

# Bodies at sea: travelling to Australia in the age of sail\*

Tamson Pietsch

School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia  
E-mail: tamson.pietsch@sydney.edu.au

## Abstract

*This article considers the bodily experience of being at sea in the age of sail. Using shipboard diaries written by eight passengers during the high period of free migration to the Australasian colonies, it argues that oceanic journeys disrupted and upended the land-based bodily practices being fashioned in nineteenth-century Britain. At sea, these mechanisms of bodily comportment were rendered fragile and unstable, leaving middle- and working-class bodies alike vulnerable and open to refashioning and reformation. In so doing, it points to the need for scholars to bring together land- and sea-based histories and to historicize and particularize oceanic spaces.*

**Keywords** bodies, emotions, migration, sea, ships, transit

## Introduction

Maritime historians have added richly to our understanding of social life at sea.<sup>1</sup> From the middle passage to bonded and captive labour, from sailor life to conditions on board migrant ships, working, transported, and punished bodies have been central to much of writing on the sea in the last twenty years.<sup>2</sup> But these studies have less often connected with the

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1 Helen R. Woolcock, *Rights of passage: emigration to Australia in the nineteenth century*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1986; Robin Haines, Judith Jeffery, and Greg Slattery, *Bound for South Australia: births and deaths on government-assisted immigrant ships 1848–1885*, CD-ROM, St Agnes, SA: Gould Genealogy, 2004; Basil Lubbock, *The colonial clippers*, 4th edn, Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1975; Freda Harcourt, *Flagships of imperialism: the P&O company and the politics of empire from its origins to 1867*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

2 Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater slavery: a middle passage from Africa to American diaspora*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007; Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker, eds., *Many middle passages: forced migration and the making of the modern world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2007; Clare Anderson, “The Ferrignees are flying – the ship is ours!” The convict middle passage in colonial South and Southeast Asia, 1790–1860’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42, 2, 2005, pp. 143–86; Marcus Rediker, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea: merchant seamen, pirates and the Anglo-American maritime world, 1700–1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Robin Haines, *Life and death in the age of sail: the passage to Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003.

well-established literatures concerned with the internal and external governance of the body on shore. This work has sought to historicize bodies, stepping away from deterministic and naturalistic notions and instead situating them in time and place. A sub-set of this scholarship has focused on the making of the ‘modern’ body, arguing that, from the eighteenth century, bodily practices in Europe and America were increasingly internalized and individualized owing to changing structures of social and economic power that were themselves being reshaped by global trade.<sup>3</sup> Barbara Duden suggests that these new ‘modern’ bodies were objectified and therefore able to be known; they were stable, and individually possessed as the property of the self; they could be classified. The bourgeois body was clean, too, and orderly; orifices were kept closed, corporality was self-disciplined and withdrawn to the private sphere.<sup>4</sup>

The extensive literature on what Michel Foucault called ‘governmentality’ has also shaped historical understandings of the ways in which bodies were coming to be ruled in this period, at least in the West.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, street directories and postal systems located people in place, sanitary systems removed bodily waste, new cemeteries and meat markets took time and death to the edge of view, street lighting conditioned legal and illegal behaviour, pavements taught people how to walk, and all these innovations and others helped to fashion the ways in which individuals saw and understood themselves. For Patrick Joyce, it was as much through the ‘freedoms’ facilitated by these modern systems, as through more obvious and older forms of constraint, that the emerging liberal democracies of the nineteenth century taught individuals to govern themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The notion of the emergence of a universalized ‘modern body’ in this period is a problematic one. Conditions in Europe, let alone the world, were highly diverse; even in the cities of London or Manchester, lives were more shaped by disease, death, and illiberal governance than the literature on governmentality tends to suggest. A global perspective further problematizes the notion of any universal lived time or experience, even if the nineteenth century was – as in Christopher Bayly’s formulation – a period in which global bodily practices were converging.<sup>7</sup> However, attending to this established literature on the body does highlight the need for maritime and global historians to historicize bodies in their contexts, and points to the possibilities of connecting land-based bodily practices to those experienced at sea. As Antoinette Burton and Lynn Hunt have both argued, thinking about bodies is one way that we might write new global histories.<sup>8</sup>

3 Roy Porter, ‘History of the body reconsidered’, in Peter Burke, ed., *New perspectives on historical writing*, Cambridge: Polity, 1999, pp. 233–60; Georges Vigarello, *Concepts of cleanliness: changing attitudes in France since the middle ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. See also Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *The making of the modern body: sexuality and society in the nineteenth century*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986; and, more recently, Laura Gowing, *Common bodies: women, touch, and power in seventeenth-century England*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003. For an imperial and global view, see Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, ‘Introduction: bodies, empires, and world histories’, in Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in contact: rethinking colonial encounters in world history*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 1–16.

4 Barbara Duden, *The woman beneath the skin: a doctor’s patients in eighteenth-century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 1–31.

5 The term is taken from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

6 Patrick Joyce, *Rule of freedom: liberalism and the modern city*, London: Verso, 2003, p. 1.

7 E.g. On Barak, *On time: technology and temporality in modern Egypt*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013; Christopher A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 12–18.

8 Antoinette Burton, ‘The body in/as world history’, in Douglas Northrop, ed., *A companion to world history*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2012, pp. 272–84; Lynn Hunt, *Writing history in the global era*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2014.

The ship in the era of sail has certainly been seen as an ordered and ordering space. Long a site of regimentation, with established ways of commanding bodies, the ships that initially carried migrants en masse from Britain in the mid nineteenth century employed mechanisms that seem ‘modern’, in that they aimed to uphold order at sea by distributing it and embedding it in the movements of passengers, their bodily habits, the ways in which they navigated space, and their daily schedules – all of which were prescribed. Accommodation was divided into saloon (or first class), cabin (or second class), and steerage (or third class), the last being located in temporarily erected accommodation between decks. Steerage itself was rigorously segregated, with the single men, single women, and married couples lodged in separate quarters, and passengers were further divided into ‘mess’ groups of about eight to ten (usually comprising people from the same region and religion). Alongside these spatial divisions were layers of formal and informal authority. The captain and the surgeon-superintendent or medical officer (mandatory after 1849 on British vessels carrying more than fifty people); the master, officers, purser, and cook; the matrons and constables who had charge of the single travellers; and finally the passengers themselves, who were selectively recruited into (and also paid for) the business of keeping social order: all had a hand in regulating passengers’ lives and controlling their behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

Enclosure, ranking, exercise, partitioning, timetabling, synchronization, repetition, and spatial ordering: Foucault saw all of these as ways of disciplining bodies and rendering them docile.<sup>10</sup> The modern body was born, he suggested, out of these processes. But, as Foucault has also reminded us, behind all such disciplinary mechanisms ‘can be read the haunting memory of “contagions”, of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder’.<sup>11</sup> Attempts to contain bodies on board ships point to the prevalence of bodies uncontained. Writing in another context about the archives of the nineteenth-century Netherlands Indies, Ann Stoler has encouraged us to think about the ways in which classificatory rubrics of rule might indicate not just the dominance, but also the uncertainty and fragility of colonial societies.<sup>12</sup> This article takes a similar approach. It is interested in the instabilities revealed by efforts to sterilize and contain, and it aims to think carefully about the fears that attempts to segregate and order sought to keep at bay.

Focusing on bodies at sea is an important part of the quest to historicize the oceans of the globe. Doing so involves delineating both the temporal and spatial specificities of oceanic spaces, just as land-based histories trace the particularities of polities and networks. There are, consequently, very different and extensive literatures for journeys crossing the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, East Asian, and Mediterranean seas. In this issue, the articles by Gopalan Balachandran, Martin Dusinberre, and Frances Steel point to the divergent bodily experiences of multiple kinds of travellers. They show that sailors, stokers, lascars, coolies, convicts, criminals, slaves, traders, indentured labourers, and regional migrants experienced very different social and environmental conditions along a variety of other oceanic routes.<sup>13</sup>

9 Charles Bateson, *The convict ships, 1787–1868*, Sydney: Reed, 1974, p. 47; Don Charlwood, *The long farewell*, Ringwood: Allen Lane, 1981, p. 159.

