Channelling Oceanic Energy:

Investigating intimacy among surfers and waves along Ireland's Atlantic Coast

David Whyte

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment

of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Anthropology

University College London

2018

I, David Whyte,

confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources,

I confirm that these have been properly referenced in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the entangled relationships of humans, waves, and the wider nonhuman environment in surfing. It is based on an ethnographic study of surfing along the Atlantic coast of Ireland, and also on how these communities are tied to a global surfing imaginary via online magazines, digital swell forecasts, and international travel. The argument at the core of this thesis is that surfing describes a collection of practices which transforms humans into channels for Oceanic energy. This becoming is both what allows the human body and technology to make lives as surfers in the littoral environment, and also produces the practical context whereby Irish terrestrial sociality is transformed into Irish surfer sociality with its own rules, hierarchies, and environmental understandings.

The thesis departs from established tendencies in anthropology, geography and popular literature to theorise the coast as a liminal/peripheral space that is distinct from 'everyday' life and in which social norms are relaxed, transformed or perhaps even absent. Instead, I develop an alternative ecological analysis of Irish surfing using surfers' own concepts which examines how surfing practice refigures the coast as the centre of certain human lives while at the same time blurring conceptual and physical boundary lines which separate land, littoral and ocean. By going beyond a strictly materialist approach to examine the energies which animate material relations, the ecological explanation developed herein argues that an anthropological explanation of surfing social relations benefits from a thorough understanding of the various ways that people become affectively tied to environments through practice.

Impact Statement

This thesis has significant impact in relation to the social scientific study of surfing, to anthropology in general, and outside academia. In relation to studies of surfing, it acts as a counterweight to the significant body of work that depicts surfing as an extraordinary, escapist activity which, as a coast-based phenomenon, takes place at the geographical and cultural peripheries of modern civilisation. Conversely, I theorise surfing as a something that becomes ordinary – a key part of the life-making process. Furthermore, rather than functioning as an escape from 'normal' life, social relations, and so on, surfing in fact presents an alternative, serious social space with at least as many norms and hierarchies as do the 'rest' of surfers' lives. Finally, I critique analyses that characterise surfing spaces and characters as peripheral or liminal by claiming that this is a matter of perspective. To a non-surfer the coast is perhaps a liminal space, but surfers produce a set of concepts and practices which recast these spaces and characters as social and cultural centres, meaning that, from a surfing perspective, alternative spaces/characters (injured surfers, for example) *become* liminal.

In relation to anthropology more generally, the critique of liminality theory that I develop herein has significant consequences. I point to the political nature of liminality theory, encapsulated in its definition of 'normal' social circumstances. I demonstrate that in prioritising analysis of the arresting effects that a transitory structure has upon the lives of individuals and their ability to live under 'normal' social conditions, theorists risk disempowering those individuals, thereby missing an opportunity to analyse the techniques and practices by which individuals invariably transform seemingly abnormal situations into meaningful social spaces. This academic impact has already been brought about through several conference papers and will be extended in the future through publication in scholarly journals.

Finally, this thesis will bring about impact outside of academia through its engagement with the terms upon which intimacy is created between humans and the environment, and how environmentalist sentiments develop from these practice-specific intimacies. In the context of a

rapidly changing climate and increasing environmental ill health, this is most valuable. As people learn to surf they begin to value the unimpeded, unpolluted flow of coastal waters, while at the same time (somewhat paradoxically) taking part in leisure and consumption practices that increases the risk of coastal pollution. In collaboration with a surfer-run community farm, I intend on extending the potential positive environmental impact of this thesis by delivering a series of short public lectures at the farm to local surfers, surf instructors and other members of the community to recommend initiatives that would increase awareness of the ecological values and dangers of developing surfing along the Irish coast.

Acknowledgements

I extend a sincere thank you to my supervisor Allen Abramson. Allen has been there since my first days as a Masters student at UCL. Always available and ever on my side, through him I always felt that I had a sympathetic, learned and welcoming connection to the teaching and administrative staff of the department. Without his critical commentary on all my work to date this thesis would not have been possible. I also thank Charles Stewart, my second supervisor for his detailed reading and commentary of a first draft version of this thesis, Nurit Bird-David for her useful comments which helped shape chapter two of the thesis, and Martin Holbraad and Danny Miller for running the ever-engaging "Trajectories of Anthropology Today" seminar in the department. Some of the analytical avenues explored in this project have been encountered here.

Among the students at UCL I have many to thank. Being part of an engaging cohort of PhD students with such a diverse research agenda and a real hunger for anthropological knowledge has been the biggest treat of my time with UCL. All have been amazing, but Pauline, Stefan, Tess, and Hernando deserve special thanks. Also at UCL, I am indebted to a group of undergraduate students whom I had the pleasure of acting as their Teaching Assistant for the Introduction to Material Culture module at UCL over the course of my PhD. They were always engaged, excited and generally a great bunch to be able to spend time with and study anthropology together.

My deepest thanks go to my family: To my parents for helping me every little bit of the way with endless encouragement and assistance that extends over my twenty-eight years, and not merely the course of a degree. To my sisters and brothers I am also grateful for all the encouragement and for giving me good reason to get back home from London as often as I could.

Among the Irish surf community, I thank all who gave their time to help me in my research. Fergal Smith in Clare deserves to be mentioned by name. I also thank members of the West Coast Surf Club for giving me their time. Finally, I have to thank a small group of surfers who base themselves in

Cork but are to be found all over the Irish coast on a weekly basis. I thank them for taking me in, for teaching me to surf, to read forecasts, to be afraid, to be frustrated, to be full of joy, and above all, to appreciate the manifold ways that surfers are affected by the blowing of the wind across the sea. This research is dedicated to them.

Table of Contents

Abstract 3

Impact Statement 4

Acknowledgements 6

List of Figures 11

Chapter 1: Introduction 15

Presentation of topic 15
1.1 Surfing clear of subject-oriented and liminal approaches 18
1.1.1 Aesthetics, risk and the individual in surf studies 19
1.1.2 Liminal surfing 22
1.2 Explaining surfing ecologically 28
1.2.1 Becoming channels for Oceanic energy 31
1.3 The ecological products of Irish surfing 37
1.3.1 Bodily-technological channels of Oceanic energy 37
1.3.2 Political Mobilisations 41
1.4 The legitimacy of the anthropology of relations 43
1.5 Methodology 45
1.6 Summary and thesis outline 51

Chapter 2: Waves and Breaks: Becoming intimate with Irish waves 55

2.1 Introduction 55
2.2 What do surfers surf? 59
2.2.1 Introductory vignette 59
2.2.2 Swells, winds, tides, and seasonal variation 62
2.2.3 Wave-knowledge, techniques and technology of forecasting 67
2.3 Surf break intimacies 71
2.3.1 Owning waves: etiquette and prestige 72
2.3.2 Environments of social normativity: localism 80
2.4 Surf breaks 83
2.4.1 Crab Island 84

2.4.2 Surf breaks as places of relational movements 91
2.4.3 The ephemeral moodiness of waves; the persistent characters of surf breaks 93
2.5 Summary 99

Chapter 3: Atmospheres of Irish surfing sociality 101

3.1 Introduction 101
3.2 Seán and Colin 106
3.3 Creating Cliff-side atmospheres 108
3.3.1 Leaving the Car 113
3.3.2 Meeting the professionals 116
3.4 Surfing subjectivities emergent in atmospheres of fear 120
3.4 Summary 127

Chapter 4: Harnessing Oceanic Energy through Material Manipulations 129

4.1 Introduction 129
4.2 Creating individual surfboards and wetsuits 135
4.2.1 Developing boards and wetsuits 135
4.2.2 Matching surfboards and fins with bodies and waves 139
4.2.4 Reworking surfboards and wetsuits 143
4.3 Growing surfing bodies 145
4.3.1 Beginner enskillment: developing the body 145
4.3.2 Boards' and wetsuits' maintenance of the body 152
4.3 Summary 157

Chapter 5: 'Fake' Waves: Artifice, alienation and the ethics of harnessing Oceanic energy 159

5.1 Introduction 159
5.1.1 Artificial waves 161
5.2 Designing artifice, experiencing environmental alienations 167
5.3 Inauthenticity as lacking the right to channel Oceanic energy 176
5.4 The Ocean as perfect imperfection 180
5.5 Summary 186

Chapter 6: #NatureTrumpsWalls: The ecology of conceptual development 188

6.1 Introduction 188
6.2 The proposed sea wall at Doughmore, Co. Clare 191
6.2.1 Surf activism in Ireland and abroad 193
6.3 Surfers, environmentalism and #NatureTrumpsWalls 197
6.3.1 Dave O'Brien 197
6.3.2 Save the Waves and the "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach" Facebook campaign 200
6.3.3 Intimacies of body and wave part of an empowered nonhuman environment 203
6.4 Building Walls, protecting people and the land 204
6.4.1 The Doughmore Coastal Protection Group 205
6.4.2 An alternative relationship with waves 207
6.5 Living together in Doughmore bay 210
6.6 Summary 212

Chapter 7: Conclusion 214

7.1 Theoretical implications 215
7.1.1 Centring the littoral; dissolving boundaries 215
7.1.2 Critiquing liminality 217
7.1.3 Animating theory 220
7.2 Anthropological analysis and the production of theory 221
7.2.1 The production of theory 221
7.2.2 The political role of contemporary anthropology 223
7.3 Methodology for practice-based research 224
7.4 Limitations and avenues for further research 225

Bibliography 228

Appendix A: Surfing Terminology 244

List of Figures

All photos belong to the author unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

Figures 1.1, 1.2: The materiality of salt water in animation.

Figure 1.3: A map of Ireland including the three main regions (West cork, Clare, and the northwest) around which ethnography took place.

Chapter 2

Figure 2.1: A further example of the global reach of the surfing imaginary. A feature on a surfing website called "Purple Blob of the Week," in which one storm is selected from around the world and assessed for its swell-generating capabilities for the countries or regions to be affected, which could be tens, hundreds, or thousands of kilometres from the storm. Available at http://www.theinertia.com/surf/the-north-atlantics-new-purple-blob-is-setting-up-an-xxl-week-for-europe/. Last accessed 20/04/17.

Figure 2.2: A surf forecast from magicseaweed.com. From left to right: forecast at-beach wave height, swell height, swell period, swell direction, wind speed, wind direction. Below are the tide times for the area.

Figure 2.3: Crab Island viewed from the west, looking back towards Doolin village and (above) a map of the then proposed new pier, which has since been built. “Crab,” the surf break, is in the right foreground of this photo.

Figure 2.4: Crab Island viewed from the south-east, on the hill behind Doonagore Castle. Photo credit Al McKinnon.

Figure 2.5: A surfer watches as another gets barrelled at Crab on a relatively large swell (wide angle lenses tend to make waves look small). Photo credit Paul Deering.

Figure 2.6: A sketch of the “activity centres” of the break “Crab.”

Figure 2.7: An informant stands on Crab Island watching a sea mist engulf the Cliffs of Moher to the south-west.

Chapter 3

Figure 3.4: The Cliffs of Moher viewed from the viewing platform. The wave is located over the right shoulder of the photographer and breaks about one hundred metres out to sea. Photo taken by Seán.

Figure 3.2: Spanish professional surfer Natxo Gonzalez surfing the Cliffs on a pretty big day. Photo from Murch, 2017.

Figure 3.3: "It is not a wave. It's a step. A vertical division between 2 levels of sea." Teahupoo, Tahiti. Photo by Wagner Brenner.

Figure 3.4: A group of surfers watch the action at The Cliffs on a big day. Photo taken by Seán.

Figure 3.5: Colin stands atop the Cliffs performing a spot-check on the wave below. Photo taken by Seán.

Figure 3.6: Colin makes the descent down the Goat’s Trail laden with equipment. Photo taken by Seán.

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1: An example of a classic wooden shape. Photo taken by Nick Lavecchia.

Figure 4.2: A contemporary shortboard (6’ 1’’ in length). The "dirt" on the deck is surf wax - a tacky substance that is applied to the board to add traction to the otherwise slippery deck.

Figure 4.3: A surfer in Irish spring/autumn attire.

Figure 4.4: Some of the gear to be put together in order to surf. Two informants carry their equipment as this particular secret spot lies a kilometre from the road.

Figure 4.5: Seán proudly shows off his snapped board.

Figure 4.6: Typical beginner's stance. High centre of gravity, weight equally on both legs, a trailing arm adding weight to the rear (which acts like a break), and with only the head and not also the shoulders turned to face direction of movement. Photo property of surfboardsoceanside.com

Figure 4.7: Typical proficient surfer's stance. Low centre of gravity, back leg disengaged with all weight on the front foot in the middle of the board, shoulders turned to face direction of movement and arms down and forward pulling the surfer along. Photo credit Tyler Walker

Figure 4.8: Matthew Bryce in hospital. His face is sunburnt into the shape of his wetsuit hood - the only part of his body left unprotected by his equipment. Photo property of BBC Scotland.

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1: Kelly Slater's famous good looks (left) and Slater in action (right). Photo property of Carve Britain.

Figure 5.2: Kelly enjoying the world of his creation. Photo taken by Matt Roth.

Figure 5.3: A graphic representation of Surf Snowdonia. Reproduced from Odriozola, 2015.

Figure 5.4: The wave pool viewed from the western end.

Figure 5.5: One surfer waits in the shallows while another surfs the southern wave.

Figure 5.6: A piece of wall art in the bar, the only explicit relation drawn between this wave and surfing cultural history.

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1: Doughmore beach viewed from the south-east. Photo property of the Irish Times.

Figure 6.2: A poster for the 2016 Irish general election that could be seen around west Clare.

Figure 6.3: A photograph of Doughmore beach at sunset, taken from the embattled dunes and with the slogan inspired by another from Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign superimposed. From Savedoughmore/Doonbeg beach facebook page.

Figure 6.4: A meme posted to the "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach" Facebook page on 06/06/2017.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Presentation of topic

This thesis investigates the intimacies that develop between surfers and waves through the forces which animate the land, sea, and air along the Irish Atlantic coast. With a focus on specific Irish surfer-wave relationships, it describes the particular manner in which humans are brought into relations with nonhuman aspects of the surfing environment, drawing out the affective, social, and political implications of making lives in salt water. It also demonstrates how human-human relationships are cultivated, re-expressed, and otherwise transformed as they move between land and sea.

I frame this analysis as a departure from two broad and related traditions of surf scholarship and anthropology. The first concentrates on the famously ecstatic experience that surfers report is to be gained from moments of proficient practice among good quality waves (Brown & Ford, 2006). Such analyses tend to be situated within surfer psychology and describe surfing aesthetically as a rejection of the banality of late-modern life. This emphasis on the surfer-subject generally comes at the expense of an understanding of the environmental conditions such as waves, winds, tides, and so on, of which developing knowledge of, and intimacy with, are central aspects to becoming surfers. It also ignores the fact that these moments are few and surrounded by frustrating surfs in a practice that is very often itself experienced as banal. The second tradition is that which describes surfing, surfers, and/or the beach/coast as peripheral or liminal. Deriving from semiotic analyses of the beach and surfing (e.g. Corbin, 1994; Fiske, 1989), depictions of the spaces and practices of surfing as liminal (defined fully in section 1.3) portray it as something other than everyday life, where "off-beach, normal" (Fiske, 1989, p. 43) rules of sociality are suspended. I claim that to describe surfing and the beach as liminal is to take a perspective from outside surf culture. For surfers, the 'home break' is not peripheral, but rather one of the centres of their lives; the activities that take place here do so not under conditions of ritual separation, but rather are strictly regulated by Irish surf-specific rules of hierarchy and etiquette. I will argue that, for surfers, to become *alienated* from the coast or the practice is to become liminal.

Becoming a surfer is a cosmic, alchemical project. It is cosmic in the sense that the practice (and its anthropological explanation) necessarily casts humans across oceans and up into storms. They travel through the tides to the moon and to the sun with the passage of day and night, and the blowing of the wind. Explanations regarding use-value of waves, the politics of surfing life and interaction with the non-human environment can be made stronger once founded on the cosmic principles which drive surfing. It is alchemical in the sense that it harnesses these energies of unimaginably vast and varied origins to create something precious – bodies, environments, possibilities, intimacies, experiences – from the raw materials of sand, salt, water, human flesh and technology, seemingly incapable of such a synthesis. The whole is very much irreducible to the sum of its parts. When one asks surfers what makes their practice so special, one is rarely told that it has anything to do predominantly with meeting friends, the competitive aspect, or getting fit. Instead, surfers generally communicate that it involves getting to know waves or being in the ocean. The relationship between surfers and the ocean is unique and I take this as an analytical starting point. My central theoretical claim is that surfers, through technical, corporeal, psychical, and symbolic means are transformed into channels for Oceanic energy. As surfers learn to act proficiently in the littoral environment, they produce certain knowledges, bodies, affinities, affects, risks, and rules of social engagement that together comprise the ecology of surfing. Accordingly, to apply ecological thought to surfing it will be necessary to develop an analytical account not only of the things/entities that exist in relations, but most importantly the Oceanic energy which creates and maintains those relations.

As Irish surfers develop relations with Irish waves, these relations also produce a set of alienations that inhibit other potential relations. These include other practices and bodies which one may assume to be similar to surfing and which share surfing's environment (bodyboarding, wind-surfing, and sea-kayaking, for example), and others which *appear* almost identical to surfing but are reproductions removed from the ocean (such as flo-riding[1] and artificial-wave surfing). Chapters two

[1] Flo-riding is a board-borne practice that takes place on a purpose built concrete wave. Powerful water jets are sprayed up and over the wave and then practitioners ride a stubby wooden skim board in what appears to

and five will discuss how the cultural hostility towards these practices emerges due to the fact that these alternative modes of "surfing" compete for cultural and physical space with "real" (as my informants describe it) surfing and invite those unworthy to illegitimately channel Oceanic energy, while the latter threaten to interrupt the relationship between surfing and the ocean.

Finally, these relations also have the potential to mobilise political action in defence of surfing environments (Anderson, 2004; Laviolette, 2006). When surf breaks and coastal areas are threatened by development or pollution, surfers may rally to defend their surf breaks. In doing so, they provide arguments predicated upon understandings of environmental processes drawn from the specificity of surfing practice. However, each surfer tends to overlook the fact that surfing itself is a keenly polluting activity. When this fact is acknowledged, it is often with a shrug of the shoulders - each individual surfer must get their waves. As such there is an interesting relationship between surfing and environmentalism. This is clearly significant to the subject matter of this thesis, but also beyond it in the context of contemporary ecological research. To conduct such research at the moment is to do so at a time when human implication in the environment has never been so widely acknowledged or treated with so much alarm. In chapter six I discuss how an environmental dispute can be used to critique anthropology's role in explaining human ecologies *and* protecting the environment.

Tim Ingold has claimed that "as terrestrial mammals, we humans stake out our differences on the land; the sea, however, is a great dissolver – of time, of history, of cultural distinction" (Ingold, in Pálsson, 1991, p. x). An anthropological examination of the everyday lives of Irish surfers challenges such a claim. It is my hope for this thesis that it does my informants the justice of demonstrating the many ways that it might.

be a simulation of surfing but what I am told is more like snowboarding but sufficiently different from both to make comparison easy.

1.1 Surfing clear of subject-oriented and liminal approaches

Much of the literature that examines surfing as a relationship between people and the environment does so in a manner which presents it as *extraordinary, individualist, aesthetically-oriented*, and engages largely with *climactic moments of intensity* that exist in proficient practice upon good waves (Poirer, 2003; Stranger, 1999, 2011). Such analyses tend to class surfing as escapist (see Duggan, 2012, for example) – "a mode of liberation from the entrapments of everyday life" (Ferrell, 2005), and by extension cast the beach, the coast and waves as liminal, extraordinary spaces away from the terrestrial centres of 'regular' human sociality (Fiske, 1989). Such an understanding disallows the possibility that surfing might alternatively be understood as an everyday activity – an integrated part of the life-making process and in which coastal areas become the intimate, often banal, homes of the surfers who make their lives around them. I believe this type of analysis derives from an overemphasis on the climactic moment of standing on one's board while surfing good quality waves, examining it in dislocation from the constellation of other practices that make up surfing (including the vast majority of days spent surfing in underwhelming, frustrating conditions), from an overemphasis on proficient practitioners to the relative neglect of beginner surfers and of lifelong processes of enskillment, and also from the dislocation of individual surfers from practice groups and especially from the environmental context. Alternatively, I intend to argue theoretically and ethnographically for an understanding of surfing that emphasises its position in the *ordinary* and the *everyday*, *the social* nature of practice, the *corporeally-oriented* process of becoming surfer, and the *processual, developmental* nature of the surfing experience.

In doing so I will bring ecological thought to bear upon surfing, and vice-versa. By ecological thought I mean that which examines relations between humans and their environment and founds analysis and explanation on the at-least methodological premise that things are, fundamentally, relations; "hence, there are no core essences, no elementary categories antecedent to relations. Things do not enter into relations; they are made up of and inhere in relations" (Venkatesan, et al., 2013, p. 304). Simply to allow an ecology-concept to remain at that level of flux and abstraction would

be to produce an explanation of social and worldly phenomena that were so homogenous and blurry as to render it analytically flaccid. Even ecologies need shape, as do the relations that populate them. This literature review proceeds as follows: In Sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 I discuss the shortcomings in subject-oriented and liminality-based analyses of surfing. In Section 1.4 I discuss how these analytical issues are overcome by adopting a specific ecological approach which contains a relational logic inspired by the nature of relations between Irish surfers and their environments, specifically that becoming surfers entails instigating corporeal, psychical and environmental transformations that transform humans into channels of Oceanic energy. Section 1.5 describes how such an ecology is productive of bodies, technologies, knowledge, and politics.

1.1.1 Aesthetics, risk and the individual in surf studies

Subject-oriented approaches tend to present surfing as an exploration/exultation of the self, usually with a focus on a representation of the intense, ineffable experience that is well storied as lying at the heart of surfing. Stranger (2011), for example, claims that "the fact that the ecstatic experience remains the focus of surfing subculture is due to the primacy of an aesthetic orientation" (p. 13). This aesthetic orientation is, apparently, "the postmodern incarnation of a dialectical struggle evident since ancient times between aesthetic and rational imperatives" (p. 9), through which contemporary (sub)cultural groups tend to reflect characteristics taken in differing degrees from each side of this binary opposition (hedonic, immediate, experience-oriented are characteristics of the aesthetic; pious, measured, thought-oriented are characteristics of the rational). Under such an understanding, pursuits such as surfing are understandable as 'technologies of the self' which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

There is nothing incorrect about such an analysis; surfers indeed are insistent that their practice affects transformations bordering on the spiritual. They do, however, promotes an understanding of surfing experiences and processes as relations internal to the acting subject – surfing becomes an activity which largely takes place within the subject/self/soul. By attempting to represent the experience itself, such psychologically inclined analyses have generated concepts such as 'flow' or 'autotelic experiences' to describe the transcendent immediacy induced by tasks that require deep attention, but without becoming so intense as to be overwhelming; "it is not boring...at the same time, it does not produce anxiety...poised between boredom and worry, the autotelic experience is one of complete involvement of the actor with his activity. The activity presents constant challenge, there is no time to get bored or to worry" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.36). This "autotelic experience" is one that is undertaken for its own sake – it does not have any motive other than its own enjoyment. Under conditions of flow, conscious thought shrinks to a point, be it a specific muscle movement, or survival, or the execution of something intellectually consuming (Csikszentmihalyi's own example is playing chess). Accordingly, Csikszentmihalyi claims that climbers do not climb in order to reach the top, it is in fact the other way around; they reach for the summit in order to climb, and to relish in the more intense and meaningful present which the activity creates (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). There are certainly parallels to be found between activities like climbing and surfing, and moments of engrossing, immediate experience that make the practices so enjoyable. There are also, however, a great many factors outside of a surfer's psychological and bodily effort that add to the affective nature of surfing. Both flow theory and Stranger's aesthetic analysis make little use of the various nonhuman, environmental factors which structure the surfing experience. The materiality of waves, the transformative effect of equipping the surfing body, and the weight of atmosphere at a surf break – comprised of winds which toss the sea, the cold weight of a sea cliff looming over one's shoulder, and the electric tension of a crowded line-up[2] in which all surfers compete tooth and nail for the best waves – are central environmental aspects that affect the surfing experience and which require

[2] The group of surfers on the water at a particular break.

analysis outside of the conceptual and corporeal limits of surfer psychology. I contend that such understandings both shed light on the environmentally embedded nature of surfing micropolitical interactions and also describes the nonhuman energies which animate surfing bodies. Csikszentmihalyi's concept does has the benefit of being derived directly from his informants' descriptions but is difficult to import into a study of peak experience in surfing because, as will become clear throughout this thesis, fear and frustration are often present in heavy degrees as surfers attempt to surf challenging waves – there are important experiential distinctions between chess-playing on the one hand, and surfing or climbing on the other. It also restricts analysis to moments of competent, engaging practice, something I am trying to avoid in order to allow non-proficient practitioners and a whole range of secondary "surfing" activities into the analysis.

An analytical overemphasis on the empowered subject risks underemphasising the potency of the nonhuman environment, the extended and social nature of such experiences, and potentially disregards the fact that ubiquitous among practitioners of activities such as surfing, sky-diving, skiing, deep-sea diving, and climbing (among others) is the assertion that these experiences are fundamentally non-representable. Providing an anthropological explanation of the intimacy which develops between surfers and the Irish coast requires analysis of people, things, forces, materials, relationships, narratives, politics, and more. Much, therefore, takes place outside of the individual surfer which warrants analysis.

An important proto-example of such an approach is actually taken from the risk literature. In her ethnography of sadomasochism, Newmahr critiques the masculinist bias of studies of voluntary risk-taking, which "has been built on values of conventional hegemonic masculinities, including individualism, independence and self-reliance, self-control, control of one's environment, and a romantic dichotomous tension between the wilderness and civilization" (Newmahr, 2011, p. 689). Instead, she uses sadomasochistic play as an example of how a theoretical understanding of this limit or "edge" experience can shift from "a masculinist understanding of control of a situation" to "control

in a situation" (Newmahr, 2011, p. 700) that may take more than one party to construct, both socialising the limit experience and reflecting it inwards. The aim is to produce, between the self, others, and environment, an *atmosphere* of tension, one that is conductive to the game of terror and thrill. Such an approach to the study of the affective character of surfer-wave relationships is desirable for a number of reasons. First, it relocates the fleeting experience of actually surfing a wave (which lasts no longer than a few seconds) in the wider process of getting to these waves, involving all the frustration, fear, and excitement that themselves become part of the intensity of surfing. Secondly, it clearly relates the experience to the materiality of the environment and the action of others – an ecological aspect that is usually lacking in psychological and aesthetic studies of surfing. There are essential environmental aspects to the production of subjectivity and practice in surfing and much is to be gained by allowing analytical attention to remain between surfers and their environment.

Academic characterisations of the surfer-subject would therefore gain by being properly situated in the context of practice, that is, at the coast. As anthropologists we need to take care, however, in choosing the analytical tools that we use to examine surfing as an emplaced practice. In the following section I discuss my concerns with the representation of the beach, surfing and surfers as extraordinary when for my surfing informants these places and practices are alternatively large parts of everyday life, the foundations upon which their social and cultural lives take place.

1.1.2 Liminal surfing

Irish surfers make their lives along the waves, reefs, and sandy beaches of the Irish Atlantic coast. In practice they become "water people," for whom "the sea is their home, their hope, their past and their future" (Anderson, 2016, p. 66). The sea and coast become the locations of (sub)cultural production for groups of these people, as global surf culture is given an Irish twist. A distinctly surfing mode of sociality with its own system of hierarchy, etiquette, and relationships with other (non)humans also develops here. In short, surfing lives have the littoral environment as their centre.

In contemporary popular literature that revolves around the beach and surfing, there is a tendency towards romanticism. Surfing is often represented as a care-free practice of "pure escapism" (Duggan, 2012. See also Corbin, 1994) replete with narratives of lives on the sea full of "stories of adventure, self-discovery, of daring rescues and exotic destinations" (Brown & Humberstone, 2016b, p. 18. See also Moitessier, 1974; Watson, 2010). Similarly, the beach and coast are sometimes presented as idyllic, nostalgic locales of cherished memories;

> "Rollers on the beach, wind in the pines, the slow flapping of herons across sand dunes, drown out the hectic rhythms of city and suburb, time tables and schedules. One falls under their spell, relaxes, stretches out prone. One becomes, in fact, like the element on which one lies, flattened by the sea; bare, open, empty as the beach, erased by today's tides of all yesterday's scribblings." (Lindbergh, 1955, quoted in Lencek & Bosker, 1998, p. xvii).

Ethnography of lives spent surfing the Irish coast reveals an alternative discourse, however, one in which the drudgery of cold dawn paddles and disappointing conditions are impressed on the enquirer and worn as a badge of pride. The romanticised seashore and surfing of popular literature is not the lived Irish seashore but rather a seashore that is visited and remembered. At the everyday level of Irish surfing, the storms, floods, inappropriate winds, accidents, and near misses populate the stories that surfers tell themselves and others.

Perhaps it is difficult for a 'terrestrially-informed' (Anderson, 2012) anthropology and geography to theorise the beach and surfing as centres of human lives. When analysed with cultural concepts that have been developed to study land-based human societies (where they are 'normally' found), the beach might seem peripheral, being removed from the centres of culture that are towns and cities. Popular representations such as those described above also feed into this tendency. From the point of view of terrestrial cultural concepts, the sea appears as pure wilderness – Nature with a capital 'N' – and the beach an anomalous space of the in-between because "it pushes the cultural as far as it can go towards Nature" (Fiske, 1989, p. 56).

Liminality is one such concept drawn from terrestrial anthropology which has been used to analyse what some have understood as the presence of the in-between in surfing. Coined by Arnold Van Gennep in *Rites of Passage* (1960), liminality originally refers to a social, temporal, and physical space that ritual subjects come to occupy during certain rituals. In liminal states, "the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" (Turner, 1983, pp. 127-128) which strips initiands of their previous social identities and, having come to "feel nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured" (Thomassen, 2006, p. 322) through carefully choreographed ritual action and symbolic manipulation, the initiand can be 'reborn' – child becomes adult, novice becomes master, etc. – a change of social status affected by ritual means (Turner, 1969). More recently liminality has been exported from the study of ritual to analyse periods of great social change more generally, such as the 'boom and bust' experienced in Ireland in the 1990s and 2010s respectively (Szakolczai, 2014), and also the uncertain, unsettling feeling of not-quite-belonging experienced by refugees and the homeless (Couch, 2017) or political exiles (Siganporia, 2016), among others.

Surfing is very often characterised as liminal in academic studies for a number of reasons. Patrick Laviolette describes surfboards (and by extension the coast) as liminal objects because of their position and development in "a shifting transitory zone between land and sea" which facilitate "altered states of cognitive and corporeal perception" (Laviolette, 2016, p. 126, also see Varley, 2011, for a comparable study of sea kayakers). For others too surfing is made liminal because of its location. Anderson argues that the beach is a liminal space because it is "not adequately defined simply by the language and concepts traditionally used to describe the marine or the terrestrial" (Anderson, 2016, p. 67). It is an in-between, resisting straightforward categorisation and thus epistemic control. I wholeheartedly agree that it is no straightforward exercise for anthropology to categorise the coast, except I would still urge caution in wielding the concept of liminality for exactly that reason – perhaps as a terrestrially-developed concept it is inadequate for the analysis of a culture which takes the coast as its centre and has produced a wealth of environmental knowledge about this very place.

Allow me to preface my critique of the use of liminality in analyses of surfing by quoting a rather different passage by Brian Wattchow;

> "I was born within sight of the ocean, on the southern coast of Australia. The coast and sea have provided a sense of 'home' all of my life. Even when work, study and travel has left me landlocked for years, I could hear the surf pounding beyond the hard edge of the horizon and feel the distant pull of the tide" (Wattchow, 2016, p. 131).

Wattchow belongs to an Australian coast-based society and culture. This is significant. It is clear in this short passage that the coast and sea are what is central; the land is elsewhere. Perhaps for many of these Australian coastal dwellers, like Wattchow, "the outback" is what is liminal. Liminality, then, depends on perspective. When Irish surfers conduct their practice at the coast it is not a break from their "off-beach, *normal* life-style[s]" (Fiske, 1989, pg. 43, my emphasis). Rather, my informants spend years getting to know a handful of their local surf breaks intimately through the joys and frustrations of repetitive practice. It is also not the case (to paraphrase Turner) that, once board-borne, surfers interact with each other in a kind of limbo without "normal" rules of social organisation or cultural convention. Chapter two and three discuss how a very rich and complex Irish surferly sociality and politics develop on the water and around surf breaks. In short, the beach is what *becomes* normal for Irish surfers and the social rules that govern it are as conventional and significant to their lives as any that they encounter on land.

Neither is the littoral located in between the two distinct categories of land and sea from a surfing point of view as surfers blur these boundaries in practice. Contemporary methods of swell forecasting have made it so that Irish surfers first encounter their waves while away from the coast at the screens of their laptops or smartphones. They also understand and celebrate the fact that these waves are produced by powerful, invisible (from land) mid-ocean storms that push swells thousands of kilometres around the globe. Effectively, surfers sew the digital through the littoral and into the atmosphere offshore in a manner which further complicates the description of the coast as peripheral, or the separation implied by the in-between.

To analyse surfing as liminal is to do so using definitions of what is peripheral, ambiguous, normal, social, and serious which have *not* been developed through the specificity of surfing. As surfers see it, to be separated from the beach and the coast is what is odd or unsettling, a danger to the social person as the identity of surfer risks annihilation. At the beginning of my fieldwork I met Ruaidhrí, a city-dwelling Irish surfer in his late twenties who became a core informant. Early into my research he developed a mysterious injury located between his back and his chest. In the beginning it remained relatively dormant – no more than an annoyance – but suddenly it flared up, causing what he described as almost unbearable pain at times up and down the left side of his body. While injured his friends stopped discussing surfing in his presence for fear of upsetting him, but of course this also had the effect of increasing his marginalisation from surf culture. He eventually brought it under control with a regime of stretching but only after spending one full year out of the water. Towards the end of this year I discussed Ruaidhrí's injury in his absence with some of his surfing friends, as often happened. "Christ that's a long time," said one. He bowed his head, shook it and sighed, as is common in Ireland when discussing the shame of someone recently deceased. "Hopefully he'll improve soon," I offered. "'Shur' there's no guarantee he'll be able to surf ever again," his friend blurts, somewhat morbidly, but it was what we were all thinking – what all had thought privately for most of the year. What may be incorrectly analysed as a disproportionate sense of dread around that and similar conversations is understandable from a surfing cultural point of view. Being in the water is what is normal for these people. To be injured is to be removed from the water and also from surf culture itself. Ruaidhrí became a liminal figure by virtue of his *removal* from the coast, from surfboards, from his practice, and *due to* his entrapment in the terrestrial places from where the coast is normally and normatively defined as liminal. Ruaidhrí was finally 'reborn' as a surfer after tentatively testing his strength on a beginner's board one calm summer's day in 2016, an event which was marked afterwards with a celebration by his friends and some emotional words by an inebriated Ruaidhrí.

To summarise, studies which portray surfing as an internalised operation of self-exploration, catharsis, or transcendence tend to do so at the expense of an understanding of how terrestrial and

sea-borne practices and environments are woven together by surfers in the production of surf sociality and culture (to be described fully through the ethnography that follows this chapter). To emerge from the surfer-subject is to arrive in the environmental specificity of the littoral in analysis. I argue for a departure from characterisations of surfing places, practices and people as liminal for a similar reason: to allow surfers themselves to define what/where/who is culturally 'extraordinary' provides an opportunity for anthropology to understand the relationship between surfers, surf culture, and surfing places on surfers' own terms. If the littoral is a liminal space, is it so because it is culturally defined as so, and if so, whose culture is doing the defining (and are they largely surfers or non-surfers)? Or alternatively is it liminal because something about the very nature of the space induces liminal experiences. This would be to argue that the littoral is *essentially* liminal. Again, however, this can certainly not be considered as given from a surfing point of view, and I will argue throughout the thesis that this is not the case.

There is certainly plenty of research that suggests many European cultures have considered the coast and oceans as more or less peripheral, dangerous, and perhaps liminal at some time throughout their histories. Before they were celebrated as spaces of pleasure in the Western world they were "portals of entry for death, in the guise of virulent plagues and hostile invaders…anxiety-ridden strips of no man's-land where…Europeans first set eyes on others who, though like them, were yet utterly alien" (Lencek & Bosker, 1999, p. xxi). If such a space – either the pleasurable former or the unsettling latter – could be described as liminal, it is on the basis that it holds events, things, processes, and bodies that could be considered culturally extraordinary – something apart from everyday life. Surfing, however, is different as it transforms such a space into the home of surf culture, sociality, bodies, politics, and more. I suggest that an interesting research direction, therefore, is to investigate what it takes in the relations between people and their surroundings to *transform* what may once have been a liminal space into one that is perfectly ordinary, the centre of social and cultural lives, and in which are produced various intimacies between people and the environment. What I am suggesting, therefore, is a new anthropological focus on the relations between surfers and the sea

using concepts inspired by surfing. The next section outlines a theoretical foundation for such an investigation.

1.2 Explaining surfing ecologically

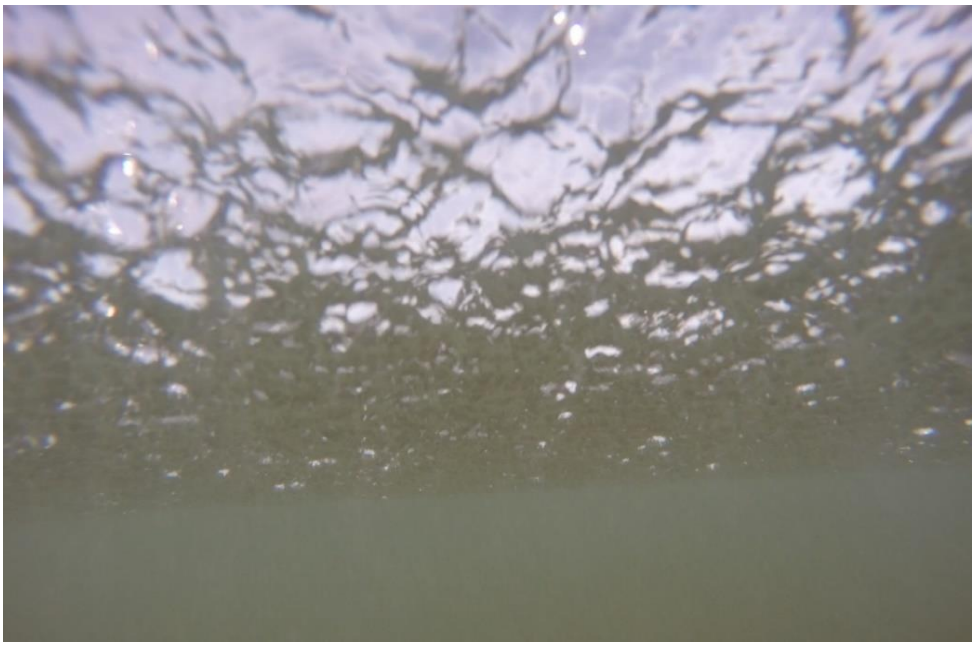
Irish surf culture is shaped by its emplacement within the littoral and its engagement with that space, but also with ocean storms and their digital projection in forecasts. The materiality of the cool salt water of the North Atlantic and its disposition towards a particular style of animation – very often animated but rarely in a manner which a surfer would deem to be of excellent quality – is also a defining feature of Irish surfers' narratives about their waves and their relations with other surfers around them. An ecological approach to surfing does not simply analyse surf culture and social relations as taking place "on top" of these waves. Rather, it admits them into social analysis as "generative and agentive *co-constituent*[s] of relationships and meaning", no longer "*object[s]* of social and cultural production" (Krause & Strang, 2016, p. 633).

