for surfers. Villages have been set up by locals to service the new surf-tourist trade. Some locals also started surfing on discarded equipment from international surfers. The most established “surf-village” in the region is at Lagundri Bay on the island of Nias. The wave in this bay was first surfed in 1975. This village now has a thriving surf trade based around buying and selling surfboard, as well as ferrying surfers on fishing boats to other island surf-breaks. There are also many warungs (local huts) in Lagundri Bay making up an accommodation network so surfers can ride the bay’s own remarkable right-hand wave.

The Mentawai Archipelago to the south-east of Nias and off the coast of Sumatra has become the site of much surfing. In the early 1990s Martin Daly began running surf charters to the area on his converted salvage boat. Currently there are over thirty yachts chartering a region that includes Nias Island, Simeulue Island, the Banyak Islands, and the Menatwai Archipelago. In some parts of the Mentawai Archipelago surf companies pay for professional surfers to travel on million dollar boats, ride the perfect waves, and relax in the tropical scenery. Businesses such as The Surf Travel Company, Great Breaks International, Good Sumatran Surf Charters, Martin Daly, Wave Park Losmens, and several independent operators compete for surf-tourists and the trade in surf-dreams.

I met a few of the charter operators and they explained that they contribute to management of the region for environmental and cultural protection. A surcharge tax and license to operate have been implemented to finance this. Jess Ponting (2001) and Robert Buckley (1999) have conducted studies on the viability of the surf tourism and best

practice techniques.<sup>1</sup> Some feral surfers consider the surf-tourism to be colonialism whereby indigenous cultures are pressured to develop in ways not suitable to local needs.

Surf journalist Steve Barilotti (2002) writes:

in the wake of the [surf] explorers inevitably follow the settlers. Outposts are set up, then villages, eventually full-blown surfburbs. While the baseline activity of surfing is essentially non-exploitative, once surfers set up a collective around a marquee surf break such as Jeffrey's Bay or Uluwatu, the impacts of human colonialization—trash, erosion, water pollution, development, environmental degradation, resource depletion—inevitably follows (50).

While non-local companies make money most locals 'feel apathetic towards tourist development, as they perceive it as something over which they have little control and which brings little economic benefit' (Ponting, 2001: 3). Most economic benefit goes to government officials and yacht-charter operators.

These yachts include a crew who manage health concerns, such as malaria or surfing injuries from the coral reefs. But the locals aren't so lucky. In some areas fifty per cent of children will die from preventable diseases such as measles, tetanus, malnutrition, whooping cough, polio, diphtheria, malaria, and diarrhoea ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)). Negative impacts of malaria extend to immunodeficiency, anaemia, neurological deficits, stillbirths, and low weight infants.

While Andy and I were travelling through and surfing the islands the local people would help us. We were given accommodation, cooked for, shown how to get to beaches,

ferried to waves in fishing boats, translated for, and so on. One boy offered to give me his only pen when mine ran out. He said he always saw me writing so he thought I needed it more than him. It was a generous gift. Most children in the area are given one pen and one notebook for a whole year of schooling. I turned down the offer. When passing through his village again the following week I brought a supply of books and pens to distribute.

Andy and I paid for a lot of the services and goods we received but the money was only ever minimal. Local rates are far below prices paid back in Australia. We gave away all our medicine, malaria supplies, as well as our surfboards to local children. One elder of the village laughed and said we shouldn't have given his son a surfboard because now he wouldn't go fishing.

### **SurfAid International**

Dr Dave Jenkins and Andrew Griffith are two surfers who have done more than typical surfers. In 2000 these blokes recognised the lack of health management for local people and set up a not-for-profit aid organisation in 2000. They began to deal with local health issues in the Mentawai Archipelago. Their operations now also service Nias Island, Simeulue Island, and the Banyak Islands. During a surfing holiday Dr Jenkins became concerned at the disparity between the living conditions of the visiting surfers and the local population. After a trip to a village Jenkins experienced distress because he could see the impact malaria was having on the local population. Due to lack of government funding there were no resident health facilities or programs. Local shamans used

traditional methods but they weren't effective according to the western doctors. So Jenkins and Griffith recruited some Indonesian staff, international advisors, and other surfers to form SurfAid International. The connection with local people was powerful.

Griffith remarks:

SurfAid represents an opportunity for me to express humanity in a very simple and compassionate manner. It is a vehicle for all like-minded people with similar values and beliefs to have a powerful measurable impact on the health and well-being of people whose plight we discovered through the sport of surfing ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)).

The organisation now collects funds from travelling surfers, the surf industry, yacht-charter operators, charity fundraisers, the World Health Organisation, the New Zealand Government, and the Indonesian Malaria Control Board. Most initial work was voluntary, and many volunteers still contribute. SurfAid International staff travel to villages to set up resident health departments, to distribute mosquito nets, immunise children, monitor pregnant women, and educate local communities on best health practices. By 2003 there had been a seventy-five per cent reduction in malaria parasite rates in villages visited, over 20,000 children had been immunised, and over 300 health care workers trained ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)).

We had heard about the practices of this group of surfers and decided to stop by their head office in Padang, on the mainland of Sumatra. When we met with Dr Jenkins his enthusiasm was infectious. Bounding about his humid office, in a sweat soaked t-shirt,

and talking candidly with other staff he politely took time out to tell me about what they're trying to do. He was unshaven and tanned. Pictures of him surfing dangerous waves were on his desk alongside photos of him distributing medical supplies. His smile was welcoming. You couldn't help but respect this bloke.

The first point he made to me was that the organisation is here for the long haul.