10 Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, pp. 135–69.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

12 Ann Stoler, *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

13 See the relevant contributions to this special issue and also Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of poppies*, London: John Murray, 2008; Gopalan Balachandran, *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping, c. 1870–1945*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012; Valeska Huber, *Channelling mobilities: migration and*

And, as Steel's article demonstrates, the sea has a chronology too. Bodily experience in the last decades of sail needs to be contrasted with that which emerged after the 1870s, as migration and sea travel became mechanized and standardized with the advent of steam, changing labour relations and conditions, routes of travel, and ship design and culture.

Uncovering these various watery chronologies and their diverse geographies is crucial to mapping the human as well as the environmental contours of oceans that are too often presented as vast and undifferentiated. It helps us think not just about bodies moving across the globe but about the relationships between different global spaces and the different kinds of bodies they helped to produce. But doing so requires connecting to land-based histories. There is now a growing body of work, to which the pieces in this issue contribute, that insists on the need to see the sea voyage as intimately linked to life before departure and after arrival.<sup>14</sup> However, understanding the relationships between ship and shore is only possible if we engage with literatures that at first seem outside our immediate concern.

This article uses the shipboard diaries of eight free migrants to examine the everyday bodily experience of being at sea. Its focus is the route to the Australasian colonies in the period 1851–80. This was the high period of organized mass transit in the era of sail, when, with convict transportation in decline, and spurred by the discovery of gold and assisted passage schemes, approximately 1.3 million free migrants made the journey south. Lasting between seventy days and five months, it carried them far from any sight of land, through both hot and freezing temperatures, to colonial cities that by the 1850s were well established.<sup>15</sup> The diaries used here have been selected for the different class and gender perspectives they present. Perhaps more than 90% of migrants who travelled this route did so in steerage class, but surviving working-class diaries are far outnumbered by those written by the better class of traveller.<sup>16</sup> There was, of course, a longer tradition of journal-keeping on board ships in the form of the captain's log, and some mariners also kept journals, though these usually tend to fit within the genre of travel tales. Most of the eight diarists examined here had some experience of urban life and work in Britain, and as far as we know all of them were making their first voyage. But beyond a few biographical details, precious little is known about their lives.

Fanny Davis was born in England and left Liverpool in 1858, when she was twenty-seven, on the *Conway* bound for Melbourne in the single women's quarters.<sup>17</sup> Also single women were Sarah Stephens and Mary Maclean. Stephens was born in Machynlleth in Wales and in 1877, at the age of twenty-six, left Gravesend on the *Cardigan Castle* for Lyttleton, New Zealand, travelling with her widowed mother and siblings to be met by family who had already migrated.<sup>18</sup> Mary Margaret Maclean, meanwhile, was a twenty-two year-old machine worker

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*globalisation in the Suez Canal region and beyond, 1869–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Jonathan Hyslop, 'Zulu sailors in the steamship era: the African modern in the world voyage narratives of Fulunge Mpofo and George Magodini, 1916–1924', in Fiona Paisley and Kirsty Reid, eds., *Critical perspectives on colonialism: writing the empire from below*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 123–40; Eric Tagliocozzo, *Secret trades, porous borders: smuggling and states along a Southeast Asian frontier, 1865–1915*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.

14 See Hamish Maxwell-Stewart's 'Founders and survivors: Australian life courses in historical context' project at the University of Tasmania, <http://www.foundersandsurvivors.org> (consulted 10 March 2016).

15 Marjory Harper, *Emigration from north-east Scotland*, 2 vols., Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988, vol. 1, p. 37, quoted in Andrew Hassam, *Sailing to Australia: shipboard diaries by nineteenth-century British emigrants*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 7.

16 Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, pp. 9, 12.

17 Fanny Davis, 'Diary of Fanny Davis, 1858', in Charlwood, *Long farewell*, pp. 277–90.

18 Merseyside Maritime Museum (henceforth MMM), DX/1071/R, Diary of Emigrant, Sarah Stephens.

born in Islay in south-west Scotland. She migrated to Glasgow as a child with her family but, after her parents died and she lost her job, she decided to go to Australia to join her brother, travelling on the *Africana* in 1865.<sup>19</sup>

Little is known about John Fenwick other than that he was a merchant aged twenty-nine who emigrated from Liverpool to Melbourne on the *Lightning* in 1854 with his wife, Ella, probably travelling in the married quarters.<sup>20</sup> John Hedges was a labourer from Hampstead who was thirty when he sailed for Sydney upon the *Admiral Lyons* in 1858, with his wife and two children.<sup>21</sup> J. T. Deighton, too, is mysterious, although his diary suggests that he travelled as a single man in a shared cabin, on board the *Fred Warren* from Liverpool to Melbourne in 1867.<sup>22</sup> Dr Henry Martin Lightoller was a Manchester-born surgeon-superintendent on board the *Scottish Bard*, which sailed from London to Rockhampton in 1878.<sup>23</sup> Trained at Owens College Manchester and licensed by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, he practised in Ipswich, Queensland, after his arrival, later returning to take a doctorate of medicine from the University of Durham and then setting up practice in Brisbane. Finally, the Rev. Charles Baker travelled in first-class accommodation on board the *Carrier Dove* in 1857 to attend to family business in Melbourne. Although not acting formally in a religious capacity, he involved himself in spiritual and educational activities during the voyage.<sup>24</sup>

How far we can transparently read the diaries of these passengers is open to question. Travellers' accounts were shaped by expectations fashioned before they left and drew on tropes of travel, as well as predetermined notions of what a diary should be. Diaries themselves were documents that did work on board the ship for their authors. As those who have written about diaries as technologies of the self in other contexts have commented, writing a journal was a way to contain a voyage, to attempt to control it, and to give it meaning.<sup>25</sup> If this was true for the content of these accounts, it was also true for the act of writing itself, which, particularly for steerage-class migrants, was achieved in the face of little time, poor light, and no privacy.<sup>26</sup> Sitting down and putting pen to paper was in many ways itself an assertion of sovereignty over the self, in a context in which the boundaries of bodily control seemed threatened and precarious. Viewing the diary as a tool of self-management, as well as an account of experience, is crucial to extracting meaning from these documents.

Yet the fragility of bodies in these accounts is striking. The pages of these eight diaries describe corporality spilling, often literally, over the divisions and boundaries apparently imposed upon it. Noises, smells, and substances slopped between berths; sleep was disturbed by storms; bodily comportment was upended by rolling waves; and the dangers of death and disease were shared by all.<sup>27</sup> In these conditions, passengers (as much as those who organized migrant vessels) sought to assert forms of organization that were familiar to them, and in many

19 'The Diary of Mary Maclean on board the *Africana* from Liverpool to Sydney, 1865–1866', in Andrew Hassam, *No privacy for writing: shipboard diaries, 1852–1879*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994, pp. 93–126.

20 John Fenwick, 'Diary of John Fenwick, 1854', in Charlwood, *Long farewell*, pp. 253–76.

21 MMM, DX/243/1, Diary of John Hedges, 1858–9.

22 MMM, DX/651, Voyage account of J. T. Deighton aboard the *Fred Warren* to Australia, 1867–8.

23 Henry Martin Lightoller, 'Diary of Dr H.M. Lightoller, 1878', in Charlwood, *Long farewell*, pp. 291–310.

24 MMM, DX/1966, Papers of Rev. Charles Baker.

25 Following Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton eds., *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp. 16–49.

26 Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, p. 20.

27 See also Michel Foucault, 'Of other spaces, heterotopias', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5, 1984, pp. 46–9.

ways their writings stand as cries of frustration that, at sea, land-based practices did not quite work the way that they felt they should.