Given my analytical emphasis on relations between Irish surfers and waves, this aspect of ecological thought is clearly desirable. Chapter two will begin to outline how the materiality of surf breaks coupled with the specific mode of interaction developed in surfing produces a competitive, intense form of sociality through which surfers understand their social position relative that of others. In producing an anthropological analysis of the relationship between surfers and the sea, however, more than waves begin to matter. The atmospheric movements that create them also come to bear upon surfer sociality, both in the sense of affectively texturizing social interactions but, more importantly, because surf etiquette emerges as social methods of organising the relationship between board-borne human movements and atmospheric movements at sea. Personality types also emerge from the various relations of humans and nonhumans in the littoral. They refer to how a surfer behaves on the water: "A charger," for instance, is someone who surfs anything of any size, and is often just as wild on land. It is not particularly difficult to collect data on the affective nature of place

in surfing for one main reason – surfers are very vocal about how their environment is making them feel (scared, stoked[3], etc.) and are visibly physically affected by their activities.

In short, an examination of relations between surfers and the sea *must* not theorise the sea as a mere setting but rather as a nexus of relationships of which surfers are one part and in which multiple nonhuman aspects play important roles in producing surfer sociality and surf culture. As such, I argue that a surfer's surroundings ought to be described as an environment. This term denotes a thoroughly interdependent and emergent relationship between humans and their surroundings. In contemporary ecological anthropology, environments are not understood as given substrates which are then populated by objects and beings. Rather, environmentally-emplaced beings emerge from their interactions with one another which also constitute the environment. "To think of environment in this sense is to regard it primarily in terms of *function,"* explains Ingold, *"*of what it affords to creatures…Reciprocally, to regard these creatures as organisms is to view them in terms of their principles of dynamic functioning" (Ingold, 2000, p. 193). In other words, "environment" is herein defined relationally in terms of the various activities and events that take place at a location between its human and nonhuman inhabitants – surfers, waves, winds, tides, sharks, and coral, for instance. Sections 1.4 and 1.5 present theory that argues exactly for such a developmental and emergent understanding of surfing bodies, technology and culture in general. Seascape, wavescape or another landscape-derived concept might also be suggested, but they lack the dynamism and interdependence of an environment. Landscape as a concept in English has its origins in 17th century European art and denotes quite a visual and distant relationship with one's surroundings (Hirsch, 1995; Tilley, 1994). The concept describes how a locale "presents itself" (Ingold, 2000, p. 193) and evokes an idea akin to 'the lie of the land.' They suggest appreciation from a distance as opposed to intimate and co-emergent interactivity.

[3] A surf term that refers specifically to the feeling of getting good waves and has become more generalised so that "I was stoked" simply means "I felt happy", useable in almost any context.



Figures 1.1 & 1.2: The materiality of salt water in animation.

An ecological approach in anthropology, on the other hand, is one that investigates "cultural adaptations to environments" (Kottak, 2010, p. 579) or, stated more generally, studies "relationships between a population of humans and their biophysical environment" (Townsend, 2009, p. 104). On the basis of definition, it seems that a study of surfing based on relationships between Irish surfers and Irish waves could fruitfully be undertaken from such a (sub)disciplinary perspective, but what difference does this make, theoretically, analytically, and methodologically? This section outlines and defends the specific theoretical orientation that I will take to produce such an analysis, explaining how it draws upon traditions in social anthropology, science and technology studies, philosophy, and ecological anthropology in the production of a specific theoretical synthesis capable of rendering the relational concepts described by surfers and evoked in their practice.

1.2.1 Becoming channels for Oceanic energy

To learn to surf is to invite environmentally-embedded corporeal, psychical and social affects upon the surfer's being and by channelling these affects surfers not only harness waves, but enmesh themselves into the energetic ecology of surfing. In this section I argue that to become a surfer is to become a channel for Oceanic energy, a particular set of environmentally-emplaced affects. Dealing with these affects in theory is a key challenge which I address here in order to describe this transformation. Affect has ended up on the anthropological agenda via an interest in human emotions which was influenced by feminist anthropology and philosophy and took root during the late 1980s (for examples see Abu-Lughod, 1986; Lutz, 1988; Myers, 1986). The anthropology of affect has come of age during the early years of the 21st century, in tandem with (and also due to) an explosion of interest in Deleuzian scholarship. Affect, for Deleuze, refers to "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. xv). By prepersonal, Deleuze means not to equate affect with emotion; rather it is a more fundamental intensity not tied to

individual subjectivity, transcending immediate experience.[4] As such it exists both "actually," and "virtually." Virtuality is a state of existent, creative potentiality; "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract," (Deleuze, 1991, p. 96). Deriving the idea from the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Deleuze draws an important distinction between what is possible and what is virtual. The possible, he argues,

> "is that which is "realized" (or is not realized). Now the process of realization is subject to two essential rules, one of resemblance and another of limitation. For the real is supposed to be in the image of the possibility that is realises…And, every possible is not realized, realization involves limitation" (ibid, p. 96).

For Deleuze, possibility is a given set of conditions that may or may not arise, while what is real is nothing more than a restricted set of these.

The virtual – also an explanation of what might become – works by a very different explanatory logic. Instead of limiting possible interactions, it extends potential relations. Whereby the possible is opposed to the real, Deleuze claims that the virtual is opposed to the actual:

> "in order to be actualized, the virtual cannot proceed by elimination or limitation, but must *create* its own lines of actualization in positive acts. The reason for this is simple: While the real is in the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual, on the other hand does not resemble the virtual that it embodies. It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization…In short, the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualised by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized" (ibid, p. 97).

[4] Anthropologists have since pointed out that the Deluzian/Spinozist distinction between affect - that transcends the subject - and emotion – which is indeed subjective - relies on a western ontology whereby emotions are indeed individual, internal experiences - a conception which is not universal to all human cultures (for such a discussion see Lutz, 2017; McCormack, 2008; Ots, 1994).

I suggest that the opposition of the virtual and the actual is a useful metaphor for thinking through affect and creativity in surfing. If surfboards, surfable waves, and surfing bodies develop, it is not because they are given in the materiality of the environment – the end result of the restriction of possibility, but rather because they emerge through a process of differentiation: surfing bodies articulate themselves differently to negotiate liquid environments; industrial materials such as polyurethane are recontextualised and reimagined to produce the technological extensions that bodies require in order to perform such negotiations (chapter four); and, in very recent years, the littoral itself is transformed, moving inland and swapping saltwater for freshwater as waves have begun to roll in artificial wave pools (chapter five). In all, surfing emerges as collection of creative acts, taking inspiration from the affective potency of environments.

I take this notion of affect as a generative and creative potential to be central to an understanding of how environments come to influence human thought, feeling and action. Some people look at a breaking wave with indifference; others with fear, excitement, and reverence. Practices such as surfing then transform these virtualities into actualities – waves and humans become surfable waves, surfers and surfing technology. Affect (so defined) is clearly related to energy and power: the transference of intensity from one body (human or nonhuman) to the next exerts an influence on how that body may (re)act. These philosophical ideas have been transported into anthropology to allow anthropologists to study the hidden power relations of sociality, such as "atmospheres, a strange connective tissue that lies between handheld devices" and "moods" (Stewart, 2017, p. 194).

Becoming a surfer in Ireland entails an everyday experience that has atmospheric affects as a fundamental aspect. Swells excite; flat periods depress; winds frustrate; tides and the coming of night alter the passage of activities in a surfer's day. That a swell might exert a greater influence on a surfer's activities than a deadline at work or the happiness of a loved one is part of the dark side of surfing but demonstrates the potency of the environment to creep into human affairs. These all act with greater

intensity the more people devote themselves to surfing i.e. the more they become surfers. The potency of the atmosphere in surf practice is significant to the anthropology of human-environment relations, not least due to the fact that it supplies the necessary geophysical conditions for surfing, but also because the anthropology of atmosphere is a quickly emerging subdiscipline which can be usefully critiqued by this context. Chapter three investigates the kind of atmospheres are encountered and produced by both surfing and anthropology, and how these can instructively be put in conversation with each other.

The ecological approach I develop here takes inspiration from Deleuzian philosophy mainly in relation to two points: 1) that practice is fundamentally creative and developmental, and 2) that it is crucial to study the underlying energies which animate them in order to appreciate their affective nature. Such an approach allows for the analysis of the social interplay between humans and nonhumans. There are, however, theoretical traditions already known to anthropology which do this. Network-analysis from science and technology studies (STS), for instance, was developed to allow for exactly this. In fact, the approach I develop here takes inspiration from the motivations for developing network analysis, but also differs from it in important ways. This section describes this theoretical formulation and explain how a surfing-inspired ecological approach might work.

STS and particularly the "Actor-Network Theory" (ANT) of Bruno Latour (1996, 2005) and John Law (2004), amongst others, is a now famous example of the contemporary effort to integrate the nonhumans which share and shape human lives into social scientific analysis. It does so through a critique of the dominant modern ontology of twentieth century social analysis, a system based on the enlightenment dualisms of "subject/object, mind/body, idea/thing, culture/nature, etc." (Venkatesan, et al., 2013, p. 304) and a hierarchical approach to the classification of beings – 'inanimate' objects on the bottom, followed by the 'lower' creatures, up through mammals, and finally with humans on top (Descola, 2013; Latour, 1993; Viveiros de Castro, 1998). ANT critiques modern ontology by refusing to treat any two things (human, rat, piece of paper, bicycle, god, etc) as being of

a different class of entity and also by proposing that any or all of these things has a similar capacity to act or to affect relationships. ANT transforms the social into a more democratic, non-hierarchical or "smooth" ontology (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) through the invention of an entirely new conceptual toolkit and analytical vocabulary – network, mediation, hybrid, flow, etc. – with which to analyse more-than-human sociality. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett, influenced by ANT, Deleuzian philosophy, and Einsteinian physics, develops a theory of matter based as much on energy as it is on materiality. She claims that "[m]ine is not a vitalism in the traditional sense; I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body" (Bennett, 2010, p. xii). With such an emphasis on energy she produces a posthuman analysis geared towards liberating things from their role as mediators in human affairs into fully-fledged actors and political subjects.

Such ANT-inspired approaches can valuably influence the study of surfing as they demonstrate that the analysis of relations between groups of surfers and their biophysical environments may benefit from the addition of categories such as digital surf-knowledge infrastructures, atmospheres (see chapter three), technologies and techniques of corporeal transformation (see chapter four), coastal bathymetry[5], and especially energy to the stock of more traditional conceptual tools of social anthropology such as power relations, kinship, rituals of social inclusion or self-transformation, and consumption. However, the 'smoothness' of the ontology is hard to reconcile with a core aspect of Irish surfers' reported experience of their more-than-human relations – what they describe as the raw power of The Ocean. This is something of which they are very wary, but also to which they are drawn. The issue is that it does not seem to be an element of their environment which they relate to, but more of a metaphysical principle which orders relations – a source of power which animates their environmental and social activities. Throughout my fieldwork my informants and surf cultural

[5] The measurement of the depth of water and (in relation to surfing) how changes in this influence the characteristics of the waves above.

literature consistently impressed upon me the importance of "respecting the ocean." When speaking of professional surfer Andrew Cotton, a surfing friend remarks;

> "I believe Andrew's respect for The Ocean is going to keep him safe. He's not reckless about it; he knows what he's dealing with. If you're going in thinking it's you conquering the ocean, then I think you're in trouble. You're not in line with the essence of what you're doing, which is something extremely humbling" (Beneath the Surface, 2016).

This "respect for The Ocean" is paid by cultivating oceanic knowledge and surfing skill in a demonstration of preparedness to face the power of the ocean and the realisation of the conditions needed to transform the human body into a channel (and not a target) for that energy.

There seems to be a metaphysical distinction between Irish surfers' immediate relations with their material environment on the one hand, and their narrative of the effects these bring about in their more general orientation to "The Ocean" on the other (which will be analysed in depth in chapters two to four). I argue that this is because when they refer to The Ocean, they are not really talking about an ocean *per se* i.e. the actual water that is the Atlantic, but rather the power or energy that it is capable of harnessing. This energy is akin to an animating principle; "the ground on which the possibility of interaction is based" (Ingold, 2011, p. 93). In the ethnography that follows this chapter I discuss how surfing is a collection of techniques that allows surfers to communicate with other surfers and with nonhumans *through* this energy, or alternatively the energy is communicated *through them*. It is in basing analysis on an ontological distinction between the relations of surfers studied by anthropology and the energies which animate them that the ecological approach taken here departs from STS network-style analyses. This approach resonates with Ingold's 'meshwork' concept, an ecology which posits an atmospheric medium (air) as an ecological substrate which provides the foundational conditions that allow relations (between living things) to take place at all. The meshwork is grounded on a metaphysical claim. He has derived immersion in air as the foundational principle from the shamanic worldview that he has encountered ethnographically in the far North and applied it to anthropological theory very successfully, but in a manner which universalises the concepts and

categories of that worldview. Recall that my departure from analyses of surfing based on liminality is motivated by the fact that they take a conceptual perspective on surfing that is formulated without the use of surfing-specific concepts and environmental/cultural understandings. It is for this same reason that I argue for the application of an ecological paradigm developed *specifically* for/from the study of Irish surfing in which relationality equates to the transfer and articulation of another's energy (the other being both human and nonhuman). Moreover, due to its specificity, I do not claim it to be universally applicable. This ecological approach remains a methodological tool to allow anthropology and specifically Irish surfing to communicate. It makes no wider metaphysical statement about how the world/human relations really are.

1.3 The ecological products of Irish surfing

This section describes some of the products of the ecology of Irish surfing, focusing on the bodies, techniques, technologies political mobilisations produced as surfers become channels of Oceanic energy, and how their emergence can be understood through and also develops themes from material culture studies.

1.3.1 Bodily-technological channels of Oceanic energy

One morning I travelled to the beach with a proficient informant and a beginner friend of his. The beginner stated his intention to buy a proficient-standard board soon so that it would take him longer to 'outgrow' the more sophisticated piece of equipment. The better surfer shot him a look of annoyance and stated solemnly; "you can't just go out there not knowing what you're doing, you need to take small steps and *learn* if you want to get anywhere, and if you don't want to drown." Essentially, a set of material relations of body, technology, and salt water needed to be put in place in order for the practitioner to progress and also to remain safe – you must respect The Ocean, as Irish surfers say.

In their study of rock-climbing, Abramson and Fletcher (2007) compare the manner in which climbing invites the threat of death upon the practitioner to ritual activity on the grounds that "rock-climbing and other extreme sports also occupy the same clan (but different lineage) as sacrifice and self-sacrifice, both of which practices require a human death or the obliteration of a symbolic substitute for the release of life-giving powers" (2007, p. 5). There is a similarly ritualistic aspect to the manner in which Irish surfing contains a set of techniques of material and corporeal manipulation which affect a transformation of the human body into a channel for Oceanic energy.

The roots of the contemporary anthropology of technology are usually traced from the work of Marcel Mauss, notably his (at first overlooked but now) highly influential essay *The Techniques of the Body* (1973). The essay describes "the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies" across different pursuits and using different tools (Mauss, 1973, p. 97). Mauss provides a long list of examples, from changes in French swimming pedagogy, to the inability of French and English soldiers in World War One to use the same sized spades, having learned their own culturally-specific techniques with different sized shovels. These "social idiosyncrac[ies]" (ibid, p. 72) create systems of rule-governed social action, learnt through engaging with different social and material environments, a system which Mauss terms the *habitus* – "the embodiment of cultural difference encoded in education" (Strathern, 1996, p. 12). The normative, step-by-step approach taken by Irish surfers upwards through technologies deemed consistently more 'advanced' is an example of such a social idiosyncrasy. The meaning of 'advanced' here is also culturally embedded and relates to the body becoming a channel. Surfboards are more or less advanced depending on their shape and their volume, with the most advanced generally being as diminutive but also as fast as possible, transforming an experience of mediation into something other (this 'other' is discussed in chapter four).

Deriving from Mauss, contemporary anthropology of technology has two main analytical features. The first is that technology tends to be understood "as a system not just of tools, but also of

related social behaviours and techniques" (Pfaffenberger, 1988, p.241. See also Lemonnier, 1986; Pfaffenberger, 1992). According to this style of analysis, within the "sociotechnical system" (McCormack, 2008) there is nothing determinative about the invention of techniques and technology simply to cover demand or to fulfil a human need. Rather, technological uptake and techniques of employment are socially specific, and also governed by rules of cultural inertia (Diamond, 1999; Pfaffenberger, 1988). In his cross-cultural study of surfing styles, Douglas Booth claims that differences in riding style which he observes around the world are due not only to the use of different boards, but also to cultural preferences. Unlike "Hawaiians who flowed with waves under nature's guidance", Californians seek to "enhance the beauty of a breaking wave," while Australians and South Africans adopt an aggressive style in which they "dance *on* the wave, attacking it from all angles and reducing it to shreds" (Booth, 1999, p. 49). Different surfing technologies and bodily dispositions therefore produce different modes of channelling The Ocean. Since this article was written, the growing popularity of both the surfing professional world tour on the one hand, and the return of more "retro" board shapes on the other has led to a situation where most line-ups worldwide contain a mixture of aggression and flow. Still, Booth's approach demonstrates how a habitus-inspired approach to technology ties tool-use to a broader social context.

The second analytical feature deriving from the Maussian idea of technology, bodies and society as comprising one sociotechnical system is that technologies – the objects themselves – do not begin and end in function and form, but in fact extend into their development, use, and failure, and the objects themselves are understood to affect and be affected by the social and cosmological principles by which they are surrounded. Coupaye, for instance, follows the yam as it is cultivated by the Nyamikum Abelam of Papua New Guinea. He finds that the yams themselves, as well as local techniques of cultivation "create a web that materialises social and cultural values, condensing networks of relations into things" (Coupaye, 2009b, p. 105). These "relations," however, do not resemble the abstract social structures of the *habitus*, which are simply embodied in the culturally-specific forms that technology takes. Rather, for Coupaye, "[a]nalyses of sociotechnical systems

demonstrate that technology is as much about the making of relations as it is about the materialisation or the objectification of successful relations" (ibid, p. 105).

For the purposes of studying the technological transformation of bodies into surfing bodies, it is crucial to recognise that this understanding of technical objects as ever-unfinished and as producers of relations could equally be applied to the body. It too emerges in the course of technical enskillment and growth. As surfers improve from novice, through intermediate and on to advanced levels, the development of different skills takes precedence at different stages. As they learn, they discover that more advanced manoeuvres call not only for a minimum level of skill, but also for the right equipment, the right wave type, and also a sufficiently strong and agile body before they can even be attempted. As such, surfing is not reducible to an abstract set of skills that are simply learnt one after the other by a human which can be imagined as separable from the skill set or the tools used. Rather, *both* the human body and its technological extensions are transformed as each skill is apprehended to differing degrees. There is much comparative literature in the anthropology of practice that demonstrates that surfing is not unique in this regard. Ingold also aptly demonstrates this point with reference to the difference between sitting cultures and squatting cultures, the former finding squatting unbearably uncomfortable, while the latter develop notched kneecaps which make the position bearable (Ingold, 1996):

> "What [this example shows] is that the actual capacities of bodily comportment that people employ, whether in movement or at rest, are properties neither of genes nor of culture, but of developmental systems…That is, they are incorporated into the *modus operandi* of the developing human body through a history of training and experience, under the guidance of already skilled practitioners, and in an environment characterized by its own distinctive textures and topography, littered with the products of previous human activity" (Ingold, 1996, p.178. See Thrift, 2003, for a similar discussion relating to the hand).

In what are very explicit examples of how learning new skills with new technology develops new human bodies, Parkhurst (2012) discusses the growing industry of human bodily technological modifications. He describes a colour-blind informant who wears a vibrating bionic eye, thereafter becoming able to "hear" colour, or another who has had vibrating magnets implanted into his fingers, creating sensations that amount to something like human sonar. In a more "traditional" field situation, Waquant (2004) evocatively discusses how the path from neophyte to experienced boxer is laid around the gym floor and the body is transformed in partnership with the material culture of the boxing gym and a sensuous, punishing training regime. To understand the evolution of skills, it is necessary "to focus on the way such [developmental] systems are constituted and transform over time" (Ingold, 1996, p. 171).

Surfing bodies and surfing technologies thus emerge through a culturally situated, interactive effort to harness the power of The Ocean. In almost every aspect of surfing practice - learning, dress, preparation, the maintenance of equipment – material culture and the body are manipulated in an organised and normative manner so as to produce a metaphysical effect: The surfer is kept safe through the maintenance of a respectful accord with the energies which animate the waves. Chapter four analyses such transformations in detail.

1.3.2 Political Mobilisations

These various socio-environmental processes also produce certain cultural politics. This is due to the fact that as the littoral is transformed from a peripheral or liminal space into the socio-cultural centre, this transformation is not just material, but also conceptual. When surfers have to fight for their right to use the spaces of surf breaks, it is with surferly understandings of coastal processes and environmental relationships that they defend their waves. Surfing and (certain kinds of) environmentalism are specifically linked, not just in Ireland but in many regions globally. Literature dealing with political activism in surfing has emphasised the relationship between activism and

identity and also between the form this activism takes and the experience of engaging with waves. Through his ethnography with *Surfers Against Sewage* (a coastal protection group that started in Cornwall but is now active on a global level as a lobby for coastal protection, marine-environmental health, and climate change), Laviolette describes how Cornish surfers' environmentalist practices are shaped by the "radical modifications in bodily practices" (ibid, p. 179) through which they encounter environmental ill-health in the form of marine pollution. Surfers expose themselves to risk, but in a skilled manner, and this shapes the surfers' response to pollution;

> "We aren't talking protection from the uncontrollable hazards you are choosing to expose yourself to, if you want to risk life and limb in a death-defying feat, go ahead, it's your choice. But, there are risks that can and should be minimised or even removed from the equation—and here we're talking sewage!" (Surfers Against Sewage campaigner, quoted in Laviolette, 2006, p. 184).

Belinda Wheaton also studies *Surfers Against Sewage* from a subcultural point of view and arrives at a similar conclusion concerning the relationship between surfing (life)style and subculturally unique forms of political action in which "the politics of identity take centre stage" (Wheaton, 2007, p. 279). In both accounts there appears to be a close relationship between on the one hand, the "practices, identities, and modes of organisation" (Anderson, 2004, p. 106) that environmental action takes, and the *narrative* of political relationships on the other. That is to say, the surfers explain their political relations through concepts derived through or are at least relatable to their practice.

During my fieldwork, a dispute erupted within a small, rural coastal community in the southwest of Ireland regarding a proposal by a local industry to build a flood defence along a particular stretch of coastline. Chapter six explores how the conceptual content of surfers' arguments against the proposal can be understood as derived through surfers' practical encounters with waves and The Ocean. This form of practically-situated political mobilisation is suggestive of the conceptual means with which people transform liminal circumstances/spaces into something other.

In anthropology, paradigmatically-located analyses of land dispute have effectively provided a description of disputes as amounting to a clash of alterity, in the sense that the foundations of dispute have been credited to the existence of an unshared, incompatible 'something' – class (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1998), symbolic systems of meaning (Bender, 2006; Jarman, 1993), ontology (Latour, 2004; Mol, 1999; Stengers, 2011), etc. – that separates disputing parties. The danger with overemphasising alterity, however, is that analysis loses sight of the many shared aspects of social life. Once again intimacy provides an interesting conceptual basis with which to examine such political activity. Whereas alterity foregrounds difference, intimacy maintains an understanding of how tension arises from the connectedness of potentially incompatible environments, practitioners, or in this case, understandings of the political relationship between people and the littoral environment. Understanding the abrasive nature of different environmental intimacies might lay the groundwork for overcoming what is divisive in dispute and in this case suggesting a line of argument that does not favour any one group but rather the environment as a whole.

1.4 The legitimacy of the anthropology of relations

It would be naïve to base a thesis on a relation while assuming unproblematically that the relation manufactured and described in this thesis as the surfer-wave relation is equivalent to, or at least legitimately represents, some sort of intimacy which exists outside of the anthropological description. This is in fact an oft-levelled critique of the structural-functionalism of early twentieth century British anthropology – that its assumption of the accessibility of relations between individuals by anthropological description, and the corresponding legitimacy of the analytical explanation "pertains to the collapse between objects and the means of anthropological description" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 116). The potential hazards of such a collapse are significant. Regarding kin relations, for instance, Edmund Leach has argued that to consider these using classic anthropological tools such as

terminology and kin diagrams runs the risk of glossing its political, demographic, and economic implications (Leach, 1961, p. 89).

Marilyn Strathern is famous for her reflexive critique of the concept of the relation. She critiques the structural-functionalist understanding of the relation as existing between individuals. From the context of Melanesian gift-giving, she suggests alternatively that rather than positing an agent at the centre of social relations, it is more correct to focus on relationships which themselves constitute people, each one "dividual" as the sum of relations of which they are a part: "Instead of relations between different units and scales, there are only relations between different kinds of relations" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 115). Relations, then, are not only external to humans, but also constitute them internally. In doing so Strathern joins Leach (and others: See also Candea, 2010) in reflecting on the limits of the concept of the relation to anthropology. The consequent postmodern critique cautions that "[a]nthropologists do not study relations between the people they study, but the relations they need to 'invent' to study those people" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 120).

It is legitimate (and probably healthy) to engage with ways of describing relations usefully without implying their equivalence with real-world phenomena. One way to do this is to use relations as methodological tools, not metaphysical claims – surfers and waves can be described *as if* they are in relation for the purposes of producing an anthropological explanation. The potential for divergence between phenomenon and representation can also be limited through analytic technique: The aim here is not to describe what the relation *is* – to essentialise, and therefore reify it. Rather, the surfer-wave relation will here be functionalised, taking note of what it *does* instead of what it *is.* To state that The Ocean 'holds surfers and waves together' is somewhat of a misrepresentation; Oceanic energy as the animating principle of Irish surferly relations, isn't like an intermediary glue holding the two things together, it is more like potential interactivity, a capacity to be affected, or a multiplication of possibilities for human and wave – this is what the relation (both the anthropological tool and the real-world intimacy) does.

1.5 Methodology

The field research for this project is based on fourteen months participant-observation conducted between August 2015 and September 2016, and intermittent follow up field research conducted between May 2017 and December 2017. The ethnographic research for this project has drawn upon the methodological philosophy of Loïc Wacquant, an ethnographer of amateur boxing. Due to the fact that boxing culture in its entirely is produced through boxing (the physical activity), Wacquant stresses that its study demands that the ethnographer should "to the greatest extent possible…put his own organism, sensibility, and incarnate intelligence at the epicentre of the array of material and symbolic forces that he intends to dissect" (Wacquant, 2004, p. viii). Only in this manner will the researcher be capable of accounting "anthropologically for a practice that is so intensely corporeal, a culture that is so kinetic, a universe in which the most essential is transmitted, acquired, and deployed beneath language and consciousness" (2004, p. xi). For Wacquant, to study boxing means to subject oneself to the punishing weekly training regime of an amateur boxer, and to fight in the ring. To ethnographically represent the corporeal relationship between the developed between the boxer, the materiality of the gym, and through it with other boxers, it is necessary not only to try boxing, but to become a boxer. Given the focus of my project on the environmental embeddedness of the surfer-practitioner and the premise that surfer sociality is predicated on a shared intimacy with certain waves, this is a good methodological starting point.

The project's emphasis on *intimacy* was particularly suggestive of a methodology based around deep participation in which I too cultivated such intimacy with these waves. This methodological approach is related to a conception of the ethnographer-as-apprentice which has been described by various recent ethnographers of practice (Pálsson, 1994; Stoller, 1989, 1997). One of the difficulties of researching surfing is that surfers find it notoriously difficult to describe the feelings or experiences generated in practice. "You'll just have to try it" is the clichéd response.

Therefore, the methodological approach was designed specifically to cultivate a relationship between the researcher and waves to a degree that Irish surfers themselves report as being crucial to their practice. These "types of substantial experiential sensations which largely exist outside the linguistic realm" (Laviolette, 2016, p. 1) are central to the motivation for the reproduction of surfing (and surf culture generally). I found that developing such intimacy through "deep training" aided my understanding of my informants' social interactions with each other and waves, helping me to 'ask the right questions' later on in the research.

Such an approach meant learning to read swell forecasts and listening to informants obsess endlessly over minute changes in wind direction or intensity. It meant tagging along as they rose before dawn and scouted fifty kilometres of coastline in order to find one particularly suitable wave that might appear on a given day, drawing on their collective knowledge of how swells, winds, and rock come together to form the waves which they come to revere. A commitment to deep training as opposed to experimentation is ubiquitous in the study of board-borne activities. Both Belinda Wheaton (2000) and Mark Stranger (1999, 2011), academics of windsurfing and surfing respectively, spent at least twelve months practising amongst other enthusiasts on a weekly basis, and other researchers of surfing and snowboarding have also suggested the prime importance of intense practice (Poirer, 2003; Olive, 2013). As far as the ethnography of surfing is concerned, a commitment to training is also essential for reasons of access. At surf breaks, talented surfers tend only to interact with surfers of a minimum skill level. Beginners are usually ignored, if not cursed for being in the way. What is more, many surf breaks demand a certain skill level if they are to be surfed (and therefore studied from an intimate point of view). For all these reasons, it is desirable that ethnographers of surfing might commit significant effort to learning to surf.

As such, participant-observation predominantly took place on the water and around surf breaks. Due to the fact that surfing in Ireland is dependent on a very fickle set of local conditions (which will be described in the next chapter) and the temperamental weather of the North Atlantic, it

is necessary to travel weekly between different surfing regions to find the appropriate waves. Participant-observation for this project took place between three of these regions: West Cork in the south-west of Ireland, Clare in the west, and Sligo/Bundoran in the northwest (see figure 1.1 below). Within each region there is anywhere from 10-15 (West Cork) to 20-30+ (Clare) breaks that are chosen in relation to the prevailing conditions. Irish surfers often surf numerous different breaks each week and sometimes each day.

Figure 1.3: A map of Ireland including the three main regions (West Cork, Clare, and the Sligo-Bundoran area) around which ethnography took place.

At face value, then, this may appear to be a multi-sited research project, but such a characterisation would miss the reality of the field situation. Travelling (physically and digitally) is not so much an activity that happens between instances and locations of surfing, but rather makes up

most of what Irish surfers do. The average surf in Ireland lasts roughly one and a half hours but the average return car journey undertaken in order to surf is closer to three-five hours. Living right at the coast in a surfing region is no guarantee that travel will not be necessary, as winds or swells can become inappropriately established for weeks at a time, shutting down all the "home breaks" in the process. What is more, contemporary Irish surfers are also always connected to other locations, group of practitioners, and swell/weather conditions via their smartphones. The conversations on these journeys to and from the beach are often punctuated by phone calls from other groups relaying a report of the surf elsewhere. Alternatively, one of the passengers might play the role of co-pilot, looking up various swell charts and webcam images on their phone and directing the driver accordingly. The field of surfing social relations does not consist of bounded regions dotted along the coast but is rather a mesh of physical and digital paths across the faces of waves, country roads, websites, phone calls, coastal areas, and city centres. This methodological orientation is also desirable given the theoretical approach outlined above. The ecological approach is a response to analyses of surfing that embed the practice/practitioners in a clearly defined, perhaps bounded physical/temporal/psychical space. Alternatively, by investigating the various more-than-human and ex-littoral elements that produce Irish surfing I aim to foreground connectivity and multi-modal movements of people and information, precisely on what a methodological orientation towards a field of movement, as opposed to a field of connected locations is based. As such, the field described herein has more in common with those of a type of anthropology which takes movement as a fundamental condition of the human life studied, such as contemporary work based on migration and mobility (Adey, 2006; Braidotti, 2012; Clifford, 1997; Elliot, et al., 2017; Mandel, 2008; Massey, 2004).

On-the-water ethnography was undertaken as often as possible. This amounted to (on average) three to four times per week in the spring and autumn (when days are still long and storms are still/starting to produce swells), twice per week during the winter (when swells are not an issue, but short daylight hours and inappropriate winds restrict practice), and once or twice per week during the summer (when the North Atlantic is at its most settled). As stated above, on-the-water

ethnography can always be supplemented by ethnography-in-transit. It is in cars that surf trips are planned, practice is debriefed, informants' relationships are reproduced, and surfing practice generally is extended through all these secondary activities. In fact, the car itself became a central aspect to the research. It was only once the ethnographer had established a group of surfers with which to share trips to the beach that the ethnography really began. To research Irish surfing, I found it necessary to become tied to one particular group and their close friends through the reciprocal relations of car-pooling to the beach, and thus a group of core informants was established by the car-load.

The journey to and from the beach was used as an opportunity to conduct informal interviews which usually lasted no more than fifteen or twenty minutes and covered particularities of practice that arose or were anticipated to arise during the course of the day's surfing. These were continued more formally at the homes of core informants once I had become sufficiently established in their social circle and once key research themes began to emerge. Three formal interviews of roughly 45 minutes were also undertaken with figureheads of Irish surfing – a professional surfer/environmental activist; an ex-professional surfer/academic working on the link between oceans and health; and a high-ranking member of the Irish Surfing Association.

During the course of practice, three further sites of note were visited. The first is a boardshaper's workshop in Clare. I accompanied an informant as he went to have some significant damage to his board repaired, although I ended up back here myself for the same reason. Speaking to the shaper on these occasions (and on the water numerous times thereafter) led to some important insights regarding the manner in which boards are shaped both for the particular body and for the particular wave. The second is *Surf Snowdonia*, an artificial wave park in Wales. This trip was undertaken to provide the participant-observation and interview opportunities needed to research how the commodification of surfing is transforming the surfing environment in a manner which is challenging the necessary relation between surfing and the ocean for the first time in the history of

the practice (producing some of the alienations between surfers and certain environments/other groups of surfers discussed previously). The third is not so much a site as it is an alternative surfing region. In what was supposed to be a break from thesis writing, in the summer of 2015 I accompanied one informant for three weeks of a surf trip that he took to Nicaragua. As it happens, however, data gathered here regarding what constitutes serious surfing and core aspects of surfing identity and subjectivity informed the analysis of what constitutes a "proper" relationship with waves and have ultimately made their way into the thesis in one form or another.

Finally, the participant-observation and interviewing were supplemented by an immersion in cultural media. *Carve* and *Wavelength* are British surf publications that generally carry at least one article per issue based in Ireland or are written by an Irish professional surfer. I collected these for most of the duration of the entire PhD. More important than these, however, are the thousands of short video clips and mini-articles that populate surfing social media on a weekly basis. While most of informants no longer purchased or read print-magazines, many digested this online content, sharing and discussing the best of it at length each week. This is a key connection between Irish surfing and surf culture globally.

The informants for this project were predominantly between the ages of twenty-five to fifty-five and overall roughly seventy to one hundred individuals were involved in the research (both male and female, predominantly Irish but not exclusively so). Different social classes were also well represented. Middle class urbanites, rural farmers, and workers all populate the Irish surfing community, and all comprise the data for this project. Rural farmers (this is a recognised social class in Irish demography) were outnumbered by the other two, which were split relatively equally. My core informants were aged between twenty-six and thirty-five, consisting of roughly fifteen to twenty individuals. They were also all male. This is of course problematic, and here this project's lack of direct focus on gender as an analytical category must be both acknowledged and defended in equal measure. First it is worth restating that a minority of informants were female, and female voices appear in the

ethnography that follows, but masculinity and femininity are not categories upon which the consequent analysis is based, for three reasons. The first, and weakest, of these is due to the gendered realities of Irish surf breaks-as-fieldsites. Over the course of the fourteen months participant observation all over Ireland, I shared the water with no more than ten female surfers and conducted extensive ethnography with only four of these. There are many more than ten female surfers in Ireland, however, which I could have specifically sought out away from the coast as opposed to waiting to meet them during my daily participant-observation. I have essentially followed Stranger's (2011) methodological approach to studying surfing, in which he seeks out more men than women (28:3) in order to retain the gender bias of surfing in his data although admittedly my imbalance is more accidental than it is deliberate. While this may produce a "fair" representation of the field studied, it also has to be acknowledged that in a context of masculine hegemony a lack of specific analysis of gender risks reproducing the conditions whereby masculinity remains hegemonic. This is a fair concern, and in the conclusion to this thesis I describe how the findings of this project could be used as the basis for a future study on gendered differences in the intimacy developed between surfers and waves. I also point the reader to the very extensive existing literature on related topics in surf studies such as masculinity (Evers, 2005; 2013), the reproduction of female oppression in the material culture of surfing (Booth, 2001) and in surfing cultural literature (Henderson, 2001), and the value of surfing as a tool for the promotion of women's rights (Britton, 2015, 2016; Poizeau, 2014). The following section will summarise this introduction and outline how the thesis develops chapter by chapter.

1.6 Summary and thesis outline

What is specific and unique about Irish surf culture is the deep and intimate relationship that surfers develop with parts of the Irish coastal environment and the specific forms that surfer sociality takes

around Irish waves. Analyses based on the surfer-subject isolate the character from the wider ecology of relations between materials, bodies, places, and politics energised by the characteristic dynamisms of the coast. Also problematic is the use of liminality in the analysis of surfers and their coastal activities/spaces. This implies that these activities remain something other, peripheral, or extraordinary to the everyday social lives of Irish surfers when in fact they form their centres – it is other aspects of life/types of people that become peripheral. To counter both of these tendencies in the literature I have outlined an ecological approach which asserts that the littoral becomes the centre of Irish surfing life as surfers are transformed into channels of Oceanic energy. This has transformative effects involving the manipulation of material culture and the body. Such transformations have ontological affects. Such practice produces affinities among surfers, other surfers and environments but also alienations between surfers and other seemingly similar (or very different) groups and environments. Finally, such environmental intimacies have the potential to produce political mobilisations which are shaped by environmentally-embedded, practice-specific concepts.I have defended my methodological approach on the basis that it is designed specifically to engage with the reported intimacy between Irish surfers and the Irish coast.

Chapter two opens the ethnographic description by beginning with the surfable wave. This chapter aims to critique the description and analysis of the littoral-as-liminal-space when it is engaged by surfers. In an analytical move inspired by purveyors of a certain "ontological turn" (Henare, et al., 2007; Holbraad, 2016; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017), it begins with the presumption that anthropology might learn something important about surfers and surfing by presuming it is unfamiliar with whatever surfers talk about when they refer to waves. This approach to waves opens the possibility of a definition drawn from the particularities of surfing practice, providing an environmental-conceptual basis for the critique of liminality-based approaches to surfing and the littoral. I will argue that the littoral is not liminal, but rather intimately connected to both ocean and land through surfers' knowledge practices. Similarly, these are not spaces are not best conceived as lacking, interrupting, or otherwise transforming 'normal' rules of sociality (as liminal spaces and indeed the coast have been

theorised as affecting) but are rather the locations of a very rich set of Irish surf-specific rules of social and political engagement that are normal in that context.

Chapter three builds on these insights in order to examine how Irish surfers' political engagements at surf breaks unfold within and also produce certain atmospheres. Considering that Irish surfing subjectivities form in relation to the land and sea that they inhabit, and also the other surfers that they engage with in those spaces, I develop an analysis that describes the communication of energy from the oceanic, through the meteorological and material, and into the social in which surfer subjectivities emerge. This is used as an argument for the emphasis on environmental continuity of the ecological approach.

Chapter four turns its attention to surfer's bodies and technologies. Becoming a surfer is a process in which the body undergoes physical and technological transformation in order to become a channel for Oceanic energy. Influenced both by contemporary anthropology of technology and the anthropology of situated learning, analysis begins from the assumption that technology is a system not just of tools, but also of related social behaviours and techniques" (Pfaffenberger, 1988, p.241), and these tools are not discrete and bounded objects but rather mature and develop along with the body of their users (Coupaye, 2013; Ingold, 2015). I use the concepts of growth and hybridity from ecological anthropology and science and technology studies to investigate how surfboards and surfing bodies emerge as aspects of a single 'corporeality' in practice. The surfboard comes to bear human features, while the surfing body is one that has a board as part of its material composition. I use this analysis to demonstrate the skilled material manipulations (affected by both human and nonhuman) to produce the surfing body as a hybrid channel of Oceanic energy.

These three chapters detail the ecology through which intimacy is produced between Irish surfers and Irish waves by describing surfable waves and their liquid emplacement, the materiality of the constituent parts of these surfer-wave relationships, and the energetics of their creation and persistence, placing skilled, technologized, affected and affective surfing bodies in a dynamic liquid environment, or to put it differently, offering a description of becoming surfers. Chapter five examines

"artificial waves" – an emerging technology that creates surfable waves in purpose-built pools which the user pays to surf – as an example of one such environment containing such practitioners. As of the time of writing, there is only one of these in the world that is open to the public, located in Wales, although dozens have had planning approved and the first competitive surfing events are to be held on some of these in 2018. This chapter describes the manner in which surfers, as energy channels, find themselves alienated from the superficially similar environment of the wave pool on the basis that it dislocates them from Oceanic energy and distorts the strict coast-based rules of surf sociality. They equally find themselves alienated from 'surfers' who learn here on the basis that such practice invites the unworthy to develop skills which might tempt them to illegitimately go and act through Oceanic energy at the coast.