Referring to similar projects in other South-East Asian countries he made clear:

The lessons learned from the Vietnamese experience are that what ultimately triumphs are tenacity, ingenuity, creativity, and courage. There's no magic bullets in this field.

He also talked about the initial problems they'd faced. Malaria nets were used as fishing nets and shamans were understandably wary of western medical techniques. The western doctors have different ideas about death and the function of current healing remedies in Mentawaiian society. Furthermore, the western medical interference threatened the roles of local shamans. Recognising the important cultural role the shamans played in Mentawaiian life the organisation now functions in conjunction with their local treatments and rituals. The shamans are trained to use microscopes and they act as local facilitators. I was shown a slideshow illustrating a shaman. A picture showed him wearing a flower in his hair and a leaf in his necklace. "He doesn't wear a white coat like we do, he prefers to wear a piece of the forest that he depends on" (Dr Dave Jenkins). Dr Jenkins explained that the Mentawai believe that illness comes about because souls leave the body and these souls need to be encouraged back with songs, flowers, herbs, and

food. Local gender politics at first meant that village elders refused to train women. This is now changing as local women are trained as nurses.

One of the volunteers took me through the medical programs. He was about to go back to the islands:

It's good to actually get dirty and do something. But it's hard work because mud goes up to your knees when it's raining, and it always seems to rain. The backpack with the supplies is heavy and the language is gnarly. I get tired quickly because of the humidity and the intensity of what goes on. The lines of people to be treated seem never-ending. But I love it, it feels good to be helping out. You feel like you're really giving something back. They let us surf their waves so we should [help out]. It's about respect. One thing though, I hate walking past the waves when its going off. You should see the waves out there!

This point of surfing the waves was a sticking point for some surfers I spoke to on Nias Island after my meeting with SurfAid International. These blokes were cautious about donating to the organisation because they thought some of the volunteers would use the funds to just go surfing. I asked whether they'd met Dr Jenkins and the SurfAid International crew. The answer was no and one bloke remarked, "But you know surfing's selfish, it all about getting good waves for yourself, hard to imagine that they wouldn't do it, you know, just go surfing". This comment is very different to the one left ringing in my ears as Dr Jenkins encouraged me to participate, "We have in the Mentawaiis a major opportunity to demonstrate what we stand for as surfers, as caring human beings".

It could also be argued that the activities of SurfAid International represent a neo-colonial attitude toward providing assistance. That is, the notion of care being exercised overwrites local health efforts with western techniques. It is true that when speaking with western members of the organisation there is a distinct sense that the field they are working in is a frontier and they are here to save the local populace. Distribution of funds and the conditions by which they will reach the local populace is mostly outside indigenous control. The programs currently underway are also largely imposed on the recipient villages, and the residents are meant to welcome this help. There does arise local resentment of the foreign intervention and this can manifest itself in outright opposition, such as refusal to participate.

SurfAid International seems to recognise the complex issues of interfering in other's affairs even if they do not have the answers to them. The involving of the local populace as key staff in the organisation is an attempt to wrestle with problems arising from the intersection of many different familial, tribal, and cultural formations. What's emerging is a milieu of care that's going to require careful negotiation of what will form and inform the politics and sociality of it. While I'm aware that a postcolonial study of this intersection of colonialism and care is very important my project is perforce different.

For my work on masculinity, what is interesting about SurfAid International is how their ideals of surfing are considerably different, even with their post-colonial problems, to what I had left behind at Maroubra Beach. These blokes wrestling with care, respect, and colonisation had lived within the same dominant representations and been influenced by

the same hegemonic conditions as my mates and I. A couple of the volunteers said they felt dismay and disappointment at what goes on at their local beaches at home. They felt uncomfortable with the surf rage, heroics, aggressions, and hierarchies, and so on. An anonymous volunteer said:

You have to adjust pretty quickly otherwise you can't get waves. It doesn't take long to fall back into the same dog-eat-dog way of going surfing. But I increasingly don't bother with surfing back home, it doesn't feel right, its too crowded and aggressive.

During my meeting with the blokes from SurfAid International stories of giving, surfing, waves, care, empathy, heartache and joy were common. At home in Australia such stories aren't as common because tales of heroics, respect, adventure, ability, and so on contest and dominate them. However, after the boxing-day tsunami and March earthquake, another collective response began to emerge which involves care and respect working together.

## **Response**

As an editorial in *Surfers Path* puts it:

Day after day calls came in from individuals organising surf events, holding auctions, benefit gigs, sponsored paddles, yard and boot sales etc, etc, etc. Small surf companies suddenly became global fundraisers, while the big brands, many already with their own charitable trusts, turned on the taps and weighed in to help (*Surfers Path*, Feb/March: 15).



Along the coastline of West Sumatra yacht-charter companies stocked up on supplies, organised doctors, and made their way to regions not yet receiving aid like cities and villages on the mainland. Many were financed and supplied by SurfAid International. Permits to travel to some areas were hard to get because martial law was being imposed due to a civil war. The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) have been fighting the government forces (TNI) for independence. Navigation was difficult because the geography and bathymetry of the area had been changed. In a story on the response of surf charter operators journalist Stefan Marti explains that some relief efforts were confronted with corruption:

Trucks had been held up at gunpoint on the road and a thriving black-market system was in full swing ... Pirate ships were looting relief vessels and selling their contents (in *Stab*, March/April, 2005: 73).