## Time, space, and usefulness

By 1850 the processes of industrialization were reshaping patterns of time and work in British cities. With the growth of the factory and wage labour, time was increasingly measured in hours and units. Steam, too, brought train timetables that regularized what had previously been a patchwork of local times, creating economic imperatives and opportunities for the movement of goods, and new forms of work associated with them. Even in the towns and the countryside, where the rhythms of labour retained a closer relationship with the seasons and with the temporalities of the natural environment, trains made their way through the landscape, clocks appeared on village churches and halls, and new public institutions (not least the postal service, the franchise, and public education) extended their reach. In these ways the individual experience of time and work began to be regularized and segmented as the patterns of everyday life were refashioned by the growth of modern social and economic institutions.<sup>28</sup> These were changes that were variously celebrated and lamented by contemporaries, but they also found an echo in literature that spoke of time as a resource of which good use had to be made. There was a conservative and fearful edge to much of this writing: what havoc might the lower classes wreak if they were left unoccupied? But nonconformist tracts and mechanics' institutes also urged moral and social self-improvement for the working classes.

At sea these on-shore rhythms of work and home life were in theory replaced by new ones that entered even more intimately into the bodily practices of migrants, regulating their washing, eating, sleeping, and worship. The 1853 *Immigrant's guide to Australia* mapped out the projected routine: passengers were to rise at 7 a.m. unless otherwise permitted by the surgeon; they were to roll up their beds and sweep the decks before breakfasting between 8 and 9 a.m., have lunch at 1 p.m. and take their evening meal at 6 p.m.; and they were to be back in their beds again by 10 p.m. On Sundays, all 'the passengers [were] to be mustered at 10 A.M., when they will be expected to appear in clean and decent apparel'.<sup>29</sup> Activities such as lighting lamps at night, accessing fires for cooking, cleaning sleeping quarters, and washing bodies, clothes, and cooking items were all likewise appointed times and places.<sup>30</sup>

Yet time at sea was not so easily governed and these schedules could be, and often were, honoured more in the breach than in practice. Travellers were conscious that time shifted beneath them. First-class passengers particularly felt the hours hanging upon them. Experiencing strong wind and rain on his way to Melbourne on board the *Carrier Dove* in 1857, the Rev. Charles Baker reported being 'confined to the Saloon during the day & found time pass heavily'.<sup>31</sup> But writing in steerage on board the *Africana* in 1865, Mary Maclean described her experience of temporal distension: 'I Do not feel the Day pass But When I think

28 Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

29 John Capper, *The immigrant's guide to Australia*, Liverpool: George Phillip & Son, 1853, p. 103.

30 Other popular examples of the genre include Eneas Mackenzie, *The emigrant's guide to Australia with a memoir of Mrs Chisholm*, London: Clark, Beeton, 1853; James Baird, *The emigrant's guide to Australasia: Australia, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, and Queensland*, London: Virtue, 1868.

31 Baker, 12 December 1857.

that I am just a month Since I left home I look on it as if I had Been away for twelve months.<sup>32</sup> This sense of the disturbance of time was not merely a subjective perception. The length of days did change as passengers travelled south, and the seasons of the year turned on their head.<sup>33</sup> December had the weather of March and Christmas was sunny when at home there was snow.<sup>34</sup> These shifts undermined the universality of lived time. ‘We are getting dinner now about the same time you are breakfasting’, wrote the surgeon J. T. Deighton in 1867; ‘Our time is nearly 12 hours before yours’, observed John Hedges on Christmas Day.<sup>35</sup>

Measuring time in these circumstances could be frustrating. The daily recordings of estimated latitude and longitude, temperature, and climatic conditions that punctuate so many passenger narratives were one of the ways travellers marked the progress of the voyage. But, according to Deighton, who socialized freely with the crew, only the captain and the mate had access to the accurate measurements of the chronometer.<sup>36</sup> Migrants looked to other more physical gauges. For John Hedges, the strength of the wind was the ‘the principal thing’ that determined distance travelled: he looked over the side to guess how fast he was travelling.<sup>37</sup> When the ship was becalmed, no progress was made at all; for Fanny Davis this stasis was measured on her body: ‘We shall never get to Melbourne’, she wrote in 1858, ‘till all our hair is grey if we go on at this rate ...’.<sup>38</sup>

As the sea disturbed temporal perception, it also upended the bodily experience of space. The floor literally moved beneath the feet of passengers with the rolling of the ship; it tipped them over and pitched them about, sometimes overboard. Not just walking, but all manner of bodily activity needed to be relearned. Passengers took time to acquire new ‘sea legs’ and in bad weather they could even be thrown out of their berths while sleeping.<sup>39</sup> Land-based certainties about the proper place for things were undermined by the shifting sea. On her way from Wales to New Zealand with her widowed mother, twenty-six-year-old Sarah Stephens conveyed a sense of this spatial disturbance when she wrote in 1876:

Cabins and storerooms are scenes of the wildest description ... One of the mates tumbled into a cask of flour and came up looking like a snowdrift, though rather a soiled one ... One man fell into a large empty barrel in which he went rolling down the deck. We really thought the ship would capsize. It was quite on one side.<sup>40</sup>

Seawater would transgress wooden walls and disturb attempts to live between decks. The surgeon Dr Henry Lightoller, on board the *Scottish Bard*, wrote of a storm in 1878 that with a ‘bang like a clap of thunder came the sea’ and that ‘the vessel shook and trembled as if she were coming to pieces and a solid mass of water came over, filling her decks up to the bulwarks’ and pouring five inches of water into the married quarters.<sup>41</sup>

In the early stages of a trip, passengers’ bodies rebelled and seasickness was almost ubiquitous. Two days after leaving Liverpool, Fanny Davis described being ‘the only one

32 Maclean, 20 December 1865, p. 103.

33 Stephens, 24 October 1876; Maclean, 25 December 1865, p. 105.

34 Stephens, 14 December 1876.

35 Deighton, 22 June 1867; Hedges, 25 December 1858.

36 Deighton, 1 July 1867.

37 Hedges, 26 November 1858.

38 Davis, 9 July 1858, p. 283.

39 Lightoller, 31 August 1878, p. 300.

40 Stephens, 20 November 1876.

41 Lightoller, 6 and 13 September 1878, pp. 301, 303.

except Miss Wellington [the matron] out of twenty who is able to crawl out of bed in the course of the day long enough to get a cup of tea ... Some of the people are nearly dead with the seasickness, they reach [retch] so violently and with little intermission.<sup>42</sup> In 1876 Sarah Stephens felt 'as if [she was] dying and would not much object to be tossed overboard'.<sup>43</sup> And seasickness had no respect for class. On the *Lincolnshire* sailing for Melbourne in 1858, the doctor was just as ill as the passengers.<sup>44</sup>

All classes, too, were affected by changes in the weather. Passengers were at first fortunate, finding balmy conditions as they travelled south along the west coast of Africa. As they neared the equator, however, the temperatures rose as ships entered the doldrums, where they often remained becalmed for weeks. Those travelling in saloon class enjoyed the relative comforts of cabins and benefited from what sea breezes were available. But between decks it was far worse. Fanny Davis wrote of it being 'so hot downstairs' that she and her fellow single female passengers were 'afraid to go to bed' and lay tossing about 'for hours with [their] clothes dripping wet with perspiration'. Of course, sleep was impossible.<sup>45</sup> In these conditions, corporeal composure was undone. 'The cabin is like an oven', wrote Sarah Stephens, 'not a breath of air. Three girls fainted quite away. One was unconscious for half an hour.'<sup>46</sup> Exposure to the sun marked the bodies of passengers and rendered them alien: 'Our complexions are a deep copper colour', continued Stephens. 'Our most intimate friends would scarcely recognise us now.'<sup>47</sup> Hedges wrote repeatedly of 'the rash and boils which we all have some off [*sic*]; his wife said it was 'like nettles stinging'.<sup>48</sup> In the hot weather, everyone grew 'very cross and irritable and some are quite sick again'.<sup>49</sup>

Yet the cold was little better. As the ships plunged towards Antarctica, with skilled mariners sailing as far as 50° south, passengers found themselves without adequate clothing and shivering in their berths. Dampness seeped into everything, in saloon and cabin class alike.<sup>50</sup> Like the heat, the cold immobilized migrants. Fanny Davis and her cabin mates remained 'in bed all day to keep ourselves warm, only crawling out at meal times'.<sup>51</sup> With chilblained hands and inflamed feet, walking and working was painful. According to Hedges, the lack of 'active employment' only made it worse.<sup>52</sup>

Little useful activity was possible in these conditions; in hot weather especially, indolence and lethargy settled upon passengers. Mary Maclean wrote that, in the heat, 'I Scarcey [*sic*] know What to Do With my Self'.<sup>53</sup> Entering the tropics, the usually industrious Baker found 'It was too hot to read and too hot to even think'.<sup>54</sup> Inactivity was a source of great anxiety for those who took the welfare of steerage passengers upon themselves. The assumption of all those involved with emigration, including those travelling first class, was that an assembly of working people would turn into an unruly mob. The social and spatial division of the ship was

42 Davis, 12 June 1858, p. 280.

43 Stephens, 3 October 1876.

44 William Merifield, diary on the *Lincolnshire*, from London bound for Melbourne, 1858, MS 8044 La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria, in Charlwood, *Long farewell*, p. 160.