Chapter six examines how surfer-waves intimacies mobilise political action through an analysis of events that take place along the Irish coast when two different human-wave relationships clash. It is based on a dispute over a (then) proposed sea wall in County Clare, Ireland, which was to be constructed along a surfable beach in order to protect an adjacent golf course from erosion and flooding. Surfers and environmentalists claim that this will damage the beach ecology and also the wave. Waves for this group protect the coast creating and maintaining a dune system at the beach. The developers and some locals claim that the wall is needed to prevent erosion and to protect property and jobs. For them the waves are the agents of coastal destruction, not protection. By continuing the comparative method of the previous chapter, the analysis here juxtaposes the two concepts of protection arising through different relationships with waves. It ties these concepts to the terms of alternative practices, demonstrating that the surfers' eco-political mobilisation takes place along 'surferly' lines and is organised around 'surferly' understandings of environmental processes. The discussion ends with a consideration of the political and environmental implications of local practices on the one hand, and of anthropological analysis on the other.

Chapter 2: Waves and Breaks: Becoming intimate with Irish waves

2.1 Introduction

In an attempt to understand surfing – to get a real feel for the types of relationships its practice warrants developing with other people, things, and with the world in general, waves are a good place to start. Whipped up by the winds as they travel across oceans, waves are driven towards distant shores where they will eventually break in the shallow waters surrounding the coastlines of the world. At some stage on the Hawaiian Islands prior to the arrival of Europeans, the islanders realised that if they cut pieces of timber long and flat enough and paddled out to meet the breaking waves, they could join up with these final bursts of oceanic energy and ride them back to the shore. During roughly 200 years since the European arrival in Hawaii, and particularly during the last half century, surfing has spread to most coastal countries in the world, and with it a deep veneration for waves. To say that surfers' lives revolve around them is an understatement. Irish surfers talk endlessly about waves, hanging pictures of them on their walls and watching videos of them breaking. They go online and try to forecast their arrival and quality. They travel to the coasts of the world to surf waves and during storms they scout lesser known areas to try to find new waves. They keep some waves secret, showing them only to trusted friends, while others they broadcast widely, sharing photos of them in magazines and online. Around this seemingly mundane meteorological phenomenon there has developed a culture of practice that is both global in reach and idiosyncratic in its local forms.

This chapter critiques the notion of the littoral as liminal by using Irish surfers' varied engagements with waves and with each other through them. It is worth being explicit about how intimate relations between Irish surfers and Irish waves might be approached. Waves can be understood in many ways: from a materialist perspective they are seawater in motion, and from the point of view of meteorology they are phenomena resulting from atmospheric processes. Both of these are related, and both inform the way surfers conceive of waves, but to presume that a surfer's

wave-concept is no more than this would be ethnographically shallow to say the least. Stefan Helmreich has made a career of studying how scientific understandings of waves are produced. In *Alien Ocean* (2009) he argues that waves are not only physical phenomena, but also arise through human cultural activity – in his field they emerge from data on measurements, mapping etc. To put it another way, practical relations with waves transform the terms upon which they are understood (Anderson, 2012). Rather than presuming that the idea of a wave is well established and attempting to fit it into some kind of surfer-environment sociality, a degree of 'ontological naivety' (see Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017) will be employed. By leaving analysis open to the possibility that a "surfable wave" might be something quite different altogether than a mere movement of seawater but also having cultural aspects, it is beholden on the anthropological explanation to ensure *its* conception of waves becomes rigorous, and not the emic concept from the field. In this way the object of study – in this case the surfable wave – "is the conclusion of our work, not its premise" (Miller, 2001).

Then there are surf breaks – the places of surfable waves. These will be examined at length in section four of this chapter. Here is not the space to explain the surf break, but rather to clarify the *type* of explanation that will be offered. The "surf break" place-concept developed below relates directly to a phenomenal locale, and the lived experience of making and being made by this place is the analytical object in question. As such, this conception of place is contrasted to one that might construe the place as a metaphor for types of human activity or scholarly thought. Paul Gilroy's (1993) "Black Atlantic" is one such example. Gilroy's work is based on peoples of the Caribbean whose ancestors were brought to the islands from Africa as slaves. Gilroy found that their lives are intimately tied to this history, but social science has tended to separate the study of African communities from derivative societies on the other side of the Atlantic, largely due to the geographic separation and the terra-centric outlook of the relevant disciplines. Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" is a figuration – a virtual construct to allow for the thinking through of the experience and history of Africans on that ocean. By nuancing analysis, Gilroy transforms the Atlantic from geographical barrier to connective tissue. This is a useful tool to allow academics to rethink the boundaries of their work and surf breaks are also

used as “theory machines” (Helmreich, 2011) here, but not primarily. Surf breaks are not figurations or metaphors, they are lived, meaningful, phenomenal places in which to act and so I will attempt to evoke this lived aspect of theirs.

Place here is used in the manner developed in phenomenological anthropology, geography, archaeology (Tilley, 1994) and architecture (Buchli, 2002) during the 1990s which opposes it to an abstracted, empty space, existing prior to human (and other environmental) action. Place is “a medium rather than a container for action, something that is involved in action and cannot be divorced from it” (Tilley, 1994, p. 10). As such the materiality of place is something that mediates and influences the type of action and meaning-making that takes place within and around it, and the experience of this materiality is all important to the analysis. In his ethnography of post-Troubles Belfast, Jarman (1993) emphasises “the materiality of barbed wire and blocked views” (Bender, 2006, p. 308), and murals whose dramatic presence “may be for internal consumption within a community or may mark the edge of the territory” (ibid). The emphasis on embodiment and sensuality that is central to the phenomenological methodology has allowed anthropologists to shift the intimate ways people come to know and relate to their surroundings to the focus of the study of place relations (Allen-Collinson, 2008; Bender, 2001; Stoller, 1989; Thomas, 2006).

At the same time, to suggest that each surf break *determines* the cultural activities of surfers would be to imprison the surfers in discrete contexts, closed in upon themselves, disallowing the possibility that human activity in one place-context could transform that in another, which is clearly often the case: the industrial development of neoprene (used in wetsuits) and fibre-glass (in surfboards), for instance, when “recontextualised,” provided sufficient conditions for the creation of surf break-places in Ireland. To ascribe to a simple material determinism would be to ignore the myriad ways in which humans fill places with their own meanings and significations. Bourdieu (1970), for instance, demonstrates how his Berber informants extend the cosmological gendering of all aspects of their activity throughout their homes, and into their gardens and town, while Tilley describes the

Australian aboriginal environment as "not something 'natural' and opposed to people, but totally socialized (1994, p. 38)" as rocks, trees, rivers, animals, and winds are filled with the spirits of the ancestors. This animistic approach to place uses human meanings to transform all environmental relations into human relations (as all things are potentially human). Human activity is not merely place-bound, therefore, but also "place-*binding*" (Ingold, 2011, p. 148). While the materiality of winds, waves and surf breaks are important generators of environmental meaning, then, it would be naïve to ignore these more traditional modes of anthropological explanation in describing the relations between surfers and surf breaks.

In the analysis that follows, characterisations of the beach, coast, and waves as liminal are problematised through an ethnographic discussion of the relations between Irish waves and Irish surfers. Section two begins with an ethnographic vignette to introduce the reader to a wave, surf break and surrounding area in an evocative style to better approximate an experience of place. It then describes how the processes involved in the creation of surfable waves coupled with the knowledge practices of surfers which surround them blur the boundaries which separate littoral from ocean and land. Section three problematises the notion that the beach and surf break are necessarily spaces of relaxed/interrupted/mutated social norms, as liminal spaces are theorised to be (see Turner, 1983; Szakolczai, 2014) with a discussion of the strict rules of etiquette and prestige which govern social relations at Irish surf breaks. Section four describes a surf break as the place where waves appear and surfing happens. It examines the particularity of the process of place-making in such a dynamic context, in which environmental and human processes must be attended to in order to create a place from relational movements. This provides an example of how surfers' understandings of their environment are drawn from the specificity of their practice. As the dynamism of the littoral becomes normalised, so a lack of such dynamism experienced elsewhere becomes 'unnatural.' The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that an understanding of a practice-based activity such as surfing ought to be thoroughly situated in the environment of practice, and also generate an explanation of the practice using concepts derived from Irish surfing.

2.2 What do surfers surf?[6]

2.2.1 Introductory vignette

Seán's hand darts instinctively to grab the side of his surfboard as one of the car's tyres bounces through a pot-hole, preventing the board's nose from hitting the windscreen. One of the back seats has been lowered and four surfboards are protruding from the boot, squeezing between the two front seats with their noses pressed against the dashboard. Outside of the car to our immediate right the ground rises sharply, changing from deep, moist green to a black-brown, becoming almost vertical, when at a height of 500 metres it suddenly disappears, and gives way to flat ground – Benbulben, the flat top mountain that overlooks Donegal Bay – we're close.

Just about audible from the back of the car over the music playing from a phone is a conversation taking place in the front. Aiden and Seán are discussing the wind. It has been howling all day – 50km/h with 80km/h gusts. Depending on the wind's direction relative to the direction a breaking wave faces, it can make surfing impossible. We are en route to a wave called Darkside, and although its direction is favourable, none of us have ever surfed in wind as strong as this. Whether the quality of the wave might be affected by its intensity, or if indeed it is safe to be on the water in such conditions is anybody's guess. Seán is confident, as always; "I'm telling ye[7], Darkside actually *likes* strong wind. It's such a fast wave that the wind tends to hold up the face a little longer before it breaks. It's gonna be *easier* to surf with this gale!" "D'ya think?" Aiden replies rhetorically. He was already expecting an analysis like this, and it has done little to shake his concerns. "Wait until ye see it lads," Seán continues, oblivious to Aiden's tone, "around the take-off zone[8] the reef is quite shallow, so it's a pretty fast take-off,[9]" he crouches down in the seat to make his body small, feigning a paddle stroke,

[6] I thank Nurit Bird-David for her useful comments on this topic.
[7] Region slang of south and west Ireland pluralises "you" to "ye." In the east and north "youz" is more common.
[8] The area on the surface of the water where waves consistently begin their breaking.
[9] This refers to amount of time available from when the wave hits the tail of the surfboard to when the surfer has to have paddled to match its speed and have gotten to their feet. The time difference is due to the speed

and suddenly bursts upwards as if he is now standing upon an imaginary board. “But if you can make that, it just immediately becomes a perfect barrel[10] all along the reef.”

A non-surfer would be forgiven for doubting the existence of a world-class wave in these parts. Images of Hawaiian beaches, thronged with onlookers shading their eyes against the tropical sun as they watch bronzed mad-men battle it out with each other, or “nature,” or whatever else it is that they do out there, might spring more readily to mind. Instead, we have been driving for five hours through rural Ireland in a storm. We arrive at the half-complete housing estate that sits between the road and the wave. Large handsome houses sitting on the water’s edge are flanked by half-completed structures. Some resemble little more than piles of grey cinder blocks - a giant child’s Lego game becoming overgrown by grass and thorn bushes. It is as if someone left in a hurry not too long ago. This is, in fact, exactly what happened. When the Irish property bubble burst in 2008 many developers around the country could no longer afford to continue their work, deciding to cut their losses and simply stop building an unsellable stock, or declare bankruptcy. There is no beach, just raw sandstone emerging from under its sodden peat blanket before falling into the sea, and the bodies (which are not usually all that bronzed) are hidden beneath a thick neoprene wetsuit, often complete with boots, gloves and hood.

But a world-class wave there *is*. A number of cars and vans are parked along the cliff’s edge at the back of the estate. Beside them people are hurriedly pulling on their wetsuits in a race against the twilight, all the while staring at a point on the water that we cannot yet see. Aiden pulls the car around as fast as possible and in unison we step out for a better look. About 100 metres down along the rocks and the same distance again out to sea a rolling wave swells up suddenly, tall and fast like a moving pyramid, before folding over and breaking with near-perfect shape in a thunderous crescendo across

---

the wave is moving at, and the volume of water being thrown over in the wave. A slow take-off could be three to five seconds, and a fast take-off could be a fraction of one second. Take-offs obviously become harder the faster they have to be accomplished.

[10] When a waves lip curls over to make a hollow tube that the surfer surfs through. Surfers tend to agree that "getting barrelled" is one of the most intensely rewarding possible experiences.

the reef below. We watch in silence for a few moments, zipping our coats and leaning into the wind. If Aiden looks hesitant, this is contrasted by Seán's excitement. He has moved to the boot of the car, and is transplanting the equipment to the grass beside. "Oh," he chuckles as a particularly large wave detonates across the shallow reef, "you'll earn your pints tonight."

Aiden decides to surf elsewhere out of anxiety, but stays for a few minutes to watch Seán get some waves. Together they climb from the grass down onto the exposed rock shelf – one clothed, one in a wetsuit – picking their way carefully around pools and slippery areas. As the waves meet the exposed reef they swell up and crash against it, before ebbing back to expose more rock on the retreat. Seán stops walking and looks up and down the edge as this happens. He is looking for a point at which no more rocks become visible at the water's lowest height between waves, as this is the safest place to jump in. "Ok then," he says as he pulls his hood up from around his neck, over his ears and onto his head. "Good luck!" Aiden bids him. He stands with his legs bent at the rock's edge and his board held vertically beside him. He waits for the moment just after a wave has crashed into the rock, when the swollen water is at its greatest height, before jumping stomach first onto his board onto the back of the wave in one movement. The retreating water then sucks him a safe distance away from the rocks. As soon as he hits the water he begins paddling at speed, aiming to duck-dive[11] under the next wave before it breaks on top of him, pushing him backwards.

Seán makes it out successfully and takes his place in the crowd. The standard of surfing is very high here. As we wait for Seán to get a wave we watch one person after another turn their board as the triangular peak characteristic of this break forms quickly, dragging so much water from the reef that a part of it becomes clearly visible even from the shore. They produce a quick burst of paddling and leap to their feet in time for the wave to fold over into a barrel, blocking them from view as it

[11] A technique for getting through oncoming waves named after a duck's technique for fishing along the seabed. The surfer must paddle towards the oncoming wave until it is about three to five metres away. At this point the surfer stops paddling and grips the top of the board with straight arms, as if about to do a press up. This forces the nose of the board down, which the surfer follows with their body and finally kicks the tail forward with their knee. This scoops the board up through the back of the wave, dragging the surfer with it.

breaks along its length for about four seconds before they come shooting out the end followed by spray pushed horizontally out of the closing barrel, as if out of a gun (Fieldnotes, 11/09/2016).

2.2.2 Swells, winds, tides, and seasonal variation

The production of a good quality wave requires the favourable combination of numerous meteorological and geophysical factors. Good quality swells begin in powerful storms which form in the middle of the oceans. As strong winds blow across the surface of the sea they push water in front of them, similar to what happens when you blow on a cup of tea. As these waves rise up, the wind is offered a greater surface to blow on, and so they continue to rise. The wind's energy becomes transmitted to the ocean and pushes forth in waves. Where waves move, water generally does not follow. The water at the surface of the ocean stays in place as the wave passes through it (aside from moving vertically up and down) (Lencek & Bosker, 1999), it is only at the shore when waves break that separate molecules of water tend to become greatly displaced. A mid-ocean wave is literally a wave of kinetic energy, made visible, audible and tangible by the materiality of the sea. These swells then travel in front of the moving storm towards distant shores, often over thousands of kilometres. This is important, as for a swell to be considered of a high quality it has to escape the influence of the winds that created it. This is known as "ground swell," a swell made sufficiently large by a powerful storm but which arrives to shore under calm conditions. Surfable waves are not simply features of the liquid ocean but are the result of the relationship between the physical factors of land (seabed), sea (swell size and direction, and tide) and air (wind direction and strength) around the coast. The shape and power of a wave depends on qualities of all three of these. Waves that break over rock (called "reef breaks") tend to have a very similar shape under similar swell conditions, as the shape of the rock will not change at all on any human time scale. Waves that break over sand (beach breaks) toss the seabed into rolling mounds. These sandbanks form a seabed that is generally smoother than a rocky coast, and so beach breaks in general produce less well-defined waves than reef breaks, but still all of a

similar character while the sandbanks exist. During storms, the extra energy in the waves passing overhead can move or erase sandbanks overnight, and so the quality of waves at beach breaks tends to deteriorate and improve periodically throughout the year. In general, then, similar waves form in similar places, giving each surf break distinct and relatively persistent characteristics.

At the same time, however, local wind conditions further disrupt a wave's consistency. In order to produce a high-quality wave, the wind must be blowing an offshore breeze (from land to sea) when the swell is forecast to arrive. This is common in some parts of the world but relatively exceptional along the Atlantic coast of Ireland due to the overwhelming dominance of the South-Westerlies, or Trade Winds, blowing in from the North Atlantic (particularly during the winter). The importance of the wind's direction to surfing is hard to overstate. If it is blowing strongly onshore, it can make it impossible to surf regardless of the swell. The difference between offshore and onshore winds over the same swell (at the risk of oversimplifying) could mean one neat, well-shaped wave rolling in with plenty of time between waves (offshore), to a mess of white water, waves breaking in different places and on top of each other (onshore).

By devoting a life to following the movement of waves, people tie themselves into particular temporal orders. Surfing time generally begins at first light and ends at nightfall. Aiden, a core informant to this project, works a nine-to-five job roughly thirty minutes from the West Cork surf breaks in south-west Ireland. He divides his year temporally depending on whether before/after-work surf sessions are possible. He calls this "evening surf season," which runs from the week before the clocks go back in March until the week they are put forward again in October. The daily ebb and flow of the tides must also be attended to as part of the "rhythmpatterns" of coastal areas, "a key way in which water-as-actant is animated" (Jones, 2011, p. 2285). The vast majority of the worlds breaks work best at a certain tide; low, high, mid, two hours after low, etc. Many do not work at all at the wrong tide and have a very small window in which good waves appear. Again, most waves work best "on the push" (when the tide is flooding), as opposed to "on the pull" (ebbing). This necessary

synchronisation can be extremely difficult to deal with, especially in winter, when ideal tides often appear at night. Spring and neap tides[12] play further havoc with surf breaks. The former causes such an intense movement of water that unusually strong currents reduce a wave's power or quality, while the latter might prevent the tide becoming low or high enough for a break to reach its optimal tide. Attempting to maintain practice through these conditions is challenging, especially with winter's shortening daylight hours. In its sparse and fickle provision of waves, the agency of Irish weather becomes visible. One morning I accompanied two informants on an early morning surf. They were chasing the tail end of a swell that was due to decrease in height and power rapidly after dawn. We rose as early as we could, rushed a breakfast and hurriedly went about shoving all our equipment into the car. At one point one informant, who had been particularly stressed since we awoke half an hour previous, stood back for a second, and with a furrowed brow and hands on his hips he exclaimed, "it's strange actually, when you think of it, being late for a weather event as if it was a meeting with someone important, isn't it?" His bemusement was quickly overcome by the resurgent imperative to "make the swell," but his exclamation clearly demonstrates the affective draw of a decent swell and appropriate winds. Winter undoubtedly produces the best swells in Ireland, but to find a window between weather systems where the wind and tides become favourable makes it difficult to maintain regular practice, particularly for those who work regular hours Monday to Friday. Conditions may not fall in sync with weekends for up to three weeks at a time. It is during the darkness and the storms of winter that my informants become the most frustrated and were most likely to begin taking sick days from work in order to meet mid-week swells. It is fair to say that surfing is a seasonal, lunar, solar, and blustery practice, governed by all and characterised by changes in each.

[12] Tides are caused mainly by the gravitational influence of the Moon pulling on the oceans, but the Sun also exerts a lesser but noticeable influence. When the Sun and Moon are aligned in relation to the Earth, their gravitational influences combine, creating the highest and lowest tides (and so the highest tidal variation) of the 28-day lunar cycle. This is known as a spring tide (the name has nothing to do with the season). This takes place around Full-Moon and No-Moon (roughly every fourteen days). Neap tides, on the other hand, take place when, if viewed from above, the Sun, Moon and Earth create a right angle with the Earth at the vertex. So aligned, the Sun and Moon exert discordant gravitational forces upon Earth's oceans, resulting in the smallest tidal variation of the lunar cycle. This takes place at Half-Moon (again, every fourteen days).

Bender claims that peoples' relations with their surroundings will "operate on very different spatial scales, whether horizontally across the surface of the world, or vertically – up to the heavens, down to the depths" (1993, p. 2). There is no doubt that the environment described and experienced by Irish surfers is "deep", but perhaps not in the obvious manner. Surfers practice is not confined to any surface, but the depth in which they dwell is largely from the water up, through the wind and into the storms. The atmospheric interactions of sea and air produces the qualitative aspects of their environment. This phenomenal atmosphere reaches down to the seabed only at the near-shore, where subsurface features determine the shape of the resulting waves. The surfing environment is also *greatly* extended. It may be tempting to remark that at the level of anthropological and cosmological analysis, surfers do not really interact with oceans *per se*, but rather with the interface of land and sea (and air) at the coast. This would be a mistake. Waves are generated by offshore storm systems, and surfers are not only keenly aware of this, but they find the thought extremely beautiful;

> "I think you can't ignore the fact that there's something magical about [finding good waves]. When you really look into it and appreciate that the swell came from fucking thousands of kilometres away, travelled across the ocean for you, and all the wind and tide had to come together, just the rarity of it" (Fieldnotes, 28/08/15).

The practices and narratives of Irish surfers are full of such examples of a wider engagement with oceans. Before a surf trip to Nicaragua, an informant spent weeks studying swell forecasts for the Pacific Ocean. But he was not looking at the Nicaraguan coast, or even Central America. He was watching an area of sea between Tasmania and New Zealand. It was July 2016, and the Southern Ocean was experiencing its winter. Due to the Earth's spin and the movements of the trade winds, Nicaragua's wet season swells originate here. A few weeks before he was due to arrive, this is the weather that was of interest. Although surfing practice is local in action, the surfing imaginary is global in reach, and the various layered rhythms of land, sea and air mean that it is positioned as much in time as it is in place (see also figure 2.1 below).

By amassing knowledge of how surfable conditions at the coast are tied to mid-oceanic weather events, the passage of the sun and the moon, and generally celebrating these facts as something beautiful, or magical, Irish surfers push their practice both out (into the Atlantic) and up (into the atmosphere and beyond) from the littoral, challenging conceptions of the boundedness of that place from the ocean with respect to surfing practice. The next subsection describes how Irish surfing has a similarly blurring effect on the boundary separating the littoral from the terrestrial.

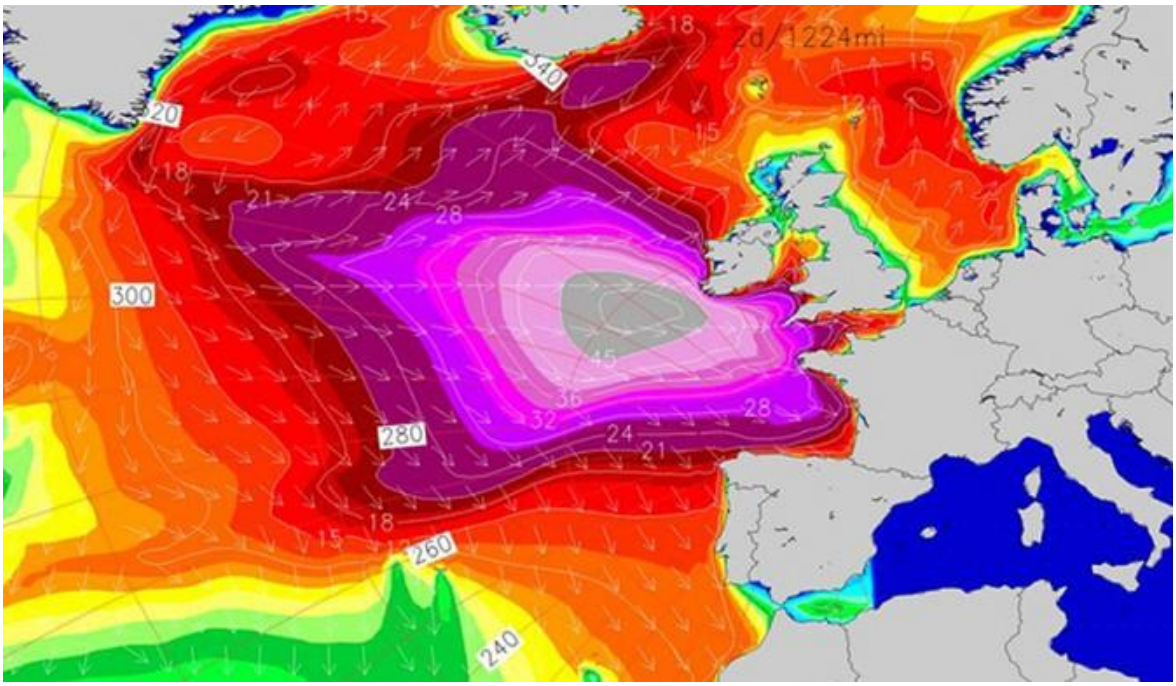


Figure 2.1: A further example of the global reach of the surfing imaginary. This is a feature on a surfing website called "Purple Blob of the Week," in which one storm is selected from around the world and assessed for its swell-generating capabilities. Available at http://www.theinertia.com/surf/the-north-atlantics-new-purple-blob-is-setting-up-an-xxl-week-for-europe/. Last accessed 20/04/17.

2.2.3 Wave-knowledge, techniques and technology of forecasting

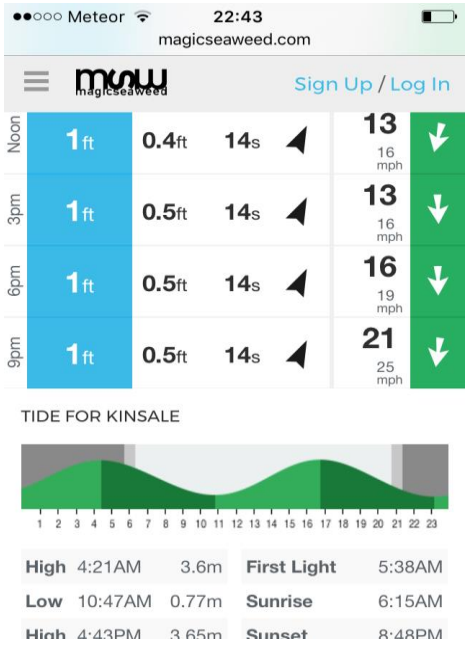


Figure 2.2: A surf forecast from magicseaweed.com. From left to right: forecast at-beach wave height, swell height, swell period, swell direction, wind speed, wind direction. Below are the tide times for the area.

In order to become intimate with waves and with other surfers around them, it is first of all necessary to find some waves. Predicting wave quality at the shore is made difficult due to the fact that the weather systems required to create good swells must not be active near the land, otherwise the storm force winds would make surfing impossible. Before the advent of the internet, surfers in Ireland used to rely on the national weather report, which of course was not tailored to the needs of water-users. "We just used to see a storm in the Atlantic, wait a day, and go," one of my informants explained, "we'd get screwed all the time." In the 21st century, specialist websites have been developed that have collected years' worth of data on more or less every surfable coast in the world. *Magicseaweed* (see figure 2.2) is one such example, which combines swell, wind and tidal information to forecast the quality of waves at a particular break. This has had a transformative effect on practice. People have become largely dependent on these projections; older generations of surfers lament the loss of intuitive knowledge that finding waves used to demand of those wishing to surf. Although digital swell forecasts are only dependable as little as three or four days into the future, none of my informants consult other meteorological charts – air pressure and wind projections for instance, even though these can be relatively accurate for weeks into the future depending on the area. Most simply cannot read them, or do not have a sufficient grasp of how that information would translate into at-the-beach wave quality.

Much of a wave's capacity to affect human movement in the first instance is becoming tied to its digital projection. If the online surf reports predict no waves, then people do not go to the beach. In her ethnography of mobile phone use in Mozambique, Archambault (2017) argues against the

"North Atlantic" narrative that new communications technology necessarily separates people from each other. Instead, she claims that young Mozambicans are using mobile phones to create new ways of being intimate (see also Sunderland, 1999). The same could be said of the opportunities provided by digital forecasts for becoming intimate with waves. At a deeper level, the ability to compare knowledge of past forecasts with past experiences allows for the creation of a deep knowledge of the idiosyncratic nature of the local break over many years. My informants impressed the value of forecasts on me by explaining that whether the waves turn out to be good or bad, the forecast is the framework then used to assess *why* particular conditions prevailed;

> "if you just show up to a beach and surf it based on, say, a webcam image of the waves, you wouldn't even know what types of swells were hitting it and why that made the waves different. But if you're actually looking at the directions of swells, like today we were surfing a south-east swell, and there was also a smaller south-west swell, and you could see that the two of them were interlinking to make peaky, wedgy waves. That is something you wouldn't even notice without reports" (Fieldnotes 10/05/16).

In this way, similar forecasts in the future can be compared to knowledge of previous surfs to produce a better sense of what might actually pertain. So although an intuition for how weather will create waves generally does seem to have declined, it has been replaced by a different kind of highly localised knowledge. Seán and Colin, two core informants (to be properly introduced in the next chapter), have both become so utterly familiar with their local breaks over the course of many years so that they are able to "read between the lines" of the swell forecasts, knowing how similar charts related to actual conditions past. The continued reliance on a type of expert knowledge, coupled with the seemingly infinite set of possible conditions turns surf forecasting into a very social affair, much of which takes place away from the beach.

The location chosen has become the result of the collective "work put in" by different surfers in coming to know the waves and is mediated by intense movements of information around systems of technologically mediated communication: Towards the close of October 2015 the charts lit up for

a few days and promised waves in various areas around the country. Seán and Aiden separately checked the charts countrywide to try to decide where to go. Following this they messaged each other over a Whatsapp[13] group chat that they use to discuss surfing (which I had been given access to) in order to decide the option that might generate the most high-quality surfs, and each also tried to talk the other around to their preferred option. Aiden is very proficient but dislikes big, heavy waves; Seán is expert, and generally likes them as terrifying as possible. After speaking to one another, a return to the charts was warranted to reconceive their information in light of the expertise offered by the other person.

This "expertise", however, must be quality-checked for any ulterior motives that might lie below its surface. In an ethnography of weathermen in the Chicago office of the National Weather Service, Fine notes that this "negotiated order of collective knowledge…leaves leeway for forecasters to angle a weather "story", for example by a little tweaking of the temperatures in any presentation" (Kemeny, 2010). Similarly, surfers will hide their own personal preference for a certain spot under an in-depth analysis of why this spot is going to be the only one worth visiting. This technique of angling reports works precisely because of the contestable nature of the knowledge created by digital software. The "expert" knowledge, on the other hand, cannot be proven wrong. When surfers arrive to the coast to be greeted by disappointing conditions, then the software is blamed, and not the group's 'expert' prediction.

Although this appears to produce a cultured hierarchy of knowledge, the forecasting of waves *does not* necessarily produce a hierarchy of *types of knower*. There is no replacement for an at-the-beach report, usually given over the phone or by text. Accordingly, a relative novice who is already at the beach, or who has surfed at a break multiple times in the previous week (and therefore having the

[13]*Whatsapp* is an instant messaging service that functions like text messaging but over the internet, and also allows for the creation of group chats.

most up to date knowledge of the present conditions of the sand banks) will usually have the most valued information regarding wave quality.

Two points can be made regarding the contemporary nature of Irish surf forecasting. The first is in relation to the effect of technology on understandings of the environment. It might be expected that the level to which waves and storms are recorded, predicted and otherwise rationalised through the use of contemporary weather modelling techniques (more on these in the next section) has led to the disenchantment (Weber, 2009) of the surfable wave. In fact, if anything the opposite is true. The more that the sheer number of factors and far reaching nature of the conditions that create excellent surfable waves are impressed upon surfers, the more that a belief of their "rarity," "preciousness," or "treasure-like" nature is produced:

> "I always wonder what's so different about [surfing], say compared to snowboarding, for instance, the feeling? Or is the feeling you get from It only so heightened because the length of time you spend on a wave is so short, you know? And it's such a chase to actually get to it, you know, to actually *get there*, for there to actually be good waves, to paddle out, to put yourself in the right position, you might only get ten waves in a session, you might only actually ride a few of them well where you stay on the board for more than 5 or 6 seconds… that if you flash frame any moment of that wave, that's the only moment in history that a wave is going to be like that, whereas a mountain is *more or less* the same, whereas that wave will be there once ever, no one else in the world will have surfed it. You can go back up, you can snowboard down the hill again and try to draw different lines but you can only get one shot at each wave so it makes it a bit more precious" (Ruaidhrí, Fieldnotes, 11/05/16).

This sense of preciousness – that waves are common but good surfable waves are as hard to find as treasure – is one of the factors that begins to create an extreme sense of intimacy between surfers and waves. The lack of a disenchanting effect of technologies of quantification and measurement is being repeated across a number of sporting practices: The electronic measurement of goals in football, of speeds of serves in tennis and pitches in baseball, and the ability to capture the movements

and techniques of fighters in slow-motion are all serving to demonstrate just how impressive each practice really is, creating a joint celebration of the practice and also of technology. The cultivation of intimacy with waves does not only rely on water-borne technologies such as surfboards and wetsuits, but also 'land-locked' technologies including forecasting software and mobile phones.

This leads to the second point: how communications technologies such as the telephones and social media have had the effect of transporting Irish surfing sociality from the littoral into the houses, towns, and car journeys which now connect individual surfers and groups with each other in a combined and dispersed effort to find waves. This too has the effect of diminishing the boundedness of the littoral, this time with respect to the terrestrial. Irish surfers' knowledge practices rely on the connectedness of different Irish waves with groups of other surfers and with digital representations that are available away from coastal areas.

This section has shown that an examination of the wider ecology of surfing practices, places, technologies and knowledge practices demonstrates the tendency of Irish surfing to blur and hard boundary lines that might be drawn between oceanic, littoral, and terrestrial spaces by virtue of the fact that surfing practice either draws knowledge from or places itself deep within all of these different spaces. Surfers' understanding of their activities in the littoral are predicated on their connections with large distances of open ocean, of storms, celestial events, but also how these activities can be aided or mediated by being connected to different groups of surfers or alternative representations of waves away from the coast. It is this connectivity that makes it problematic to theorise the littoral as dislocated or bounded *from a surfing perspective.*

2.3 Surf break intimacies

One of the key aspects of 'classical' theories of liminality (i.e. those seen in the work of Van Gennep and Turner in which liminality is most strictly associated with rites of passage) is that during the liminal

phase/space the ritual subjects exist “in a sort of social limbo” (Turner, 1983, pp. 127-128). Equally, its contemporary usage in the study of extended (even permanent) transitional states suggests that the liminal subjects exist in an abnormal or extraordinary state of “feeling like an outsider” (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018), awaiting “normal” (Fiske, 1989) social conditions to resume. This section will demonstrate that, with respect to surfers, the coast is not the type of space conducive to such experiences. It will do so by describing the rich and strict nature of Irish surfing sociality, which is composed of norms and rules of interaction that are tied to surfers’ interactions with waves. Alternatively, the section will argue that the littoral environment embeds the conditions for ‘normal’ *surfing* social lives and thus becomes a central space of social and cultural life, as opposed to peripheral.

2.3.1 Owning waves: etiquette and prestige

The interaction of humans and waves has given rise to vibrant surf cultures. Along with fishing, sailing, and other salt-water-based practices, surfing has moved human sociality from the land to the sea, upon which intimate relations take place. Groups of those who share a local break often become life-long friends, particularly those who also live near each other and so carpool to the beach. Julie Archambault reminds us, however, that it is a mistake to think of intimacy solely in its positive sense, as “harm and suspicion are often most manifest at a very intimate level” (2017, p. 153). As waves bring people together, they force them to compete for the same limited resource. In his classic study of play, Huizinga (1949) claims that human social life is best described as structured by the elements of culture developed in and attached to games (as opposed to labour, for instance, as many of his Marxist contemporaries claimed (Laviolette, 2016)). Although instances of play might appear trivial, he argues, they have the effect of organising social hierarchies and encounters that leak out of game time into wider areas of social life. So it is with surfers. Along the Irish coast, particular kinds of water-based,

board-borne sociality has developed in which terms of access, prestige, honour, etiquette, and various other social relations receive their cultured iterations.

Good waves are a cherished and limited resource that takes time, effort, and money to catch. At breaks where good waves do appear, most waves that come through every hour are no good. If a break averaged three good quality surfable waves every five minutes it would be considered very consistent, but that is still only about thirty-six every hour. If there are thirty-six people on the water, that could equate to one wave per person per hour (presuming that each person is equally skilled at competing for position, which they would not be). Most breaks are nowhere near this consistent. It is more common that periods of waves are interspersed with "lulls", where no surfable waves appear for ten to thirty minutes. Considering that the number of surfers has been steadily increasing globally for the past few decades, "overcrowding" is recognised as a huge problem. Having a wave to oneself is a rare treat in contemporary Irish surfing, one worth protecting. Certain groups lucky enough to stumble upon an unknown wave can also control access to it by keeping it secret. "Secret spots," as they are known, are generally never a secret kept by a single individual for long. Often it will have been discovered along with someone else on a walk around the coast, and if not, then it will be disclosed to a select group of friends with whom to share it, after one or two surfs confirms the wave's quality. Although the actual water-borne aspect of surf practice is highly individualised, in which each practitioner is in competition for waves, the wider practice of finding and travelling to waves, and discussing equipment is a highly social affair. The only thing better than having a wave to oneself is having it to oneself plus one or two friends. The disclosure usually happens by photograph. One evening in February 2016 a stream of photos appeared on my informants surfing *Whatsapp* group chat. The first few were of Seán, one of my informants, surfing an impressive looking wave. This was followed by a message saying "that's Kilcuddy today, don't tell anybody." Then two videos of the wave breaking, this time with nobody on it to demonstrate its shape, probably taken by Seán himself after he returned ashore. Seán's brother Colin is one of Ireland's most talented surfers, and his network of contacts allows him to be brought along to all the best spots that are still being kept under wraps. He

then tells his younger brother about the places he's been shown, and eventually brings him along on a trip, who in turn tells his own friends. This is how secret spots eventually become widely known.

There is a strict code of etiquette around both who is allowed to reveal a secret spot, and to whom they may reveal it. Serious violations of this code amount to the breaking of a taboo. Having been introduced to a secret spot, the new initiate ideally should not introduce anyone further unless they have become friendly with whoever did the original introduction. This person should usually be a good surfer (why waste the spot on a novice?) and should also be a *single* person, and not a group. It is absolutely unacceptable to be shown a secret spot only to turn up the following week with a car full of people from another county. This will result in a steely reception from the locals *at best*, and often verbal and sometimes physical abuse as well (in the US and Australia at some breaks it is common for cars with out-of-area registration plates to be vandalised while its owner surfs). Professional surfers and surf magazines are often blamed for causing lesser-known waves to become crowded. Professionals rely on corporate sponsorship for their income, and they become product-selling tools by generating impressive footage surfing around the world. For this reason, they often travel with photographers who then sell their work directly to the sponsors or to surf magazines. The spring issue of *Carve* (a British surf publication) in 2016 contains an article written by an Irish professional surfer of a trip that he made to a particularly good wave in the west of Ireland. On this day Colin, an informant, was also there. Photographs of him surfing, as well as his name were featured in the article. En route to the beach the following week I mentioned it to his brother Seán; "What did Colin think of the article?" I asked, anticipating a positive response. "Oh *that*, he's seriously pissed off, they all are." I was surprised. I presumed that Colin would have been excited to appear in such a well-respected magazine. "Shur that's how secret spots get out, like."[14] All the English pro's now will be like "where's that wave; what swell does it work on?" It'll be jammed with the fuckers next time."

[14] People from Cork in the south of Ireland use the word "like" at the end of a sentence or clause to denote emphasis, or express strong emotion.