Chaos, panic, and looting have also become problems for relief efforts:

on April 8th 120 tents from the Red Cross were stolen in Teluk Dalam (south Nias) during a looting and near riot incident. Trucks had to be protected by armed police, and aircraft had to stay out of site to avoid additional violent conflicts. A similar situation happened the next day ... The situation went on for over four hours, with constant shouting, raging, pushing and pulling ... Many of the volunteers actually broke out in tears, distraught over the mayhem and helplessness of the situation ([www.sumatransurfariis.com](http://www.sumatransurfariis.com)).

SurfAid International medical units became mobile and emphasised immunisation, malaria control, education, and nutrition ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)). People are

slowly returning to their villages but the ground is too salty to grow rice and their houses are uninhabitable. Many families are still living under tarps and using kitchen utensils, cooking oil, washing and cleaning products, lamps, and clothing supplied by SurfAid International.

It's difficult to comprehend the suffering of the people of this region as their families, food, homes, clothes, tools, and money have been washed away. The villages and regional centres are wastelands of debris. The surfers operating relief efforts had to contend with waves of bloated bodies and tropical beaches filled with skeletons. One surfer talks about taking some children surfing while his mates distributed aid. 'It was heartwarming to see all the smiling faces splashing in the water ... their whole village had been destroyed, yet somehow, they continued to laugh' (Marti in *Stab*, March/April, 2005: 77).

Surfers began to talk about what could be done and questions were asked about what may have happened to local families we lived with. There's a self-reflexivity emerging about the suffering we hadn't seen and how we hadn't helped out when we were there. Dr Jenkins' words came flooding back: "We have in the Mentawaiis a major opportunity to demonstrate what we stand for as surfers, as caring human beings". My mates have decided to always take extra medical supplies to distribute when they go there. Some blokes said that they wouldn't go back for fear of future natural disasters but donated lots of money to SurfAid International. The tectonic plates are still unstable and a third earthquake is predicted to happen in the next 12 months (<http://earthquake.usgs.gov>).

## Local Care

I'm aware that care isn't neutral. Part of the care we feel is because we're ashamed at not having helped out when we were there. But the care is also because we respect the families that were so generous and respectful of us. Care can also express a fear of the prospect that the same thing may happen on our own shores. Sometimes we care for another because we have suffered together with them, but we may also care for another in a way that is not between equals but between a person who is free from distress for another who is in distress, a relation whereby the carer is "superior". Sometimes care slips quickly into pity, sympathy, and condescension because it's tied up with economic, social, and political resources. What exist are complex economies of care.<sup>ii</sup> But in small ways, in individual and collective actions the events in Sumatra realigned performances of masculinity in the surfing field. Within the surfing field there's been self-reflection, questioning, and new ways of imagining surfing.

While I have focussed on care in relation to the tragic events in Sumatra, it also happens on a local level here in Australia. Respect and care can be seen in such organisations as the Godfather's of the Ocean Foundation, the Surfrider Foundation, and the Disabled Surfers Association. The Surfrider Foundation is an environmental organisation that conducts advocacy, research, and education programs. It has over 40, 000 members and chapters in Brazil, Australia, Japan, France, Spain, and the United States. The Surfrider Foundation also conducts education programs on surf etiquette to reduce violence. Gary Blake set up the Disabled Surfers Association in 1986. Blake lost a kneecap in a motorbike accident and noticed a lack of support for disabled surfers. Members

rehabilitate injured surfers and take people with physical, intellectual, and sensory disabilities surfing. Many surfing boardrider's clubs also hold charity auctions and surfing events.

*Michael "Munga" Barry has a vanload of kids from inland suburbs, they're all in their early teens and dressed in sports clothing bearing the brand-names of Adidas, Everlast, and Nike. One girl wears a t-shirt with the surf-brand "Billabong" emblazoned across it, but it's a few seasons old. There's a lot of excited chatter, climbing over seats, and plenty of questions. "Oi! Can you all sit still for awhile?" asks Michael sternly. He squirms in his seat and arches his back to stretch. It's been a long drive to Brisbane from the Gold Coast to collect the kids. "What's it like, you know, surfing?" asks one boy with his cap on backwards. "Hard to explain, but you'll have fun, I guarantee it," replies Michael. "Will there be chicks in bikinis?" asks the boy. The girl with the Billabong t-shirt punches the boy in the arm and Michael laughs.*

*This is an excursion for disadvantaged kids sponsored by the Godfather's of the Ocean Foundation. Some of the kids are in foster care. Most have never been to the beach. Michael started the foundation with some his friends in 1998. He'd travelled the world as a successful professional surfer and seen a lot of children struggling with poverty. One time he'd given one of his boards to a young girl near some slums in Brazil and she'd cried. He'd been surfing in an international contest with all the food and beer he wanted only a few hundred metres away from her home. The excitement in her brown eyes and delighted screaming had made him realise that surfing was more than his competitive*

*results and getting the best waves. The foundation now organises charity auctions where famous surfers sell their equipment to the highest bidder. The auctions provide funding for one-day surf-schools for disadvantaged kids, like the one he's doing today.*

*Michael and the children arrive at Currumbin Beach. This is a good surf-break to learn at because the inside waves are fat, gentle, and slow. The kids spill out of the van, some pause and look at the grey ocean, it's raining but they don't seem to care. It's not long before he's shown them where the rips are and how to wax the boards. A couple of the kids are grumbling about putting on sunscreen even though it's overcast and how heavy the old surfboards are. Some of the kids drag the boards leaving trails in the sand but the boy who wants to see girls in bikinis has spotted how the other surfers carry their boards and copies. "Do it like this!" the boy yells at the others. "Fuck off you poseur, you're not a surfer," replies another boy who is still trying to smear the wax on his board. "Hey, easy on the language grommie! He is actually a surfer, you all are today", replies Michael. "Awww, cool," is the unanimous reply.*