45 Davis, 5 July 1858, p. 282.

46 Stephens, 15 November 1876.

47 Stephens, 19 October and 20 November 1876.

48 Hedges, 17 October 1858.

49 Stephens, 28 October 1876.

50 Baker, 27 June 1857.

51 Davis, 16 August 1858, p. 287.

52 Hedges, 7 December 1858.

53 Maclean, 6 January 1866, p. 109.

54 Baker, 7 June 1857.

an attempt to prevent such disorder. So, too, were the useful pursuits that were organized for the migrants below decks. ‘The fact is’, read *The Emigrant’s Guide to Australia with a Memoir of Mrs Chisholm*, ‘there must be strict regulations and some employment – “For Satan finds some Mischief still / For idle Hands to do”’.<sup>55</sup> The quotation is a line from a hymn by Isaac Watts that was common in migrant and self-improvement literature and, as the hymn continued, it was ‘In Books, or Work, or healthful Play’ that migrants were given occupation. The single women in particular were a source of anxiety. They were put to work sewing samplers and clothing items for sale on arrival. A school attended by ‘grown up Women learning the alphabet’ ran on Mary Maclean’s voyage, and reading, diary-writing, and exercise were all encouraged (see below).<sup>56</sup>

The language of usefulness was not only used *about* the below-deck passengers. It was also one employed *by* at least some of them. In 1858 Fanny Davis, for example, commented approvingly on the work ethic of her fellow single women: ‘everybody seems happy, and a more industrious set I never saw’.<sup>57</sup> Sarah Stephens, too, spoke of the female passengers sitting pleasantly on the poop under an awning, ‘all very busy with some work or other’.<sup>58</sup> According to Davis, such activity sped the passage of time: ‘The days pass so fast and pleasantly it is like a dream’.<sup>59</sup> Yet it seems unlikely that steerage passengers were often without tasks. Not only were they occupied in the activities organized for them but Hedges’ journal suggests that the routines of life on board left him little spare time:

I have been doing a little Arithmatic [*sic*] the last 4 days, and intend to continue it if I can, but it is a very difficult matter to get being [*sic*] the mind to study anything here, the noise and confusion is so great & all the morning is taken up by the regular work of the day such as cleaning, getting food, preparing it and taking it to the Galley to be cooked and fetching away again. Then in the Afternoon there is water to fetch & filter which takes some considerable time, then comes tea, after which there is not chance to do anything except stand on deck and look at the stars &c for there is not light enough to do anything by down stairs, I generally leave the writing of this to the Evening and I can scarcely see what I am writing of.<sup>60</sup>

The discourse of working-class indolence or laziness says much more about the concerns of those above deck than about the lives of those below. For example, the interest that the Rev. Charles Baker took in organizing activities for the steerage passengers – which included a school for children and adults, religious services, and organized concerts that structured their previously spontaneous singing – served as much to allay his anxiety at his own inactivity as it did to foster the welfare of his self-appointed charges.

Idleness certainly was an experience of those in the saloon, and descriptions of boredom are ubiquitous in the travel narratives of better-class passengers.<sup>61</sup> But we can perhaps see in these repeated assertions of the tedium and monotony of sea travel something else, namely an anxiousness about the writers’ own unproductivity. Describing the voyage as boring was

55 Mackenzie, *Emigrant’s guide*, p. 73.

56 Maclean, 19 December 1865, p. 103.

57 Davis, 24 June 1858, p. 282.

58 Stephens, 21 October 1876.

59 Davis, 24 June 1858, p. 282.

60 Hedges, 30 October 1858.

61 E.g. Huber, *Channelling mobilities*, p. 53.

perhaps a means of neutralizing the stigma associated with enforced idleness. Being bored implied a *desire* to work or be active, shifting the moral weight of responsibility for inactivity from the individual to the constraints of the environment.

The act of writing helped to negate these worries. Writing and reading did not just simply serve to ‘pass the time’, but were activities that enabled passengers to assert control over it by helping to keep anxieties about indolence at bay.<sup>62</sup> We can see the newspapers published on board ships in the period before the telegraph in this same light.<sup>63</sup> Written often by hand during the voyage and circulated, and then printed, bound, and distributed among cabin-class subscribers for a fee after arrival, these publications contained pieces on shipboard news, gossip, information on sea life and maritime activity, character sketches, humour pieces, and advertisements. Their editorials and articles often spoke of boredom and monotony. But, rather than the content of ship newspapers, it is perhaps the practices associated with their production and reception that is most important. Ship newspapers can be seen as attempts by the middle-class passengers (who almost exclusively compiled them) to replicate the patterns and rituals of life, work, and leisure that they knew on shore. By 1850 the newspaper was a prominent feature of domestic life and the custom of circulating them on board was a familiar and grounding ritual that served to create a community among dislocated peoples.<sup>64</sup> The making of these publications might be seen to have roots less in the mass-circulation papers of the period and more in the production of the parish newsletter. They helped occupy those who on land took responsibility for leading social life.

Writing also served as a vehicle for coping with the restrictions of ship life. For those between decks, note-passing was one of the chief ways of making contact between the sexes. Fanny Davis spoke of several incidents of sailors and single women being punished for communicating with each other, with a ‘boy locked up for carrying messages from the sailors to the single women’.<sup>65</sup> ‘We get plenty of attention’, wrote Sarah Stephens, who mentioned looks during the weekly religious service and ‘books lent us, etc. etc.’<sup>66</sup> These acts of transgression can be seen as ways of maintaining identities in the face of their repression. It was a grievous slight when the laboriously won private world of the diary was intruded upon. ‘It Seems as if they tried to Deprive us of Every Liberty’, lamented Mary Maclean, when she and her companions were ‘Strictly forbidden to take Nots [*sic*] on account of So many Writing to the men’.<sup>67</sup>

For all classes, diaries were ways of composing the self in the context of its erosion. They were tools by which passengers sought to impose some control over unruly time and compromised personal space. Yet, over and over again, diarists themselves record the enforced interruption of their undertaking: ‘I have not been able to write any of my diary since last Saturday’, wrote Fanny Davis on 9 September 1858, ‘for it has been one continued

62 See Paul Ashmore, ‘Slowing down mobilities: passengering on an inter-war ocean liner’, *Mobilities*, 8, 4, 2013, pp. 595–611, for discussion of the diary as a record of ‘affective moments’, albeit in a different period.

63 See Johanna de Schmidt, ‘“This strange little floating world of ours”: shipboard periodicals and community-building in the “global” nineteenth century’, pp. 229–50 in this issue. For the later period, see Roland Wenzlhuemer and Michael Offermann, ‘Ship newspapers and passenger life aboard transoceanic steamships in the late nineteenth century’, *Transcultural Studies*, 1, 2012, pp. 77–121, <http://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/transcultural/article/view/9363/3245> (consulted 16 July 2014).

64 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

65 Davis, 1 July 1858, p. 282.

66 Stephens, 22 October 1876.

67 Maclean, 6 January 1866, p. 110.

hurricane';<sup>68</sup> 'I have not felt to have pluck enough to write during the last few days having been very queer sometimes', noted Hedges.<sup>69</sup> And if writing for saloon passengers was a way of dealing with a surfeit of time, those between decks undertook it in the face of an absence of private space: 'I intended to have entered the events of each day of our voyage but I found it impossible. There was no privacy for writing', wrote an eighteen-year-old shoemaker, Edwin Frances, sailing to Australia on board the *Clara Symes* in 1852.<sup>70</sup> Bodies unsettled by sicknesses and storms, by weather, and by the waves could not quite put pencil to paper. And, inevitably, passengers failed to write for other reasons too – the pleasures and distractions of sociability, lack of materials, and illiteracy among them. Words proved a fragile device for containing the self in the midst of so much water.