Taboos speak colourfully about the world of which they are a part. The attitudes surrounding secrecy and disclosure in surfing create a sociality where both skill and identification with place form the core of a person's social body. Inevitably secret spots can only stay secret for so long, however, and it is expected that everyone will tell a friend eventually. The etiquette is designed around delaying the inevitable, not preventing the unpreventable. Only the best-known breaks in a country are ever named in a magazine article, and most of these will be clearly visible from a town or road, so that they were never secret in the first place. Aside from these few, a surf magazine will never print the name of a wave and will only refer to its area in a very general way ("somewhere along the Donegal coast," for instance), in order to preserve its anonymity. This sociality of relative secrecy was obviously significant to the fieldwork for this project. As much as people informed the data for this project, so did waves, and these informants in particular value their secrecy. Aside from a handful of *very* well-known breaks, all wave names that are used in this thesis are anonymizations. This is out of respect to those who were sufficiently trusting to lead me to certain places, and also to the breaks themselves. The most secretive waves roll stealthily along secluded coastlines which are less accustomed to being trampled by cars and people, who in their movements may litter and pollute. Anonymization protects people and waves and allows them as best as possible to continue their interaction on their own terms. Surf-etiquette establishes the central normative rules of surf breaks, but as with most human activities, there are techniques by which certain groups can gain merit over others, in this case to get more waves.

At most Irish surf breaks, however, space must be shared with many other surfers. In order to control the action at a crowded break, a system of etiquette has developed that designates ownership rights over each wave. When paddling out at a surf break as non-locals, Irish surfers usually perform the same ritual. Having reached the waves, they paddle wide and sit on their boards for a moment, making an effort to greet the other water users with a nod of the head. "Then it's good to make a little small-talk," explains Seán, ""few good ones ya?" or "shape's not great is it?" – something like that to break the ice. There's nothing worse than sitting in the water, watching two cars pull up and seeing

four people get out of each one and start jumping into wetsuits." This usually incites a response regarding what the conditions will do later, and whether or not that favours the break in question. All of this information is already known by both parties, who are still happy to listen and chat regardless. This amicable back and forth serves a function: Surfers paddling into a line-up as a group are well aware that those already present are unhappy to see them arrive. Those sitting with their boards turned towards the horizon are in competition for a limited resource. A few friendly words functions to establish a relationship between people. It is also considered good manners to very deliberately *not* paddle for the first wave or two that comes in, deferring to a local or someone who has been in the line-up for longer. In this way, newcomers establish themselves as friendly and respectful – welcome additions to the line-up.

The action begins when a set of waves appears on the horizon. It is now up to each surfer to guess where the wave will start to break and attempt to establish "position." The surfer who manoeuvres closest to this point (known as the peak) is "in position," holding claim to ownership of that particular wave. At some breaks the peaks are constantly shifting, which means surfers can sit more or less anywhere they like and eventually a wave will come for them. At other waves, like Crab (described in the following section) and particularly Darkside (from the vignette at the beginning of this chapter), the peak appears in almost the exact same spot every time. This forces the surfers into a concentrated area with everyone scanning the horizon, looking for the earliest sign of a slight shift in the peak so that they can reposition. Etiquette surrounding surfers' respect for another being in position differs around the world;

> "We're lucky it's quite chilled in Ireland on the water. In Australia when you're on the water you are constantly looking around thinking "who is a kook[15], who can I snake[16]? And also you are trying to spot the two or three guys that are near you that are very good, and you're thinking "ok I won't snake them" (Aiden, a core informant, Fieldnotes, 04/09/16).

[15] A bad surfer.
[16] Ignore their being-in-position and paddle around them to claim the wave.

Irish surfers and visitors often remark on the relatively welcoming and laid-back nature of Irish surf sociality. When compared to many other surfing regions such as Southern California, South-West France, south and east Australia, parts of Central America, Portugal and Indonesia, there are far less incidents of verbal aggression at Irish surf breaks and instances of physical violence are all but unheard of. It is difficult to pinpoint an exact reason for this, but Irish surfers claim that it has much to do with the relatively low population of Irish surfers and uncrowded nature of Irish surf breaks when compared to most of those other regions. With less competition for cherished resources there is less reason to surf in a highly competitive manner.

If a surfer is in position at a break full of talented surfers and they fall – wasting the wave – the other surfers will begin to ignore their place in the line-up;

> "If you kook-it[17] at Snapper [an Australian surf break] those guys will remember you. You won't get waves again until you prove that you can surf" (Jacko, an Australian surfer).

> "At Snapper there is a really strong rip that you paddle out in and it brings you right out-back, so if a set[18] comes as you're paddling out you can kind of snake everybody. Well a wave came and I was in the perfect position so I was like "ok well I'm going…", but it was so fast that I got thrown off my feet in front of about thirty people. It was pretty hard to get waves after that!" (Ruaidhrí, having spent a year in Australia).

A kook is a derogatory term in surf culture which means bad or 'wannabe' surfer. Like many English language surf terms, it originates in the US but is now also used by (at least) Australians, Irish and British surfers. A surfer can become labelled as a kook in a number of ways. Using a beginner's board is certainly enough reason, as is dressing head to foot in 'surf wear' and (in Ireland) overusing Californian surf slang. Consistently messing up and wasting waves is also a demonstration of

[17] Make a mistake that makes you look like a bad surfer.
[18] Surfable waves of a similar quality and size tend to travel in groups of two-five, known as 'sets'.

'kookiness.' As the quote above demonstrates, being labelled a kook can have a negative effect on a surfer's wave count, as others start ignoring their right to waves.

Clearly although surf etiquette is strict, it is not thoroughly binding. To establish position at a crowded break requires the development of *subtle* skills of bending the rules of etiquette, known as "hassling for waves." When waves push in, the line-up falls silent and a paddle battle is commenced. Surfers paddle directly at the oncoming waves, estimating where the peak will appear before it forms, only to whip around at the last moment and burst-paddle into the wave. Another technique is to *gradually* paddle closer to the person who seems to be in position, forcing them sideways in the hope that when a wave does come through, they will now be too "deep;" for them the wave is now too steep to catch, and the hassling surfer has in fact ended up in position. This is part of the more general non-acknowledgement tactic, where surfers refuse to talk to anyone in the line-up so that they never have to hand a wave to someone with whom they have built a rapport. Verbal arguments are an hourly occurrence in the more crowded surfing regions of the world, and instances of physical violence are not uncommon.

Irish surfers also have to share waves with other water users. Foremost amongst these are bodyboarders, kayak-surfers, and stand-up paddle[19] (SUP) boarders. The surfers generally dislike sharing space with practitioners of these other activities. Although they all perhaps seem similar to surfing (they all involve catching waves, and SUPPers also ride them on-foot), they lack either the "pop-up" manoeuvre whereby surfers rise to their feet – notoriously the hardest part of surfing – or they rely on something other than arms strength to catch waves (or both). Accordingly, surfers become alienated from these other water users due to the fact that, while they share the same environment, they are incapable of attaining the same level of surf cultural prestige as they cannot demonstrate a sufficient level of surfing ability to be considered surfers. More than this, however,

[19] A very large, voluminous surfboard that the users stands upon and paddles using a single-bladed canoe paddle.

surfers end up resenting these cultural others. Due to their increased ability to catch waves (due to the paddles), or due to the fact that they do not have to perform the pop-up, these water users can catch waves earlier than surfers, meaning that they can sit "deeper" than surfers, guaranteeing themselves position. The sight of a group of kayakers or SUPPers paddling out at a surf break is often greeted with a sigh or muted cursing by Irish surfers.

Peaks of waves bring surfers intimately together – quite literally in a spatial sense – and force them to work hard, developing techniques of etiquette but also of its subtle circumvention, both so that they get can along with each other but also that they get waves. Generally, the more talented the surfer, the more waves they will catch on a given day. This is because they will be fitter, faster paddlers, will have developed a sixth sense for where wave peaks appear, but also because of the intimidating effect of paddling next to someone of clearly higher talent. Very talented surfers are also given priority at the breaks they frequent as a mark of respect. At Pipeline in Hawaii, for instance, a surfer called Jamie O'Brien is currently recognised as the top dog, having spent his entire life living on the beach and achieving global fame predominantly by surfing this one wave. "Jamie is king out there," remarks another professional surfer, "if Jamie is [paddling for a wave] you don't even look at the wave" (Olafsson, 2015). The manner in which terms of prestige, etiquette, and ownership are transported from land to sea in surfing has its analogues in other activities. Just (1995) describes how Meganisiot fishers establish a system of self-regulated rules of fishing rotation to allow them to breach quota restrictions in a manner discreet enough so as not to be caught by authorities. During the Kula expeditions undertaken by the Trobriand Islanders (as described by Malinowski), the power of chiefs becomes sea-borne via the terrestrial activity of canoe decoration, whereby the chief's canoes inevitably end up the most adorned and impressive (Malinowski, 1932).

Unlike the Kula expeditions, however, in which social hierarchies are preserved as they move from land to sea, Irish surfing has a more transformative effect on social relations. This is due to the fact that social hierarchy is based on different factors in surf culture than it is on land: surfing skill and

being a local to a break (see subsection 2.3.2 below). This has the effect of refiguring social relations amongst surfers who surf together often. From a land-based perspective, it might seem unique to encounter groups of close friends along the coast comprised of a mixture of rural farmers, rural and urban working class, and urban middle class, as is the case with several of my groups of informants. Once on the water, however, this is very much understandable. One of these groups in particular happens to be comprised of some of the best surfers in Ireland. It is through the norms of Irish surfer sociality that they have become related through skill, demonstrating the importance of surfing and the coastal environment to surfers' social lives both at and away from the coast.

From the point of view of Irish surf culture and sociality, proficient practitioners are not liminal characters, but central social actors. If liminality *were* to be applied to a study of surfing figures – those peripheral to 'normal' social relations, or in a transitory stage, then this section has mentioned alternative candidates: kooks, other non-surfing water users, perhaps beginners (and also injured surfers, to recall the discussion from the previous chapter). These are all groups that share surfing social and cultural space, thereby making a claim on being full-fledged surfers, but for one reason or another remain peripheral, incapable of challenging for central or status in local social relations (from the point of view of surfers, that is). Surfers more generally, on the other hand, are not liminal social actors from the point of view of surf culture.

2.3.2 Environments of social normativity: localism

At a surf break, physical behaviour, appearance, accent, skill and an understanding of how waves work amount to a system of knowledge, techniques, and biosocial factors that allow some to control a line-up. "Subcultural capital" (Thornton, 1996, pp. 11-14) is amassed through the terms of prestige which in surfing take the form of recognised talent, as described above, and also by "being a local."

Being local to a break is a sure way for a surfer to guarantee themselves some waves. Again, there is both an environmental and a social reason for this. On the one hand, when a surfer has dedicated years to surfing the local breaks, they develop a deep appreciation for a break's various idiosyncrasies – how *exactly* each set of conditions is likely to affect it. This environmental knowledge helps locals to predict the best spot to catch waves. Localism as a social phenomenon, on the other hand, varies in intensity from region to region, and is generally regarded as a problem in surf culture. Localism describes the techniques which groups of surfers use to control access to a break. It can range from the creation of an uncomfortable atmosphere and verbal abuse to physical abuse and property damage (mainly to parked cars). Localism is not a problem everywhere. It tends to be worse in regions with the most serious overcrowding problems – Australia's Gold Coast, Hawaii and California being the three most notorious. Within these regions there are breaks known to be safe, and others that are not worth the risk. Lunada Bay near Los Angeles, California, is one such example. The "Lunada Bay Boys" are a group of local surfers who function as a gang that strictly control access to the good quality point break[20] in the bay. There are many videos and articles available online documenting overt intimidation and property damage targeting non-locals. During 2016, a group of residents brought a collective lawsuit against some of the known leaders in an attempt to reclaim the beach for public use. The trial is pending, but whether the legal action can permanently solve the anti-social behaviour at the break remains to be seen.

As mentioned above, Ireland does not have a serious issue with localism due to the relatively small surfing population, and also probably to the fact that the Irish coast is largely underdeveloped and rural, meaning most surfers at any break are not local in the sense of living nearby, but rather in the sense of having "put in the work" at a particular break. Still, Irish surfers do notice regional differences in how welcoming line-ups tend to be;

[20] A wave created when a "point" of rock emerges at the tip of a coastline that juts out from the surrounding area. This can create a perfect rolling wave that works its way across the indented bay.

> "It was much more laid-back out there today than it is in Bundoran [a surf town in the north-west of Ireland] wasn't it? It's refreshing to be able to surf good waves in a relaxed atmosphere" (Overheard in Crab Island car park, June 2016).

Even without recourse to violence "locals" still use subtler techniques of spatial domination. One is to converse loudly with a few other members of the line-up during lulls. This can function as a performative demonstration of how comfortable a surfer is in this particular social context and how well he or she knows the other locals. It can also provide a powerful demonstration of the power of an accent, and the extent to which speaking with an "out-of-area" tone can mark a person as other, non-local, or "blow-in" in surfing terms. One day an informant was discussing what he described as the bad etiquette that he had experienced on the water in Southern California. Another surfer asked him "why didn't you say anything?" "I couldn't" he retorted, "You can't complain because as soon as they hear your [Irish] accent they'll just order you out of the water." As terrestrial places have their own accents, then, so do surf breaks.

The system of etiquette and techniques through which surfing (as sociocultural activity) emerges leads to the development of terms of prestige specific to Irish surfing, in which skill and identification with place are the supreme markers of distinction within the cultural context. As such, surfers begin to lay claims of ownership over waves attempting to control access to them both through violent and subtler means. As humans engage with different environments, they use the material terms of those environments to reproduce and transform normative rules of social behaviour. This is clearly visible in the way accents mark a surfer as other on the water (social reproduction) and restrict their access to waves (social transformation). As far as surfers are concerned, the littoral environment is not a place of relaxed or absent social rules, but rather contains an environmentally and practically specific system of social relations which organise surfers' engagements with each other and the environment. As surfers, it is categories such as local, kook, and talented surfer that become organising principles of different surfing groups which are then transported away from the beach. As

such, the littoral becomes the centre of surfing lives, with other places appearing peripheral to surfing social activity.

2.4 Surf breaks

Thus far this chapter has discussed the littoral, beach, and coast in general terms, and has not distinguished surfable waves from the places they appear – surf breaks. This is an important distinction in Irish surf culture and the difference between the two categories provides insight into the manner in which surf practice produces concepts through which the relative dynamism of oceans and salt water comes to be designated 'natural' by surfers, and in contrast the relative stasis of land becomes seen as 'unnatural.' This section will discuss how such a distinction is further proof that the littoral becomes central to Irish surfers' cultural lives, this time through the development of conceptual orderings of their environments. What follows is a detailed description of the activities of two informants, Seán and Ruaidhrí, on a morning spent surfing "Crab Island", a surf break in County Clare in the West of Ireland. The actions of these two informants and the environmental movements (the swell, the tide, and the wind) combine to produce "Crab," the surf break as a place. This ethnographic encounter will be used to investigate the manner in which intimacy with place and people is produced on the water.

2.4.1 Crab Island

Figure 2.3: Crab Island viewed from the west, looking back towards Doolin village and (above) a map of the then proposed new pier, which has since been built. "Crab," the surf break, is in the right foreground of this photo.

> "If the sea is in your heart and blood, and if a westerly Atlantic ground-swell is running, I cannot describe the sensation of excitement mixed with awe and fear, that the sight of the swell roaring off Crab and into Doolin Bay can bring, and that fear can only come from personal experience."[21]

Crab Island is a small, roughly circular area of exposed limestone reef that sits about 400 metres from the Clare coast (see figures 2.3 and 2.4). It is flanked by the Cliffs of Moher, Europe's tallest sea cliffs to the south, which rise vertically to 214 metres. Seven kilometres west into the Atlantic lie the Aran islands, a popular tourist destination. These are serviced by ferries which leave from the mainland

[21] Quote from "Learning the sea at Doolin Bay & Crab Island," an article appearing on a blog called *Lone Swimmer*, 28/03/13. Available at https://loneswimmer.com/2013/03/28/learning-the-sea-at-doolin-bay-crab-island/. Last accessed 21/04/17.

adjacent to the east of Crab Island from a small rural village called Doolin, a postcard-perfect little enclave snuggled between the Cliffs and the raw limestone landscape of east Clare known as the Burren. It has preserved a traditional image in order to benefit from the tourism attracted by the Cliffs and the Aran Islands. When the conditions are right, a very high-quality wave forms immediately to the south of the island and, depending on the swell size, it can roll all the way across Doolin Bay, almost back into land.

In late June 2017, Seán's car pulls into the ferry port car park at Doolin just before 11am. It is an hour before a spring low tide, a fact that worries Seán; "It gets a bit shallow to surf at dead-low, and [the wave]'s shape isn't as good." Seán parks the car at the western edge of the car park, where the land meets the sea and the wave can be seen in the distance. What surfers refer to as “Crab” (the surf break) is comprised of an area of the water’s surface between the mainland and the back of Crab Island where the wave actually breaks, the limestone reef beneath the water here which gives the wave its shape, the path on the water through which surfers must paddle in order to reach the waves, and arguably the land where cars are parked and from where the water is reached. Seán and Ruaidhrí hurriedly step out of the car, peer at the waves, and spend a few minutes studying them and discussing their perceived quality; "eh..it's about head height I'd say, 3-4-foot," remarks Ruaidhrí after a surfer takes off on a wave, offering a method of approximating wave height from this distance. "God, that wind is stronger than I was expecting. It looks a bit messy out there." The first impressions are disappointing, but after another minute or two both have become more excited. More surfers have been seen executing impressive manoeuvres on the waves, and so their quality is deemed acceptable by Seán and Ruadhrí, who begin changing into their wetsuits as they continue to watch. As we are changing, Luke, an Australian board-shaper who now lives locally, emerges from the water and makes his way towards the car parked next to Seán's. Ruaidhrí greets him and asks him for a report; "Yeah mate, it's really fun out there. Plenty of hollow[22] ones. I think everyone out there is about to come in

[22] The more concave the face of a wave is, the more “hollow” it is deemed. Hollow waves always feel more powerful than “fatter” (more convex) waves.

too, you could get it to yourselves for a while. Just watch the rocks, it's getting really shallow!" Following this report, the prospect of surfing these waves has become exciting. Seán and Ruaidhrí waste no more time chatting or observing, and jog down to the stone reef at the edge of the car park in order to begin the long paddle between the island and the mainland.

The waves at Crab make their first appearance through a process of discourse and demonstration. On arrival to the break, the surfers must decide what they are looking at - are these mere movements of water, or are they surfable waves? The waves are discussed in terms of shape, size, the character of their breaking, and the affect that wind and tide seems to be having on all of these. This is an important process of getting to know a break under certain conditions, which will allow the surfer to make safer and more pragmatic decisions when on the water. "A lot of learning about waves takes place on land," Ruaidhrí explains later. "You stand there and talk about what's going on, talk about where the waves are breaking, who is doing well (and why), and who isn't - all that kind of stuff. When you're out there you are on your own, and it's all body reflex, so the spot checking helps make sure you are doing the right things on the water" (Fieldnotes, 04/07/17). Attention to both what the *sea* is doing and what other *people* are doing allows surfers to appraise a wave and plan their surfing. In what is described above it is clear that Crab's waves become of a better-quality following a positive report from Luke, and especially as surfers are observed surfing them (regardless of the fact that the skill level of these surfers would have a large influence on "how good they can make a wave look," as Seán cautions). Before Seán and Ruaidhrí step into the water, certain perceptions of human and environmental movements (and the relationship between the two) has led them to conclude that the surging and ebbing of water next to Crab island can be designated as "surfable waves" with distinct characteristics (such as hollowness and shallowness) that will have to be attended to when on the water.

Figure 2.4: Crab Island viewed from the south-east, on the hill behind Doonagore Castle. Photo credit Al McKinnon.

Seán and Ruaidhrí now jump from the rocks into the calm water by the shore and begin the long paddle between the mainland and the island (which takes about twenty minutes), keeping wide of the island in order to avoid the waves that break beside it. This is the "paddle zone," an area of water that is sheltered from the main power of the incoming waves, providing a relatively calm, albeit long and tiring, paddle route "out-back" – the area of water far enough from the shore so that it is *just* beyond where the waves begin to break. It is from here that surfers make their move "inside" when they wish to catch waves. Not all breaks provide the comfort of a paddle-out zone. At others, the incoming waves have to be tackled head on, resulting in an exhausting and sometimes dangerous beginning to a session. It is the blocking influence of the island that creates the calm channel here.

The guys are stronger paddlers than I am and are out-back before me. I first come across Ruaidhrí, who is sitting on his board well wide of the island, just beyond where it is possible to catch waves - an area of the surf break known as "the shoulder." Having successfully managed to paddle out-back, the surfer now has two choices. The first is to sit on the shoulder, as Ruaidhrí is doing, in order both to recover for a moment and also to reassess the waves from a closer vantage point. "There

are actually a few breaking here too," he explains, "they would keep you away from shallow water around the peak." The second choice is to leave the shoulder and attempt to begin catching waves. This is what Seán has chosen to do. He is about fifty metres closer to the back of the island (as judged from the mainland), in an area known as "the peak." This is the exact point at which the wave begins to break, which will remain relatively constant at Crab on any given day (moving in and out with the tide) but will change day-to-day given various swell and wind conditions. At Crab, the peak appears behind the island and the wave is surfed from left to right, around the south side of the island (see figure 2.6 overleaf). This is where the handful of other surfers who have remained out despite the dropping tide are gathered. All are in competition with each other, estimating the exact point on the water that is sufficiently close enough to land meet the wave's first breaking ("deep" enough in surf parlance), but out far enough so that the wave does not break on top of them, knocking them off their boards and dragging them across the reef below. This is the "take-off zone," an area of frenzied activity, both human and nonhuman. The peak of a wave is where its potential energy is highest, providing the fastest, longest, most dangerous (depending on the break) and generally most intense ride. The sea is constantly rising and falling here, and as the surfers sit on their boards looking outwards they might feel their toes graze the reef as the wave troughs at this tide, reminding them to take care. Seán lines himself up for a decent-sized wave, but he tries to catch it too late and falls from his board as it connects with the bottom of the wave. Both he and his board emerge a moment later. "It's shallow alright!" he shouts over. "I bumped the bottom, nothing too bad, just be careful."

The guys spend the next hour paddling around each other, trying to catch waves in what is becoming an increasingly restricted area as large chunks of exposed rock emerge from beneath the surface in front of some waves. Eventually the risk to body and board becomes too much. All surfers on the water now claim to have bumped off the reef; if it becomes any shallower there is a danger of surfing directly onto dry rock. After a mentally and physically tiring surf it is time again for the long paddle home. This time the guys keep close to the island on the way back in, happy to use the momentum of the swells from behind to speed up their paddle. Sometimes surfers are seen using the

island as a short cut by walking across it and jumping back in again for the final leg (although some claim that this is illegal. There is a medieval-era stone monk's hut on the island (visible as the rocky bump in figure 2.4) which is a protected heritage site, and there is some disagreement regarding whether this designation extends over the whole island.

Figure 2.5: A surfer watches as another gets barrelled at Crab on a relatively large swell (wide angle lenses tend to make waves look small). Photo credit Paul Deering.

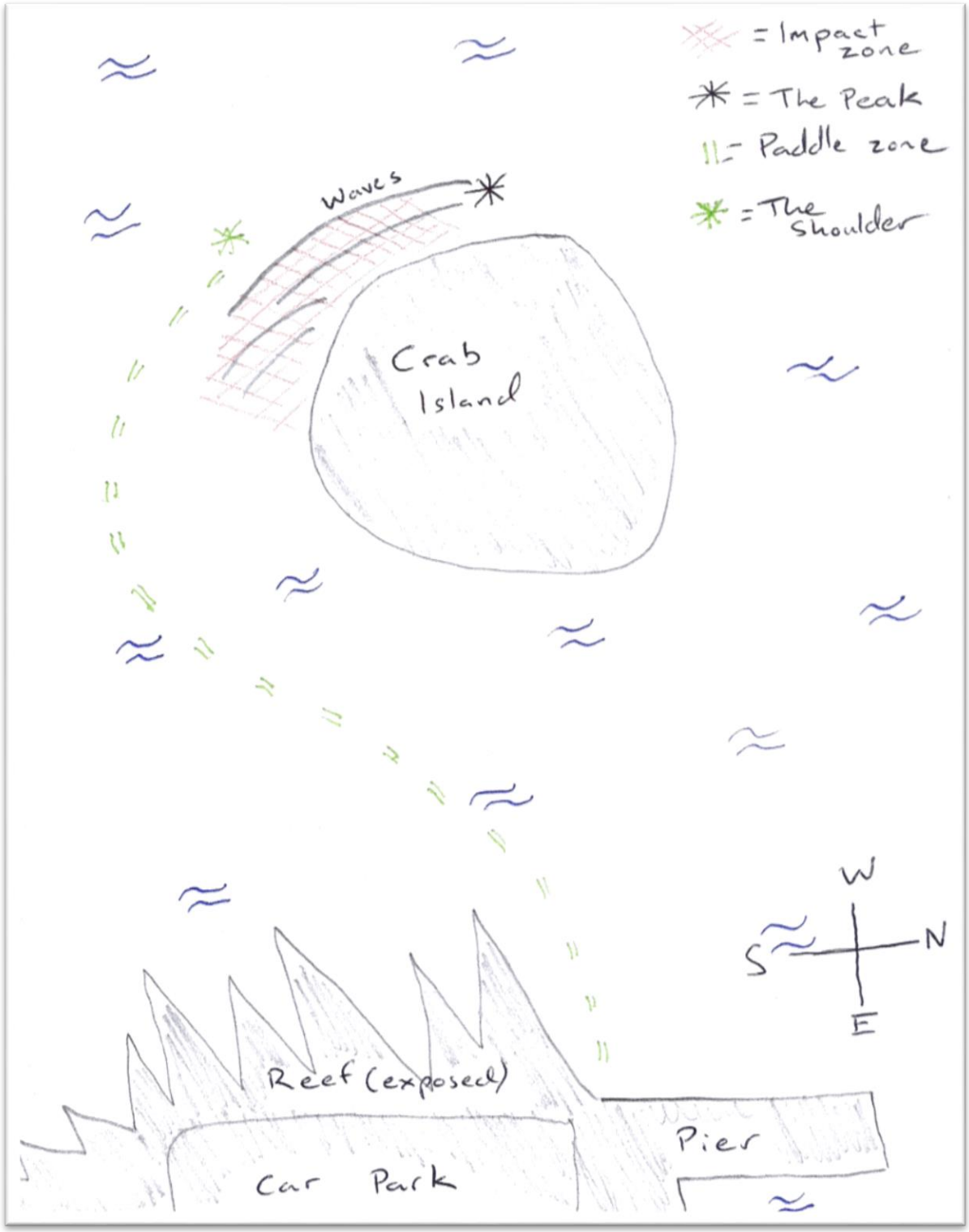


Figure 2.6: A sketch of the "activity centres" of the break "Crab."

2.4.2 Surf breaks as places of relational movements

Crab, the liquid place, is broken down into spatial categories depending on the activities that take place in each (figure 2.6). The paddle-out zone is an area of transit. “Proper” surfing does not take place here, but the activity that does is central to the experience in multiple respects. Most obviously is that it leads to the waves, but this paddle zone also establishes Crab as an advanced surf spot. Novices and lower intermediates would be unable to paddle for the requisite time required to arrive out back, or if they did, their muscles would then have become too weak to surf. The extended paddle zone acts as a gatekeeper, restricting access to the unqualified (including anthropologists. The ethnography for this chapter was largely collected towards the end of the fieldwork period, after I had developed sufficient skill and strength to engage in the research). The shoulder is a place of rest, but also of safety. This is where Ruaidhrí decides to sit and gauge his options. It is the final area from which the waves can be surveyed up close, and a surfer can decide whether they fancy their chances in the take-off zone. If a surfer becomes “caught inside” (trapped in the area where the waves are breaking), it is to the shoulder that they will paddle in order to take a breath and re-gather their confidence. The take-off zone, as stated above, is where place and human are most energetic, and where the majority of the human activity is concentrated. Finally, the impact zone is as uncomfortable a place as it sounds. The aim is to never end up in here, either by paddling around it or surfing over it. After a fall, however, or when a freak set of waves breaks surprisingly far out back (which usually happens once or twice per session), this becomes an area which surfers must traverse. Depending on the break and the swell, this can range from being mildly tedious to life threatening. As one wave after another unloads its energy, it creates currents that spin like washing machines and move vertically downwards, attempting to drag the tiring surfer against the seabed. Exiting the impact zone takes muscular and psychological endurance: do not panic, keep the arms moving, keep breathing calmly.

The zones of a surf break emerge as a relationship of movements between the surfing body and the surf break. This resonates closely with Jon Anderson’s (2012) concept of a ‘relational place,’

which are “made up of material objects, living things, and natural processes, alongside the practices, cognitive responses, and emotions that produce and are produced by this intersection. From this perspective places are constituted by, and themselves are, *coming togethers*” (Anderson, 2012, p. 574, my emphasis). This sense of ‘coming together’ is exactly what informants seem to describe when they evoke the activities that are implicated in becoming familiar with surf breaks;

> “You become familiar with the rip [current], the waves: where they become hollow, where they tend to close out, where to sit, when to paddle” (Surfer, Fieldnotes, 11/05/16).

At a surf break, familiarity does not just entail a knowledge of the place, but also a knowledge of one’s own movement relative to that place and the differing attitudes different parts of it demand;

> “You become familiar with whether the rights are good or the lefts are good. You know that at Castlefreke [a wave in south western Ireland] it’s mainly rights and the lefts usually shut down more, bringing you farther from the channel where you get stuck in the impact zone” (Surfer, Fieldnotes, 11/05/16).

The different areas of *human* activity that lead to a break’s categorisation further depend on the *environmental* activity around the break. A surf break is organised as areas of altering forces; rip currents, shoulders, inside, out back, the take-off zone – each has its own energetic feature in which the liquid landscape moves at different speeds and makes different shapes. This is part of the peculiarity of liquid places. When compared to a terrestrial place, the development of familiarity with liquid landscape features forces humans to become intimate with different categories of “thing.” The relative persistence of features of the terrestrial landscape – paths, mountains, buildings, homes, etc. – allows humans to revisit the same things time and again, which (at the phenomenal level, at least) are experienced as similar, perhaps identical, at each meeting. When surrounded by waves, however, there is little at rest. Anderson usefully points out that it is one thing to theorise *for* the ocean, but another thing to theorise *from* the ocean. The more fluid, changing, “watery” (ibid, p. 570) concept of relational places is an effort at exactly this. It acknowledges the work of both human and nonhuman materiality and movements in producing the place.

However, in his examination of the place-making activity of surfers and environment around the littoral, Anderson extends his concept to include each discrete surfed wave. He discusses how the act of wave-riding can be understood as a moment of 'convergence' during which the constituent parts of a surfed wave – human body, board, and wave – see "their thresholds…blurred into a converged entity/process" (ibid, p. 570), which, in keeping with his notion of a "coming together" (ibid, p. 574), describes a place (relationally produced). Each individual surfed wave, then, can be understood as a place. While I see the theoretical logic of extending the concept of relational places to very specific single acts of surfing, doing so has the effect of blurring important conceptual distinctions that Irish surfers draw between each wave and the *locations of* each wave, which in turn inform their understandings of their environments (littoral and terrestrial) more generally. The next section will draw out this distinction through an examination of how and why surf breaks become named.

2.4.3 The ephemeral moodiness of waves; the persistent characters of surf breaks

Surfable waves have many moods. On bright, windless days along Irish beaches the waves roll in neatly, rising up as turquoise or emerald mounds, smooth as glass, and rolling towards the shore before folding over and breaking with the sound of a chandelier falling continuously along their lengths. On days like these surfers might describe the waves as "chilled," or "fun." When the wind blows, it causes the surface of the water to slide over itself, creating a diamond pattern like the scales of a dragon and, when these waves break, the wind throws a cloud of white mist across their backs like its steamy breath. If you are sat on a board behind a wave as this happens, the spray falls down like hail and you are blinded momentarily as the area around is enlivened with an elongated "*slasssssshhhh"* noise under the torrent. On rougher days when the sky is dark, the waves show their malevolent side. They turn steely black and froth white all over as the wind throws them around, and

if you look towards the horizon it is unclear where the clouded sky ends and the tormented sea begins. These kinds of waves are described as “angry,” “hairy,” or “uninviting” by their would-be surfers.

It might seem strange to say that waves have moods. When a person is said to be in a mood, what is meant is that it is the same person, but certain qualities of their character might be emphasised or inhibited from moment to moment. But surely all waves are totally different; the sea perhaps could have moods, but waves are simply the chaotic end of a particular movement of the water? Irish surfers would disagree. Due to the interplay of the different forces of land, sea, and air that create particular waves in particular locations, waves with a specific character – a style and speed of movement, aggression, and persistency – appear around the same places over time – similar, but not identical. There is an extensive vocabulary used to describe the characteristics of different wave types (right, left, barrel, slab, beachy, reef, hollow, fast, wedge, wall-y, close-out, heavy, weak, and river mouth are some examples). Even beyond wave types, however, each surf break produces waves that are considered distinct enough to have its own personal name. I have never once heard the name of a break repeated around the world. The best, most famous of these become almost fetishized, as mountains do by mountaineers. There is no surfer who has not heard of Pipeline in Hawaii – “the Mecca of surfing” (as described by an informant) – home to one of the best and most dangerous waves in the world. The Cliffs in Ireland, Supertubos in Portugal, Skeleton Bay in Namibia, Uluwatu or Padang Padang in Indonesia – almost every coastal country has its famed spots. Surf breaks get their names in a number of different ways. They might describe a salient characteristic of the waves that break there, such is the case with “Cyclops,” an Australian wave, so named because it consistently forms a circular barrel-shaped wave and looking into it is like looking into the single eye of a large monster. Others might describe the area around the break, such as “Crab” in Ireland, which breaks next to Crab Island, or otherwise they may simply reflect a whim of the discoverer (“Riley’s” in Ireland is named after the discoverer’s nephew. See Laviolette, 2016, for a comparable discussion of the names of Cornish cliff-diving spots).

In some ways surfers talk about waves as if they are people. Specificity in their naming individualises each surf break and its waves to a degree consistent with the distinction surfers perceive in each of them. Relationships develop between surfers and waves through deep and repeated interaction. Throughout a lifetime of surfing, the local waves are both thanked and cursed. Greg Noll, a legend of Hawaiian big-wave surfing of the 1960s, captures the quality of this relationship perfectly;

> "Wiamea [in Hawaii] was my gal, man, she was like, I mean I surfed with this beautiful woman who allowed me to get away with shit as long as I didn't act too outrageously towards her. There was times when the surf would get perfect, you know, and you could go out, catch a wave – *pfffffeeew* – make this thing and just have your adrenaline dripping out of your ears, paddle back out, do it again. You get a little too cocky, you get your ass slapped a little bit, she let you know it. But for the most part it was just this full-on *love affair* that took place for twenty-five years" (Peralta, 2004).

To simply state that "for Irish surfers, waves are moody and full of character" would amount to what Martin Holbraad has termed "blithe relativism" (Holbraad, 2016), in which so-called analysis fails to actually address the concept at all: waves as non-surfers normally understand them are such that they are *not* the type of things that have a character or moods. What, then, is it in the terms of the intimacy between surfer and wave described thus far that might suggest such an understanding of what waves are?

Irish surfers do not really think that waves are people. They use the language of moodiness, characters and names, because through their practice they come to perceive a close yet antagonistic relationship between ephemerality and persistence that is so characteristic of human persons. Recall the quotation in the previous section in which Ruaidhrí asserts that the preciousness of each wave is due to each one being unique. This aspect of preciousness is tied to the ephemeral aspect of waves. Their names and characters depend on the opposite – the persistent. Another time, the Ruaidhrí described how

> "As a surfer, it's the similarities [in each break] that become more and more important to you. These are the things that you study and it's the things that you travel for and it's the way that you communicate amongst other surfers. If I was describing waves to a non-surfer, in my very first sentence I might talk about how waves are all unique, but then I could spend the next 500 sentences talking about how in fact they are similar and not chaotic and they are formed by particular weather patterns and bathymetry of the ocean floor…" (Fieldnotes, 10/08/2017).

The moodiness of a wave relates to its ephemeral aspects. These are highly transient, changing with the weather, swells, and even from one wave to the next over a period of minutes (one wave can be 'chilled'; the next 'monstrous'). What is more, each specific wave at Crab (and other breaks) is not named. Instead, nameless waves roll in *at* Crab. Alternatively, if a surfer is asked to describe Crab, they will give an answer such as Seán's below;

> "It's a really fun, punchy reef that, on its day, gets really hollow and can hold a good-sized swell. One of the most reliable, best-quality waves in the country" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 18/08/16).

Here Seán evokes the persistent, characterful aspects of surfing at Crab Island – those that relate to the break itself. As Seán and Ruaidhrí surf this small piece of coastline, then, they experience and describe each discrete wave as the moody iteration of the break-as-place.

Another way of capturing this distinction is by differentiating between surfers' functional descriptions of waves versus their formal descriptions of breaks. The ephemeral aspects of the surfing environment relate to the activities of individual waves; their moodiness is a description of *what they are doing* at a given moment. Their persistent aspects, on the other hand, relate to the formal characteristics of a surf break – to the nature of the predominant swells, and the shape given to waves by the solidness of rock and sand – more temporally stable than wind and sea – which lie at the seashore and, on the temporal scale that is concerned in surfing, are experienced as more permanent features of the environment. Surfable waves and surf breaks are nuanced categories which share complex relations. This is unsurprising given how closely related surfers and waves become. It is by

forcing antagonistic concepts such as the ephemeral and the persistent into close relations that surfers are able to assert that the uniqueness of waves is what makes surfing so special, and yet at the same time that it is the persistent aspects of surf breaks that makes surfing possible at all. It is such that waves become at once a ubiquitous presence at the coast and yet (certain of them) can be as rare as treasure. Due to the opposing properties of the surfable waves and surf breaks described by surfers, then, it seems to be the case that surfable waves *take place* – the place being the break. To return to Anderson, surf breaks indeed emerge relationally (Anderson, 2012), but to call each surfed wave a relational place seems contrary to the logic by which Irish surfers themselves distinguish between them conceptually.

In his study of Cornish surfers' environmental activism, Laviolette describes how the materiality of waves offers itself as a metaphor of "endless sources of renewal" which become related to "shifting local identities" and to the specific qualities of local political resistance (Laviolette, 2006, p. 178). Similarly, what is significant from the above discussion is how Irish surfers' interactions with/in the littoral environment are suggestive of certain concepts through which their environment is understood. Specifically, the interplay between ephemerality and persistence at surf breaks evokes a complex dynamism of the littoral environment that becomes positively valued by Irish surfers, who come to perceive it of evidence of the power of the ocean;

> "It's an amazing experience to be in the ocean, surrounded by its beauty, immersed in nature, and experiencing the raw power of the ocean as its waves beat relentlessly" (Marck Botha, surfer and surf photographer[23]).

The link between the "power" of the ocean and "immersion in nature" is a repeated theme of Irish surfing discourse: "Short of skinny-dipping or walking around naked in the forest, there isn't much in the way of experience that is more natural than surfing."[24] As surfing offers a way for surfers to

[23] Quoted in *The Mirror*, 01/08/2015, available online at https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/stunning-images-shot-surfer-show-6176068. Last accessed 23/02/2018.
[24] Roth, 2017. Article available at http://magicseaweed.com/news/patagonia-starts-phasing-out-neoprene-wetsuits/9231/. Last accessed 23/02/2018.

transform their bodies and technologies into channels for the energy which animates the oceans, so they begin to conceive of the expression of such energy in the form of complex dynamism by the littoral environment as constitutive of 'naturalness.'

Conversely, in relation to terrestrial places, Irish surfers describe terrestrial places as lacking what is 'natural' about oceans:

> "I mean everything you see in the city here, like the trees outside which are not natural, they had to be planted there and have to conform to the demands of a street and housing. But even in the countryside the fields all have walls and are planted with different things. It's hard to find a place on land that hasn't been controlled in some way" (Ruaidhrí, *Fieldnotes,* 11/05/2016).

It is interesting to note that Ruaidhrí designates the countryside as 'unnatural' because, like the built environment, it too exhibits evidence of human control. The Ocean, on the other hand, is out of control. It exhibits this capriciousness by virtue of its unpredictability and tendency to change. The dialogue between persistency and ephemerality that characterises Irish surfers' interactions with waves and surf breaks lends itself as evidence of the vitality or potency of nature experienced in those places.