*A few of the kids walk with more confidence past the surfers who sit in their cars watching the procession. One bloke laughs at the grommie still wearing his cap backwards even though he's going surfing. After showing the kids how to stand up and paddle Michael sends them into the water. A few of the kids hang on the water's edge and slowly wade in. One of the girls tentatively jumps in front of the white-water and rides into shore on her belly. Michael screams, "get up!" She manages to climb to her knees and other kids hoot and holler. One by one the kids manage stand up on the surfboards,*

*each time they travel farther with the waves. It's not long before they all have red rashes on their stomachs. No-one is grumbling or complaining but paddling furiously for the next set of waves. The kids call out from all directions, "look at me Michael, look at meeeee!"*

*Michael's having trouble keeping an eye on everyone because bodies slip under water, speed off toward shore, and try to get out the back where the real surfers are.*

*Michael hears a surfer yell at one of the kids to get out of the way. He swims over to where the bloke is floating. The crew in the line-up turn to see what happens.*

*"What the fuck do you think you're doing mate?" asks Michael, who is physically much smaller compared to the bloke he's querying. Michael's fists are clenched, his face is hot, and his eyes narrowed. The apology doesn't take long to come. "Oh shit! Sorry Munga, didn't know it was your crew," says the bloke. "Crew like you piss me off. They're just kids!" yells Michael.*

*There's no reply and other surfers in the line-up make a few remarks to the bloke who now bows his head in shame. Some blokes need to respect surfing more and put something back in, such as share the stoke and do something with it. Michael goes back to the kids who are laughing and won't get out of the water to go home. One of his mates paddles past and complains about the weather and quality of the waves.*

*The kids are still talking about their rides as he drops them off at a youth-centre in Brisbane. Some of the parents are there to walk their children home. One of the girls*

wants to go surfing next week but Michael can't say yes because he might not have enough money to come and collect her. He gives her a surfing magazine and tells her to give him a few weeks and he'll come back. She looks away and he thinks she doesn't believe him. A burst of saltwater runs out of bikini boy's nose as he looks at Michael. Everyone starts laughing. The girl with the magazine looks up at Michael. She's just seen a picture of him in the magazine showing him surfing giant waves. A boy looks over her shoulder, "wooah! That's Munga," he observes. The girl nods and looks up at Michael.

During the drive back to the Goldie Michael tries to work out how to get more surfboards, autographed photos, and t-shirts off the pros for the next auction. He wants to make sure he takes the kids surfing again otherwise they'll think he doesn't care. These excursions also make him feel stoked about surfing again. He's been jaded about surfing since the end of his competitive career.

Many blokes remain convinced by dominant conditions and hegemonic myths that are deeply ingrained, such habits and norms are hard to shake. But sometimes performances of masculinity do shift from ideal modes to alternatives. As I've explained throughout the thesis, biological, sociological, and psychological arrangements are malleable, slippery, and sliding. Bodies that surf with such moving arrangements are never given or stable.

To be honest, the political outcomes of my research are sometimes less than inspiring for me. I'm hassled, suffer ridicule, and even had to fight because I question how things "just are". But I remain hopeful about promoting other ways of doing masculinity and surfing.

I've seen glimpses of alternative arrangements that emphasise care and challenge expected norms. While the care and respect I've drawn attention to are clearly limited they can still produce very different performances of masculinity in the surfing field, ones that are often overlooked.