These accounts suggest that the schedules of governance we read in immigrants' handbooks point to temporal and spatial control that was asserted rather than effective. The adoption of ordering mechanisms such as diary-writing and other 'useful' occupations points as much to ways in which passengers attempted to rein in the upended world of time and space on board as to signs of its successful management.

## Bodily boundaries

Just as time at sea evaded the reach of territorial practices of organization, so too did bodies themselves. In steerage, passengers lived at close quarters. Although joint sleeping was widely practised on shore in the nineteenth century, it was something rarely done with strangers, and comments on conditions in these migrant diaries suggest that the process of accommodating to life in such cramped proximity was far from easy. Single women and married couples shared beds in berths made of two tiers of double wooden bunks, created by head-height partitions and separated from the central eating, dining, and washing area by a set of curtains at the end of each bunk.<sup>71</sup> While the single men had hammocks and were sometimes allowed to mix more freely with the crew, the women were only allowed on deck under supervision for exercise, to wash, and for a weekly religious service and airing of their bedding, mixing rarely with the saloon passengers or with other groups on board the ship. 'Just imagine', wrote Sarah Stephens of the single women's quarters, '68 in one place without a breath of air. Not a port hole open.'<sup>72</sup> Visiting from his much more salubrious cabin quarters, Henry Lightoller struggled to find the words to describe what he saw:

The condition below is something beyond description, even in fine weather they are awfully crowded at night, but just fancy when it is pouring with rain, water flying over the ship, all the people below, and the forward and middle hatch closed. Everything you can put your hand on, floor, bedding, is damp or wet, with an atmosphere like steam, scarcely any ventilation, and the ship rolling and pitching as if trying its best to add to the discomfort!<sup>73</sup>

68 Davis, 9 September 1858, p. 289.

69 Hedges, 29 September 1858.

70 Edwin Frances quoted in Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, p. 20.

71 Hassam, *No privacy for writing*, pp. xviii–xxiv.

72 Stephens, 18 November 1876.

73 Lightoller, 14 August 1878, p. 297.

In such circumstances and despite the best efforts of the surgeon, it was impossible to contain the sights and sounds and smells of so much human life. On the ocean, bodies erupted and spilled into each other in ways that continually threatened to slip out of check.

Noise was a constant problem. In the married quarters, the twenty-nine-year-old merchant John Fenwick, emigrating from Liverpool to Melbourne on the *Lightning* in 1854 with his wife, described the din at night as: ‘every roll or pitch sent some crockery or tins on the floor; then the laughing at the accident, the noise of the wind, the rush and roaring of the sea – put all these noises & the rolling & pitching about in your berth, together, and you have one of the best anti-opiates ever discovered’.<sup>74</sup> But it was just as bad for those in the saloon. The somewhat sanctimonious Rev. Baker complained of M. Chatelain, in the next berth, ‘laughin [*sic*], singing & talking till midnight’.<sup>75</sup> ‘And the noise!’ exclaimed the surgeon, Lightoller: ‘What a clatter the pannikins make flying through the air like tambourines, with slop pails and buckets rolling and jumping all over, women groaning and screaming, babies yelling and some men crying!’<sup>76</sup> There was no hope of escaping the boom of the sea, the creaking of the ship, the racket of the pans, or the clamour of voices speaking merriment and despair.

Bodily fluids were similarly disorderly. Passengers were more reticent to talk about them in their diaries, but the evidence is unmistakable. Fanny Davis alluded to a vomit-covered floor, describing how ‘the sailors [were] obliged to come down [to the women’s quarters] with buckets of water and mops and clear our apartment up as there is no one able to do the least thing but lay in bed and groan’.<sup>77</sup> Lightoller spoke of one of the girls who was seasick giving him ‘the benefit of part of the contents of her gastric organ’ and having ‘a rattling good vomit’ himself.<sup>78</sup> And William Reay wrote of the ‘tremendous seas coming against the side of the ship like to nock [*sic*] her in and the water coming in from water closets into our cabin’.<sup>79</sup> In the married quarters, the ‘awful smell of babies’ was ubiquitous.<sup>80</sup> According to the historian Kevin Brown, ‘effluence was a perennial problem’. There were never enough lavatories and passengers had to cope as best they could, with attendant olfactory consequences.<sup>81</sup>

Infestations of lice and vermin were common and they too spread between berths. Upon waking one morning and finding himself lousy, Hedges was horrified. He complained to the doctor but received no consolation. All the surgeon said was that ‘he had been out with 9 ships before, & there had always been a few dirty people on Board, who managed to stock the rest, he likewise said he had no doubt we should all be alike before we reached Sydney’.<sup>82</sup> If such problems beset the steerage passengers, they extended also to the saloon. In his surgeon’s quarters, Lightoller himself wrote of feeling ‘something tickling the end of my nose last night. Made a grab at my nose, and caught what do you think? Why two cockroaches’.<sup>83</sup> Jumping from body to body, lurking in crevices and scuttling along wooden partitions, lice, bugs, and rats not only transgressed the social and spatial efforts to separate bodies during the course of these passages but they also remained permanent inhabitants of ships, linking voyage to voyage as well.

74 Fenwick, 12 June 1854, p. 263.

75 Baker, 21 December 1857.

76 Lightoller, 14 August 1878, p. 297.

77 Davis, 13 June 1858, p. 280.

78 Lightoller, 16 July 1878, p. 292.

79 William Reay, 12 November 1877, quoted in Hassam, *No privacy for writing*, p. xix.

80 Lightoller, 15 July 1878, p. 292.

81 Kevin Brown, *Poxed and scurried: the story of sickness and health at sea*, Barnsley, S. Yorks.: Seaforth, 2011, p. 130.

82 Hedges, 9 October 1858.

83 Lightoller, 29 July 1878, p. 295.

Such conditions were anything but healthy.<sup>84</sup> Contemporaries had little understanding of germ theory or awareness that lice were a common transmitter of *Rickettsia prowazekii* (typhus). Instead, ideas about health and disease were environmental. Katherine Foxhall has suggested that it was moisture that was thought to be the primary determinant of health on board ships: dampness, bred by dirty and crowded spaces and exacerbated by poor ventilation, led to disease. Voyages were understood as processes during which the air quality worsened, affecting the health of patients accordingly.<sup>85</sup> Various regimes were put in place in an attempt to prevent such conditions (see below) but surgeons and passengers alike remained acutely aware of the potential for outbreaks of illness and infection. Lightoller knew that with two new cases of measles early in the voyage he could expect ‘a nice time of it, for it is pretty certain that the disease will run through the ship’.<sup>86</sup> On the same trip, bronchitis and infantile cholera were rife among the children, and typhus, diarrhoea, and adult cholera were an ever-present danger.<sup>87</sup> What upper-class passengers sought to purchase with their tickets was insulation from some of these conditions. Yet a first-class berth could not shield them entirely. Not only were saloon passengers also vulnerable to sickness and infection but it also only took one person on board, regardless of their class, to be identified as a risk by the quarantine officials for the whole ship to be impounded (although the segregations of the ship were often perpetuated within quarantine-ground accommodation).<sup>88</sup>