Figure 2.7: An informant stands on Crab Island watching a sea mist engulf the Cliffs of Moher to the south-west.

What is significant about surf breaks to Irish surfers is that they offer themselves as arenas in which the varied, powerful "beats" (as Botha put it above) of oceanic energy can be harnessed. The littoral becomes a place in which ephemeral environmental features maintain an element of surprise and difficulty to practice, but around which emergent persistent characteristics become the organisation features that earn the designations of surf break places. What is more, these aspects of the littoral become experienced as *more* natural than terrestrial places because it affords the opportunity to communicate with such raw, complex, contradictory, but certainly beautiful power more directly than environments which surfers have found away from the coast. As such, conceptually speaking, surfing reorients the littoral as what is a natural environment for humans to engage, while contemporary Irish terrestrial environments are experienced as less so.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has begun the ethnographic section of this thesis by insisting that a rigorous anthropological explanation of social and cultural phenomena is to be found by attending to the field primarily through categories developed by informants themselves. Surfable waves, hard work, preciousness, and intimacy are all central to how surfers experience their practice. Towards the goal of allowing surfing to inform ecological thought, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate how human lives are not just thoroughly invested in particular places but are in fact animated by the same energies which lend environments their vibrant characters.

The premise of many popular and academic treatments of surfing, the beach, the sea, and the coast in general is that these are liminal or peripheral spaces kept distinct from 'normal' terrestrial spaces where normal social life takes place. This first chapter has used ethnography to demonstrate that in fact the opposite is true if a surfing perspective is taken on Irish surfing. Section two demonstrated that the littoral is not bounded by discussing how surfers' understandings of the processes of wave formation blurs the boundary between ocean and littoral, while their knowledge

practices surrounding wave prediction blurs the boundary between littoral and land. Section three demonstrated that neither is the littoral peripheral to surfing sociality by discussing the strict and complex rules of surfing social organisation that are tied to Irish surfers' interactions with waves but are brought away from those places as surfers travel away from surf breaks. Finally, section four demonstrated that surfing practice is generative of certain conceptual orderings of environments in which complex environmental movement comes to be perceived as natural by Irish surfers. This conceptually refigures the ocean as more natural than the land from an Irish surfing perspective.

So, rather than describing a bounded, peripheral space in which social relations are suspended and in which experience is extraordinary, this chapter has described an ecological approach which follows the multimodal (digital, bodily, aesthetically, etc.) communication of energies between surfers, other surfers and the sea, which offers a contradictory picture of the littoral. By describing Irish surfing concepts and Irish surfing rules of social organisation, it has instead recast this place as ordinary, socially normative, and fundamentally *connected* to both the ocean and the land by various means.

Chapter 3: Atmospheres of Irish surfing sociality

3.1 Introduction

In late 2016, Mick Fanning, a multiple world title winning Australian surfer, visited Ireland. When surfers of this standing visit unfamiliar countries it is usual for their sponsors to contact a local professional (often they might share a sponsor), who hosts the visitor and brings them to all the best spots in the country (a famous professional surfer is almost always welcome at any break in the world, such is the prestige that is attached to supreme wave-riding talent). Gearóid McDaid became his Irish host, and Ripcurl (their mutual sponsor) produced a video reel of their trip around the Irish Atlantic coast[25]. One frame in this video shows Fanning surveying a wave breaking from the shore. He jumps up and down as he sees its shape and McDaid can be heard hooting in the background. Before the first wave finishes breaking, both turn back towards their car and break into a run as they rush to get their gear. Mick Fanning is a grown man who has surfed thousands of waves. He rises early and spends his days deconstructing his surfing with a trainer – an effort for which he is payed (which supposedly takes the joy from anything). To see such a professional surfer jump, smile and scramble back to his car just as teenagers do in similar circumstances speaks for the affective potential emergent in the development of a relationship with waves.

This chapter builds on descriptions of Irish surfer sociality from the previous chapter to analyse how surfers' micropolitical engagements unfold within, but also produce, certain atmospheres, at once meteorological and affective. In doing so, it demonstrates that Irish surfer subjectivities emerge within fields of energetic communication between (human) surfers and their (nonhuman) environment. This analysis provides further evidence of the usefulness of an approach which foregrounds continuity between diverse elements and actors such as oceanic energy, the materiality

[25] *Mick Fanning's Irish Crossroads*, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSYRFIia9F0. Last accessed 27/07/2017.

of the coast, and Irish surfers' socio-political relations, or "the way that lived experiences with the sea shape who we are" (Brown & Humberstone, 2016b, p. 18). It also posits atmosphere as the surfing-derived field of more-than-human relationality upon which the ecological approach of this thesis is based.

The analysis is based upon the interactions between two Irish informants – Seán and Colin – and various foreign professional and corporate-sponsored surfers at The Cliffs, an elite-level surf break in the southwest of Ireland. This section briefly reviews anthropological and geographical approaches to atmosphere, and section two then introduces the core informants in question. Section three describes how the micropolitical engagements that take place between them and groups of foreign professionals are influenced by and produce affective atmospheres of positive tension which inform the experience of surfing. It does so by following Seán and Colin through an experience of surfing The Cliffs from arrival to surveying the surf spot and engaging with the other surfers. Finally, section four follows the action onto the water to analyse how Irish surfer subjectivities are formed in the negotiation of affective atmospheres of fear and excitement. This demonstrable competency then becomes part of the surfers' social capital, politically refiguring them within the group.

In contemporary anthropology and geography, 'affective atmosphere' describes the field through which affect (as defined in chapter one) permeates the world and communicates through bodies, although the qualities of the field and the manner in which affect is communicated between humans, weather, things, animals, etc. is contended. The affective atmosphere is described variously (and contradictorily) as immaterial (Anderson, 2009), virtual (Massumi, 2002), yet tangible (Stewart, 2011), sometimes comprising of materiality itself (Bennet, 2010), but always transpersonal (Edensor, 2015), and affecting and being affected both by humans and nonhumans. It is "something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies while also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal" (McCormack, 2008, p. 413). This is the aspect of atmosphere that surfers refer to with comments such as "the atmosphere out-back was intense", "it's

a chilled wave", or "the sheer magic of the place is hard to comprehend." The nature of specific breaks – their level of danger, difficulty, and accessibility – influences the social atmosphere amongst surfers on the water (depending on the number of surfers competing for waves, the frequency of waves, and the attitudes of individual surfers). This mixture of human social affect and nonhuman environmental affect gives rise to a field of energy that is created between the materiality of place and surfers' practices. While much recent work on affective atmospheres has focused on how atmospheric immersion takes place along structural-political lines such as class divisions (Bille, 2013; Shapiro, 2015), relationships between seller and consumer (Edensor, 2015; Healy, 2014), or the citizen and the state (Adey, 2009), the aim here is alternatively to examine how atmospheric engagements in surfing themselves *create* cultured terms of (micro)political interactions between surfers. In effect, cultured terms of prestige develop amongst surfers according to how surfers relate to each other through waves. As surfers discuss and compete for waves at a surf break, alternative forms of surfing prestige produce a social atmosphere which aggravates, relaxes or otherwise affects the experience of sharing the littoral environment.

One particularly salient aspect of surfing with respect to this topic is the extent to which its practice amounts to a cultured negotiation of aspects of local meteorological atmospheres. Wind is a direct component of this atmosphere; waves are caused by it; 'bad' or 'good' weather directly affect the experience of practice, and surfing skill relies on knowledge related to negotiating coastal weather phenomena. The anthropology of the meteorological atmosphere is borne of a growing disciplinary concern for the environment. The anthropology of Western societies has taken notice of tropes such as climate change (Carrier, 2004; Szerszynski, 2003), the proclamation of the Anthropocene, concerns regarding nuclear power (Mori, 2011; Otsuki, 2013; Slater, 2011), etc., and has recognised that the study of humans can no longer continue in absence of the more-than-human processes that affect human life. The meteorological atmosphere refers to "a turbulent zone of gaseous matter surrounding the earth and through the lower reaches of which human and non-human life moves" (McCormack, 2008, p. 413). This corresponds with the atmosphere of the physical sciences, and the changes within

give rise to weather and climate. Anthropology of the meteorological atmosphere attends to the manner in which people manage their lives around a changing climate (Ellis, 2003; Strauss & Orlove, 2003), and the embodied, sensuous experience of living in a weathered landscape (Vannini, et al., 2011).

The meteorological aspect of the surfing atmosphere directly contributes to its affective texture: one cannot be understood in isolation from the other. Indeed, when informants describe the atmosphere at a surf break they constantly slip between both aspects: In the statement "the [swell] period[26] was so short that we were all scrambling around each other – there was a lot of aggro in the line-up" (Fieldnotes, 02/08/17), the swell period is a meteorological aspect to the atmosphere, the "aggro" is affective – a transpersonal human affect – and one extends directly from the other. Given the field situation in which the meteorological and the affective are closely related, an anthropological conception which unites the two is required. McCormack (2008) attempts this simply by analysing both side-by-side. He studies the hot air balloon, specifically that used by Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée to perform an attempted fly-by of the North Pole in 1897. McCormack argues that balloon flight "can be understood simultaneously as a technology for moving through atmosphere in a meteorological sense *and* as an event generative, at least potentially, of atmosphere in an affective sense" (2008, p. 413). The analysis provides equal space to describe both how the balloon (a novel technology of the time) allowed the meteorological atmosphere to be experienced in a new way – its depth, alterations in temperature, etc. were now "thinkable" from a human perspective, and how the balloon basket contained a certain affective atmosphere (which McCormack refers to by way of Andrée's diaries and letters)[27]. While this is certainly desirable, this "parallel" approach to the study

[26] Swell period measures the time between wave crests (in seconds), but not necessarily *surfable* wave crests. In Ireland, a period of between twelve to eighteen seconds would be considered long (this changes globally depending on location, particularly on which body of water is in question), but the majority of these crests will pass as unbroken bumps, and most of those that do break will do so too far in/out/big/small etc. So an eighteen second period might sound short, but this might only produce surfable waves every few minutes.

[27] This voyage certainly makes for an interesting story. I will not spoil the end for the reader. McCormack's article is worth a read just for the manner in which he journeys chronologically through the mission, revealing nothing until the end!

of aspects of atmosphere does not do enough to approximate the sense communicated in surfers' conceptions of atmosphere which seems to hint at the continuous nature of these two modes.

Ingold (2006, 2015) proposes such a continuous approach. He points out that most anthropological work on weather and meteorology "has tended…to address the symbolic and cultural significance of atmosphere and weather in human society" and thereby underplaying "the *animate agency* of phenomena such as wind, frost, ice, and fog" (2006, p.17). Instead of approaching weather as an object which is imprinted with cultural significance (a constructivist explanation), or as a discrete entity that affects human activity in isolation from further affective considerations (as is the case in explanations inspired by Actor-Network Theory), Ingold proposes that anthropology ought to conceive of the weather and meteorological atmosphere as a medium, not itself something that humans relate to, but rather something that they relate *in*. Thus conceived, the social lives of Irish surfers, productive of multiple surfer subject-positions, takes place in a textured atmospheric medium, in which "the quality of that [human] interaction will be tempered by what is going on in the medium, that is, by the *weather*" (Ingold, 2011, p. 70). That is to say that human sociality is productive of and affected by 'pre-personal' intensities, to use Deleuze's term, of which one (major, in the case of surfing) aspect is the meteorological. Such an approach, which combines meteorology, affect theory, and human social interaction within the one theoretical framework is clearly influenced by the Deleuzian virtuality concept (insofar as atmosphere becomes the grounds from which potentiality differentiates into actual practices), and is very close to the affective atmosphere confronted in surfing discourse and practice.

Irish surfers are therefore immersed in an atmospheric medium which requires skilled and technological deftness in order to negotiate upon surfboards. At the same time, surfing cultured terms of prestige arise from this engagement. The meteorological and affective aspects of atmosphere are continuous with respect to surfing practice.

3.2 Seán and Colin

Seán is a twenty-eight-year-old surfer from Cork on the south coast of Ireland. He discovered surfing through bodyboarding which he had begun practicing before the age of ten, but gradually stopped as he became more skilled at surfing around the age of sixteen. He spent his teenage years and his early twenties doing very little besides these two activities (and skateboarding when there were no waves). Now he is a qualified vet and lives with his fiancée in a small house which they have recently purchased in Cork City. Seán is one of those people whom it is always entertaining to be around. He is carefree, more than a touch reckless and with a penchant for bravado, but passionate, loyal, and full of life. I first came across him early during my fieldwork following an introduction by a mutual friend who was aware of my keenness to meet surfers. As with most Irish relationships that revolve around surfing, our first encounters amounted to polite expressions of mutual interest of carpooling to the beach. Fortunately for my research, Seán was still in university at this time, and willing to skip as many lectures as necessary so as never to miss a swell. Driving across the country and surfing together multiple times per week is a good way of getting to know someone and following just a handful of these journeys it became clear that Seán would become a core informant, and now a close friend.

Colin is Seán's older brother (thirty-two at the time of writing). He too started surfing in his pre-teen years and by the age of twenty-five was one of the most talented surfers in the country. He is one of a handful of home-grown Irish big-wave surfers and has been featured in international magazines on numerous occasions. If Seán's life revolves largely around surfing, Colin's is nothing but. After leaving school he scraped through an engineering degree having rarely attended lectures before spending the following year on social welfare, not because he couldn't find employment, but rather as a type of surfing sabbatical. He worked cash-in-hand jobs during this time to finance transit to Australia (via Indonesia), where he then spent a year working odd jobs and surfing every day. Upon moving back home, he secured a job in an engineering office and immediately organised his holiday allowance so that he only worked four days per week and was often absent besides. Unsurprisingly,

he failed to be made permanent after his six-month probation period. “It’s not like he was made redundant!” Seán joked afterwards, “they definitely had to replace him immediately!” A nine-to-five job was simply too regimented to allow Colin to surf as much as he needed. For the past few years he had been working with a recruitment company started by a friend. Both surfed, and all of their work was done online, meaning that they could set their own hours. They moved their office from Cork City to West Cork so that it was closer to the beaches, surfed whenever the waves were good and worked at other times during the week. Recently, however, Colin decided to make yet another change, booking a one-way ticket to Sri Lanka with a vague plan to go to New Zealand for work and waves when it suits.

Compared to his younger brother, Colin is far more measured and introverted, but strong-willed and, when it comes to surfing, completely fearless. While Seán is often keen to show off, Colin carries himself and his skill in line with the contemporary Irish serious-surfer’s maxim of understating the surfer within. Over the past thirty years, there has hardly been any other lifestyle or practice that has found itself such a target of intense commodification and transformation into a marketable “image” as surfing (Lanagan, 2002). “Surf wear” is worn by people who have never set foot atop a board, and perhaps due to the fact that all this brand advertising has succeeded in marking surfing as “cool” (where it was once seen as degenerate), there are also many people who call themselves surfers regardless of their level of skill or commitment – a source of much annoyance amongst more “serious” surfers. I suspect that this has much to do with the development of a contemporary Irish surferly mode of expressing oneself that quite explicitly downplays every aspect of what could be considered “surfing identity” *besides* demonstrated skill on the water. I have never heard Colin refer to himself as “a surfer,” and he is never to be heard discussing surfing with nonsurfers, becoming visibly uncomfortable and evasive when these try to engage him in conversation about his passion. He does not dress like a surfer, listen to surf music or use surfing slang outside of a surfing context. Rather, his surfing identity is expressed exclusively in his on-the-water ability and also through his cultural

capital, visible in the acknowledgement and respect he receives from talented and professional-level surfers all over Ireland.

Colin started surfing The Cliffs shortly after it was "discovered" (see below) just over a decade ago. Over the past three seasons Seán has also decided that he is ready to take on the famous big-wave break and has been introduced to the Irish big-wave scene by his elder brother. The next section presents ethnography of how Seán and Colin's relationship with The Cliffs and other surfers that visit the break is productive of an affective atmosphere in which the micropolitical games of surfer sociality are played out and through which Irish surfer subjectivities emerge.

3.3 Creating Cliff-side atmospheres

> "Step on to the edge of the world and into an awe-inspiring view that dreams are made of – at the Cliffs of Moher you will encounter nature in its wildest, purest form – see the rugged cliffs facing the mighty ocean, taste the salt air, hear the birds cry, feel the ancient rocks beneath your feet, smell the wind" (Introductory message to the webpage https://www.cliffsofmoher.ie/, last accessed 24/07/2017).

The Cliffs of Moher are an 8km long stretch of sea cliffs that stand at the Western edge of County Clare in the south-west of Ireland. Due to their almost-perfect vertical aspect – rising to 214 metres at their tallest point – the Cliffs of Moher are an imposing landscape feature. Made of sandstone and impacted shale, they are deep red and brown in colour, and their sheer beauty attracts about one million tourists per year[28], making them one of Ireland's most popular tourist attractions. They are widely storied and are mythologised (both locally and through more extended channels) as affecting a powerful and dangerous influence on human activity. Their darkest side relates to the amount of lives they are

[28] "Cliffs of Moher visitors exceed 1 million in 2014", *Irish Times*, 30 December 2014. Last accessed 24/07/2017.

credited with taking: They have been the site of many accidents, but also of suicides (Kaul, 2018). Veteran local surfer Bill Keane describes the melancholy atmosphere at their edges;

> "There is a resonance to that place that you don't find anywhere else. An awful lot of people have gone up there to jump off so it is very powerful. You go up there and you get a sense of the energy up there and you think: what the fuck is going on here?" (Bill Keane, quoted in Duggan, 2012, p. 198).

Figure 3.5: The Cliffs of Moher viewed from the natural viewing platform. The wave is located over the right shoulder of the photographer and breaks about one hundred metres out to sea. Photo taken by Seán.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2009), a cave at the base of the Cliffs – surrounded by a violent sea – houses an amulet infused with dangerous dark magic. The Cliffs find themselves renamed in *The Princess Bride* (1987) as "The Cliffs of Insanity" – so tall and unyielding that sailors would be driven mad by the sight of them shortly before becoming shipwrecked. For surfers, the

affective power is concentrated around a place a few kilometres south-west of Doolin village, where "The Cliffs" has a dual meaning – it refers both to the cliffs themselves, but also to the world famous big-wave surf break of the same name that is located here.[29]

Before The Cliffs was first surfed in 2006, Ireland was absent from the global surfing imaginary, save for amongst the small population of home grown surfers, and a few displaced British enthusiasts. It was one of these – Cornish surfer and surf photographer Mickey Smith – that pioneered Ireland's big and heavy wave scene, introducing the country's liquid assets to the world. Having relocated to Clare, Smith spent the early years of the twenty-first century scouting the Clare coastline during storms, large swells, and irregular winds to see what else it offered (Duggan, 2012). Until then Clare was known to have decent waves (of which Crab from the previous chapter was the best), but nothing world class. This was changed by Smith's discovery of The Cliffs (and another wave called Riley's in 2008). It helped that he was a surf photographer with connections to all the big British surf publications. That pioneering surf was recorded and featured in *Carve* (the foremost British surf publication), and over the following winters more professionals began to fly in when the charts suggested that The Cliffs would "turn on." Surfing online and print media steadily became flooded with footage of these waves, and through surfers like Easkey Britton and Fergal Smith, Ireland's first generation of homegrown big-wave surfers were introduced to the surfing world.

[29] This break was originally named Aileen's, adapted from *Aill na Searrach*, the name of the local cliff area, but it never caught on.

Figure 3.6: Spanish professional surfer Natxo Gonzalez surfing the Cliffs on a pretty big day. Photo by Murch, 2017.

There is no exact metric to determine when a wave becomes a “big wave”, but usually they fall within the ten to thirty-foot range or more (keep in mind that these break with a 20-60-foot face!). It is also worth remembering that size is just one aspect to waves that makes them daunting; the weight of water that they lift and throw (“heaviness”) and also the depth of water in which they break may make a smaller wave more challenging and daunting than a larger one elsewhere. Teahupoo (pronounced *tshow-foo*), in Tahiti, is one such wave. When a large Pacific swell that has travelled for thousands of kilometres uninterrupted hits the Tahitian reef that rises suddenly from a deep-

Figure 3.3: "It is not a wave. It's a step. A vertical division between 2 levels of sea." Teahupoo, Tahiti. Photo by Wagner Brenner.

water trench, the entire wave is quickly forced to fall over itself in a sickle shape, creating one of the most beautiful – and dangerous – waves in the world. The Cliffs happens to combine both of these factors. It is a very large wave, often breaking in the twelve to twenty-foot range, but at the same time it is fast and extremely heavy, meaning that it needs to be approached like a smaller, highly technical wave, but on a big-wave board that is unsuited to such a surf style. It is indeed one of the world's most unique and difficult waves.

There is resonance between the Deleuzian movement from virtual to actual and Laviolette's "embodied imagination." Laviolette cautions against concepts of the imagination in which it is only "seen as images and dreams engendered in the mind through cognitive and cerebral processes" (Laviolette, 2009, p. 308) at the expense of "the embodied nature of imaginative events" (ibid, p. 308). Alternatively, he proposes that

> "the interaction of body, landscape, and danger is an experiential and existential arena in which the imagination can be acted out. The practice of stretching the mind and body to the limits – and of playing with life and death – establishes an ontological basis for an embodied creativity, for a creativity of the body" (Laviolette, 2009, p. 308).

Essentially Laviolette describes a process of embodied inspiration whereby the environmental potential for survival is drawn upon by a body forced to articulate itself in a manner conductive to survival, and so into creative practice – bodily capacity and practice are extended through the crucible that is an intense encounter. Through this, what is ecologically virtual (in this case new modes of engagement, skills, and so of becoming affected by place) is made corporeally actual at an accelerated rate.

These concepts differ with respect to the scales over which they operate: Deleuze's virtuality is useful for describing (in an abstract manner) the creative potential of environments in general; Laviolette's, on the other hand, is useful for describing the creative aspect of the bodily practices of individuals. This chapter investigates the manner in which creative potential is successfully scaled from

the environmental down to bodily skill. It will do so by using the emic notion of atmosphere and its anthropological interpretations to suggest that surfers activities take place, produce, and are affected by an atmospheric field which affectively binds bodies to each other socially, and to the energies which animate the environment. It is in this social atmosphere that practices make what is virtual actual, and bodies imagine new relationships with the land, sea, and air.

More so than any other Irish wave, The Cliffs has the power to draw surfers from all over the world. It is impossible to describe the sheer magic that a surfer perceives in the existence of such a perfect, difficult and dangerous wave in such a scenic location;

> "It's a breath-taking place – it's absolutely surreal…I don't think there is a more beautiful surf spot in the world. Anyone who has been there says it. It's just *magical*. The sheerness and the height of the cliffs…it's just "*wow*". It's mind-boggling that the best wave in Ireland and one of the best waves in the whole world breaks in possibly one of the most scenic places in Europe if not the world, and it's the most perfect wave, so powerful that it could kill you in a second, but it's just so beautiful" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Those are Seán's words, who has, over the past few years, developed a relationship with The Cliffs. The rest of this chapter will analyse how Seán, Colin, and various other groups of surfers socialise while negotiating the affective and meteorological atmospheres of The Cliffs.

3.3.1 Leaving the Car

> "I don't want to surf The Cliffs personally when it's quadruple to five-six-times overhead[30] and you're actually going to drown. I want to do it on a more manageable day – but that's still colossal! But you never really know, like. You check the charts and of course one chart means one thing; another means another, so you never *really* know until you get there so there's

[30] "Overhead" is another rough measure for wave height. Head high is roughly 5-6-foot; double overhead is double that, etc..

always that night-before-butterflies feeling, and Colin is always so amped[31]" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Before Seán and Colin can surf The Cliffs they have to get to them. The experience really begins while still at home. Both stay together and rise before dawn at 4am in order to meet the appropriate tide in Clare – almost a three-hour drive from their home. As was discussed in chapter two, the wave affects human affairs in the first instance via its digital projection on the swell charts. Seán's relationship with his brother Colin is also an important factor in Seán's experience of surfing The Cliffs. His respect for Colin's skill, and his deference to his brother's rich knowledge of the behaviour of Ireland's waves are immediately obvious. Colin's excitement also affects Seán; "Colin has been doing it for days – when a swell like this appears he paces to and from the computer, hitting the refresh button and inspecting the chart every hour. You know it's going to be big when he's this excited!" Colin's excitement increases Seán's anxiety, and there is a distinct feeling of positive tension as the car pulls off – smiles, awkward laughter, periods of silence. There is certainly reason to be nervous. Peter Conroy, a veteran Clare surfer, lists injuries of his and his friends at The Cliffs as follows;

> "Fractured skull, burst eardrums, broken nose, lacerations to my head and face from my fins, dislocated shoulder, broken ribs, intercostal muscles torn, broken fingers, dislocated knee, broken back…" *(Life and Death under the Irish Cliffs*, http://surfeuropemag.com/videos/life-death-irish-cliffs.html, last accessed 26/07/2017).

As Seán prepares himself for his latest attempt at surfing The Cliffs, local myths such as this compound his anxiety.

Having arrived at the Cliffs, the car must be parked beside the road about a ten-minute hike from their edge;

> "You can't see the wave from up there. And you are getting the boards ready, because it's such a hike down to the cliff from there that there's no point in going down to check it and

[31] Excited or enthusiastic.

> coming back up, getting your shit and hiking back down again…So either way when you park up there you're getting your board out of the car and everything so you're kind of [nervous laugh] *half committing!* Part of you is like "oh Jesus", and the other part of you is really excited, nervous" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Emerging from the car, the reality of the situation is impressed on the surfer through the changing material register between home and coast and the corresponding alteration in atmosphere. The car, an extension of the home, which has housed cherished belongings (surfing equipment) and retained the comfort of its passengers with cushioned seats, air conditioning, and music, is traded suddenly for the salty, frigid air of a North Atlantic January dawn. It takes a very large west swell for The Cliffs to begin working, and these generally only appear from late autumn to early spring. As a result, these dawn missions are usually undertaken in testing conditions, with air temperatures approaching zero Celsius or a few degrees below. Seán and Colin blow clouds of water vapour from their mouths as they stretch to loosen sleeping muscles. There is a morning dew on the grass and the air is still – as of yet there is no sensory clue that a giant wave is close by. Seán identifies the removal of boards from the car as a significant process. First of all, these are specially designed big-wave boards. They are longer and heavier than usual,[32] with longer leashes attached to them;[33] "You have to remember that you're surfing a board that you never surfed before. This makes it more difficult." The weight of the board under his arm and its unusual (for him) length compounds his feeling of being removed from his comfort zone. The materiality of Irish big wave surfing has begun to surround his body, amplifying the tension in the atmosphere between the two surfers and their surroundings. Colin takes a board under each arm, instructing Seán to carry the large plastic bucket containing their two wetsuits, boots,

[32] The more voluminous the board, the earlier it can catch a wave. It is desirable to "get into" bigger/more dangerous waves as early as possible, when they are still convex lumps, as opposed to concave walls when the drop is much more difficult. Every fall on waves of this size is potentially life-threatening.

[33] Bigger, more powerful waves push a surfer further down after a fall, so the leashes are longer to prevent snapping.

gloves, a spare leash, two towels, a two-litre bottle of sparkling water, and two half-eaten sandwiches, and begins to march down the thin, grassy path that leads to the cliff's edge.

3.3.2 Meeting the professionals

> "So then as you walk down there's a little crack – a v-shaped crack in the cliff and sometimes a set comes through and you can see a bit of size. It's hard to get perspective on it [because it is still about half a kilometre away], but you can still see it's big to be honest. Sometimes you see someone paddle out – you see this little dot and then a big wave next to him – you're like "fuck it's big anyway" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Figure 3.4: A group of surfers watch the action at The Cliffs on a big day. Photo taken by Seán.

En route to the cliff's edge comes the first visual confirmation that there are waves to be surfed, and also of their size. It is now getting steadily harder to turn back – there are surfable waves, the equipment is ready to hand, and regardless of their size, Seán never wants to appear to not be "up for it" in front of his brother. If Colin is going out, Seán is going out (regardless of the fact that Colin is

considerably more talented and experienced). Before getting into the water at this break, the imposing physical environment and meteorological atmosphere are the key factors in the generation of a potential field of affectivity. At this point surfers find it very difficult to describe their feelings towards the place, stumbling between awe, fear, stillness, and disorientation;

> "[It] is a such amazing place [sic], one of the best waves I've ever surfed. It's beautiful but at the same time really scary – big cliffs, shallow reef and the wave breaks in the middle of nowhere" (Natxo Gonzalez, Spanish professional surfer. Quoted taken from Murch, 2017).

> "It's beautiful – terrifyingly beautiful. Kind of like a double-edged sword" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Figure 3.5: Colin stands on top of the Cliffs performing a spot-check on the wave below. Photo taken by Seán.

The path ends at a flattened natural viewing platform slightly lower than the cliffs to either side from where the view is breath-taking. The cliffs tower above, shrouded in darkness from the

shadow cast by the Sun from over their backs. They march off into the distance as far as the eye can see in both directions. A boulder-strewn beach lies at their feet, currently being battered by walls of white water washing in from the break. This is now clearly visible below and looks formidable. We are also no longer alone; "Sometimes there can be a bit of an atmosphere up here. There might be pros after flying in. The last time I was there, that guy Natxo [Gonzalez, see figure 3.2] was there, and there was a group of Spanish pros after coming from Puerto Escondido [a legendary Mexican big wave break] shortly before." This morning there are indeed a few others carrying all their gear with stickers on the noses of their boards – a sign of corporate sponsorship, as well as numerous photographers setting up their cameras.

The role of groups in the perpetuation of an atmosphere is well documented (Böhme, 2017; Edensor, 2015; Lutz, 1988; Newmahr, 2011). At the cliff's edge, this group of pros actions and speech draw on the energy of the place, influenced by their intentions of getting in amongst the giant waves;

> "I suppose it's kinda cool – that this is such a unique place and world-class wave that there's no way these guys would be going here if it was anything but, so ya you're like "this is the real deal you're at here. This is big wave surfing at a world-class level." It's just crazy that whatever way shit came together in the forming of the rocks millions of years ago to create this. You have to see it for what it is, it's not just the wave: appreciate the magic of the place. But of course the wave is why you're there" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

Here Seán describes his experience of entering this place of prestige. Standing amongst the pros at the viewing platform, he hears the same nervous yet excited tone in their voices as he can hear in his own and in Colin's. They greet him and ask him has he surfed it previously. Colin provides tips on where to paddle out and how wide to stay. Buoyed by his brother's cultural capital, Seán gathers confidence from this distraction and also from the excitement of sharing the water with these people as equals, or better yet, as a *local*.

It is in this exchange that the link between atmospheric immersion and the production of political relationships can be appreciated. The nature of the wave below and the intention of all surfers (both local amateurs and foreign professionals) to get in amongst them perpetuates an atmosphere that has a levelling effect on the hierarchy which would otherwise exist in the group (with pros socially superior to amateurs). The nervous and reverential manner in which this wave is approached by the professionals establishes the conditions for all potential water-goers to share the same atmosphere, breaking down social boundaries between them. In a sense, the professionals relinquish part of their claim to social and cultural distinction by attuning to the local atmosphere.

However, this presents a chance for the locals to become active political actors, manipulating the atmosphere in order to express their own social superiority (not as an attempted social violence but more as a technique of earning the respect of the highly-skilled surfers). The act of supplying information about a surf break, while friendly, is an unmistakably political act in surf culture – a demonstration of intimacy with place. Colin speaks loudly to demonstrate his comfort and, together with his knowledge and accent, this establishes his local credentials. Even professional standard surfers owe a respectful deference to local surfers. Once on the water they are expected to gift local's some waves and to not use their superior skill to 'hog the waves.' Colin's 'helpfulness' is equally a demonstration of social status.

As people become surfers, they become differently affected by the coastal environment. It is in this differentiation that Deleuze identifies the creativity of practice. The transformation of potential into practice is part of the Deleuzian process of moving from virtual to actual, in which "the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualised by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualised" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 97). At the Cliffs, the materiality and energy of the environment has inspired a surfing mode of engagement. This, in turn, produces an atmosphere which is shared between would-be surfers,

altering and being transformed by their social and political engagements. The affective atmosphere at the cliff is now charged with mutual respect, fear, and excitement.

These political relationships emerge as components of affective atmospheres that are tied to the materiality and energy of the surf break as much as they are to other surfers. It follows that Irish surfer subjectivities, as well as being comprised of "axes of differentiation like class, race, ethnicity, age and others" that "intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 25), also comprise of environmental elements, as demonstrated by Colin's use of his local environmental knowledge to amass social capital.

3.4 Surfing subjectivities emergent in atmospheres of fear

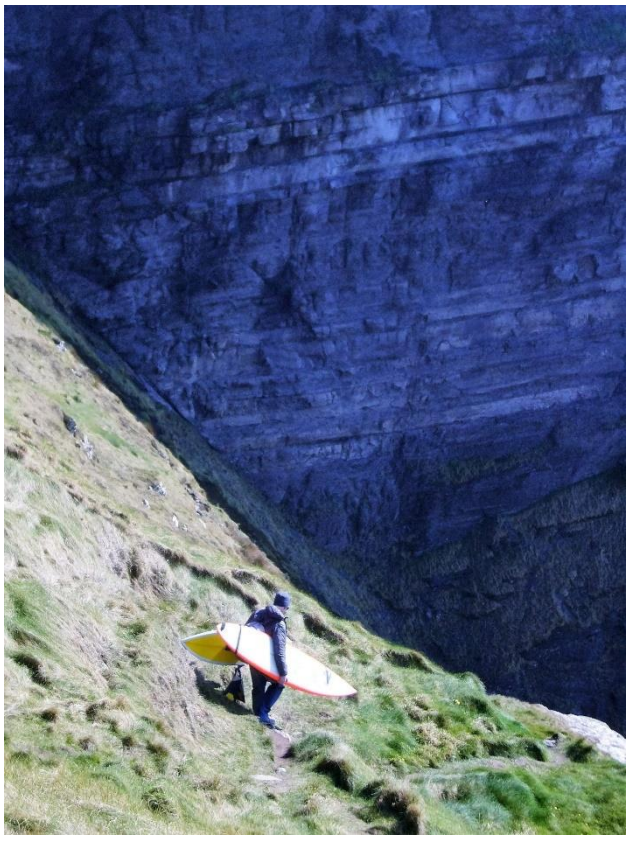


Figure 3.6: Colin makes the descent down the Goat's Trail laden with equipment. Photo taken by Seán.

"And then to finally get out it's a long twenty-minute paddle – almost as far out as Crab. So you're even tired getting there, and you're seeing the sets coming in, and then it starts getting hairy" (Sean, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

This section examines how Irish surfer subjectivities emerge through the cooperative and competitive negotiation of fearful encounters with surf breaks. Having left the atmosphere at the viewing platform, it is now time to paddle out back and begin interacting with the break. When surfing "waves of consequence" (to use Seán's words) it is necessary to familiarise oneself as best as possible with how the sea is behaving around the surf break;

> "If you're not careful there is a really slight side sweep that brings you from the shoulder to the impact zone. So if you just sat there you'd get washed into the impact zone, so you have to be mindful. But then trying to get out, if there's just two of ye, trying to know where to sit can be difficult, because these long periods could only be one [wave] every ten minutes or something, so you're trying to remember where the last set broke, trying to get to there, and making *sure* that you're not too far in. You want to go too far out if anything, and then eventually realise that you're not catching anything" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

All surfers that surf waves like The Cliffs feel fear and are more and less scared at different points on the water. Fear is a key affect of the surfing environment and therefore of the development of surfer subject positions. As Seán discussed above, encountering fear is part of the reason for surfing, but at the same time this must be done in as responsible a manner as possible. The discourse surrounding fear in surfing does not concern avoidance, but rather management. In order to manage fear on the water, surfers put much emphasis on preparation, in one form or the other. Seán's ritual hesitance at the peak is one such way of preparing oneself. Physical preparedness is also of acute importance. "The best way to overcome fear is to feel strong and physically prepared. Training hard and surfing big waves often builds your confidence to push your limits more" (Keala Kennelly, professional surfer, quoted in Lock, 2016).

Of course, there is also a mental and emotional aspect to this fear management, which relates directly to the necessity of a *gradual* increase in the challenge undertaken, in line with skill. In October 2015 Seán attempted to surf The Cliffs for the first time. On this day he paddled for a wave too late but felt unable to pull back due to the social pressure instilled in the lively atmosphere on the water. The crowd, with whom he had been conversing moments earlier, were whistling him into the wave. He fell, snapped his leash, and ended up boardless in white water until finally he swam/was washed into the rocks at the base of the cliff exhausted. The next time the swell looked right for The Cliffs I asked him would he be going back. "That wave, it's just so terrifying like. I think I'll stick with you guys

today," was his response. The atmosphere, charged with the raw materials to potentiate fear (shapely lumps of water in a certain state of dynamism), provided only panic, and the experience collapsed into something unpleasant and dangerous.

In the end, the best way to overcome fear is to is to force oneself to get a wave, either to succeed (and become elated), or to fail, wipeout, and (hopefully) realise that, while unpleasant, it is survivable. After roughly half an hour Colin has caught two waves, while Seán waits for his first. Eventually he paddles a few metres deeper than the handful of surfers waiting around the peak. He paddles hard but falls badly on the take off. It is the first wave of the set and he is now stuck in the impact zone for those following his wave. I quote his description of this experience at length as it is far more evocative than anything that could be managed from a spectator's position above;

> "I was out there and didn't catch anything for about forty minutes. Then I was getting excited and I was like "fuck this, I'm just going on the next one, I want to get the next one." And you forget how much of a slab[34] it is. It's not just a big wall of water, it actually pitches and throws out a lip, so it's like air-dropping into a gigantic barrel. So I paddled in as hard as I could into one and just wasn't making the drop, got pitched out with the lip, catapulting down the face and got absolutely flogged. Now you're really shitting it. You're trying to keep calm, trying to get your breathing ok and just timing it. You see the next wave coming at you and you just know. First you try to scramble over it and see can you make it to the outside. Then you get this daunting feeling going through you that's like "no, there's no way I'm going to make it". Then you're like "right, prepare for an absolute flogging. So you start timing your breathing. And you just take the deepest breath as you can, and you swim as deep as you can, and you feel this thunder explosion, and you're put in reverse. It picks you up, shakes you about like a rag doll, rolls you, you literally do ten somersaults under the water. You're pulled up, pulled down, you have no idea what direction you're going in, and then finally you get up for a breath

[34] A fast, heavy wave.

> of air. You don't even know which way is the shore. I remember for a second I thought that the cliff was another wave coming at me, and then I was like fuck that's not a wave, turned around and look back out to sea and see another one coming at me, then I got a third one, and by then I had drifted sideways enough. The fourth one was fine. Its tiring as fuck" (Seán, Fieldnotes, 13/07/2017).

The reality of a weight of water falling over itself at speed is that each wave moves indeterminately. While a path may stay open on one, the next may collapse. This means that when surfers set their lines, they never know for definite whether it is a viable escape route. For this reason, "taking a wipeout" is not a failure in surfing, but rather a central skill – drowning is the failure. Again, the embodied aspect of imagination is clearly apparent in such situations. Faced with the seemingly insurmountable challenge of taking a set of house-sized waves on the head, Seán's body is forced to search its capacities for a line of flight – he remains calm and starts timing his breathing in preparation. He slows his paddling (his only means of escape) to allow himself to breathe slower and deeper, before diving at the last second. Seán does not know for definite whether he is capable of surviving such an event, but this embodied creativity both gets him through, and also produces the self in articulation with the materiality of the environment. Seán has to be given credit for not giving up and paddling in at this stage. Such a wipeout is a terrifying experience, but at least now he has an embodied knowledge of exactly what the wave is capable.

Seán collects himself, sits for a moment to catch a breath, but is soon back at the peak in order to remain connected to the waves. He is in their flow now, and one will eventually come if he stays in touch, paddling in and out, left and right as is necessary. Analysing such an event is frustrating due to the impossibility of representing the experience in text. What follows is a short vignette adapted from Seán's description of his eventual success on the water that morning which aims to evoke a sense of immediacy and intensity which is difficult to communicate in the more analytical tone of the preceding ethnographic discussion.