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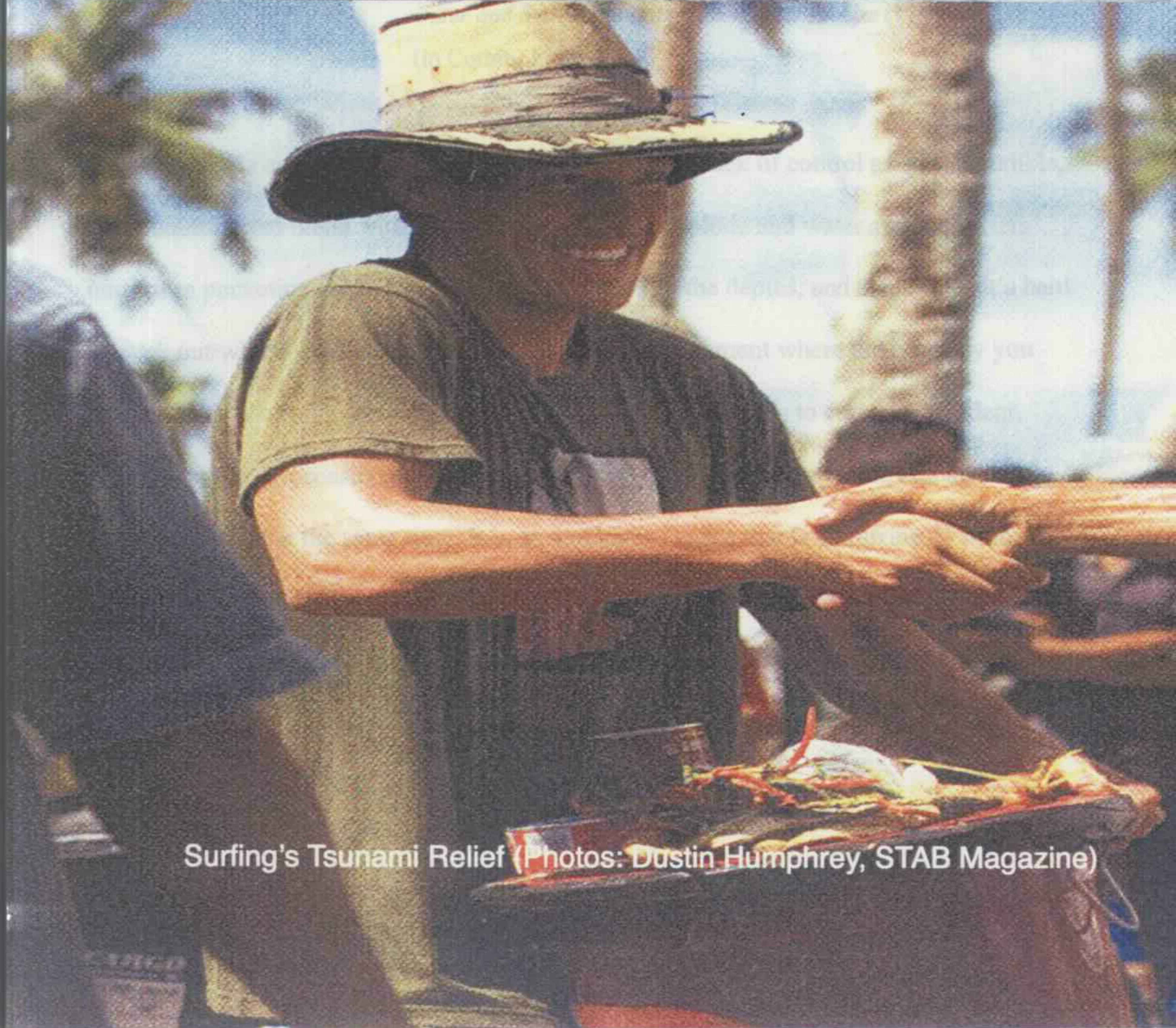
<sup>i</sup> For an account of this process and its results see Jess Ponting's *Managing the Mentawais: An Examination of Sustainable Tourism Management and the Surf Tourism industry in the Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia* (2001) and Robert Buckley's conference paper presented to the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management *Recreational Capacity for Surf Tourism in Indonesia's Mentawai Islands* (1999).

<sup>ii</sup> My diversion into care and compassion here is meant to act as a provocation for further research into how men do these. A genealogy of care and surfing requires its own specific research, unfortunately, more than I can offer here. *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2004), edited by Lauren Berlant, offers an example of how such a genealogy may begin.





Conclusion



Surfing's Tsunami Relief (Photos: Dustin Humphrey, STAB Magazine)

### Wipe-outs

... [If people] are hurled down into it [the water], before they can prepare or prevent their immersion, a prodigious upheaval occurs throughout the whole body; the soul, surprised by such an unexpected event, startled by the fear of disunion from the body that it thinks is close at hand, lets the reins of government of the body over which it presides drop from its hands, so to speak. This results in irregular irradiations of the nervous fluid and a new modification in the organs of thought and the whole nervous system.

From Dr Maret's *Memoir on the Workings of Fresh-water and Sea-Water Bathing and on their Use* (1766)  
(in Corbin, 1994: 68).

The wipe-out is an interesting part of surfing. There is a lack of control as surfers tumble, twist, contort, and blend with bubbles. Clouds of air explode and water sweeps surfers into caves pocketing reefs. It can get quiet and dark in the depths, and sometimes it's hard to work out which way is up. There is a sense of abandonment where the boys say you just "go with it". Falling from the board and into the wave tends to come by accident, surprise, and only occasionally is deliberate. Wipe-outs can be scary, fun, embarrassing, and shameful all at the same time. It is an ambiguous space that is a blurring of flesh, white-water, surfboard, leg-rope, seaweed, feelings, and so on. The wave and surfer blend in a zone in which it is difficult to determine where one begins and the other ends.

The wipe-out is a space full of uncertainties but enticing because it is such a chaotic assemblage. My mates laugh at how I rave about particular wipe-outs rather than boast about a “successful” ride. Some workings – wipe-outs – are intense when the surf is big while others are soothing in the small surf of a summer day. But they all offer me a moment where my vision is distorted and my experience is disorientating. Rather than avoid such moments I find they can invigorate a more felt awareness of what is happening. For example, some wipe-outs can have my senses working overtime to escape the turbulence threatening to throw me onto the cliffs.

Progress through the surfing hierarchy depends on an ability to avoid the wipe-out, to overcome its confusing ambiguity. But I like wipe-outs because they are a space where mastery cannot be recognised, where experienced surfers and kooks are the same but different, neither above nor below each other but bodies at different speeds. There are no simple hierarchical beginnings and ends of becoming-surfer in such a space because the movement of the assemblage has the ability to throw such identities into confusion. The normative mode of what constitutes a surfer is replaced by a “whateverness”, recalling that space of the in-between Giorgio Agamben identifies as being not whatever, so that it doesn't matter, but whatever so that it always matters.

It is the wipe-out with its ambiguous and confusing moments that regularly reminds me of the potential to disable claims to fixity, definitions, stable rules, and ordering.

Interestingly, there is not “a” way to wipe-out because such a performance is ironic in that it doesn't have a foundation; it is a moment that threatens points of surfing and

masculinity with potential and specificity. This potential is where other assemblages can happen yet they are not pre-determined. When I am being tossed about I have to respond to alterity and infinite contestation, unlike when I change in car-parks and paddle line-ups that favour my familiar mode of belonging. Wipe-outs remind me that bodies are surfaces, contextual, affective, and connective. The experience is always about specificity, proximity, and movement. As Michel Foucault explains:

Arranged on the surface, things take on their full relations of proximity: their position is never defined in relation to the whole but according to a system of directions of proximity passing from one to the other ... "to the left," "in front of them to the left," "above" ... (in Philo, 1992: 145).