In the midst of these hardships, passengers themselves frequently sought to employ classificatory and ordering devices that might make sense of their experience. The diaries of these cabin and saloon travellers point to the refuge they sought in hygiene controls that had a social and moral as well as material character. It was the doctor who was held responsible for enacting these measures, policing the quality of food and the cleanliness of berths and bodies in a way that was routinized and regulated. The airing of beds was an enforced weekly activity for steerage passengers, and zinc chloride was applied en masse as a disinfecting (and deodorizing) agent.<sup>89</sup> Emigrants themselves were recruited into its application, with ‘Cleaning Day’ a weekly event for scrubbing floors and airing beds, and ‘Washing Day’ similarly timetabled. Bathing, too, often took place collectively and in public. Fenwick described ‘lots of men [who] begin to emerge from the Hatchways of the Intermediate [deck] with wash basins & pails & from 6 until after 8 there is a goodly number busy washing themselves on both sides of the Deck house’.<sup>90</sup> When such washing was not undertaken of an individual’s own volition, it could be enforced. Lightoller reported that one of the single men on his voyage in 1878 refused to wash himself: ‘I have told him if he does not, then I shall order his companions to wash him in a tub on deck.’<sup>91</sup> These measures of constraint reflect the worries about infection, moral pollution, and disorder that occupied those in cabin class. While the wealthier passengers

84 Brown, *Poxed and scurvied*; Katherine Foxhall, *Health, medicine, and the sea: Australian voyages, c.1815–1860*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012; Robin Haines and Ralph Shlomowitz, ‘Causes of death of British emigrants on voyages to South Australia, 1848–1885’, *Social History of Medicine*, 16, 2, 2003, pp. 193–208; John McDonald and Ralph Shlomowitz, ‘Mortality on convict voyages to Australia, 1788–1868’, *Social Science History*, 13, 3, 1989, pp. 285–313.

85 Foxhall, *Health*, pp. 56, 196–7, 201.

86 Lightoller, 19 July 1878, p. 293.

87 Lightoller, 9 August 1878, p. 296.

88 Stephens, 6 and 15 January 1877; Krista Maglen, ‘Quarantined: exploring personal accounts of incarceration in Australian and Pacific quarantine stations in the nineteenth century’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 91, 1, 2005, pp. 1–14.

89 Foxhall, *Health*, p. 72.

90 Fenwick, 31 May 1864, p. 259.

91 Lightoller, 22 July 1878, p. 294.

attempted to insulate themselves as best they could from the people pressed together below decks, their on-board experience, too, was characterized by anxiety about the compromised boundaries of bodies, social as well as physical.

The spatial and discursive strategies of cabin-class passengers found their echo between decks too. For Hedges it was the Irish who were the agents of infection and disease: ‘we would be more comfortable here if it was not for the Irish’, he wrote; ‘*they are so dirty*’.<sup>92</sup> Racializing dirt served for him, as for many others, as a way of distancing and controlling it. Hedges welcomed the government regulations that imposed hygiene routines and hoped ‘we shall soon have them [i.e. the Irish] a little cleaner’. Similarly, gendered segregation was not always chafed against. Fanny Davis put it clearly: ‘There is one thing I am very glad of’, she wrote in 1858; ‘we see no more of the men than if there was none in the ship, for the highest crime a girl can commit is to be seen speaking to one of them, and I think it is best so.’<sup>93</sup> On-board patterns of sociability further reinforced these divisions. Davis reported on the activities on the ‘poop on a moonlight night’: ‘two dozen [Irish] singing in one corner, Scotch girls dancing in another, and a lot talking scandal and gossip everywhere’.<sup>94</sup> In the comparatively unregulated space of the open deck, migrants turned to the social mechanisms they knew from land.

These acts had a paradoxical quality. Even as hygiene measures strove to preserve bodily and moral health, perpetuate land-based social practices, and alleviate saloon-class anxiety, they simultaneously worked by collapsing boundaries between bodies, thrusting them together in communal and public acts of washing and cleaning. Both despite and because of the constrained environs of gender segregation, there were tantalizing opportunities for bodies to meet. As historians have recently shown, ships in this period (as also later), provided opportunities for the upending of land-based sexual norms.<sup>95</sup> For single men who had more freedom of movement these were connected to the potential for socializing across class and racial divides, and it was on board a ship to Ceylon in 1890 that Edward Carpenter formed an erotic attachment with a lascar crew member called Kaludesaya (Kalua).<sup>96</sup> J. T. Deighton was fascinated with the bodies of the sailors, describing in detail their tattoos, to which he added, ‘making sketches on the sailors arms’ and filling them in ‘with needles and ink’.<sup>97</sup> Ships offered saloon passengers the opportunity to break convention, to relax their clothing, and even to sleep on deck on moonlit nights.

Even as passengers sectioned themselves into regional and religious groupings, they engaged in forms of entertainment that softened the boundaries of the individualized self through dancing and song. Alcohol, too, offered the promise of dissolution. In first class, alcohol was freely available and many a passenger overindulged. But Baker also described ‘20 or 30 drunk’ in the third-class cabin as the ship approached Melbourne. ‘It is a shame that so much drink has been allowed to be sold’, he moralized, ‘the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class passengers having not been permitted it during the rest of the voyage’.<sup>98</sup>

92 Hedges, 4 October 1858, emphasis in original.

93 Davis, 8 August 1858, p. 286.

94 Davis, 23 July 1858, p. 284.

95 Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello sailor! The hidden history of gay life at sea*, London: Longman, 2003; B. R. Burg, *An American seafarer in the age of sail: the erotic diaries of Philip C. Van Buskirk, 1851–1870*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

96 Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: a life of liberty and love*, London: Verso, 2008, pp. 151–9.

97 Deighton, 1 May 1867.

98 Baker, 12 July 1857.

The romance and written contact between the sexes in third class has already been mentioned. First-class passengers were of course free to mix as they wished and, in the small society they constituted, speculation about love matches was frequent: 'I observe, as do others,' wrote Baker, 'that Mr Graves is somewhat "live" with Miss Dunn and is become sentimental.'<sup>99</sup> Under foreign skies and out of place, in singing, dancing, and in some cases drinking, bodies and voices merged into each other in ways reminiscent of carnival.

In such conditions, how did passengers compose themselves? Clothes were a key site for the assertion of individuality. There was much excitement when migrants were permitted once a month to access their boxes: 'the Whole talk', wrote Mary Maclean, 'is What have you to put on and What I have to put on ... all Seem to be quite uplifted'.<sup>100</sup> But even sartorial certainty was elusive at sea. As the ship headed south and into hotter weather, passengers were literally undressed by conditions. 'Coats, waistcoats and stockings are quite superfluous articles of clothing, and under flannels quite out of the question', wrote Deighton, not far from the equator in 1867: 'It is a great treat to turn out first thing in a morning after the manner of ancient Britons and get the sailors to give you a bath with the hosepipe.'<sup>101</sup> In the heat, clothes became a hindrance and a burden. They hung heavily upon sweating bodies pressed together. Nor were they easy to launder: as Mary Maclean wrote of Washing Day on the *Africana*, 'it is So hard to Wash in Salt Water thair [*sic*] is not getting of them Clean'.<sup>102</sup>

The boxes in the hold were a cause of great anxiety for passengers. In them were contained everything migrants took from their old lives to their new. If passengers experienced the voyage as destabilizing, these boxes represented the preservation of land-based selves and the possibility of their reconstruction. No wonder, then, that a rumour on board the *Fred Warren* in 1876 that 'if there will be fever on board every article of clothing, boxes, etc. that the passengers possess will be tossed overboard' deeply frightened Sarah Stephens.<sup>103</sup> Not only might fever put them all into quarantine, but it also threatened to undress and dispossess them. Even in the relative safety of the hold, clothes could easily be ruined by the damp or by spillages or seepages from the boxes of other passengers.

Ships also inverted the gendered labour of bodily care. If on shore the work of maintaining modern bodies fell largely to women (it was they who did the 'body work' of modernity, washing, mending, scrubbing, cooking, and caring) on board ship these tasks fell predominantly to men.<sup>104</sup> Attending to such responsibilities had long been a dimension of sailors' lives, but they were less familiar to many of the male passengers.<sup>105</sup> 'Commenced washing today', reported Hedges, 'first time I attempted to wash a shirt in my life, pretty well done considering circumstances.'<sup>106</sup> Although in the married quarters the women still undertook much of the work of food preparation, taking dishes to be cooked was considered a man's job. Hedges also looked after his wife when she got ill, and took on most of the work of cleaning, fetching food, and getting it cooked.<sup>107</sup> As Mary Maclean conveyed, the single men

99 Baker, 1 June 1851.

100 Maclean, 26 and 27 December 1865, p. 105.

101 Deighton, 28 April 1867.

102 Maclean, 11 December 1865, p. 102.

103 Stephens, 18 October 1876.

104 Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul bodies: cleanliness in early America*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 363 ff.