***

Seán sits on his board as the sea rises and falls around him. He is attempting to shed the nerves incurred by the walk down the goat's trail. Behind him the Cliffs loom menacingly. They block the morning sun, causing a chill to linger on the sea below. Sitting on the shoulder, Seán takes his time to assess what the waves are doing – where they are breaking; where people are sitting and when they are taking off. Surfing this wave is not something done lightly. In its short lifetime as a surf spot there have been numerous broken bones here and many near-drownings. All this knowledge adds to the air of tension on the water, and there is little chat between sets[35] as each of the five other surfers concentrate on keeping position. A set appears on the horizon. Total silence falls over the line-up as all paddle out to meet the in-coming waves. All Seán's attention is now focused on the closest crest. Will he make it over the back of the wave in time, just before it breaks? His heart beats faster from effort and anxiety as he drives his heavy big-wave board through the water as fast as his arms will allow. One of his companions who had been sitting farther out is now paddling sideways, lining himself up to take it on. As Seán makes his final scramble vertically up the face of the wave he glances to his right in time to see his brother Colin pushing himself to his feet, crouch, and descend vertically down the twenty-foot face. Seán just manages to make it over the top. A thunder-like clap fills the air from behind and Seán is showered by a cold spray which adds to the volume. He is scared but excited by the perfect wave he just saw and energised by the all-consuming intensity of the situation: He and his companions could well be paddling for their lives. The second wave is moving in fast and Seán senses that he can paddle himself into position. His eyes never leave the in-coming peak, surging higher and higher as he paddles straight for it. At the last second Seán whips his board around, paddles, and finds himself staring down an impossibly vertical face the height of a two-storey building. This is bigger than he has ever experienced. His instincts tell him to pull back, but just as he is about to hesitate he hears a scream; "*GO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*" Another surfer can see that Seán is perfectly positioned for the ride

[35] A "set" of waves: Waves tend to go through lull periods, and then when they do arrive they rarely come alone; more often they travel in "sets" of 2-5.

of his life. At the crucial moment, this bellowed imperative cuts through the air with so shrill and forceful a sound that it acts as a climax to the waves gathering energy and solidifies Seán's resolve – his mind and body cannot let it be ignored. He digs hard, leaps fast, stands tall, and with awe looks up as the lip of the wave throws out and over his fully-extended height. He is moving through a turquoise tube as big as a train carriage. It is at once deafeningly loud and totally silent. The atmosphere in the line-up – thick with adrenaline, noise, competition, challenging weather, and fear is for a moment left behind. He is in another world. As the barrel starts to close he resets a high line of escape and bends low. A powerful spray created by the violent death of the tube shoots from behind him and boosts him out before the liquid cylinder disappears. He dives off his board and emerges face to face with the cliff – that such a beautifully terrifying wave exists in such a beautifully terrifying place seems more magical than coincidental. He is ecstatic. As the world becomes audible again the sound of hoots from his companions who have watched his success greet his ears. And it all begins again, but Seán paddles back out with his head spinning and his energy super-charged, having borrowed temporarily from the sea, the cliffs, and his companions.

***

Too much fear leads to panic, but the right amount produces a sense of thrill. "Surfing waves like that is just the biggest thrill ever, that's what it's all about for me," explains Seán. "That's why this place is so special. There aren't many places in Ireland that can scare you in that kind of way." Interacting with the Cliffs in Seán's "kind of way" – by surfing them – submerges the surfer in an atmosphere charged with the energy that causes the giant waves to break and a surfer's adrenaline to rush. In the course of this practice, fear becomes an energy with which the self is cultivated. In his engagements with fear, anxiety, excitement, respect for other surfers, and reverence for a beautifully dangerous place, Seán becomes a surfer – a *big-wave* surfer. Using the environment to cultivate the self through the negotiation of psychosomatic responses such as these can be understood as an aspect of embodied imagination as described by Laviolette. That is to say, practices are not the only thing that can be

imagined by the body, but also new senses of self. Surfing identities and subjectivities are sustained by amassing skill, but also by being comprised of certain environmental affects, and moving in certain social atmospheres. It is not uncommon for surfers to describe themselves as being *of* a certain wave. In early 2017, Spanish professional surfer Kepa Acero was almost killed at Mundaka, a wave in northern Spain which he had surfed his entire life:

> "This January second, surfing at home in Mundaka, I suffered a serious accident. I hit my head hard against the bottom and I almost drowned. Once in the hospital I realised I broke my neck and it was in a very delicate situation. After a long surgery, chance has wanted me to walk again. People ask me now if I'm afraid to go back to Mundaka, and I say that the best moments of my life has been in there, and there is nothing I want more than to return" (Steve, 2017).

For Acero, Mundaka has become "home" through the countless hours he has spent there. As the break, weather, intentions and actions of other surfers have created an affective field through which Acero has become a surfer, it has become precious – the place of "the best moments" of life.

This ethnography further demonstrates that atmospherically immersed bodies are not only capable of imagining and creating practices but, given the crucible that is the fearful but skilled negotiation of waves, Seán and Colin's surfing is also *auto*creative in the sense that these skilled bodies produce surfers that are marked as capable of surfing The Cliffs, which becomes a foundational aspect to Irish surfing identities (if not global in this case, such is the fame of this wave). This practical cultivation of the self is therefore also productive of the means of social mobility, as surfing skill and identification with the world's great breaks are the marks of prominent surfers. It is in this way that surfing practices are not the only thing that can be imagined by the body immersed in an appropriately dynamic and affective atmosphere, but also new senses of self and new surfer subjectivities in which social actors are socio-politically empowered by their board-borne deeds.

3.4 Summary

The atmospheres which permeate The Cliffs are produced through numerous different affects: wind and waves are the product of meteorological affects; fear and excitement are partly tied to the superlative nature of the materiality of this specific place (Bille, 2013; Edensor, 2015), but also become emplaced through the cultural narratives surrounding past surfing experiences at The Cliffs (Luna, 2018); respect, deference, and competition are elements of surfers' social engagements which also alter the affective experience of sharing this place with others. Being immersed in such atmospheres does not only conserve or compound socio-political realities, as is the case, for instance, with class differences in the experience of domestic chemical exposure in the US (Shapiro, 2015). Such immersion also creates the conditions for the emergence of new practices and corresponding socio-political configurations. Such is the case with the meteorological negotiations of surfers at surf breaks how these become the raw materials which Irish surfers then use to gain social capital, as they either develop skill or intimacy with particular places and particular surf break atmospheres.

Given the importance of demonstrable environmental and atmospheric intimacies to the practical and social aspects of surfing, there is clearly a close relationship between atmospheric attunement and the development of Irish surfer subjectivities. At The Cliffs, surfer subjects emerge as those drawn to particularly fearful, excited, yet skilful negotiations of the environment and who amass social capital (and recognise it in others) precisely within such negotiations. This provides the basis for another critique of liminal approaches to surfing, this time with respect to the surfer subject. The surfer subject is described as liminal because of their 'doing something other' at the coast that does not constitute normal life. An example is Keith Duggan's assertion that because his Irish surfing informants seemed unaffected by the post-2008 atmosphere of doom and gloom that gripped the country while water-borne, their surfing amounted to "pure escapism" (Duggan, 2012). Essentially Duggan argues that his informants left their Irish social selves on land and encountered a different subject entirely on the water. If a liminal subject is one undergoing a transitional phase in which their

social status is ambiguously "suspended between the familiar that is left behind and the one they have yet to assume" or in which they become "structurally invisible" (Couch, 2017, p. 2), it is clear from the above discussion that this does not seem to be what takes place at surf breaks. The production of surfing social capital, politics, and subjectivities through a process of atmospheric attunement demonstrates that Irish surfers actually produce their social selves within these littoral atmospheres and, by carrying their practices and social groups away from the beach, also bring the surferly aspects of subjectivity from the littoral back to the terrestrial.

More generally, atmosphere has proven a fruitful concept capable of evoking two important aspects of the ecological approach to surfing taken in this thesis. The first is that *it foregrounds connectivity* over boundedness*,* breaking down barriers between human and nonhuman, littoral and terrestrial/oceanic, digital and real (and accordingly land/home and coast); the individual and the group, the affective and the meteorological. The necessarily connected nature of diverse elements and environments is a key premise to this analytical approach. The second is that atmosphere is a field capable of making sense of a more-than-human concept of relationality as energy transfer derived from the study of surfing practice. The discussion above demonstrates that there is a direct connection between the energies which animate surfer politics and waves. The meteorological is transformed into the affective and the social as surfers' bodies develop techniques of harnessing environmental energies, and then also forms of social distinction based on those techniques.

Chapter 4: Harnessing Oceanic Energy through Material Manipulations

4.1 Introduction

Technologically speaking, surfing is an experimental pursuit; every five years or so boards change shape and size as technology advances and riding styles/preferences develop, which means that bodily dispositions towards the energy animating waves also changes. Each surf is thus an experiment to see how such a board feels in such a wave under the foot of such a surfer. The human body is similarly transformed as it learns to surf. It becomes scarred, muscled, and burnt by the sun and wind. Its centre of gravity is lowered and it becomes agile in a manner barely perceptible on land but is instantly recognisable on the water. This chapter examines the manner in which Irish surfers harness Oceanic energy through material manipulations. These manipulations are carried out by both Irish surfers on material culture to produce functioning gear and also by material culture on the body. The result is a hybrid surfing body as channel of Oceanic energy.

In STS a hybrid network, entity, concept, etc., is one that consists of "a melange of human and non-human" (Brown, 2006) parts. In *We Have Never Been Modern,* Latour describes how the production of knowledge and practice mixes "natural" phenomena with human modes of investigation and description in such a way that almost every process that humans find themselves a part of, or entity they interact with, is hybrid in some sense;

> "On page four of my daily newspaper, I learn that the measurements taken above the Antarctic are not good this year: the hole in the ozone layer is growing ominously larger…the same article mixes together chemical reactions and political reactions. A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and the most sordid politics, the most distant sky and some factory in the Lyon suburbs" (Latour, 1993, pp. 2-3).

In this chapter I examine how interactions between surfers and surfing technologies complicate the boundaries between body and technology, but I am interested in this hybridity in a more specific sense

than described above. Jöns (2006) distinguish between two meanings of hybridity; the first is the "classical socio-material" (ibid, p. 572) hybridity described above which argues for the addition of the technological and the material into the social. The second, which Jöns terms 'dynamic hybridity', refers to the combination of materially and symbolically diverse elements "that facilitates dynamic hybrids to actively negotiate between ontologically different elements and to establish lasting connections between them" (ibid, p. 572). A hybrid's dynamism lies in its ability to bridge ontological gaps that neither human or nonhuman aspects of the hybrid can do alone. An example of such a hybrid, I argue, is a surfing body. The Ocean, as surfers describe it, is an energy source that is ontologically distinct from human life (in that it animates relations as opposed to being 'in' relation) and separated from terrestrially developed technologies prior to water-going practices. By working on each other, however, human bodies, surfboards, and wetsuits produce the material and symbolic conditions necessary in order to produce surfing bodies which, in their becoming channels for Oceanic energy, break down ontological boundaries separating Oceanic environmental energy and human corporeality as they equally blur the human-nonhuman barrier at the material level.

There is a tendency in the STS and anthropological literature regarding hybridity to gloss over what it might mean for the distinction between human and nonhuman to be 'blurred.' Statements such as "[m]any of these synergies between climber and gear appear so seamless to climbers that they blur the boundaries between the 'body' and 'technology', the 'artificial' and the 'natural'" (Barratt, 2011, p. 401) invite the question of whether the blurring is largely perceptual – an experience of seamless use. Similarly, if "the bodies of climbers cannot be revered as pure natural forms" but "are purposefully co-constructed through climbing and the use of artificial training aids" (ibid, p. 401), a thorough conceptual analysis ought to investigate the nature of this 'co-constructedness'; if it means that body and technology create each other in practice, then what exactly is created, and how does the relationship between them change during the process? I argue below that a dynamic hybridity which blurs both ontological and material boundaries requires an understanding of becoming-hybrid that is based on more that the co-emergence of technology and bodies within the one hybrid network,

but, more deeply, that surfboards take on human aspects and bodies take on technological aspects as they 'grow' into each other in developmental practice.

Ingold uses the concept of growth to describe this continuous process whereby bodies and tools emerge from one another in the development of techniques:

> "Do we think of nurture as the projection of pre-existent cultural form upon materials provided by nature, or of culture as the sum of emergent properties of a nurturing process?...Think of the canoe-builder in the Trobriand Islands – described by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in his classic study, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* – who is instrumental in turning what had been a tree growing in the forest into a craft that will ride the waves. It is not that the builder begins with shapeless raw material (timber) and ends with a well-formed artefact (the canoe), or that the canoe 'grows' as it takes shape under the impress of his adze, from initial formlessness to final form" (Ingold, 2015, p. 120-121).

To grow is to become human in line with the specificity of a set of practices and technologies. In order to be able to surf, surfers must imagine technological transformations of the self that require searching beyond the littoral environment – for wetsuits they have employed neoprene from a military context and are now experimenting with forest rubber as a sustainable alternative; the wood of boards has been switched for polyurethane from industrial contexts. What is required is a creativity to imagine what the human body might be capable of given the right tools and materials not-yet-existent in the littoral. Creative practices cause technology to overflow their contexts; development in one environment can radically change the terms of interaction in another, given a group of sufficiently motivated practitioners.

Growth implies a more continuous and permanent relationship between surfers and their technology in which the distinction between them is blurred through extended processes of development, care, use, and as surfing identities and life histories are objectified into these things. It is not merely the case that this blurring only takes place in time of proficient practice, as will be

described at length below. Through a wide range of practices, body and board converge. In this assertion, my understanding of how things grow out of each other in relations differs from Ingold's, who postulates that while relations are indeed ontologically primary, individuals indeed maintain their particularity within these, inspiring his knotting metaphor, implying a rejection of the type of hybridization that I have described above. Considering the relationship between surfers and their equipment, however, in which both constantly develop and maintain each other and together imagine new modes of environmental engagement, I suggest that it would be a mischaracterisation to suggest that surfboards or wetsuits are removable parts which aid the body's temporary transformation into a surfing body. The changes that are brought about through the use of surfboards – bound into muscles and steadied in the new sense of balance, among others – are such that the tools of surfing are not really *removeable* and the effects of their use is not really temporary.

The reported experience of Irish surfers is demonstrative of the above point. Proficient surfers characterise their encounter with waves as being almost entirely – sometimes fully – unmediated. In Ireland, their discourse often represents quite a modernist image of "pristine" nature which is removed from human activity *except* when surfing;

> "Getting out into nature is not the main reason I surf, but it certainly is one of the things that makes it so enjoyable" (Ruaidhrí, Fieldnotes, 11/05/2016);
>
> "Surfers are one of societies groups that are most connected to nature – sitting in the ocean is the best way to do this" (Fergal Smith, Irish professional surfer, farmer, and Irish Green Party activist, Fieldnotes, 23/06/2017).

Superficially it might seem counter intuitive for a surfer to be able to characterise their experience of the environment as unmediated considering the amount of expensive, high-performance equipment that they require to achieve the experience. This is to presume, however, that surfers bring a terrestrial body to their practice, perhaps attaching various technologies as temporary prosthetics to help them negotiate the littoral environment. Alternatively, understanding the surfing body as a hybrid formed through the convergence of human corporeality with nonhuman things which

symbolically and materially bridges ontological barriers between terrestrial things and Oceanic energies affords an alternative analysis of the above statements: *Surfing bodies* feel removed from 'nature' on land due to their temporary incompleteness – their separation from material parts carefully developed and their inability to harness vital energy. Once acting through a surfboard, wearing a wetsuit, and using the body in a surferly fashion, however, vital Oceanic energy becomes proximate. Material, conceptual and ontological barriers between the surfing body hybrid and The Ocean ceases to exist.

The development of surfing bodies is a social process. Surfers learn from the instruction of others and are also influenced by the surfing styles of professionals that they watch online. In this extended "communit[y] of learning" (Pálsson, 1994), engagements with new techniques and technology comprise the social relations between beginners and proficient practitioners (Coupaye, 2009b), but through which all are constantly learning. Contemporary anthropology of bodily enskillment is derived largely from the growing interest in theories of "situated learning" (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Gibson, 2014; Pálsson, 1994) in psychology in the 1980s-1990s, and also from the concomitant interest in anthropology regarding the learning body (Csordas, 1994; Farnell, 2003; Ingold, 1996, 2000; Pálsson, 1998, Waquant, 2004). Situated learning theories argue against Durkheimian theories of learning-as-socialisation, which regard skill sets as "supra-individual byproducts of interaction" (Pálsson, 1994, p. 903) that the novice taps into through learning. As "an imitator of a technique" (ibid, p. 903), both the novice and the skill set are imagined as fully formed and separable; the former a subject, the latter a collective object that is simply imprinted onto the mind of the human through practice. Theories which emphasise the situatedness of the learning process, on the other hand, "insist that persons acting and the social world of activity cannot be separated" (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993, pp. 4-5). As such, "sociality is given right from the beginning" (Pálsson, 1994, p. 904). Enskillment is less about mimicry and acquisition than it is about development, whereby skills "*mature* both biologically and socially" along with both the person and the practical environment (Harris, 2007, pp. 20-21, my italics). The word "mature" has been italicized in order to

emphasize that skills themselves undergo a process of evolution within the "communities of learning" in which they are developed (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993) and are not simply taken up.

For this reason, it would be an analytical short-coming not to engage with unskilled practitioners in the ethnography of technique and practice. The ethnographic record of practical activities such as skateboarding (Borden, 2001) circus performance (Bouissac, 2012), agriculture (Coupaye, 2009a), fishing (Pálsson, 1994), surfing (Stranger, 2011) windsurfing (Wheaton, 2004), and I suspect many others besides is comprised almost exclusively of studies of skilled practitioners, and this is especially true in the social science of leisure practices (see Donnelly, 2006. Waquant, 2004, however, is a notable exception, although the unskilled body in question belongs to the researcher himself). Skills and the relations which they affect are examinable in two ways. The first is through a descriptive analysis of the work of the skilled practitioner, whereby a particular world of action is evoked. The second is by following the development of skills as novices bring their bodies to new contexts and will them to act. The examination of the gradual embodied development of surfers at different levels sheds light on the intimate changes brought about through such engagements. The majority of this chapter will be spent discussing the *learning* of skills and the *development* of technologies and bodies, as opposed to taking all these as givens. It is through this ethnography of skill at all levels and the comparison of discourse and practice of beginners, intermediates and professionals that has generated the insights into the importance of nonhuman activity in the co-development of body and board, and the technologization of human bodies that make up the analytical body of the chapter. I do not believe that these crucial aspects to the artefacts of surfing would have been visible solely in the activity of proficient surfers.

This chapter advances the ecological argument of this thesis by developing the conceptual tools capable of explaining the processes of scaling energy from grand Oceanic-atmospheric level down to the corporeal. Section two of this chapter examines the labours undertaken by Irish surfers to produce properly functioning technology through its development, maintenance and placement in

partnership with other related tools. These labours do not only produce a hybrid ecology of human and nonhuman elements, but also cause human properties to emerge in what might usually be described as nonhuman. Section three will then discuss how this technology in turn works on bodies by altering their movements, preserving them at sea, and eventually by producing surfing bodies as channels of Oceanic energy.

4.2 Creating individual surfboards and wetsuits

4.2.1 Developing boards and wetsuits

Until the mid-20th century, surfboards were made exclusively of wood. When surfing was first recorded by Europeans in Hawaii in the 1800s, each surfboard was shaped from the solid trunk of an Olo or Alaia tree, not unlike the design of dugout canoes found in various Pacific island cultures (Malinowski, 1932; Tilley, 2002). As surfing spread to California in the early 20th century, locally available redwood replaced the Hawaiian materials. To support the weight of a person and to move optimally with a wave, these wooden boards had to be large. At 9'-15' in length and weighing 45-70kg, these were not very portable and also lacked manoeuvrability on the water. A hollow board design was developed by Californian surfer Tom Blake in the 1920s, who drilled hundreds of holes into the deck[36] of the board and added thin layer of wood to the top and bottom. This decreased the weight but had little effect on manoeuvrability. A board of such a length is nearly impossible to turn and promotes what had by now become the classic Hawaiian surfing style whereby the board is surfed straight back towards the beach (as opposed to sideways along a wave's length), and skill is demonstrated by moving around the amply-sized deck in what appears to be a demonstration of balance.

[36] The upper surface of the board.

Figure 4.1: An example of a classic wooden shape. Photo taken by Nick Lavecchia.

The invention of the polyurethane surfboard in the late 1950s transformed surfing (and the surfboard industry along with it). Polyurethane is a highly buoyant, lightweight foam which is cast in a mould into large rectangular “blanks”. The blanks are then bought by individual shapers and sanded into shape by hand. This foam is not waterproof, but actually acts like a sponge if it gets wet, adding extra weight and causing the material to deteriorate. Because of this, a layer of fibreglass cloth is laid over the board and painted with synthetic liquid resin. This sets into an opaque

Figure 4.2: A contemporary shortboard (6’ 1’’ in length). The "dirt" on the deck is surf wax - a tacky substance that is applied to the board to add traction to the otherwise slippery deck.

shell, both waterproofing the board and adding extra strength. Polyurethane is much more buoyant than wood of a similar weight, allowing boards to become smaller and more portable (boards now weigh as little as 5kg). A surfboard made of foam and glass is, however, far less durable than its wooden counterpart. The nose of a polyurethane surfboard will snap off if it hits a submerged rock at even a moderate speed, and the force of a relatively heavy wave landing on the middle of the board can easily break it in two. The layer of fibreglass is also infuriatingly delicate. Even lightly bumping the hard edges of the nose or tail results in a crack into which water begins to seep. Watching a surfer carry a board around the house is like watching someone handle a China vase. They move delicately through the narrow passages of doorways and staircases, peering behind as the tail follows them around a corner, and placing them on tiled or concrete floors in slow motion, attempting as best as possible to lay them down without making a noise. With portability and performance comes fragility and expense. Wooden surfboards can last a lifetime whereas polyurethane boards gradually become waterlogged and are often snapped before they get the chance. Surfers in Ireland currently buy a new board every two or three years, spending €500-€800 if bought new, although it is much more common to buy well-maintained second-hand boards for €180-€400.

Shorter, lighter surfboards are not only more convenient to transport but have also transformed surfing style. “Shortboards” – as the most commonly used polyurethane shapes are known – have extended the potential of what can be done on the face of the wave; “Whereas plank and longboard technology imposed severe limitations on surfers’ movements, three-finned technology has freed the surfer: today’s boards are ‘extensions’ of the surfer’s body and mind” (Booth, 1999, p. 42). Due to their small size (generally 5-6 feet long) and hugely reduced weight, they are very manoeuvrable. Surfers no longer move in straight lines, but left and right across waves, up and down their faces and also use the space above the wave, as shortboards and an appropriate surfing style generate enough speed to launch surfer and board into the air. Having said that, classic longboard shapes continue to remain relatively popular. They are used by beginners who require the extra volume to develop balance but also by more talented surfers when the waves are smaller, or who

simply prefer the laid-back surf style which they promote. Surfboard fins also require consideration. Shaped like the dorsal fin of a dolphin, they are attached to the underside of the board towards the tail. Their function is to funnel water either side, preventing the board from slipping sideways down the face of the wave as it moves forward. As with all high-performance equipment, changes to the shape, size and material these fins are made of will transform the way a board turns or accelerates.

The modern wetsuit is also a product of post-war USA. In 1952 physicist Hugh Bradner of UC Berkeley realised that trapped water, if retained against the skin by a piece of insulating fabric, would quickly reach body temperature and – together with an appropriate material – would retain body heat for long periods of time in cool environments. He developed a prototype suit using neoprene (a synthetic rubber material) for the fabric and unsuccessfully attempted to market his design to the navy. The first wetsuit manufacturing company was started in 1952 by surfer Jack O'Neill, based in Santa Cruz, California, who recognised the potential of this technology to allow the now-flourishing sport of surfing to spread to the colder areas of the world. This 'additional skin' allows surfers to remain comfortable for hours in the water, but restricts movement, vision, tactile awareness and makes paddling more physically demanding.

Figure 4.3: A surfer in Irish spring/autumn attire.

As opposed to surfboards, wetsuits are not a ubiquitous piece of surfing technology. They only appear in regions/seasons where either water or air temperature (or both) are too low to allow a surfer to remain comfortable wearing surf shorts or a surf bikini. This does, however, cover most of the world outside the tropics. In places like Southern California and Australia's Gold Coast, a "summer suit" – 3mm or 4mm thick – with no hood, boots or gloves will get most surfers through the winter, and these can be left at home during much

of spring, autumn, and all summer. In Ireland, a "winter suit" – 5-6mm thick[37] – complete with hood, boots and gloves, is an absolute necessity between October and March. Although swimmers enter the sea without wetsuits during these times, it is worth keeping some key differences between the two practices in mind. When swimming, the entire body is submerged and protected from the wind. Swimmers also have to move constantly, and this effort generates heat. Surfers, on the other hand, spend the majority of a surf session sat still on their boards, with their torso fully exposed to the wind and without the warmth-generating movement. The average surfing session (at about two hours) is also much longer than the average swim. The extra gear is essential. Gloves usually come off in Ireland around April; the hood can be removed on sunny days and is usually no longer seen by June, along with the boots. Over the summer some surfers switch to a summer suit on sunny days, but most use an old, leaky winter suit to save the expense. These are the technologies required if the human body is to become skilled at surfing and getting to know the right combination of tools is a slow process of ongoing use and practice. The following section begins to describe this process, focusing on how surfers learn to choose the right equipment and put it together in such a way that it suits their bodies and local waves.

4.2.2 Matching surfboards and fins with bodies and waves

Aiden is a surfer in his late twenties. He began surfing early during his teenage years and is now very proficient. Like Colin, he also trained as an engineer after leaving school. Unlike Colin, however, he actually managed to find and hold down a job successfully. For the past four years he has worked in an engineering office halfway between Cork City, where he lives, and West Cork, where he surfs. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of surfboard brands and models, and because he has been earning a

[37] It is interesting how much difference 1mm of neoprene makes. A 4mm thick wetsuit is relatively stretchy, allowing the arms to move freely but is totally unsuitable during the winter months in Ireland. A 6mm, by comparison, is very restrictive of movement, especially of the shoulders. Even in the depths of winter at air temperatures a few degrees either side of 0 Celsius, however, a brand-new winter wetsuit will keep the wearer comfortable for hours in the water.

decent wage for several years he updates and experiments with his gear more frequently than his surfing friends. The following is an extract from a conversation with Aiden regarding how he chooses which boards to surf:

Ethnographer If you had no boards and money wasn't an issue, what board would you buy yourself?

Aiden Well I suppose you'd go and look at the top 10 in the world – usually there's a ranking. The usual boards you'd look for would be Al Merrick, JS, Pukas – they're the world-renowned boards, and then look at the all-rounders – that's what you'd want to buy. So that would be the equivalent of an Al Merrick Fred Stubble, a JS Monsta – they'd be renowned as being in the top five.

Ethnographer Ok, so if you had the all-rounder and you could buy one more, what would you buy as a second board?

Aiden Then a board for slightly bigger waves, so that would mean a different tail, more volume, and a slightly longer board – so say a 6'2" for me. Again, I like Al Merrick, that's what I'm used to surfing, so probably I'd go for that brand, maybe a Black Beauty – something with more volume for bigger waves (Fieldnotes, 12/08/2017).

The first thing surfers like Aiden keep in mind when choosing a surfboard is the type of waves that they are going to surf (Aiden's recognition of his own body and skill remains implicit in the conversation above, but these are equally important factors). Most amateur Irish surfers have no more than one or two useable boards at any one time (although several other older models usually clutter up some part of their home). The vast majority, then, predominantly surf an "all-rounder". Within this category, however, there are still many shapes and sizes to choose from. A surfer's main technique for making informed decisions on board choice is test-driving a friend's equipment. Beyond that, it is necessary to take risks by purchasing new equipment in the hope that it will perform as anticipated. Often a board will fail to live up to expectations, as is the case with Aiden's previous board; "I thought the shape looked perfect for summer waves," he explains, "but it just generated zero speed. I felt kind of guilty selling it on." This is one of the reasons that there is a decent second-hand market

full of almost new boards (in Ireland it is based mainly on a *Facebook* page to which individuals can post advertisements).

A surfboard alone, however, is not much use to a surfer: It must be coupled with the correct fins, surf wax (for grip), leg leash, and a wetsuit if it is to have its potential unlocked;

> "[When testing a board], your rubber attire is worth considering. If it's spring and you'll soon be switching to lighter summer rubber, maybe wait for that day to try out your new surfboard. Likewise, if you're in boots but will be ditching them soon, maybe wait for that day before your test drive. The less you have on, the more your test drive will reveal about your surfboard" (Evans, 2015).

A surfboard is not so much an object in its own right as it a collection of a set of material conditions with which to surf. The extra buoyancy of a winter wetsuit allows a surfboard to ride higher in the water when paddling but makes body movement more difficult. The choice of fins is even more important. To oversimplify, bigger fins generate more speed and grip, while smaller fins allow for easier turns and critical manoeuvres. The aim is to find the perfect balance between these given the day's waves surfing skill and body weight. All these factors change how a board responds, and the more skilled the user, the more perceptive of the minutiae of differences they will be. Consider the following review of a morning's surf by another informant;

Ethnographer I know it's a bad workman who blames his tools, but I do think that my board is a bit too voluminous to whip around fast like that.

Surfer Oh it would be. It's so voluminous that it kind of sits on top of the water and doesn't really bite in. So does mine actually, even though it's eight inches shorter. My other board would have been better out there today actually. It kind of carves and cuts easier. Because of that punch[38] that was there today it was kind of hard to shave off

[38] A sensation of power behind a moving wave.

speed on the fatter board – you ended up outrunning the wave into the oncoming broken section, a good problem to have! (Fieldnotes, 05/04/2017).

This surfer is aware of exactly how his local wave is behaving on this particular day, and exactly how he ought to have assembled his equipment, had he been aware of the surprisingly good conditions in advance.

Figure 4.4: Some of the gear to be put together in order to surf.
Two informants carry their equipment as this particular secret spot lies a kilometre from the road.

One way of characterising the ecology of practice described above is that it consists of boards, wetsuits and fins as strictly nonhuman elements, and surfers as strictly human elements. Such a characterisation, however, overlooks the fact that human aspects reside in the very constitution of the technology (for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between surfboards, their surfers, waves and surfboard makers see Warren, 2012). Surfboards are designed and assembled as much to fit a particular body and culture of movement as they are to be trustworthy watercrafts. If growth depicts culture as the sum of emergent properties of a nurturing process, then human corporeality is one such

emergent property. This is why strictly materialist, assemblage-oriented approaches to hybridity sometimes miss a deeper connection. It is not just that the surfboard is a network of human and nonhuman parts, it is the materialisation of a process whereby the nonhuman parts become human, and vice versa.

4.2.4 Reworking surfboards and wetsuits

Once a board is so old or damaged as to be beyond fixing, or a wetsuit too old to wear any longer, this nevertheless does not necessarily mean that this "dysfunctional" piece of technology is no longer a useful tool for catching waves (in a broader sense). On one morning in early spring 2016, I waited in the car park of Crab Island as Seán went to surf the 6-foot+ waves that broke that day. After no more than about 40 minutes he arrived back to the car with half his board under his arm but grinning from ear to ear; "The waves out there are insane!" he begins, standing on the tips of his toes and throwing his arm over his head to mimic a large barrel shape. "It's easily double-overhead. I got one ridiculous barrel, but then had to duck-dive a big one in the worst position on the way back out. It ripped me from my board and when I resurfaced [the board] had been demolished." What he was most relieved about was that it was the tail of the board that he had been able to find. "At least I still have the fins, and I can tear the deck pad[39] off and superglue it to another

Figure 4.5: Seán proudly shows off his snapped board.

[39] A deck pad is a square-shaped piece of synthetic material that feels quite like cork. They can be stuck to the tail of the board and provide more traction than surf wax.

board." The removeable working parts of Seán's board-fragment can be used to cultivate a new one. Holes and tears in wetsuits can be similarly patched by cutting up an old one and using superglue.

It is also common to see broken boards kept as trophies or used as pieces of art. Often surfers have bits of old boards lying around their homes and gardens, or even hanging from their walls. When he was younger, Aiden used an old board that had become too waterlogged to surf or sell as a canvas onto which he painted the album cover of a Californian reggae-rock band from Ocean Beach in San Diego, a small surf town that Aiden had visited in his early twenties. Now this surfboard's superficial role in Aiden's life has changed dramatically, but Aiden's continuing cultivation of the board allows it to remain functioning as a tool by which Aiden harnesses Oceanic energy to create himself as a surfer. Through symbolic means, Aiden's artistic labour produces a corporeal, cultural, and technical hybrid in which surfing cultural history (with respect to the importance of the surf town in question to Californian surf culture) and Aiden's own biography is written into the materiality of his surfboard, across all the bumps and cracks impressed in the material as marks of his own body once developed atop this board. As a piece of art, the board is a performance of Aiden's surfing identity, but it is also much more than that. This board (perhaps even more so than those Aiden still surfs) is a carefully constructed tool connecting Aiden with The Ocean. It is part of his becoming land-ocean hybrid; a material aspect which bridges the ontological gap separating his terrestrial corporeality with incorporeal Oceanic energy.

By joining fins and leashes to boards and picking wetsuits all with specific conditions in mind, surfers' work to match a developing body to developing equipment in an environment that is always changing. Good, working equipment is grown through processes of human care. This knowledgeable assembling is part of how surfers' bodies constantly work on their tools such that they become "the end result of the integration into the body of the relations (of distance, form, and so on) that it holds with things" (Gil, 1998, p. 125), including both equipment *and* waves. Surfing equipment needs to be put together and taken apart again as bodies change and boards break. A well-performing surfboard is grown out of a mixture of materials, tools, surfing conditions, and bodily capacity. As non-human

materials are caught up in the ecology of surfing, some become hybrids by losing their 'pure' nonhumanity as they take on aspects of surfer corporeality.

4.3 Growing surfing bodies

The final section of this chapter will now examine the opposite operation, namely how surfing bodies are themselves developed by the technology they employ to catch waves, a process requiring plenty of the hard work that Irish surfers are so insistent is characteristic of their practice and which also ties them into surfing communities of learning.

4.3.1 Beginner enskillment: developing the body

Paddling, duck-diving, sitting on an unstable board, remaining in position, competing, paddling into waves, popping up, pumping, turning, taking a wipeout[40], falling "shallowly" when there are rocks beneath: These are some of the physical skills that have to be mastered in order to become a good surfer. As surfers work on their equipment on land, so their bodies are equally worked upon by their equipment on the water during practice – just as squatting notches the knees (Ingold, 1996). This calls for continual muscular redevelopment and the attuning of the senses (particularly of balance) to the moving surface of the board and ocean. Each water-based surfing skill requires the development of new bodily dispositions – attention to the minutiae of relationships between posture, gesture and the movement of the water that, like most high-skill activities, each take thousands of hours of practice to perfect. In order to use any of the technology described above, it is first necessary to develop the requisite skills. By learning to surf, surfers embark upon a lifelong apprenticeship to the elements and to each other. Fledgling surfers who take their first tentative steps into the North Atlantic in Ireland,

[40] Falling from the board while surfing.

swaddled in an awkwardly-fitting wetsuit and with a board under arm, are not just novices of a practice of board-riding, but also of weather-reading, water-movement, etiquette and indeed an entire culture of movement. To amass the social and cultural capital necessary to become a recognised and comfortable member of this world, the first step is to allow the equipment to retrain the body.

Christian and Eimear are two beginner surfers with whom ethnography for this project was periodically undertaken. The following is an edited section of fieldnotes describing a trip to the beach which they undertook accompanied by the very proficient Aiden. Christian had previously surfed only for one week - a surf camp on holiday a few weeks previous to the excursion described below. Eimear had surfed many times during her adolescence, but lacking regular transport to the coast or acquaintances that were sufficiently skilled to tell her when and where to go, she surfed once or twice per year and languished at the stage of absolute beginner;

> "Both of these fledgling surfers bring different predeveloped capacities to their new activity. Christian swims a lot and is quite fit and strong. He has no problem paddling his 7'10'' board (which he has borrowed from Eimear) around the water and through waves – his back muscles are already well-conditioned. He also relatively well capable of getting to his feet. His strong arms allow him to paddle into waves with ease (the board is also helping) and, once moving with the wave, his core muscles help to swing him to his feet without the intermediary step of rising onto his knees – quite an achievement for someone who is surfing for the seventh day. From this point, however, his trouble begins. He finds his board very difficult to balance on even when sitting and is thrown from it numerous times. Once on his feet, he instinctively stands tall with a high centre of gravity and his legs pressed together which causes him to overbalance. Time and again he rises to his feet but falls immediately into the water, swinging his arms wildly on the way.
>
> Eimear, on the other hand, has been around surfboards for a much longer time and so the low-centred, wide-legged stance is more intuitive to her. It is getting to this stage that

is her problem. When compared to Christian, Eimear has stronger legs and a better sense of balance (both benefitting from her years spent as a dancer), but her upper body is far weaker. She finds paddling out-back exhausting and paddling into waves even more so. After just a few minutes it seem as if Eimear is paddling in slow motion – her shoulders simply refuse to lift her arms around and drive them through the water at speed. When she does manage to catch a wave her core and arm strength are not yet sufficiently developed to allow her to swing to her feet. Instead she rises to one knee and stands from there. To be fair, the majority of beginners do this at the start but it wastes the best energy of the wave and un-learning the technique is arguably harder than developing it in the first place, once the body has become sufficiently strong for the more explosive manoeuvre. Having said all that, once she does manage to rise to her feet, she is relatively well-balanced and is almost learning to turn her board and travel sideways along the wave.

To regard Aiden at the same time illuminates the gulf that exists in all aspects of their mutual skill. First of all, he is visibly more muscled than the other two in his back and his shoulders – the product of many years spent paddling around surf breaks. The next most obvious distinction between Christian and Eimear on the one hand and Aiden on the other is the way they use their weight on the board. Eimear and Christian consistently appear to be lying either too far forward on the board or more often too far back (beginners fear nose-diving[41] and tend to overcompensate to prevent it). As unbroken waves push in towards the shore they scoop up the surfers and carry them to their crests where the potential energy of the wave is highest. At this moment, the surfboard acts like a seesaw: enough weight forward and the right amount of paddle-power will drive the board down the face of the wave; hesitation, a lack of paddle strength or too much weight to the rear will simply allow the wave to pass by. A combination of all of these factors causes Eimear and Christian to miss most

[41] When the nose of the board pierces the face of the wave, throwing the surfer head-first downward.

waves. Comparatively, at a similar moment, Aiden takes one last look over his shoulder to be sure he is correctly positioned. He lies with his chin pressed to the top of his board and then calls upon a reserve of energy to produce a burst of paddling faster and more powerful than he uses when he paddles around in search of waves. He has his eyes fixed on a point along the wave in the desired direction of movement (the gaze should always remain concentrated ahead, never at the board or body), and without looking at his board again he presses his hands down and rises to his feet in one fluid manoeuvre, arriving a moment later at the point on which his gaze has been fixed" (Fieldnotes, 14/04/16).

When learning to surf, the board presents itself as the first problem. It meets the terrestrially-trained body on land where the novice discovers how awkwardly heavy this big, voluminous beginner's board is to carry to the shore. In the shallows it acts like a cumbersome yet unsteady moveable surface; too light to remain steady as the water surges up and down; too heavy to be navigated with ease. These boards are highly voluminous to allow for stability but this makes it impossible for them to be paddled through the white water at the shore to access the better-quality waves out-back, especially with an unskilled back and shoulders. This confines the novice to the shallows, where they stand beside their board in anticipation of an approaching wave, before jumping on and attempting to stand up. Paddling, however, is the only way of maintaining warmth on the water. And so while intermediate and advanced surfers can keep moving to remain warm, beginners are forced to slowly freeze in waist deep water, while being hit periodically in the face by incoming surges of white water. Most of these new recruits do not make it past September when the weather begins to deteriorate. For those that do, a long process of attrition is commenced. Bigger boards soon recast the novice's body by altering their stance to allow for multidirectional movement. The low-quality waves in the shallows begin to lose their appeal, although learning to make the more vertical drop down an unbroken wave and developing the paddle strength to navigate through waves takes time. There is a period when the novice surfer is doing very little surfing at all, but rather learning to

paddle through one wave after another and failing to surf in conditions that are still slightly beyond the scope of their abilities. Many would-be surfers give up during this extremely frustrating period;

> "One of the cons [about surfing] is definitely the amount of work it takes to become even moderately capable of surfing. I mean as a beginner, you're not going to go from never having surfed before to surfing three times per week, so it just takes so many years of going backwards and forwards and having unenjoyable surfs. I especially feel like this since I moved to London. The last time we went out I finally got down the line[42] after years of trying. That was one of the best feelings ever. And then I didn't surf for five weeks and it almost felt today as if I was starting all over again, but I've been surfing for years! Today is one of those days when I just want to give up (Eimear, Fieldnotes, 14/04/17).