My thesis has invoked such a body and version of masculinity. And in turn these surfing bodies have told us about how men who surf make sense of their lives, what they affect and are affected by, what they are inserted into and what inserts itself into them, and with what they connect and disconnect? As I argued at the outset of this thesis, a surfing of such self-reflexivity, difference, and potential would be surfing like a wave, a becoming-wave. It's a question of the "capture of the code" of the wave which is fluid and always threatening to wipe-out.

Throughout this thesis, I have unsettled normative rides of men who surf by dismantling and challenging what assembles to enable them, like what happens when they fall. The wipe-outs have had powerfully affective and emotional results engaging me with frustrating, embarrassing, proud, frightening, sad and enjoyable moments, much like great surf sessions do. The self-representations that inform the ground from which I

understand and behave, have been traced and disturbed, to see how they come about due to discursive and ideological means. My body carries all sorts of ideals, values, rules, and norms that position me as a man who surfs. My case has been that this is no stable position but one that requires constant negotiation and ongoing performances. In this thesis I have increasingly relaxed about seeing unravel what I once took for granted. The result has been a letting go of certain power structures inherent in the surfing field. My research evidences how belonging and participating as a man who surf may be assumed, restricted, or defined, but it also always threatens to go elsewhere or assemble differently.

In chapter one I argued for a specific study of masculinity and surfing and not a general surfing picture. Rather than distinguishing a general picture that included plural identities I favoured a dismantling of such a model because it actually reduces possibilities. By making visible how specific arrangements of surfing and masculinity happen I attended to the actual living of ongoing and complex surfing performances. This meant involving my mates in the questioning process so that they too wondered about what makes up the ground from which they speak and do things, and revealed that ground as moving. My aim was to amplify the diversity and movement of how men who surf do masculinity.

In the second chapter my questioning turned to how masculinity is understood and done. I was not satisfied with approaches that treat bodies as either essential or separate to the social whereby masculinity is simply imposed upon us. My study favoured working through how men who surf make sense of their lives by appreciating how masculinity is always a negotiated performances of biology, sociology, and psychology. These

performances were said to involve physiological and sensorial economies, and not just discursive ones. Significant to my thesis was how feelings are crucial to doing masculinity in the surfing field and influence what assembles. Since feelings are like wipe-outs, often ambiguous and open to change at any moment, I didn't prescribe what slid along with them as they mutated, adapted, twisted, and were swept about.

To get at the connections, details, textures, movement, feelings, and activities of men who surf, I employed an approach to research that worked through bodies and experience. In chapter three I discussed how grounded accounts of masculinity were possible by accounting for how my researching body felt and performed modifications, connections, detours, conversations, and so on. An affective research enabled me to appreciate how learning to surf, or doing masculinity, is a sensuous process.

To convey this felt research I employed surf stories. What surf stories offered me were qualities such as diversions, digressions, surprise, openness, sensuality, bodies that are surfaces, and contestation of authority. The stories also allowed my mates to engage with the research, question its validity, and invest in sending it elsewhere. But what I found most exciting was the way the stories could pull bodies back into an awareness with the way they emphasise feelings and allow those who have never surfed to imagine what it would feel like to wipe-out or glide along a wave-face.

My surfing method meant winds, tides, swells, reefs, and sand became just as important to analysing how men who surf do masculinity as the discourses and ideologies their

bodies carried around. Noticing these factors, and relating them, allowed an ethological reading whereby rhythmic and stylish bodies revealed how men move. Appreciating bodies in this way presents a more challenging reading of what bodies do by providing a strategy that captures an embodied 'openness to possibility' (Barcan, 2002: 347). The spontaneity and creativeness of becoming-wave wasn't lost.

Revealing how men who surf move through the surfing field was important but I also wanted to show how certain performances from surfing's past attempt to contain style and rhythm. This was an immensely enjoyable part of the thesis as friends told stories, older surfers down at the point remembered names, well-thumbed magazines provided anecdotes, hazy movies displayed visions of rides long since over, and dilapidated surfboards recalled memories of coastal road trips. The richness of what was remembered, and that which was sidelined or spoken as an aside, threatened to swamp me with too much information. It was intriguing and refreshing to learn new things about a culture I thought I knew everything about. What became clear with each successive wave of memories was how certain myths, stories, and performances were a result of dominant discourses and ideologies on sexuality, gender, ethnicity, age, and race being expressed. My alternative history made obvious how micro-processes have become conditions of possibility for going surfing now.

My thesis has argued against assumptions that suggest doing masculinity as a man who surfs is a simple process overtly contained, and wholly determined, by dominant gendered discourses. My inquiry and critique took me into the field and drew on past

experiences, to find out if wipe-outs were more common than we are led to believe by surfing's history and prominent self-representations. In chapter five I wrote a ficto-critical story that attended to how a couple of surfers on the Gold Coast of Australia live, reproduce, and assign meaning to particular representations and expectations. By divulging everyday knowledges and activities of these surfers as they did masculinity in the surfing field I began to identify how some performances are aimed at avoiding the wipe-out. But what also emerged from this story was how blokes do become uncertain, do masculinity in different ways, feel their way through moments, and don't have "a" way to cope with situations as a man who surfs. While ambiguous and uncertain moments were present, the imperative to recover the surfboard and return to dominant norms so as to forget the confusion that can happen amongst white-water, bodies, feelings, and so on can mean such moments are silenced. Even though such silencing is the case, my story makes clear that affective bodies are actually hard to contain. This means doing masculinity is always open to contestation.