105 For work on the gendering of the sailor, see Colin Howell and Richard Twomey, eds., *Jack Tar in history: essays in the history of maritime life and labour*, Fredericton, New Brunswick: Acadiensis Press, 1991.

106 Hedges, 5 October 1858.

107 Hedges, 14 November and 30 October 1858.

also had to wash their own clothes: even ‘Girls Who have Brothers on Board are not allowed to Wash for them and are only allowed to Speak to them for about an hour Every Sabbath’.<sup>108</sup> In the saloon, the stewards who tended table and cleaned cabins were usually male. So were the cook, the doctor, and the sailors who cleaned decks. On the shifting seas, gendered codes of conduct were shown to be relative. As Sarah Stephens reported somewhat smugly of behaviour during a storm, not only were men expected to do the work of maintaining cabins and quarters, but when they failed at it they were deemed unmanly and lacking in courage.<sup>109</sup>

Travelling the route to Australia in the age of sail, these migrants came to know each other’s bodies intimately. In the cramped conditions between decks, corporeal boundaries became porous. They leaked into each other, eroding familiar forms of individual sovereignty. If first-class passengers sought to insulate themselves from some of these conditions, they were never wholly successful. Everyone felt the effects of illness, was kept awake by the noise, and waged an unsuccessful battle against the lice and vermin that ran through the whole ship. Everyone was disturbed – whether in fear, apprehension, or excitement – by a journey that rendered bodies unruly. In this context, efforts to segregate, fumigate, and classify appear fragile and anxious. The accounts examined here show just how unsettling of established expectations and practices the experience of sea travel could be.

## Authority

While sea travel challenged passengers’ experience of governing their own bodies, it also made them acutely conscious of the fragility of distributed forms of human authority. The rule of states held little sway in the face of the unforgiving waves. ‘It was a very rough night’, noted Deighton dryly in 1867, ‘and I could not help agreeing with Lord Dundreary who says that if Britannia *does* rule the waves she might rule them a little better sometimes.’<sup>110</sup> At sea it was nature whose dominion was confirmed. ‘In a storm what a change’, wrote Fenwick. ‘Then see the contrast between Man’s mightiness and Grand Nature in her strength.’<sup>111</sup>

In such times men and women looked to higher powers for consolation and salvation. On a night when a person fell overboard and a sailor was washed out of the rigging, Fanny Davis described the effects of a rumour that the ship was sinking: ‘many were on their knees praying who had perhaps never thought on the name of God before’.<sup>112</sup> Lightoller took a more sardonic tone: ‘last night the ship was simply buried in seas ... Oh, Moses, you should have heard the praying!’<sup>113</sup> Ridiculing the ‘stupid’ Irish, immobilized in fear and superstition and praying when they should have been bailing, was a common response. But this too was a form of discursive distancing that located fear in the other and ennobled the response of the self. Although sectarian divisions were real, religious language was deeply embedded in nineteenth-century ways of thinking, and in tracts and weekly services passengers were presented with a narrative that enjoined them to look to God as protector. Passengers such as Mary Maclean used such language to make sense of a world in which human rule seemed precarious: ‘[God]

108 Maclean, 11 December 1865, p. 102.

109 Stephens, 9 December 1876.

110 Deighton, 12 June 1867, emphasis in original.

111 Fenwick, 7 July 1854, p. 269.

112 Davis, 14 June 1858, pp. 280–1.

113 Lightoller, 15 September 1878, p. 304.

I Cannot forget', she wrote, 'for on Deck I See him in the grate [*sic*] Deep below I here [*sic*] him in the raging [*sic*] noise of the Waters.'<sup>114</sup>

There was every reason to be worried. Although shipwrecks were surprisingly uncommon on emigrant voyages, reports of accidents were a regular feature in newspapers in Britain, and death on board was known to be a common occurrence.<sup>115</sup> It was a lucky ship indeed that made the passage along this route without loss of life, with the numbers often reaching double figures. Adults suffered but, with the poor food and lack of light and air, children were especially vulnerable. In addition, there was the constant danger of injury. Fanny Davis wrote of one of the single women who 'fell down with the rolling of the ship on Tuesday and knocked several of her front teeth in'.<sup>116</sup> Baker spoke of Mr Foster, a midshipman, whose 'head was cut & face much disfigured & he was insensible' having been 'very nearly killed ... from the falling of some ropes on his head from aloft'.<sup>117</sup> Even though passengers did not always witness such events, news of a death or an injury spread quickly throughout the ship. If such events were outside passengers' direct experience, they were nonetheless proximate in their imaginations.<sup>118</sup>

On these routes power was embodied in the figure of the captain. It was he who was able to negotiate with the unruly waves and he who held the lives of hundreds in his hands. It was the captain who 'spoke' to the world when ships were sighted and he who acted as the mouthpiece for all those on board. And within the segregated social world of the saloon, the captain held court at table. In him, too, was located the authority to punish. This punishment was often itself physical and enacted on the body. Fanny Davis described a boy being made to stand sentry outside the captain's door for four hours with a large piece of wood on his shoulders to imitate a musket because he had not kept himself clean.<sup>119</sup> Mary Maclean reported that one of the sailors was put in 'the black hole for Disobaying [*sic*] the Second mate and Stricking [*sic*] the Captin [*sic*]; passengers and crew alike could put in irons.<sup>120</sup> Punishment on board was a public display of the captain's personal authority. Sarah Stephens, for example, described how 'some one had thrown an empty box over without the Captain's permission and to show his authority he sent out a boat with five men to bring it back'.<sup>121</sup> Rather than being hidden, punishment remained a spectacle.<sup>122</sup>

Yet the rule of the captain was far from absolute. Deighton described a tiered structure of authority that became increasingly arbitrary as it proceeded from the captain to the cabin boy.<sup>123</sup> The surgeon, too, was given a great deal of power, not just over bodies but also over the moral and social lives of migrants. 'There is not an hour in the day', reported Fanny Davis in 1858, 'but the Doctor is fetched to quell some riot.'<sup>124</sup> Reporting to the surgeon, the matron ruled with a strict hand over the single women. But the power of these official figures was often less total than the statute book might lead us to believe. Deighton's entry points to the

114 Maclean, 18 February 1866, p. 117.

115 Haines, *Life and death*, p. 12.

116 Davis, 6 August 1858, p. 286.

117 Baker, 13 June 1857.

118 Kirsty Reid, 'Ocean funerals: the sea and Victorian cultures of death', *Journal of Maritime Research*, 13, 1, 2001, pp. 37–54.

119 Davis, 2 July 1858, p. 282.

120 Maclean, 4 March 1866, p. 120; MMM, DX/2223, 'Account of William Molison Strachan's passage to Australia on board the ship *Panola*', 1 December 1852.

121 Stephens, 4 November 1876.

122 Foucault, *Discipline and punish*, pp. 8–10.

123 Deighton, 3 July 1867.

124 Davis, 21 July 1858, p. 283.

complexities of formal lines of command, and in the cramped quarters between decks passengers were forced to navigate a terrain of informal authority that only sometimes intersected with these formal structures. The reach of the doctor, too, was limited, not least because of dubious competence and passengers' frequent distrust of him. As Terry Coleman points out, of the seventy-eight surgeons sent out to Australia in 1849, twenty-two were found wanting.<sup>125</sup> Passengers turned instead to each other to retain an element of control over their own wellbeing, and employed the forms of 'negotiated order' that Frances Steel has highlighted in her article in this issue. In the waters of the tropics, as Foxhall reminds us, 'sailors turned maritime and medical authority upside down, dowsing passengers and mocking the surgeon's obsession with dryness in their rituals of "crossing the line" [the equator]'.<sup>126</sup> These ceremonies were a reminder to all that, in the end, it was Neptune who reigned supreme.