The requirement of time and effort in the production of surfing bodies is the ethnographic inspiration for combining the concepts of growth and hybridity. In order to bridge the ontological distinction (Jöns, 2006) between surfers and surfboards on the one hand, and Oceanic energy on the other, surfboards too must affect relatively permanent nonhuman alterations to the human body. Growing hybrid surfing bodies requires a more thorough ecological transformation than producing a mere combination of human and nonhuman elements. It is rather a convergence of these elements in which nonhumans recreate human bodies. Beginner surfers advance as the materialities of body and board reshape one another. In the last section the human body become visible in the nonhuman board. Equally here the nonhuman boards become aspects of the surfing body and its mode of environmental engagement.

Eimear's enskillment is clearly social in nature. She, Christian and Aiden surfed together several times during the course of my fieldwork. On such excursions, Aiden's favourite method of instruction was to compare their attempts at catching waves, which worked so well because of their contrasting skills and capacities. Pálsson uses the concept of "communities of learning" (1994) to

[42] Surfing left or right along an unbroken wave, as opposed to surfing straight into shore with broken white water pushing the board along.

critique not only Durkheimian theories of learning-as-socialisation (see chapter one, section 1.5.2), but also the straightforwardly binary master-apprentice relationship that is currently popular in the anthropology of learning (e.g. Stoller, 2009). While Aiden's role in the learning process is clearly important, the degree to which Christian and Eimear also teach each other is significant. This is not only the case with beginners. Surfing "style" – the specific ways that surfers stand and move on a surfboard – are far from determined by waves and boards. Rather they are cultured, changing from year to year and from place to place (to a degree). The main influence on the development of surf style is the professional surfing scene and the saturation of videos online in which the vast majority of surfers now emulate and aggressive, critical surf style, examples of which can now be seen at almost every surf spot worldwide. This cultural homogenisation is perhaps lamentable, but it too demonstrates the fact that surfers do not learn in pairs, but rather as a (progressively more global) community of learners.

This community-based mode of enskillment further suggests that growth is a social relation as well as a reference to the development of materials and bodies. Eimear and Christian's surfing bodies are grown out of each other as they relate *through* their shared waves, producing communities of hybrid bodies. The "situated" nature of the learning process (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Pálsson, 1994) is also apparent. In surfing, learning is corporeal and requires interaction with the coastal environment. As Eimear becomes a surfer, the "axes of differentiation" (Braidotti, 2012) which constitute her subjectivity now include the surf styles of Aiden and Christian, their comments, and also, as was made clear in the previous chapter, her developing attitude to waves. The following subsection continues the discussion of the production of hybrid surfing bodies by describing how equipment extends the surfing body's ability to maintain itself when at sea.

Figure 4.6: Typical beginner's stance. High centre of gravity, weight equally on both legs, a trailing arm adding weight to the rear (which acts like a break), and with only the head and not also the shoulders turned to face direction of movement. Photo property of surfboardsoceanside.com

Figure 4.7: Typical proficient surfer's stance. Low centre of gravity, back leg disengaged with all weight on the front foot in the middle of the board, shoulders turned to face direction of movement and arms down and forward pulling the surfer along. Photo credit Tyler Walker.

4.3.2 Boards' and wetsuits' maintenance of the body

The physicality of surfing puts equipment and bodies through their paces. Surfers fine-tune their chosen equipment to the pertaining conditions (as best as their budget and skill will allow) in order to maximise performance and to keep them safe. Being pulled and pushed by waves, rolled across sand and bounced off the occasional rock all take their toll, however, and eventually surfboards and wetsuits all require repairs. The body can repair itself, but the chosen equipment plays an important role in limiting the body's need to do so. The board and wetsuit act as guardians of bodily vitality when on the water, just as bodies rejuvenate equipment through maintenance when on land. What is more, using the right equipment and developing the skills necessary to do this effectively are some of the techniques of respecting The Ocean.

In early May 2017, Matthew Bryce, a Scottish surfer, got into difficulty while surfing alone when confronted by an ebbing tide and north-easterly winds blowing strong from shore to sea as he attempted to paddle back to the south-west coast of Scotland. When he failed to return home after dark, his parents raised the alarm. Bryce ended up spending 32 hours drifting at sea. He sat on his board with no land in sight, paddling "not because it was getting me anywhere, just because it was keeping me warm" (BBC, 2017). He was finally rescued close to the coast of Northern Ireland and was airlifted to hospital in Belfast where he was treated for hypothermia, dehydration and sunburn to his face. There is no doubt that Bryce is only alive today because of his wetsuit and surfboard. Sitting on the board allowed him to rest and kept his core out of the chilly water. It also aided in his rescue; "When I saw the helicopter I jumped off my board… and started waving with the board and they flew over, and I thought they'd missed me [sobs], and then they turned 'round" (ibid). Irish surfers were amused by the news report's claim that his wetsuit "would have helped." At the time of the incident, Bryce was wearing a full winter suit including hood, boots and gloves, as most Scottish surfers would in early May. "No shit his wetsuit would have helped," exclaimed one surfer discussing the incident a few days later, "he would have lasted about an hour without it." "He would also have been a goner if

it was a few weeks earlier," remarked another. In order to become a channel for Oceanic energy, proper attire must be worn otherwise the surfer might be overcome among the waves where a terrestrial body ought not tread. The rubber skin of the wetsuit provided Bryce extended protection. His thin-skinned body relied on the wetsuit which retained the heat crucial to allow him to survive a night in the cold, salt water between Scotland and Ireland. Under circumstances such as those suffered by Bryce, the thick, black suit covering the surfer from head to toe is never far from awareness, and neither is the insufficiency of the body that lies beneath it. As is the case with equipment on land, sometimes bodies require more intensive care on the sea, and this is the task of the appropriate technology. To surf without a wetsuit during the summer in Ireland would be foolish; to do this in winter would be suicidal. Wetsuits are part of the bodily transformation that surfers undergo in order to make surf breaks places that they can inhabit practically, but also respectfully.

Figure 4.8: Matthew Bryce in hospital. His face is sunburnt into the shape of his wetsuit hood - the only part of his body left unprotected by his equipment. Photo property of BBC Scotland.

Bryce should be most thankful next for his surfboard, which allowed him to stay out of the water over night and to conserve his energy. The board's function as a safety device is sometimes

overlooked, but when surfers fall and become trapped by waves, the board and leash attaching it to the leg come to the surfer's aid, sometimes saving their lives;

> "You don't know which direction is up or down or right or left. It's black, it's dark, I can feel the pressure in my ears. You're sure you're at the surface and all of a sudden what you perceived to be up is actually the bottom. And the leash is pulling hard on [your leg]. The board is tombstone-ing[43] up there…It's like a life-line. If you get held down, the only thing that I know is that at the end of this [leash] is something that floats a lot more than I do. So I reach around and grab my leash and climb it…I know for sure from personal experience that there are times where if I didn't have a leash, I'm not sure would I have lived" (various surfers, *Riding Giants*, 2004).

In such instances it is the board that maintains the body, providing the means to escape a critical situation in which bodily buoyancy is not sufficient to counteract the downward force of the water in the impact zone.

The surfing and surfing equipment share an intimate partnership of mutual care in which, as skill levels increase, the cooperative functioning of each almost begins to feel automatic. In *The Absent Body* (1990), Leder describes how the body recedes from conscious awareness during the course of normal functioning. When something goes wrong, however (a broken bone, for instance), the body "dys-appears," forcing its way back to immediate consciousness – "it is experienced as something that "stands in the way" – an obstinate force interfering with the individual's projects" (Leder, 1990, quoted in Groven, et al., 2012, p. 509). This notion of dys-appearance could readily be applied not only to the body, but to its relationship with the tools that it uses to negotiate its certain tasks. Consider the following interview extract:

Ethnographer: What does the wrong board and fin combination feel like?

[43] When a surfer is pushed deep by a powerful wave their board remains floating on the surface, but the force of water pushing on the surfer causes the surfboard to stand upright, like a tombstone emerging from the water – an eerie sight on a heavy day.

Surfer: Mainly just that you're sluggish…It's most noticeable if you're using fins that are too small, then you just don't get enough drive at all when you pump,[44] instead of your pump pushing you forward using the curvature of the wave to drive you forward, you're just pumping from side to side instead, or wiggling. And of course the wrong board can cause all sorts of problems. It can feel like its sinking if you're too heavy for it, or like it's putting on the breaks if its designed for a really hollow wave and you're surfing [a wave] with a very flat face – that kind of thing (Ruaidhrí, 11/05/16).

Here it is not simply that technology is malfunctioning, or the body, but rather that the hybrid surfing body is fragmenting. If a surfer becomes separated from their board (which happens when the leash attaching their leg to the board snaps) when waves are large, or when they are far from the shore, there is reason to panic. All of a sudden, the surfing body *dis*appears and the terrestrial body partly *dys*-appears: A surfed body, complete with board and wetsuit, is proficient among waves; if it malfunctions or is unfit for purpose then the relationship breaks down into its constituent parts[45] and both board and body are put at risk.

Surfing is an activity in which things go wrong – such is the unpredictability and power of each wave. Under these circumstances, the appropriate equipment cares for surfers' bodies by enveloping them, altering their practical potential, and leading them from danger. The hard work of developing competent bodies capable of choosing the correct technology, being knowledgeable in its deployment, and of becoming of a certain muscular disposition, requires effort not only from surfers but also from their technology. Surfed bodies "become as one with the tools they relate to" (Thrift, 2003, pp. 311-312). The surfed body is essentially a work-in-progress: its potential is extended not only as it develops skills, but also (perhaps more so) as new technologies are applied. Laviolette's

[44] Pumping is a side to side movement of the body and board which aids in gaining speed that works by the exact same principle that speed is generated when on a swing by meeting the forward and backward movements with an appropriate bodily motion. In surfing the motion is simply side to side along the line of motion instead of forward and backward in pendulum motion.

[45] On a perceptual level at least. The deeper connection between the body of the surfer and the materiality of the board is maintained but is not of much practical use if they become physically separated on the water.

embodied imagination, then, is not just apparent in moments of particular landscape relations, but is also carried from these encounters, objectified in the technological creations suggested by the almost-fit body. Jack O'Neill's wetsuit is a perfect example. To return to Deleuze and creativity: the embodied imagination is a method of actualizing what is virtual, and surfing technology is one mode of differentiating the body with respect to the environment. In discourse and terrestrial practice, boards and wetsuits grow and are maintained by their human carers; on the water, however, it is surfing bodies that are grown and maintained by their equipment.

Ultimately, human and nonhuman material manipulations dissolve the human-nonhuman distinction by causing them to converge – surfers bodies take on aspects of their technology through repetitive practice and development, and boards are shaped by the bodies of their users. What as a beginner might once have seemed like a prosthetic is now part of the hybrid body used to harness Oceanic energy. The transformation is appreciable in how surfers refer to their equipment and waves as they progress. As Christian and Eimear struggled to learn to surf on that day, they often fell and emerged from the water, exclaiming something like ""this board nose-dives so easily," or "*it* feels too thin when I try to get from my knee to my feet." When the question "why do you think that you are having trouble" was posed to Christian, he answered;

> "I think this board is too small, like even when I lie on it to paddle it is trying to throw me off. I can paddle into waves fine, but when I get to my feet it gets unsteady. If I had a bigger board I think it would be better" (Christian, Fieldnotes 14/04/16).

In both cases the action of the waves is considered unproblematic. At this stage neither novice surfer had yet acknowledged the difficulty of correctly positioning oneself for a wave and attempting to catch it at the correct time. Their sphere of awareness is restricted to what the board is and is not doing – their bodies are not sufficiently skilled so as to get beyond the board and to the waves.

This can be compared to Aiden's various discussions of his experience on the water. "Did you see *my* last wave," or "did that turn look ok?" are more representative of Aiden's preoccupations. The

difference being that his bodily relationship with his equipment is no longer problematic, and his attention is directed outwards to allow him to "read" waves – how they are breaking, where are the steep sections and the slower sections, and what line to choose to escape their breaking. Eventually (as is most obviously the case with Aiden), surfers' boards, wetsuits, and bodies begin to be less acted *on*, and rather acted *with*:

> "After about six years of concentrated effort, perfecting turns, cutbacks, noserides, etc., I became aware of the total correlation of man, surfboard and wave. This discovery had a profound effect on my surfing, and sent me one step further into a new dimension - the flow ... I would surf with my mind open, reacting to the situation as it appeared, and utilizing whatever manoeuvre it took to get to the next experience" (Professional surfer Laird Hamilton, quoted in Booth, 1999, p. 64).

Once the surfing body emerges, ontological distinctions that order the worlds of terrestrial bodies such as land, ocean, beach, and surfboard-as-object are replaced with the alternative ontologies of surfing bodies. These harness Oceanic energy, draw terrestrial aspects of their worlds through the littoral, out into the ocean and up into the atmosphere. These alternative environmental orientations are legible through the material manipulations of Irish surfing.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has used the concepts of hybridity and growth to outline the manner in which surfing bodies are produced as part of an extended, developmental process. In comparison to a more superficial or temporary understanding of hybridity as combination (Latour, 1993) or prosthesis (Barratt, 2011), the combination of growth with hybridity argues for a more permanent understanding of the transformations affected in bodies and technology over a lifetime's interactivity. The processual, difficult and effortful nature of such transformations is clearly visible in the ethnography of beginner surfers and the work undertaken on boards and bodies away from waves as well as among

them. Through symbolic and material means, surfing bodies thus become capable of acting as permanent ontological bridges (Jöns, 2006) between human terrestrial corporeality and Oceanic energy. This yet again demonstrates that surfing is fruitfully analysed from a theoretical point of view that foregrounds the connectivity of various environments as opposed to the particularity, peripherality or boundedness of the coast relative to the land.

Chapter 5: 'Fake' Waves: Artifice, alienation and the ethics of harnessing Oceanic energy

5.1 Introduction

Becoming a channel for Oceanic energy is affected through material and symbolic means. It is *not* the case, however, that, given a board and access to waves, anyone can become such a channel. More precisely, according to Irish surfers, it is not the case that just anyone, having found waves in just any place, *ought* to attempt to become such a channel. This chapter analyses a normative dimension to the harnessing of Oceanic energy by surfers by examining a particular emerging environment – the wave-pool – and the surfers that develop within. Wave-pools are man-made facilities of which a wave-generating machine is the central feature, capable of creating "artificial," or "fake" waves. Superficially (and in the hopes of the designers) there may appear to be a great affinity between waves that appear in the littoral environment and those that appear in these wave pools; similarly, one might expect affinity to exist between surfers who become skilled by learning to surf at the coast and those that are now beginning to learn in wave-pools. On the contrary, however, Irish surfers express a sense of alienation from both wave pool users and 'fake' waves, as they are often called. These are not only *very* different environments and practitioners from the point of view of proficient Irish surfers, but they are places where one *ought not* learn to surf, and people who *ought not* be considered surfers. I argue that the suspicion levelled against artificial waves by proficient Irish surfers is connected with the manner in which it allows the unqualified to partake in experiences that approximate 'real' surfing, thereby inviting unqualified practitioners to become something similar to channels for Oceanic energy in an improper manner. Worse still, it might inspire these people to call themselves surfers! I will analyse this normative aspect of harnessing Oceanic energy and the sense of alienation it produces with respect to certain similar practitioners and environments through an examination of the terms upon which waves, surfers, and surfing sociality become 'artificial' at a wave-pool. By applying the

designation 'artificial,' surfers maintain the exclusivity of their access to Oceanic energy through semiotic means.

The development of artificial waves is part of a wider global trend in the production of artificial environments for the purpose of replicating (or more correctly approximating) certain outdoor activities in new (usually pay-to-use) spaces. Artificial climbing walls, ski slopes, sky-diving chambers, off-road cycling tracks, and now wave pools are examples of such environments (van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). The anthropological investigation regarding what makes one environment artificial when compared to another evokes the long standing meta-theoretical inquiry into the relationship between nature and culture, or the tendency of "man-made" to be equated to artificial to greater or lesser extents depending on the context (see Carrier, 2004, and Descola & Pálsson, 2006, for discussion on this topic). Environmental anthropologist Bronislaw Szerszynski discusses how "nature" can be understood as a performance engaged in by humans and nonhumans alike, in which nature, rather than defining an entity, is best understood "as a process open to improvisation, creativity and emergence" (Szerszynski, 2003). James Carrier similarly cautions against analyses which are based on assessing the naturalness or artificiality of environments *per se,* as it risks producing ethnocentric descriptions of what each concept is constituted by. Instead he suggests not to "study, environments, study peoples' relationships with their surroundings" (Carrier, 2004, p. 2). The approach taken here will build on such an understanding of artifice/naturalness as a concept related to the *relationship* between humans and nonhumans and not indexing a quality of humans or nonhumans themselves.

The next section describes artificial waves as an emerging technological and cultural phenomenon. Section two investigates the connection between artifice and alienation through ethnography conducted at one particular artificial wave facility – *Surf Snowdonia,* Wales. It will begin with a spatial analysis of *Surf Snowdonia* to investigate how artifice is produced materially in the design, differentiating this wave from an ocean wave and producing a sense of environmental alienation at a phenomenological level. Section three uses these insights to demonstrate that artifice

is not a given essential quality of the wave but, in this context, is rather something that is i) *produced* and ii) comes to describe not only physical objects but also social relations *and* human beings – surfers can *become* artificial by learning in the wave-pool. I describe an emerging discourse and suspicion of wave-pools and their surfers which functions to protect surfing as a set of techniques of Oceanic communication by bracketing off this place and these practitioners from surfing and surfers at the coast. Section four examines discourses of artifice to suggest that the manner in which artifice at *Snowdonia* upsets cultural norms and creates alienations is due to the fact that because it is not an essential quality of objects or people but alternatively a quality of the relationships between Irish surfers and waves, and the energies which animate them.

5.1.1 Artificial waves

Artificial waves have been part of the surfing imaginary for as long as anyone can remember. The idea of a perfect, man-made wave that breaks in one's backyard and to which one controls the powers of access amounts to "the collective dream of a LOT of surfers on this planet" (Weisberg, 2015). "Wave pools," as they are usually known, in which a mechanical source creates a force that pushes water through the pool, have actually existed since at least the early 1990s. In the more powerful of these (examples still exist in Las Vegas, Dubai and Tokyo, among others), surfing demonstrations are held in order to attract visitors to these novelties which they too could pay to try.

As far as surfing is concerned, these were and remain mere novelties. The problem with all early attempts of wave pool design is that the force which generates the wave operates from behind and is not sustained throughout the wave's breaking. This results in a very poor-quality wave that loses its power quickly and is incomparable to the real thing in any practical manner (Odriozola, 2015). These examples notwithstanding, artificial *surfable* waves maintained their 'pipe-dream' status in surf culture. This situation changed dramatically in 2015 through the technological and commercial efforts of two new companies – *Wavegarden* and the *Kelly Slater Wave Company*.

Wavegarden are the first in the world both to develop an artificial wave that that is capable of generating a sustained force to drive water through a pool and to successfully package this invention in a marketable form (the specifics of how the wave works will be discussed below). *Surf Snowdonia* opened its doors in August, 2015, in Snowdonia National Park, Wales. At the time of writing, Wavegarden currently have wave pools under construction in Texas and Melbourne and have more than twenty contracts finalised around the world (Weisberg, 2015). One of the original consequences of this sudden development (*Wavegarden* kept their technology secret until it was fully functional) was the instigation in the surfing world of a heated debate regarding the desirability of such technology. Surfing purists asserted that, lacking the ocean, this simply was not surfing and also that this was the latest example of the corporate appropriation of a lifestyle already having been branded and marketed with such success since the 1980s. Others were excited about the possibility of surfing inland. While the *Wavegarden's* technology is impressive, however, it is very much flawed. The wave created is certainly surfable (much more so than anything that had come before) but compared to the real thing it is still of average quality. It is well suited to beginners and intermediate surfers but advanced practitioners have been largely uninterested by its mediocrity. Unbeknownst to most surfers worldwide, however, *Wavegarden* were not the only company with a functioning artificial surfable wave machine in 2015.

Kelly Slater is the most famous surfer alive. A Florida native, he is the most successful competitive surfer of all time, having won eleven world championships and dozens of other competitions. The prestige attached to his name as well as his good looks have transformed him into a highly valuable brand over the years; both he and his sponsors have made millions from successful commercial partnerships. He is also well-known outside of surfing as an environmental spokesperson and an ex-partner of Pamela Anderson, a relationship which developed following his appearance in *Baywatch*. Kelly, as he is intimately known, is an ever-popular and hugely respected individual who can do no wrong in the eyes of most surfers. It turns out that this talent of his is equally applicable to artificial wave development.

Figure 5.1: Kelly Slater's famous good looks (left) and Slater in action (right). Photo property of Carve Britain.

During 2015 *Wavegarden* was certainly "winning the space race" when it came to man-made waves (Jennings, 2017), but this was not to last long. In January, 2016, Kelly published an online video that sent shockwaves through the surfing world. The clip opens with steam rising from what looks like a large, still lake. It then cuts to a frame of Kelly himself who is looking into the distance. He smiles, puts his hands on his head, before jumping up and down shouting "oh my god!" The camera suddenly turns around. And there it is – a *perfect*, as good as (if not better than) nature, man-made wave – the holy grail of artificial wave engineering and the object of almost every surfer's wildest dreams. Following the introduction of the *Kelly Slater Wave Co.*, resistance to the existence of artificial waves has become far more muted[46];

> "I think it's since Kelly's wave dropped that public opinion really shifted. I think people were still like "this is bullshit" after seeing the one in Wales, it doesn't really…I don't know what it is about [that one] but it just didn't look that appealing – it didn't look like it was really going to replicate surfing. Then Kelly's wave came along, which looks for all the world like (if you couldn't see the pylons through the middle that your surfing towards) a legitimate real wave, so yeah, the whole surfing world when they saw that I think were like "that is *amazing*", like

[46] Although the place they ought to take in surfing practice is still hotly debated. See sections three and four of this chapter.

you couldn't not be enthused by that, you know? So yeah, I think it was only cranks that weren't won over to some extent by that" (Ruaidhrí, fieldnotes 11/09/2017).

Kelly still has a lot of work to do. *Wavegarden* have proven that their invention can be run in a commercially viable manner, producing two surfable waves every ninety seconds and having attracted roughly 150,000 visitors in its first year of operation at their pilot facility in Wales – doubling their goal (Haro, 2016). "Kelly's wave," on the other hand, while being of a far-superior quality, still exists solely at the test facility not yet open to the public. At the moment, it is capable of producing just one of its famous waves every three hundred seconds, greatly limiting its revenue-generating potential. The hype continues, however, as does Kelly's grip on the direction of surf culture. In September, 2017, the wave finally received its full-scale test run. A behind-closed-doors competition was held there with all the world's top surfers. No media were allowed, but the *Kelly Slater Wave Co.* (hereunder KSWC) promised an online edit in the days following. This video[47] amounts to a clear statement of the intentions of KSWC and the World Surf League (organisers of the professional world tour event and now majority stakeholders of KSWC). As the gates of Kelly Slater's Wave Factory open in slow motion, the familiar, idyllic, yet discomforting tone of Gene Wilder's Willy Wonka announces "Boys and girls – the chocolate room." The message is clear: this is the realm of fantasy. The world-class surfing on a world-class (artificial!) wave, which is usually set to aggressive rock music, or chilled-out reggae, takes place to the well-known tune sung by Wilder in the movie;

"Come with me, and you'll be in a world of pure imagination…
We'll begin with a spin, travelling in the world of my creation…
If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it
Anything you want to do – do it.
Want to change the world – there's nothing to it."

[47] http://stabmag.com/stabcinema/kelly-slaters-wave-factory/. Accessed 03/10/2017.

Figure 5.2: Kelly enjoying the world of his creation. Photo taken by Matt Roth.

It is a piece of marketing genius, which both plays on the all-pervasive idea in surf culture of the perfect wave breaking according to the whims of surfers (and not the atmosphere), and also to Kelly's regal position at the core of the practice. Like it or not, having watched this wave develop, surfers now acknowledge that, in what promises to be "the beginning of the greatest fundamental shift in the sport's 100-plus year history" (Jennings, 2017), the future of surfing is in part "looking more chlorinated by the day" (Howard, 2017).

Artificial waves are an attempt at technologically repackaging and transforming natural environments into "safe, predictable and controlled indoor centres" (van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010, p. 143) which, by virtue of their design and purpose, are part of a wider observed "detachment process from the physical landscape" (Öhman, et al., 2016, p. 285). While artificial waves are not (yet) covered by a roof to complete their move indoors, they are certainly characterised by the rest of the criteria mentioned in the above definitions insofar as they are a technological replication of one environment in another, altering the aesthetic, experiential and practical potentials of the landscape.

From an economic perspective, an explanation of the development of such environments claims that this is part of a wider process of the commodification of certain types of experiences.

Adventure tourism and the general sale of adventurous experiences is a growing enterprise worldwide (Humberstone, 2009). There is a growing market in a number of European and North American countries for courses which provide a relatively safe, brief introduction to activities including mountaineering, white water kayaking, canyoneering, and many more. Usually controlled by a skilled guide, companies develop ways of packaging the experience of these activities in a manner marketable to an unskilled audience. Artificial environments can be seen as products of this "experience economy" (Pine & Gilmour, 1999). Practitioners of activities such as surfing and mountain climbing often cite the embeddedness of their practice in the physical environment as well as the lack of the sense of human control evident on the city street as motivating reasons for their practice. Waves and mountains are notoriously hard to get at on a daily basis, however, and can also be quite dangerous. Under the economic understanding, these artificial environments essentially allow for certain aspects of the practice to be repackaged, sanitised of much of the danger in order to attract a wider customer base, and relocated closer to city centres. They are marketed as places for beginners to learn, or proficient practitioners to stay in good practical shape while honing advanced techniques. The following is a quote from an interview with Kelly Slater following the sale of the *Kelly Slater Wave Co.* to *WSL Holdings,* the company that organise the professional world tour. It was published on the WSL's website;

> "While surfing for me will always be about adventure, travel and the ocean, this wave brings a new opportunity to the sport without taking away the soulfulness that attracted many of us to surfing in first place…Surfing great waves in a controlled environment adds a new dimension, as there is no hassling for waves, no stress over who got the best wave - they are all good. Everyone can relax, have fun and focus on improving their surfing" (Kelly Slater, quoted in WSL, 2016).

The suggestion is that while an artificial wave will not be equivalent to surfing, it does not merely offer an inferior experience but rather extends the possibility of a *different* kind of equally valuable practice. Both the economic explanation and Kelly's artificial wave positivism belong to a more general liberal

narrative in which explanations are offered from a mixture of processes of technologization, profiteering, and experience-on-demand consumerism in which the artificial wave is a new frontier of practice and an opportunity for individual (surfer) improvement. While this analysis is valid, it does not offer the full picture. The intentions of developers of new technologies are not always realised in the course of daily use, with the real effects of such developments to how people relate to each other (and in this case with the environment) through the new technology only becoming apparent when analysis is focused at the level of the everyday (Archambault, 2017; Horst & Miller, 2006). This chapter will balance the liberal narrative with the more everyday, experience-oriented analysis of anthropology in which the activity which takes place in wave pools emerges as something quite different from surf breaks, and users as different from surfers.

5.2 Designing artifice, experiencing environmental alienations

Figure 5.3: A graphic representation of Surf Snowdonia. Reproduced from Odriozola, 2015.

Surf Snowdonia is located in Dolgarrog, a pretty rural village that lies about ten kilometres from the northern Welsh coast (not renowned for its waves). It has been built in an old, shallow, elliptical-shaped reservoir – ideal for the application of *Wavegarden's* wave generating technology. Josema Odriozola, chief engineer of the *Wavegarden* acknowledges that finding the right location is by far the most difficult aspect of building artificial waves (Weisberg, 2015). A suitable pool must also be sufficiently protected from the wind to ensure that the quality of the wave is not negatively affected. This reservoir lies length-ways east to west. The prevailing winds blow from the west but the pool is protected from these due to a steep hill sitting directly to the west of this location, rising almost out of the end of the pool. This shields the wave from the dominant winds. It is protected from other winds by virtue of its genius design. Running through the middle of the pool is a mechanism, separated from the surfers by a chicken-wire fence, that resembles a submerged snow plough. Every ninety seconds this drives through the water from one side to the other pushing a wave in front to each side of the pool. This is the first key invention that artificial waves required – a continuous force that sustains the wave's power throughout its breaking. The next is a manner of dealing with the wind. As described above, the prevailing winds are not such an issue, so what to do when the wind blows from the east? The wave generating mechanism is capable of working both ways so consecutive waves break in opposite directions. In this way wind is only an issue when it blows from a non-dominant direction, and even then, only half the time. The last issue to resolve has been called "the settle." Running a wave every ninety seconds obviously disturbs the water, and the pool has to become still again if the quality of the following wave is not to be affected. To solve this the engineers raised the bottom of the reservoir and installed drains around the circumference like those in public swimming pools but much bigger. The result is the world's first commercially viable artificial wave.

Figure 5.4: The wave pool viewed from the western end.

Figure 5.5: One surfer waits in the shallows while another surfs the southern wave.

Surf Snowdonia is a self-described "adventure park," and there is an obvious effort to promote the facility as more than just the wave. Having arrived in the new car park at the south side of the pool, visitors walk into the repurposed reservoir via a hotel-like reception and surf shop. Adjacent to these is a minimalist-styled bar and restaurant with bare wooden tables, metal benches, pastel coloured walls and slate tiles on the floor. The walls are glass to offer a full view of the pool. Outside there is a large wooden deck which is used as a beer garden or for drinking coffee from another coffee shop. A skatepark and obstacle course for younger children are located at the western end and the entire northern side of the pool has been developed into a "glamping site" where comfortable, family-sized yurts have been erected and can be rented by the week/end.

Having anticipated that the facility would be veritably drenched in surfing imagery and advertising to create what I presumed would be the desired atmosphere, I was taken aback by the relative lack of effort made to relate this wave to the ocean. There is almost no surf brand advertising visible, and no blues or sand colours used in the décor; browns and greens are much more prevalent. It seems the designers were more interested in situating the facility in the context of the Welsh hills than they were in relating it to the ocean. There are also no wave murals – a ubiquitous presence at surf shops around the world, and for which the bare concrete of the entrance walls and each end of the wave mechanism seem to beg. This is all perhaps understandable when the wave is put in its commercial context. While the surfing world may imagine this place as if it begins and ends with the wave itself, for the *Wavegarden* this is first and foremost a *business*. It is located inland in a region that is not otherwise known for high-quality surf and accordingly northern Wales does not have a large population of talented surfers. There are far more beginners at the facility than there are proficient surfers, most being teenagers brought along with their parents (split evenly between girls and boys, as is the case at beginners' surf courses at beaches). Of the twenty or so observed surfing the advanced wave on the day of visit, none were outstanding by any means (and all were men, again mirroring what might be a sample set of a similarly small size taken at the British coast). Two were on a stag party and most payed for two hours surfing (at a cost of £50 per hour). All were middle aged (at

twenty-eight, I was the youngest user of the advanced wave on the day of visit). Two worked “in the City” in London and two more were on a cycling holiday from Spain. Because of its location and the quality of the wave, there is no doubt that *Surf Snowdonia* remains a novelty for serious surfers and the park is themed to suit the comfort of others accordingly. One quickly gets the impression that this is a family activity centre, *not* an attempt at reproducing the coast inland.

In attempting to replicate the surfing environment inland, the design of *Surf Snowdonia* is oriented towards maximising potential for commodification, profit-making, and extending potential consumer groups beyond the surfing population. This is hardly surprising given the argument in the introduction of this chapter that artificial wave pools represent one of the most thorough attempts of transforming surfing into a marketable product by the surfing industry. These attempts, however, have the effect of alienating surfers from this supposedly familiar environment even before they get into the water.

Figure 5.6: A piece of wall art in the bar, the only explicit relation drawn between this wave and surfing cultural history.

Then there is the wave itself. As surfers arrive to the deck, they begin by studying the wave just as they would any other. They observe the mechanism driving east and west and watch the technique of others already in the water. The wave's movement is very strange. It is created by a force pushing from its centre, meaning that it is convex, pushing water forward and outward, whereas a normal wave would suck it in towards its centre. It seems wrong to see a surfer surfing towards the highest point of the wave which remains consistently just in front instead of surfing away from a peak which is in pursuit. Surfers also ask those emerging from the water for a report, as they would at the coast. "What's it like to surf?" – each surfer gives their opinion: "Very different to a real wave, it feels strange, but fun – you'll have fun (accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders)!" Another agrees; "It feels quite mechanical, and obviously you're looking at the mechanism. It'll take you a few waves to get used to the way it moves but it's good once you've got the hang of it!" Almost all surfers emerge smiling and seem pleased with their experience.

There are distinct phenomenal differences between surfing here and in the ocean. The base of the pool feels padded underfoot and is a light beige colour that does not resemble any rock but perhaps would look like sand if it were not covered in a layer of red slime. The freshwater (no salt!) is brown like a river in flood. The taste is totally unexpected. It does not leave a layer of salt on the skin afterwards[48] and is also pleasantly balmy when compared to British coastal water in September (the time of visit). These sensory distinctions matter, and there is a sense in which intimacy with waves is inhibited due to the failure of the *Wavegarden* to attempt to replicate them. Alexander Haro, editor of *The Inertia*, an online surfing magazine, refers to exactly this in an article that imagines a dystopian future in which human activity has rendered the oceans toxic, and all surfing takes place in wave pools:

> "I'm still not really used to surfing in a pool, and I don't think I ever will be. But it's a necessity now that the ocean's off-limits. Got barreled off my head, just like always. Water was an electrically-heated, balmy 75 degrees…[kids these days will] never know the smell of a stiff

[48] The same could also be said of river waves, which exist in some parts of the world (Munich has a famous example). The non-salty character of these waves would be equally alien to any surfer not used to them.

offshore breeze whipping the backs off a wave, pelting your cheeks after a deep duck dive" (Haro, 2017a).

Surfers wait their turn in the shallows and then paddle the twenty or so metres to the take-off zone, remaining in position by holding onto the chicken wire which protects the mechanism while lying on their stomachs. To hold a metal fence at arms-length towards which the surfers shortly intend to surf is indeed a strange – even unnerving – sensation. Experience would suggest that they will collide with it as soon as they begin paddling. This is actually impossible due to the fact that the wave pushes from here. Although surfers move down the pool (east-west) with the wave, they actually surf on the spot laterally (north-south), surfing right next to the wire but without ever being able to hit it. Every ninety seconds a noise like a lawnmower engine starting is heard from the far side of the wave-maker's track. A wave appears suddenly from nowhere and drives towards the waiting surfers. The wave feels strange to catch and the pushing (as opposed to pulling) sensation affects the sense of equilibrium once upright. It took me three waves to recalibrate to the alien conditions, but once re-conditioned, it is certainly quite easy to surf. Once the allotted time is up (a lifeguard shouts "one more!" from the shallows), surfers paddle to the edge, and, after briefing the incoming bunch, move towards the changing rooms where a hot shower awaits (a final phenomenal peculiarity).

If a sense of environmental alienation is produced around the wave-pool it is compounded once in the water. This has much to do with how the design of the pool affects the experience of negotiating the waves. Recall that a surf break is organised into zones (paddle zone, shoulder, peak, take-off zone, impact zone, etc.), and that these zones describe spatial categories defined both by a specific level and character of the dynamism of salt water *and also* specific types of accompanying human activity. How is this affected by the wave-pool environment? How are artifice and alienation produced in practice?

The waves at *Snowdonia* also have zones, but they are quite different than those of a surf break. First there is "the shallows" – ankle deep water roughly ten metres from the wave in which

surfers patiently wait their turn. This is most closely related to the shoulder of an ocean wave, but only insofar as it is from where the surfers throw themselves into the action. Sitting on wave's shoulder, surfers are pitched up and down, demanding them to learn to balance on their boards and also to dodge surfers surfing their way from the peak. Waves also periodically break on the shoulder so surfers have to remain attentive to the movements of the sea. "The shallows" at *Snowdonia,* in comparison, are more an area of non-activity, demanding no skill to negotiate and are perhaps better conceived as being exterior to the break and not a constituent part. After a wave has passed, the waiting surfer paddles the short distance to the wire and takes hold. "Next to the wire" is this wave's equivalent of the peak, but again there are important differences. First is the fact that the wire can be held to keep the surfer directly in position for a wave that does not shift an inch. Second, this area is further divided into three skill grades. "Advanced take-off" lies at the centre of the wave's run (and is marked by a large black sign which reads "advanced"). "Intermediate" lies a handful of metres farther along the run where the wave is less threatening, and finally "beginner" is at each end where the wave has become white-water and beginners practice with large foam boards in the shallows (the advanced surfers have been told to jump off before this point). At first glance this may appear quite similar to a beach break (minus the signs) where beginners surf in the shallows and the more advanced surfers surf out-back. At a beach, however, skill is what confines beginners to the shallows and allows proficient surfers passage out-back. Beginners are incapable of negotiating the walls of white water and incoming waves that block the way and, in any case, would put themselves in danger if they did so. At Snowdonia, on the other hand, the main criterion separating the three skill levels is money. Beginners pay thirty pounds; intermediates pay thirty-five, and advanced surfers pay fifty per hour to gain access to the waves. There is no restrictive paddle to prevent a beginner paddling a foam board to the advanced take-off, no dangerous wipeouts, and no skilled practitioners with which to compete. Once they have signed the insurance disclaimer, there is no restriction whatsoever preventing an unskilled surfer from surfing the advanced section – it would simply be a waste of their money. There

is no impact zone, as the ninety second period between waves coupled with the shallow water ensure that recovering from a wipeout is hardly dangerous in any way.

The spatial categories that emerge from human-environmental activity at *Surf Snowdonia* are of a different type than those of a surf break. In relation to the environmental, they are much simplified. There is just one movement of water that becomes important – the wave created every ninety seconds. In relation to the human, while the take-off zone and the shallows are indeed partly constructed by alterations in the way the body negotiates the different places, economic relations are the ultimate demarcation criterion. What separates the beginner's area from the advanced can be measured in pounds Sterling – twenty to be exact. In the place of alternating forces and human *embodied* activity, this artificial wave is produced as more of a binary wave-not wave area and human *economic* activity. The relationship between surfer and wave here is not cosmic or alchemical – this wave is not an iteration of solar energy. Rather the relationship is one of exchange – this movement of water has a clearly defined economic value which can be purchased. These aspects of engaging with the wave pool environment are different such that it contrasts sharply with the experience of surfing at the coast. This produces a sense of alienation in proficient surfers who visit *Surf Snowdonia,* captured in their descriptions of the wave as "weird" or "strange."

Surfers begin to categorise *Snowdonia* as artificial due to the sense of alienation produced in the design of the facility. While seeming superficially familiar, it does not sufficiently approximate an ocean or surf-cultural environment and the materiality of the wave-pool engaged through practice has aspects that contrast sharply with oceanic waves. It may be tempting to assume, therefore, that artifice is best understood in this context as a quality of the physical objects in *Snowdonia*, the foremost presumably being the wave itself. Such an understanding, however, is complicated by considering how surfing social relations are transformed within this place.