The most difficult chapter arrived when I attempted to explore some moments where arrangements of bodies, masculinity, surfing and care, re-aligned performances of men who surf. Writing about the effects of a devastating tsunami on families I had lived with, and coastal villages I visit to go surfing, left me in states of disbelief, shock, and sadness. While writing this chapter I pursued numerous solo surfs to offset the feelings that were uncertain and intense as any wipe-out. This disaster was difficult to relate but it was also rewarding because it revealed to me how a particular type of relation between respect and care can emerge from current conditions of possibility. What I found interesting was how

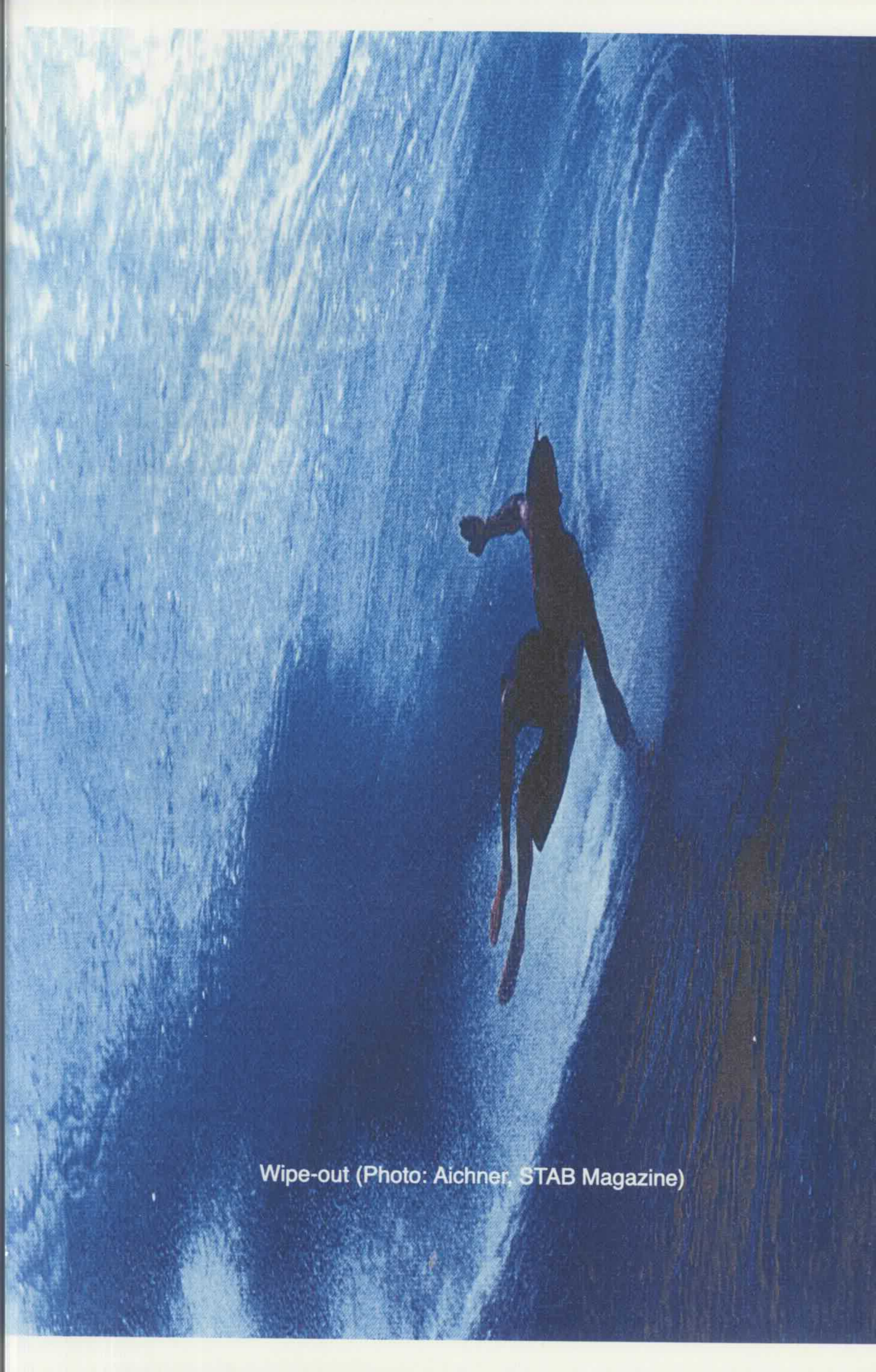


the same conditions that produce hierarchies, violence, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and so on could be swept, twisted, whirled and flipped about to assemble quite alternate performances of surfing and masculinity. This chapter evidenced how the biological, psychological, and sociological can come together in very different ways in the surfing field.

The disaster of the tsunami, the meeting of some disadvantaged children, and the noticing of health issues in a remote region have meant waves of care have swept over some surfing bodies. What has resulted is a mobilising, voicing and imagining of performances that challenge, and extend upon prevailing cultural attitudes and meanings. While these performances confront new problems, be they medical colonialisation or other surfer's resistance to change, they do offer a strategic wiping out. I take confidence in the re-configuring that can emerge from such turbulence in the surfing field.