There were also times when sailors and passengers openly challenged the authority of the captain and surgeon. Sarah Stephens reported a mutiny on board the *Cardigan Castle*, in which the crew came to blows with the officers. Even the captain was 'knocked about very much'.<sup>127</sup> Hedges told of a quarrel between the captain and his steward that ended when 'the Captain struck him three or four times'.<sup>128</sup> Here the captain's authority was challenged and reasserted through physical means, but the sailors also won some concessions: 'I believe they have come to some terms now', Stephens' entry concluded. Passengers could be equally demanding. In 1854 Fenwick wrote of 'a terrible row in the saloon between some of the Gents. & the Capt.'<sup>129</sup> In this case, the grievance was about social status and respectability, but for steerage passengers the quality of the food was frequently a site of contest, and so also could be the captain's seamanship.<sup>130</sup>

The target of these protests remained the captain. It was he who was formally responsible for life on board, and he who was held to account when things went wrong.<sup>131</sup> During a crisis such as a storm, it was his visible presence that reassured migrants and crew alike, and his absence that caused consternation. This personal authority was formally recognized at the end of a voyage, when passengers presented testimonials, not just to him but also to the doctor, purser and stewards. Signed collectively and offered up separately for each class, their presentation was highly ritualized, with the addressee publicly receiving the tribute and responding accordingly. The protests and petitions spoken of in these accounts show the extent to which authority remained embodied on these journeys. The captain put men in irons, sailors tattooed their bodies, and passengers quaked at the power of the waves.<sup>132</sup>

Efforts to separate and classify may be seen as attempts to embed power within the practices of shipboard life. But, against the extremity of the sea, the sheer brute physical force underpinning such measures could not be hidden. In the middle of a very bad storm, Lightoller described the forms of bodily constraint used to control steerage passengers 'coming out [onto the decks] by swarms, so we got all below that we could and then lashed down the hatches to prevent them coming up again until all the uproar was over'.<sup>133</sup>

125 Terry Coleman, *Passage to America: a history of emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland to America in the mid-nineteenth century*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972, p. 115.

126 Foxhall, *Health*, p. 8.

127 Stephens, 13 December 1876.

128 Hedges, 4 November 1858.

129 Fenwick, 19 June 1854, p. 267.

130 Baker, 1 July 1857.

131 Deighton, 18 July 1867.

132 Deighton, 14 April 1867.

133 Lightoller, 19 September 1878, p. 306.

## Off ship and onto shore

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that passengers' first actions on land, at least as far as we know, were deliberative attempts to recompose their bodily selves. These began even as the ship approached shore. On nearing her destination in Dunedin, Sarah Stephens described how the boxes were brought up from the hold, 'opened and all the finery is taken out'. 'Each girl evidently intends making an impression on the natives.'<sup>134</sup> But if putting on clean clothes was the initial step in putting unsettled bodies back together, the first task on landing was often to wash. Many accounts also speak of the delight of eating a good meal. The social self was put back together too, with the reading of mail and the meeting of friends and family a priority. At the Quarantine Station at Sydney Heads, the landscape today remains marked by the engravings of passengers in the sandstone. What these etchings meant to those who made them is hard to know, but they stand as testimony to passengers' desire literally to inscribe their names in their new landscape and perhaps to ground themselves as well.<sup>135</sup>

Others were forced to make different kinds of arrival. The first melancholy act of poor Hedges in Sydney was to bury his young son Basil in Sydney's Camperdown cemetery.<sup>136</sup> Some carried the ship in their bodies long after they landed. Fanny Davis, for example, was never able to shake off the effects of her voyage and she remained in fragile health for the rest of her life.<sup>137</sup> For many emigrants, arriving in port was only the first of a series of relocations. Before they finally settled, they would move through hostels and boarding houses, navigating the unseemly world of swindlers notoriously associated with them, and making a succession of train trips and bullock rides before finally finding some kind of permanent accommodation.

It was not as if some decent food and clean clothes, a ticking watch, a job, and a recognizable postal service and legal system automatically signalled the stabilization of bodily practice on shore. If these diaries tend to end with their authors' arrival, this was part of the point of the device. Diaries were written in an attempt to order the upheaval of the voyage and give it 'a beginning, middle, and an end'.<sup>138</sup> The ship, of course, was not the only site in which bodies were rendered unstable in this period. In nineteenth-century Britain and Australia, as elsewhere, illness, accident, motherhood, and old age all made bodily boundaries porous; physical labour, exposure to toxic chemicals, and air and water pollution undid them too; and conditions in farms, factories, slums, and workhouses were certainly inimical to privacy and neglectful of corporeal sovereignty. But the migrant ship in the last decades of sail was a very particular kind of space. These sailing ships had been largely bypassed by the kinds of contemporary spatial reform that in this period had begun to govern the management of factories, schools, prisons, and cities. At a time when the reforms of liberal democracies in Britain were teaching people to govern themselves, sailing ships 'were persistent reminders of the confined spaces of an earlier era'.<sup>139</sup> Pushing bodies together, ships stripped away the mechanisms that increasingly constituted corporeal composure.

134 Stephens, 3 January 1877.

135 Anne Clarke, Ursula Frederick, and Anna Williams, 'Wish you were here: historic inscriptions from the North Head Quarantine Station, Manly, NSW', *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 28, 2010, pp. 77–84; Anne Clarke and Ursula Frederick, "'Rebecca will you marry me? Tim": inscriptions as objects of biography at the North Head Quarantine Station, Manly, New South Wales', *Archaeology in Oceania*, 47, 2012, pp. 84–90.

136 Hedges, 3 January 1859.

137 Charlwood, *Long farewell*, p. 277.

138 Hassam, *Sailing to Australia*, pp. 3, 4.

139 Foxhall, *Health*, p. 56.

## Conclusion

Travel by sea to Australasia in the era of sail disturbed the bodily practices that were increasingly being learned on shore in Britain in the mid nineteenth century. At sea, bodies were anything but stable, individualized, clean, and orderly. By contrast, they continually threatened to break their boundaries. The diaries examined here suggest that passengers of all classes experienced acute anxiety at this prospect. They were unsettled by shifting temporal and spatial practices, and immobilized by dramatic changes in temperature. The bodily fluids, bugs, noises, and diseases of others were hard to avoid. If the better class of traveller sought escape in above-deck cabins, they nonetheless also lived in fear of contagion from below.

It is significant that in the midst of all these hardships diarists nonetheless sought to employ practices of containment as they reached for the forms of bodily composure they had learned on land. Their writings give testimony to their frustration and uncertainty when these practices did not work as they thought they should. In the face of on-board bodily chaos, these passengers both acted on the imperative to deploy the ordering mechanisms of shore life and experienced the possibility of their failure. For them, the body at sea was an unstable and anxious one.

The articles gathered together in this special issue have turned their attention to the ship at sea, highlighting the ways in which transit along different routes in different periods refashioned travellers and made them into new kinds of subjects. They show that sea travel was characterized by divergent and layered geographies, which produced particular experiences of passage. But the diverse on-shore impact of such experiences is not yet clear. While historians of mobility are increasingly showing just how important spaces of transit were in fashioning experience and identity, historians of colonial cities and societies tend not to consider the impact of the sea journey in fashioning bodily subjectivities and cultures of rule.<sup>140</sup> How did passengers like those examined here live in the wake of their shipboard apprehension of the loss of order? To what extent did their experience of bodily anxiety influence their eagerness to embrace and even produce the cultural classifications and hierarchies of rule that typified colonial and settler societies? These are large questions, but if they are to be answered we must connect bodies at sea to bodies on shore. That task begins with historicizing the experience of sea travel in different periods and in different geographic contexts. In doing so, we may also end up reframing questions that land-based histories have themselves long elided.

*Tamson Pietsch is ARC DECRA Research Fellow in History at the University of Sydney. She is the author of Empire of scholars: universities, networks and the British academic world, 1850–1939 (Manchester, 2013) and is currently undertaking a project on educational travel, international politics, and the Floating University of 1926–27.*

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140 Colin Divall, 'Mobilities and transport history', in Peter Adey, David Bissell, Kevin Hannam, Peter Merriman, and Mimi Sheller, eds., *The Routledge handbook of mobilities*, London: Routledge, 2014, p. 37.