

The Triathlon – A Multidisciplinary Heuristic

The Olympic Games came to a close concomitantly with the deadline for submissions to *Junctures* 3, and while we reluctantly pulled ourselves from the continuous live coverage of Grecian sands and toned bodies, we also saw how these Games poignantly served as a heuristic for the mission of this journal.

Reflect for a moment upon the men's triathlon. New Zealanders were glued to the screen during this event, where at least one, if not two members of the New Zealand team were contenders for places of honour. Indeed, the duo of Carter and Docherty ended up finishing first and second, bringing home forty percent of the total New Zealand medal haul. Not only was their victory based on triple-disciplinarity, but both the preparation of and the symbolism concerning these athletes embody how knowledge can issue forth from a myriad of places.

One might be quick to presume that their success was the result of exceptional sports science preparation. With the only swimming flume in the southern hemisphere at their disposal, these triathletes might have swum in variable currents, with continuous biomechanical assessment, oxygen consumption and blood lactate analysis. They acclimatised to the Athens weather conditions via heat chamber with controlled humidity, and then trained at altitude to enable their haemoglobin to saturate more fully with oxygen in order to enhance their endurance performance.

However, to assume that sports science was the reason for their success would be to trivialise the contribution of other specialities. While it may have contributed to the maximisation of their $VO_2^{1\max}$, medical science was an important lynchpin in their performance – injury prevention, health maintenance and diet enabled them to adhere to their training regimens. Psychological skills training contributed to their ability to stay composed in the face of competitor attacks on the 18% gradient of the Vouliagmeni bike circuit.

But beyond the obvious associations with medicine, psychology and sporting performance, numerous other factors contributed to the victory of the New Zealand triathletes. What about history and geography? New Zealand is an island country, with only one land-bound city. Young children are raised with a familiarity and love for the water. Not only this, but extensive rural roading networks and hilly landscapes strengthen cyclists' thighs, as well as their resolve. But finally, New Zealand has a rich history in distance running, with a disproportionate number of

Olympic medals in events ranging from the 800m to the marathon gained in the 60s, 70s and 80s. School cross-country events are mandatory for all students in most New Zealand schools, an unusual practice in the rest of the world.

The bodies of these athletes speak of techniques of self-discipline: simultaneously in the sense of being subjected to such discipline *and* as being embodiments of social control. The lean and sinewy body of the endurance athlete sets a normative standard of appearance to which young New Zealanders both aspire and are chained.

On a macro-level, the successful Olympic athlete embodies the hope of the nation, which basks in the reflected glory of the victory. The images, traditions and memories constructed around the athletes provide emotional unity, a sense of identity, and becomes the perfect Andersonian tool for “imagining nationhood.”² For him, the nation exists only as an imagined entity because so few members of a nation even know one another and thus they must create an image of what they believe it to be: in this case, a nation of staunch and well-prepared world-beaters. By extension, sport is a mechanism of control, reproducing and promoting the values which are consistent with the dominant ideology of the nation.

But the triathlon is not different from any other subject of contemporary interest: its practice cannot be perfected; and its understanding cannot be captured from the vantage point of one discipline. All knowledge, we maintain, is at its most useful when it is distributed across, and indeed contextualised by, the widest possible framework of understanding.

So, we again explore the body in *Junctures* 3. The body, like the triathlon, is a fruitful platform for multidisciplinary cohesion. Its position in the traditional Māori *haka* is explained by Nathan Matthews. We read of the importance of embodiment where Johannes Heidema and Willem Labuschagne investigate its role in cognition. We consider its status as constructed by adornments in Holly Thorpe’s analysis of snowboarding fashion. Annette Hoffman contrasts the symbolic meaning of heart and breast in discourses of illness. Suzanne Human focuses on how the body erupts in cultural subversion. How are its emissions simultaneously gendered and subversively humoristic? Maxine Alterio narrates the poignant moments of a woman preparing to leave her body; while Lynn Taylor’s visual essay speaks of incorporated experience of a familiar practice deployed in unfamiliar surroundings. Book reviewers Bridie Lonie and Jane Venis respectively focus on affect as impact on the body through new media and the theoretical analysis of this process; and on the body as a humorous and critical-performative “border crosser” defying the politics of separation.

Junctures 4 will examine *movement* and welcomes contributions from scholars from all disciplines. It is through thematic dialogue that we gain a better understanding of our own areas of study and of those of others.

Annemarie Jutel
(Editor)

- 1 V02 max is, in simple terms, a physiological measurement of the body’s ability to extract, transport and utilise oxygen. It is a predictor of performance in endurance events.
- 2 B Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).