While I still get laughed at because of my fascination with wipe-outs, the potential they tend to remind me of remains affective. The feelings, uncertainty, and ambiguity that wipe-outs generate do not allow me to become complacent; they stress a critical agility to continue to recognise and listen to other possibilities. I make no grand gestures here to fix masculinity or pose a new category of some caring masculinity but I hope to have illustrated how connecting with new bodies, new ideas, new waves, and so on can radically alter how surfing and masculinity are done. That is, wiping out isn't necessarily bad or to be avoided but can provide glimpses of alternative relations, assemblages, feelings, and performances. Such wipe-outs can make dominant assumptions fragile and

powerfully reveal masculinity as contingent. I do want the thesis to have a least some little effect, even if it is just promoting an enjoyment of what wipe-outs, and the uncertainty and ambiguity they carry, have to offer.



Wipe-out (Photo: Aichner, STAB Magazine)

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*Storm Riders* (1982) Dick Hoole and Jack McCoy.

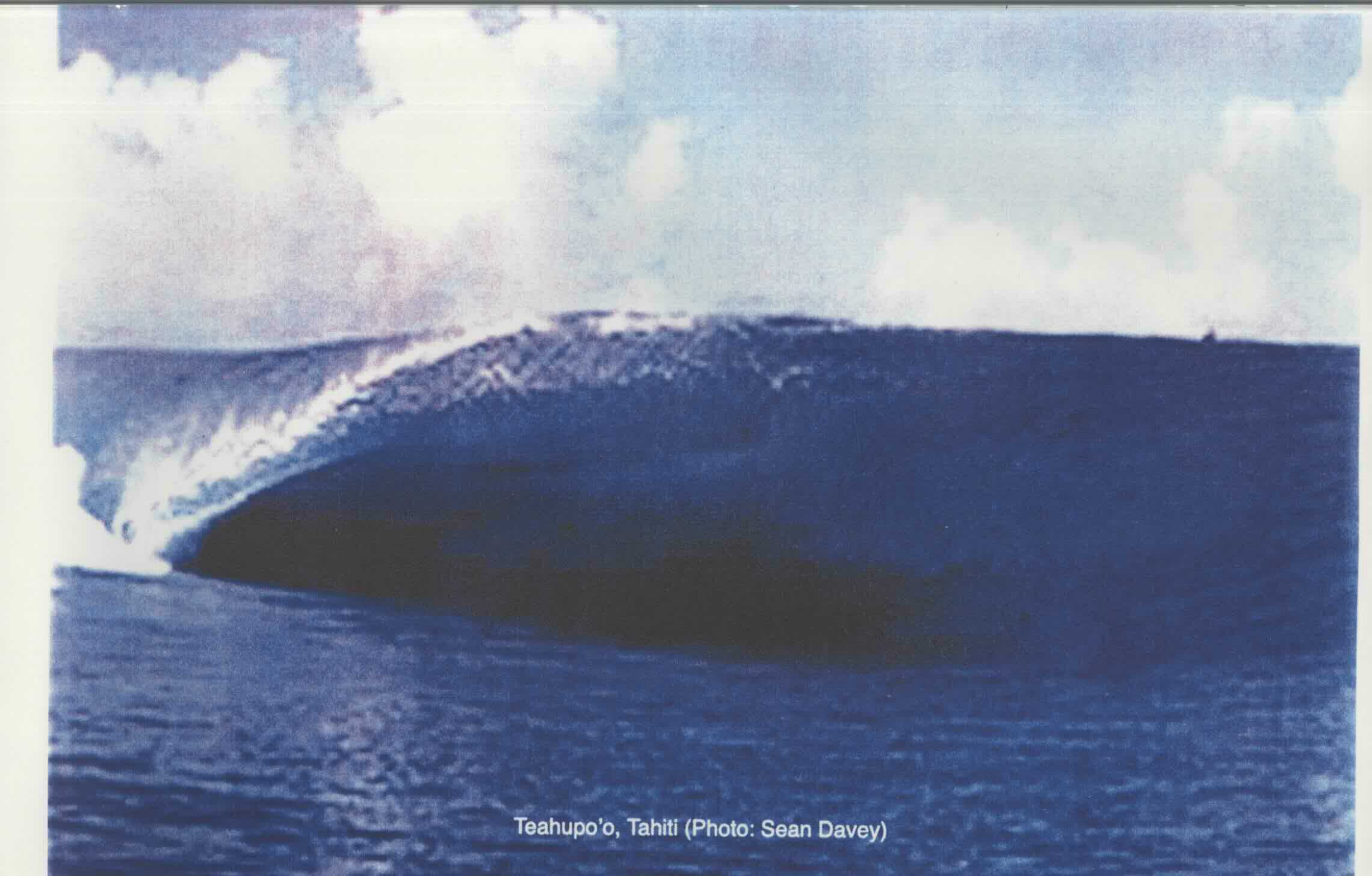
*Surf Trek to Hawaii* (1960) Bob Evans.

*Surfers: The Movie* (1989) Bill Delaney.

*The Innermost Limits of Pure Fun* (1970) George Greenough.



Surf's Up (Photo: Uge, [www.aquabumps.com](http://www.aquabumps.com))

An aerial photograph capturing a massive, dark blue wave barrel at Teahupo'o, Tahiti. The wave is a long, continuous tunnel of water, stretching from the left side of the frame towards the right. The water is a deep, dark blue, and the barrel is a darker shade of blue, almost black. The surrounding ocean is a lighter blue. In the background, the horizon is visible under a sky with scattered white clouds. A small boat is visible on the horizon to the right.

Teahupo'o, Tahiti (Photo: Sean Davey)

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