5.3 Inauthenticity as lacking the right to channel Oceanic energy

Having had an interview request turned down by two young *Snowdonia* lifeguards on the self-confessed basis that neither of them could surf, I was pointed in the direction of their supervisor who, I was assured, was "a very good surfer." "Finally, a solid informant," I thought. I walked to her office and in through the open door where a woman in her mid-twenties greeted me with a smile from her desk. I explained what I was doing and that if she did not mind I would like to ask her a few questions, to which she agreed. I began; "What do you think is the main pro and con with fake waves versus real waves?" She answered immediately; "I think the main problem is that people don't know about rip currents and then they take what they have learnt here to the ocean and have no idea about rips, or tides." "Or even something as fundamental as duck-diving?" I offered. "Even duck-diving," she agreed, and added "I still can't duck-dive I'm ashamed to say." I was taken aback, and suddenly realised that this woman embodied a whole new breed of surfer – one that has become proficient without ever stepping foot in the ocean. The interview went on and I asked her to outline exactly how talented she is/what techniques she can and cannot do, and indeed if she was to surf as she described on an ocean wave she would certainly be considered somewhat proficient but, lacking a skill as fundamental as duck-diving, it is clear that she would be incapable of surfing in the ocean. The existence of such a surfer begs questions about the manner in which surfing cultural terms of prestige are transformed in the artificial environment of the wave pool, while the responses of "real" surfers to such a possibility begin to clarify the cultural discourse surrounding these waves and uncover normative attitudes to the proper channelling of Oceanic energy in Irish surf culture.

Recall from chapter two that prestige at a surf break is tied to two important factors: being a local, and being expert at reading waves, competing for position, and surfing generally. Localism is non-existent at artificial waves, firstly because the uncrowded nature of the break eliminates the possibility of aggravation, but mainly because of the price tag that comes with surfing the wave and the manner in which this fundamentally changes the relationship between surfers on the water. To

become “local” to this wave would cost a person fifty pounds per surf, so perhaps some of the staff (being able to surf for free) have a better claim than most. Locals gain much of their confidence, however, from knowing their home break so intimately that they are usually some of the best surfers on the water, capable of reading every subtle shift in the conditions and obtaining waves around all the other surfers accordingly. The conditions at *Snowdonia,* on the other hand, never shift, and, in any case, there is nobody to outmanoeuvre for waves considering the other two surfers simply wait patiently in a turnstile-like system. This inhibits the usual social relations at a surf break.

The “pay to surf” nature of this wave is also responsible for eliminating the need for wave selection, positioning and competition. The wave runs once per ninety seconds on each side with surfers restricted to one side for the duration of their fifty-five-minute surf, during which they share the water with two others. Three surfers, therefore, share thirty-seven waves, meaning that whichever surfer is invited by the lifeguards to jump in first will get an extra thirteenth wave while the other two surfers will get twelve (this may seem like a very low number, especially considering the fifty-pound price tag, but catching twelve decent-quality waves per hour in the ocean would be considered a good haul, so this wave is actually comparable). At the end of one particular hour, one surfer was not so pleased; “I got a wave less than everyone else!” he complained angrily. “How many did you get?” The lifeguards asked. “I don’t know, but that guy started and finished the session so he got extra waves!” he shouted, holding his board in one hand and pointing with the other at another surfer emerging from the water and oblivious to the argument taking place. The lifeguard sighed and delivered what sounded like an oft-repeated speech of the numerical facts that are reproduced above. Eventually the angry surfer gave up and walked to the changing room without stopping to brief any of the incoming surfers. This surfer was annoyed because the money that he had payed to guarantee him access to this wave had bought him one less ride than his fellow surfer, at which point he felt the *Wavegarden* were to blame. At a surf break, the difference between his wave count and that of others boils down to nothing but the difference in skill between them. There is nobody to receive a complaint. Authenticity – being a “real” surfer versus a “fake” surfer – is to be adept at battling other surfers in

order to take one's place in the social hierarchy and be gifted waves (both by other surfers and the sea) accordingly. Wave knowledge and competitive skills are signs that a surfer has put in their time getting to know the Ocean. Standing upright on a surfboard is actually one of the easier surfing skills. Being able to 'read the ocean,' as Irish surfers say, and outmanoeuvre other accordingly, is the mark of surfers that have prepared themselves to become channels of Oceanic energy. Hence the simmering suspicion of artificial waves in surf culture; they allow the totally unqualified into an environment that mimics one which surfers revere and spend a lifetime amassing the skill necessary for its negotiation.

Prestige, then, lends a surfer their authenticity. You are only as good a surfer as you are at getting yourself waves. On the one hand, the commodification of the surfing environment that wave pools represent could be viewed as having a democratising effect on surfing sociality – it is no longer survival of the fittest on the water and everyone can get their waves (provided that is, that they have the economic capital). On the other hand, however, they eliminate much of the surfing – the activities *aside* from standing upright on the board. This is how most surfers deal with the thought of a surfer who cannot surf in the ocean, by simply stating that they have never surfed, and so cannot be considered surfers;

> "Call it wave-riding if you want, but don't call it surfing…It's not surfing…[W]ith the Chinese government's newfound interest in the sport a la Olympic fever…don't be surprised to see a dozen wave pools pop up by decade's end. Beijing and Shanghai's hottest new export? Surfers with gymnast-like precision. But would they really be surfers?" (Howard, 2017).

By categorising wave-pool surfers as other, ocean surfers police their exclusive access to Oceanic energy. According to the above quote a surfer is not merely someone capable of standing upright on waves, but someone who has developed a deep relationship with oceanic waves in a practice animated by Oceanic energy. Lacking these aspects, *Surf Snowdonia* transforms surfers and surf sociality into something other, something artificial.

Notwithstanding the reservations of many of my proficient-standard informants with respect to wave-pool development, itwould be wrong to claim that "serious" surfers do not acknowledge a potential place of legitimacy that wave pools may yet take in surf culture – that of the practice arena. The fact that wave pools guarantee uncrowded, good quality, safe conditions that consistently churn out identical waves does indeed make them ideal for perfecting technique:

Ethnographer: So would trying a wave pool be something that would interest you?

Surfer: Oh I'd love to try one. Jesus, I'd like to try one more than once! I'd love if one opened up down the road from me because in winter you can't surf Monday to Friday when you're working. And the thing with surfing is because of that unpredictability you can never…you always feel like you would be so much better if you had the perfect opportunity to just work on your turns and work on your technique and you will never, ever get that unless you are luckily able to post up at some perfect wave with no crowd which is just almost never going to happen, so artificial waves would give you an opportunity to improve so much.

Ethnographer: So if you had the opportunity, you *would* make it part of your surfing?

Surfer: Oh definitely, as practice for when you *do* go out.

Ethnographer: Practice for the real thing?

Surfer: Exactly – practice for the real thing.

Whereas repetition is difficult in the more chaotic conditions of the ocean, manoeuvres can be fine-tuned with ease in the controlled environment of a wave pool. It is in this sense that what takes place here is not so much surfing as it is training:

Ethnographer: What do you think of this [artificial] wave compared to surfing a normal wave?

Staff member: I think it's kind of like a gym for surfing because you have the same wave coming every time. So…if you mess up on a wave because you turned slightly too much or something you know the same wave is coming again the next time.

Surfers, in a sense, have dealt with artificial waves by divorcing them from their beloved oceanic activity. They are either novelties for kids to play in, a technology enabling land-locked people to get a taste for the activity, or as a place to train, *but only* as a small supplement to "the real thing." In each case, either the activity is not considered surfing because of where it takes place, the practitioner is not considered a surfer, or both. These social values become yet another way that practices produce senses of affinity or alienation in seemingly similar environments. Social values of prestige, authenticity and artifice are not afforded by wave pools – they are not a suggested behaviour, but alternatively a social transformation of environment through creative modes of practice.

Artificial waves are capable of producing artificial surfers, be it by allowing people to become surfers who have never surfed ocean waves, or those who have surfed in both environments, but are incapable of competing for waves and have limited knowledge of the character of various surf breaks, marking them as inauthentic. The next section examines surfers' discourses of artifice and realness in order to analyse the what it is about Oceanic animation that surfers value and, conversely, what exactly is lacking in the wave-pool.

5.4 The Ocean as perfect imperfection

Wave pools are the first challenge to the necessary relation between surfers and the ocean, a fact that is widely lamented;

> "The first time I rode a wave, I mean really rode a wave, I remember feeling a connection that I hadn't experienced before. I felt so in tune with that wave, and that bond has only grown tighter throughout my years of surfing. The world around us seems to be getting more artificial by the day. Surfing should be an escape from that trend, not a part of it. I don't want surfing to lose its purity, and I don't want to lose the connection to the natural world that I get through it. I've never understood the people I see running on treadmills when there is plenty of running to be done outside. I guess wave pools just seem like surfing's treadmill to me" (Dunn, 2017).

Here a surfer uses the treadmill analogy in order to describe his sense of affinity with the ocean and the alienating potential of wave pools. He also describes a positive feeling of being "in tune" with a wave. To feel "in tune" with a wave is to gain a corporeal awareness of the power which has given birth to it. For the author of the above article, this is impossible with a motorised mechanism which provides a connection to something that is no longer considered "pure."

Surfers do not, however, merely yearn for oceans for their aesthetic value. The complaint against wave pools goes deeper. Consider the following conversation with Ruaidhrí:

Ethnographer: What makes a wave artificial when compared with a normal one?

Ruaidhrí: Well it doesn't break in the ocean. *Actually*, I suppose you could still have an artificial wave breaking in the ocean that is not formed by wind energy and hasn't travelled over thousands of miles of ocean like most waves. Or you could have other kinds of artificial waves, like when they built that artificial reef in England and on the Gold Coast [Australia], but they didn't really work. That would be halfway towards an artificial wave – it's a *real wave*, but the reef is artificial.

Ethnographer: So the artificiality comes by the fact that what you're surfing has a different kind of cause?

Ruaidhrí: Yes, the cause is the main thing (Fieldnotes, 11/09/2017).

Artifice, it seems, has as much to do with the terms of the waves' creation as it does their unsalted, ex-oceanic character. Artificial waves differ from ocean waves primarily due to the fact that they are not animated by Oceanic energy – a wide ecology of atmospheric forces swirling around the littoral and emanating from out at sea. They are not determined by the tides nor are they created and later influenced by winds. This factor alone eliminates the necessity of "wave knowledge" and the social processes which revolve around choosing surf breaks. Recall Bender's statement, quoted in chapter two:

> "Peoples' landscapes will operate on very different spatial scales, whether horizontally across the surface of the world, or vertically – up to the heavens, down to the depths" (1993, p. 2).

I claimed that the surfing environment is both very deep (as it extends up through the atmosphere into the storms) and greatly extended (out into the middle of the oceans). As people accustomed to operating in such an environment, then, an artificial wave feels almost two-dimensional. The idle chat that takes place with the other surfers does not contain the usual information about tides ebbing and flooding, nor new swells hitting, but rather is deconstructed to refer only to what the wave feels like to catch.

While artificial waves are indeed tied to the seasons, the seasonal influence is commercial, not meteorological. When asked "how long have you worked here," all *Surf Snowdonia* staff responded in units of "seasons": "I've been here since the first season," or "this is my second season." As it happens, *Surf Snowdonia* is closed Monday-Friday from late autumn to late spring, and operates a very restricted timetable during November-February. "The season," then, refers to the summer – the opposite to that of the surfers of the British coast, to which winter is the busiest season. Surfers, however, do not tend to speak of "the surfing season," as they imagine their practice to be equally spread throughout the year. With respect to waves, then, what is of ultimate value is their ability to act as media which connect surfers to the wider natural world in an almost holistic way. It is due to this mediating ability that the informant quoted above would still consider wave pool-like technology operating in the ocean to produce an artificial wave (it leaves the surfer separated from the atmospheric forces), but a wind-powered wave breaking over a human-manufactured reef to remain "a real wave."

Surfers designate waves as artificial insofar as they are removed from the oceans, and more importantly, from the source of the energy capable of animating those oceans, but there is a third constituent of artifice in this context of human-wave relationality, tied more closely to human practices rather than environmental processes. Artifice not only emerges in the location of the wave

and the terms of its causation, but also in the effort involved in its pursuit (or lack thereof in this case). What is missing in the relationship between surfers and artificial waves is the joy of the pursuit, and the deep love and respect engendered within. "This pursuit is core to the culture, and is as celebrated as it is frustrating" (Jennings, 2017). Of all complaints levelled against artificial waves, this is by far the most common and insurmountable for artificial wave-creators.

The following is an edited extract from my fieldnotes which records a morning spent with Ruaidhrí attempting to find somewhere to surf in a storm. There are key ingredients to this experience that will aid an understanding of the value that surfers assign to the effort involved in finding waves:

> "The first storm swell of autumn has hit the Irish coast. A powerful north-west swell has made landfall which is creating eleven metre waves just offshore. Still, Ruaidhrí knows of a break in Kerry in the southwest of Ireland that faces almost directly south east. He has never surfed it before but his guess – supported by the ever-knowledgeable Colin via the usual *Whatsapp* interrogation – is that the north-west swell will expend most of its energy on the other side of the headland but will still wrap waves of a suitable size into in southeast-facing bay.
>
> Ruaidhrí turns onto the coast road roughly three kilometres from the break. Here there is a west-facing beach, almost totally exposed to the incoming swell. The waves are double-overhead, uninviting, white water monstrosities that look in no way surfable. Apprehension grows in the car. Is there really a surfable break just a five-minute drive from here? Looking out the car window, Ruaidhrí spots a wave that seems to be more sheltered from the wind at the base of the cliff now separating the road from the sea. He stops the car and we walk to the cliff's edge to have a look. Indeed, the headland seems to be blocking the ferocity of the wind and swell. In the centre of the bay it is doubtless that there is a storm raging, but right here under our noses there is an area of water where the wind is not as strong. Still, the waves look big, and it is hard to estimate their exact size from up here. They could be anything from 4-8ft (just over head high to more than double overhead). To say that

> both of us would struggle in the latter of these conditions is an understatement. We watch as the waves batter the base of the cliffs below; "Getting down looks doable, but how are you supposed to get back in?" asks Ruaidhrí nervously. Thankfully, a local pulls up. He confirms that we are in the correct place, that it looks surfable to him, and finally that there is a spot around the corner where exiting the water is a bit less hazardous. Having gained confidence, we walk back to the car and prepare for a surf (Fieldnotes, 11/09/2017).

Surfing a new wave, particularly under the conditions described above, is often a stressful affair. This stress climaxes on the paddle-out, but once a few waves are caught, the stress quickly transforms to elation. Following this surf, I asked Ruaidhrí to attempt to place his experience that day in relation to surfing in a wave-pool:

> "A large part of what is attractive about surfing is the unpredictability, that you feel like you in some way mastered this unpredictable force out in the ocean. Like today - you've pulled up to this crag of reef in the middle of nowhere, read the tide and wind and everything has come together. You see it and you think "is this even surfable?" So you paddle out and everything is a bit of a mess, but then you get one and everything changes. And that might be the one patch of coastline with that one wave coming through for hundreds of kilometres and so you feel total joy at the sense of accomplishment. Whereas when you're just showing up [to a wave pool] and you know what the wave is going to look like, and you know what it's going to do and there's a guy pushing a button – that just definitely takes a lot away from it" (Fieldnotes, 11/09/2017).

Waves, in a sense, are not supposed to be perfect. It is their imperfections that allow them to craft their own character, that supplies the challenge of surfing them, and that generally makes them a pleasure to surf.

The imperfection of waves is explicitly valued in surf culture. In the above example, the imperfect conditions increase the challenge and so the reward of successfully finding *good* waves, but imperfection is equally valued in its more extreme form – as a lack of surfable conditions whatsoever:

> "I [would] even miss the long drives in the early morning dark, sipping coffee from a plastic cup with the window open to wake me up, only to pull up to the beach and see the ocean was a blown out, un-surfable mess in front of the rising sun before I drove home again, dejected but happier for the experience. It is always the failures that make the successes so great" (Haro, 2017a);
>
> "We seem to be entering the era of pools that can create legitimate waves for surfing, but I have no interest whatsoever in trying one out. That's not to say that I'm not impressed by what Kelly Slater's wave pool can do. That wave looks absolutely perfect, but I don't want perfection. For me, part of the experience of surfing is checking the conditions in the morning and maybe even driving to a few different locations to scout options. Checking the forecast to see what the winds might do, assessing when the best tide will be; these things add to the experience of surfing and my relationship with the ocean. The wave pool robs us of these intricacies. If the waves were pumping all day every day, we'd lose our gratitude in great surf conditions. The sweet isn't so sweet without the sour. Afternoons spent battling onshore winds and strong currents just to score a couple of decent rides make those glassy mornings seem all the sweeter" (Dunn, 2017);
>
> "Wave pool choreography seems to have more parallels to figure skating than The Search" (Howard, 2017).

It is true that each surfer dreams of perfect waves (and perfect artificial waves) in a sort of utopic way. A utopia (derived from the Greek for "no place") is an imagined perfect society. Utopianism, the derived branch of political philosophy, is concerned with conceptually manufacturing these idealised conditions to act as a yardstick next to which the negative aspects of the status quo can be measured and critiqued. Judging from the above discussion, however, artificial waves seem to serve the opposite

function in surf culture: they are idealised figurations next to which the *positive* aspects of the status quo can be *appreciated*. Perhaps, then, the perfect wave is more of a dystopian concept than it is utopian – idealised, impossible, but totally undesirable in practice in any case. It is the challenge of imperfect waves that surfers come to love along with the ocean and the forces of its animation.

This brings us back to surfers' use of artifice as a category to demarcate certain waves, surfers, and environments from other. Is *Snowdonia* an artificial surfable wave? Yes – surfers consider it to replicate the conditions which allow them to stand upright on a board and surf along a disturbance of water in the ocean. Is it a surf break, a coming together of reef, sea, and wind? Clearly not, but is it even an *artificial* surf break? Considering the data presented throughout this chapter, I suggest that the answer is no. The "realness" or "naturalness" that lends a surf break legitimacy requires three factors to be present: i) that it is in the ocean, ii) that the waves therein are caused by the interaction of land, sea and atmosphere, affording the opportunity of harnessing the power of The Ocean, and iii) that there is a sufficient level of hardship involved in negotiating the place, activity through which the surf break – and surfers – are produced. Artifice, thus, is emergent in the entirety of the terms of the relationship between surfers and waves. If the relationship takes place within the ocean, connects surfers to atmospheric forces, and necessitates that they work hard to establish and maintain this connection, the relationship is *natural* and surfers become *naturally,* if any one of these three is absent, it is deemed *artificial*, and the "surfers" therein become *artificially.*

5.5 Summary

Becoming a surfer at *Snowdonia* takes place to a different logic than becoming surfer at the coast. It is almost teleological, taking place to predesigned plans in a facility full of signposts and with just one identical path to and from the wave. This is in contrast to the fickle waves of the coast which required and continue to require imagination and creativity if they are to be negotiated. For this reason, surfers cultivate a different relationship with the waves of a wave pool, one that is artificial in comparison.

This chapter has used surfers' engagements with wave-pools to examine the relationship between surfers use of artifice as a category, senses of environmental alienation reported and/or demonstrated by surfers, and the emergence of standards whereby surfers become more or less 'real,' regardless of their ability to actually surf waves. Beginning from a conception of nature and artifice as improvisational processes which require performance (Szerszynski, 2003), and that these appear not in and of themselves, but rather within relationships with environments (Carrier, 2004), it used the particularity of surfing and the technology of artificial waves to develop a concept of artifice derived from surfing-based definitions of authenticity and environmental intimacy. Having introduced the artificial wave and situated its study within this literature in section one, section two began by describing how artifice is produced in the design and materiality of *Surf Snowdonia.* It demonstrated that it is not just the wave that becomes artificial at *Surf Snowdonia.* Although the wave is designed to replicate surfing, as the new technology transports practices from one environment to another, it affects surfing social relations in ways not anticipated by its designers (Horst & Miller, 2006). Surfing social relations *and* even the surfers themselves also become artificially in practice there due to the transformative effect of the commodification of the surfing environment. Thus, it is better to conceive of artifice (and accordingly naturalness) as indexing a quality of the surfer-wave relationship. Surfers describe surfers, waves, and surfing social relations as artificial in order to 1) communicate a sense of environmental alienation arising from the terms of surfer-wave interaction at *Snowdonia* engendered by the waves' dislocation from Oceanic energy and 2) to police their exclusive access to The Ocean. The fact that wave-pools do not provide the opportunity to harness Oceanic energy means that they do not provide the opportunity for surfing. Such an attitude is visible in surfers' suspicion of anyone who learns to surf in a wave-pool.

Chapter 6: #NatureTrumpsWalls: The ecology of conceptual development

6.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis situates surfing in the wider Irish coastal environment which also contains non-surfers. Mostly surfing comfortably coexists with other Irish coastal practices. At times, however, disputes arise. This chapter examines one such dispute which is unfolding as different human-wave relationships – each productive of their own intimacies – clash. It is based on an ongoing (as of November 2017) dispute over a proposed sea wall in County Clare which is to be constructed along Doughmore bay – a surfable beach – in order to protect an adjacent golf course from erosion and flooding. At the core of the dispute is conflicting conceptions of what environmental "protection" consists of, wherein protective agency is located, and what indeed is actually in need of protection. On the one hand, surfers and others insist that the proposed wall will have a damaging effect on coastal ecology, natural processes of coastal rejuvenation, and may kill the wave. On the other hand, the golf course owners and other locals insist that, without the proposed wall, the dunes will eventually give way to erosion, eliminating the habitat anyway, flooding farmland and local property, and taking away the jobs provided by the golf club and hotel to the local area. The different relationships with waves give rise to these mutually exclusive conceptions of protection: one *laissez-faire*; one interventional (to be explained below). In the course of such "environmental knowledge controversies" (Whatmore, 2013), "the ontological settlement that divides the social from the natural, and which expert environmental management practices assume and perpetuate, loses its grip. In these conditions, such expertise and its various socio-technical intermediaries come under intensified scrutiny by those sufficiently affected by the matter at issue to want to participate in mapping it into knowledge and, thus, in its social ordering" (ibid, p. 45). This chapter analyses how as surfers become eco-politically motivated, they produce arguments and organise campaigns based upon ecologically-

derived concepts engendered through surfing practice. Such political actions protect certain environmental and human interests, but do so at the expense of others.

All parties at Doughmore beach are agreed on one thing: that there are aspects of the local environment which are acutely in need of protection. There is a great and often lamented disjuncture, however, between peoples' acknowledgement of environmental issues and their practical commitment to solving them. In *Loving Nature* (2002) Kay Milton opens with the question "Why isn't everyone an environmentalist? Why do some care more about the future of the natural world than others do? Why do some people actively protect nature while others, by indifference or intent, are prepared to see it destroyed?" (ibid, p. 1). There is an implicit assumption in this style of analysis that "environmental protection" is a straightforward concept and that all parties agree on what constitutes protection and who or what ought to do the protecting (whether or not any protective actions actually follow). The anthropological reality, however, is sometimes a bit more complicated. Regarding the proposed sea wall in Doughmore, neither side of the dispute accept that their proposed activity is environmentally destructive – in fact quite the opposite; both insist that environmental protection is an ultimate concern. So does it have to be the case that one group are simply lying, or can anthropological analysis say something different? As was the case in the last chapter, the first aim here is for a deeper understanding of the surfer-wave relationship achieved through a comparative process. I will juxtapose different with waves, in which "protection" emerges as an ecologically situated human (but not only human) practice (de la Cadena, 2015). The concepts described herein are far from arbitrary inventions of human minds – they are tied to the environment. Neither are concepts simply given in the materiality of things, however, as Henare et al. (2007) and especially Holbraad & Pedersen (2017) seem to suggest is at least sometimes the case. If this were true, then surfers, farmers, developers, and other locals living in the same community at Doughmore would have equivalent environmentally-derived concepts, which is not the case. Instead, this chapter extends the emphasis on Oceanic energy advanced in the thesis as a whole, claiming that concepts too are transformed in line with the terms upon which practices harness (or inhibit) the energy of

environments. The relationship between surfer and environment is transformed conceptually as well as physically. To return again to Deleuze's metaphor, the virtual (at least in relation to humans) has a conceptual aspect. These two are transformed in creative practice: What is made actual includes new understandings which also alter the potential for future engagements.

The argument in this chapter takes inspiration from a tradition exemplified by Kay Milton (2002) and Natasha Myers (2017) in taking as axiomatic the fact that contemporary ecological anthropology *must* actively involve itself in the promotion of environmental health and the ecologies with which it works. It asks "how might the existence of two conflicting protection concepts in the one environment provide anthropology with an opportunity to involve itself in the resolution of the dispute, not in favour of any one group of informants, but in favour of the environment as a whole?" This final analysis of the surfer-wave relationships situates them in their wider web of Irish coastal relations to suggest how anthropology can use the raw materials of dispute (two conflicting protection concepts) on behalf of a more-than-human ecology in order to affect conversation, highlighting the potential for ecological damage and cultivation on both sides.

The chapter proceeds as follows: The next section introduces the case study in question and describes surfers' engagements with environmentalism in Ireland and globally. Section three critically examines some of the voices opposed to the wall, relating surfing practice to a very particular brand of environmentalism and demonstrating how surfers' eco-political concepts are also animated by Oceanic energy. Section four does something similar for those in favour of the wall and discusses that because surfers' environmentalism is premised on concepts derived through surfing ecological relations it is *necessarily* limited. Finally, section five closes the chapter with a comment on how ecological anthropology ought to conduct its analysis in the context of widely recognised environmental ill-health.

6.2 The proposed sea wall at Doughmore, Co. Clare

Doughmore (pronounced “dug-moor” or “duck-moor”) beach is a sickle-shaped sand and cobble bay in a rural part of County Clare in the West of Ireland. It is flanked by 31 acres of rolling sand dunes, designated a “Special Area of Conservation” by the European Union Special Habitats Directive (Steve, 2016). It is also home to a good quality surf break named “Duggie” (a shortened version of the name of the beach), one of the most consistent waves in the region, enjoyed by beginners and advanced surfers, and which tends to “work” when other waves nearby are unsurfable. As such it is a highly valued wave to local surfers.

Figure 6.1: Doughmore beach viewed from the south-east. Photo property of the Irish Times.

Adjacent to this stunning beach sits a hotel and golf links called *Trump International Golf Links and Hotel Doonbeg* (Doonbeg is the wider local area around Doughmore beach). The property was bought by property tycoon – now US president – Donald Trump’s newly established Trump International Golf Links (TIGL) Ireland Enterprises Ltd in 2014 and has been the centre of much controversy since. Desperate to attract foreign money to the West of Ireland as it struggled to recover

from the deep recession following the 2008 financial crash, then Minister for Finance Michael Noonan greeted Trump as he landed in the West of Ireland complete with red carpet and Irish-dancing girls (this is now considered a national embarrassment). Trump bought the property for "a reported bargain €15 million" (*The Irish Times,* 14/12/16), but it was subsequently valued by TIGL at €25 million just one year later. Some criticized Trump for taking advantage of the beleaguered economy to buy up an Irish asset at an unfairly low rate; others welcomed the capital injection, and eagerly anticipated the creation of employment in an area so badly in need of it. The controversy began involving surfers around this time too. Not many people outside of Ireland are aware of this, but as of the year 2017, US president Donald Trump is attempting to build (at least) *two* walls. For one, along the US-Mexico border, he is globally notorious. The second would-be wall is a proposed reinforcement of the dunes along Doughmore beach, which TIGL claims is essential in order to protect the dunes from flooding during storms and general erosion which threatens the golf course.

In 2016 TIGL applied for planning permission to Clare County Council for a 2.8km boulder wall to be erected along the entire length of Doughmore beach. The proposed wall consisted of roughly 200,000 tonnes of rock, concrete and wiring which was to be dropped along the sand at the base of the dunes and would create a barrier four metres high and twenty metres deep. Surfers, environmentalists and other members of the local community and beyond organised protests and submitted formal objections to this proposal, while others, particularly locals whose homes, farms and businesses lie on the land behind the golf course, and also families of employees of TIGL, formally supported the proposal. Of the 112 submissions received by the Council, 76 spoke in favour of the wall (36 from locals, 15 from golf club members, 14 from non-locals) (Roche, 2016). Amid mounting local, national, and international pressure, however, in early December 2016 TIGL announced that it was scrapping the plans for the original wall. In its place, TIGL submitted a new proposal consisting of "sheet metal piling and rock armour for 650 metres at one end and 200 metres at the other end of the dune system. Two holes will be relocated inland" (Webmaster, 2016). Similar levels of support and

opposition have surrounded this new wall, and in late February, 2017, the Council issued a Request for Further Information (RFI) with respect to the proposal, claiming that

> "it is considered that the information submitted with this application is insufficient to enable the Planning Authority to make a complete planning assessment of the proposal…Whilst it is acknowledged that the current proposal has provided for a reduction in the scale of the coastal defence works, from that as previously applied for…concerns still remain with regard to the impact of the development on the beach and dune dynamics, and the adjoining Special Area of Conservation" (Clare County Council, 2017).

The RFI was answered on the 24th of October 2017, and at the time of writing (November 2017), the Council were in the process of making their final decision over an allotted period of eight weeks.

6.2.1 Surf activism in Ireland and abroad

Surfing and environmentalism in particular have a long history of interconnection. Environmentalism became popular in the US amongst the political left during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly its 'counterculture' element, which was closely intertwined with surf culture at the coasts (Laderman, 2014). By 1975, when the Women's International Surfing association (WISA) was founded in California, it cited "linking surf culture to environmental advocacy" as one of its founding principles (Comer, 2010, p. 197). At present, the visibility of this environmental advocacy in surf culture is maintained in many different modes. One is by professionals who act as spokespeople for groups like *Greenpeace* and *Surfrider Foundation.* Kelly Slater, in considering surfers as environmentalists, affirms, 'if you're one, you're the other – you have to be" (Hill & Abbott, 2009, p. 275). This attitude held by some surfers – that there is a necessary connection between surfing and environmentalism, stands in support of the work of Gosling & Williams (2010), who contend that "closeness to nature" – something which surfers consistently claim their practice affords – is linked to the development of environmental politics (Gosling & Williams, 2010). Grassroots environmental activist groups also play a role, such as *Surfers*

Against Sewage mentioned in chapter one. Surfing's poster child for environmental action in Ireland (and probably the world) is Fergal Smith. Ferg (as he is generally known) spent his early and mid-twenties living the life of many surfer's dreams. Having secured corporate sponsorship (which pays for flights, accommodation, all equipment and a wage), he followed swells around the globe, sharing breaks with the world's most famous surfers in return for the footage of him using his sponsors' products. He could go anywhere – Hawaii, Tahiti, Western Australia, Fiji – and certainly did, but something was wrong with this dream. As he was nursing a knee injury in Tahiti, something else began tormenting him;

Figure 6.2: A poster for the 2016 Irish general election that could be seen around west Clare.

"Surfing was my dream, but I didn't think about the environmental costs, I just really wanted to do it. You hear all the stories about pollution and the model I was in for professional surfing wasn't telling me to do anything about it. So I sat there and had a think and…I had to ask myself, what could I do? What's the thing I could do to try and give back? We all care about future generations" (Gilbert, 2016).

Ferg's decision which followed his return from Tahiti shocked the surfing world. He decided to turn his back on his pro-surfing lifestyle and begin a small-scale organic farm in County Clare. He lost his corporate sponsors by refusing to travel for swells. During the past four years Ferg has given up flying, stopped using jet-skis to avoid emissions, started a community-supported agricultural (CSA) project called the "Moy Hill Community Farm" in Clare, appeared in an online series called *Growing* based around his farming and surfing exploits in the West of Ireland, and stood (unsuccessfully) as a Green Party candidate in the 2015 Irish general election. He is currently one of Ireland's foremost big wave surfers, re-imposing his name upon the surfing world

through his radical shift in lifestyle and continuing passion for pushing the limits of the types of waves that can be surfed without the use of a jet-ski.[49]

The commercial surf industry is also in the midst of a 'green revolution', in which low carbon, low toxicity and recycled alternatives are flooding the market. In 2017, *O'Niell's* launched a range of boardshorts and surf wear using "eco-threads" made from recycled beach plastic. The company's website claims that this first Spring Summer collection "is estimated to have removed 200,000 bottles from beaches and shorelines worldwide" (Anon., 2017). *Patagonia* in particular stand out as an 'eco-conscious' brand. The company donates 1% of its yearly profits to environmental charities and made world news on "Black Friday" in November 2016 when it announced that, rather than join in the discount-induced spending spree that the day is coming to represent in the English-speaking world, they would be donating 100% of profits made on that day to their chosen charities.

It would be naïve to presume that these industry efforts to produce environmentally-friendly products derive from an honest corporate altruism. It is more probable that either they reflect the eco-capitalist (also known as blue-green[50]) principle that a healthy market requires a healthy environment, and so corporations care for their markets in the long term by caring for the environment – "We've been thinking long and hard on this one. Reality is that business is more likely to save the world rather than legislation, we live in a globalised capitalist system which isn't going to change anytime soon." (Nunn, 2016) – or perhaps more likely (and cynically) is that these efforts are simply an acknowledgement of the growing appetite for environmentally-friendly products among consumers, and so products are developed for the sake of demand. Either way, the discourse of environmentalist action, both in surf cultural literature and the market is more prevalent than ever.

[49] It is presumed that there is an upper limit to how big a wave can be before it is impossible to catch by paddling, and instead a jet-ski must be used to tow the (already upright) surfer into the wave. The problem, however, is that whenever this limit is deemed to have been reached on a certain wave, somebody paddles when everyone else is being towed. In Ireland, that person is often Fergal Smith.

[50] As opposed to red-green, the green ideology that identifies the capitalist market as the source of all contemporary environmental issues.

Notwithstanding the above discussion, it is still necessary to stop short of pronouncing surfing a fast track to eco-conscientiousness. When the materials used to make surf products and the methods of travelling between the world's breaks are considered, surfing begins to appear considerably less innocent. The vast majority of wetsuits on the market continue to be made using toxic petrochemicals which result in an unrecyclable product. The same is true of surf wax, the sticky substance applied to surfboards to provide traction. For now, most surfboards are also made of non-biodegradable polyurethane. What is more, when Irish surfers buy brand new boards, the vast majority buy online where €100-€200 can be saved over the local shop price, choosing to fly their new toy across the world instead of sourcing it locally. Personal car and aeroplane mileage is another issue. Most surfers fly-to-surf once per year with many of these journeys being long-haul and the weekly mileage clocked up following swells around the Atlantic coast can be in the low hundreds. As an amateur practice group, then, surfers are perhaps some of the keenest polluters on a day-to-day basis – far more so than footballers, golfers, tennis players, boxers, and many more! This is an oft-levelled critique of surfers' environmentalism, that it remains overly narrow – so deeply focused on the protection and preservation of surf breaks that it fails to appreciate other problems involving the coastal environment or even the negative practices of surfers themselves which ought to be changed for the better (Laderman, 2014). When challenged on their polluting practices and (for the most part) lack of active eco-political engagement, it became clear that many of my informants went about their surfing in a manner ambivalent to, or even consciously in spite of, the facts of its environmental impact. While surfing and environmentalism are certainly linked, there is nothing necessary about their connection. When they do speak on behalf of the environment, they are also often conveniently protecting a playground of theirs in the process.

6.3 Surfers, environmentalism and #NatureTrumpsWalls

This section considers the specific objections that surfers and environmentalists have against the proposed wall in detail, examining the positive aspects and limitations to the environmentalism and concept of coastal protection that is given form by surfing's specific relationship with the sea (Laviolette, 2006).

6.3.1 Dave O'Brien[51]

Dave O'Brien is a local surfer who has held multiple positions in the Irish Surfing Association (ISA) and is also a civil engineer. He has been involved in disputes with the hotel's current and previous owners for just over a decade;

> "The relationship in the past has generally been very good. There were a few complaints and challenges about accessing the beach across the course over the years, but these were always sorted out without too much hassle. We had come to accept [the hotel] as "not a disaster." This all changed two years ago when the hotel changed hands" (Dave O'Brien, Fieldnotes, 23/05/2017).

Dave identifies the change in ownership to TIGL with a total breakdown of relations between surfers and the hotel management. As a spokesperson for key institutions of the Irish surfing community, he identifies two main issues with the wall. The first is the destruction of "Duggie," the wave that breaks on the beach;

> "If you've surfed Doughmore you know what a special place it is. It's beautiful and also such a dependable wave when everywhere else is too big or too small. That [first-proposed] wall would have starved the dunes of their regenerative ability and caused sand to build up changing the bathymetry of the bay. The rocks would have also created a backwash at high

[51] This is not the informant's real name and his position in the ISA has been left vague on purpose to protect his identity.

> tide. All this would have killed the wave, not to mention created a hazard because the rock wall would complicate exiting the water at high tide" (ibid).

Here Dave captures the predominant gripe of surfers – the destruction or alteration of a wave which they consider to be intrinsically valuable. It is worth noting that a change in the bathymetry of the bay would not necessarily lead to a deterioration in surfing conditions. Sand bottomed bays change shape all the time under the action of the tides and storm swells. Sometimes this activity greatly improves the surfing conditions at a beach for a time. Surfers' vehement disapproval of any human intervention comes from both a disinclination to risk any negative alteration that may prove permanent, and also from the attitude discussed at length in the previous chapter; that surfable waves are perfect(ly imperfect) in their "natural" form.

What is more, waves and beaches come naturally equipped with the agency of their own self-perpetuation;

> "Beaches protect themselves by depositing a layer of stones along the top of the beach. These act as a natural defence. These stones were removed from Doughmore by Clare County Council in the '60s to build new roads but have now almost regenerated. Every now and then these stone walls get breached. You go back a month later and they have regenerated – the wound has healed" (ibid).

The use of bodily metaphors of wounds and healing, as well as the contention that a wave is the type of thing that can be *killed*, demonstrates at once the intimacy with which surfers identify the coastal environment with their own bodies, the inherent fragility of these environments, but at the same time the potency of the environment as a collection of processes to rejuvenate and to protect itself in general. Human intervention, on the other hand, is understood to be destructive of these lively forces.

This leads to the second argument that Dave level against this proposed development (one which has been used by surfers and many engineers worldwide in similar disputes): that sea walls are completely useless as flood barriers;

> "You can't draw a hard line through nature. Walls flood, soft spots appear at each end…you see what's happened at Lahinch [a nearby beach where a sea wall was built]; since they added boulders they have to keep being added, the sand beneath the wall shifts" (ibid).

The surfers argue that while the golf course might be spared in the short term, the wall may cause adjacent land to flood. In the long term, however, the wall will prove useless anyway as water washes away the beach in front, and the dunes and course drift inland having been starved of sand from the shore. As an individual, Dave lends a powerful voice to the wall's opposition as he points out that because he is an engineer, he "straddles both sides of the debate";

> "I'm not anti-development. I have commercial projects around the country, I am an engineer by qualification. But I studied coastal management and erosion. Our argument is that the golf course should adapt. Nobody is claiming that the dunes will disappear and the coast will be eroded back as far as Dublin [at the other side of the country in the east]. There is plenty of space on TIGL's land for holes to be relocated every few years. The problem is that the company has ambitions of attracting major tournaments in the coming years, like the Ryder Cup, and to do that you have to have a fixed course" (ibid).

Dave is a good example of how the disputing parties at Doughmore cannot be easily split on the basis of identity, way of life, or profession. He is a local surfer and a property developer. The surfers are lucky to have him precisely because of the affinity he shares with the opposing side of the debate.

In their everyday use of the beach surfers stage a playful resistance to TIGL. The walk across the dunes (which carries surfers through a section of the course) almost always instigates transgressive plans to sneak back with clubs and attempt to play a hole for free. This daily access is actually illegal. When the WCSC challenged the attempt of the previous owners to restrict surfers access to the beach via the course, the court ruled in favour of the surfers but only those present in the court room that day. All the others are now simply tolerated. Under the organisation of the West Coast Surf Club and the Irish Surfing Association, local surfers have organised resistance to the project on the basis of its damage to their cherished local resource and also because of the flawed logic of the

engineering. Eventually the efforts of local surfers of speaking on behalf of the beach caught the attention of the wider surfing world and Irish mainstream media.

6.3.2 Save the Waves and the "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach" Facebook campaign

Save the Waves is a non-profit international environmental lobby group. It is dedicated to protecting global "surf zones," some "of the most unique environments on earth, providing surfers with epic waves, and providing habitat and numerous species of plants and animals"[52]. They are made powerful because of their reach, being highly regarded amongst the global surfing community and having working relationships with most major surf publications worldwide. *Save the Waves* launched a petition in objection to the proposal to be presented jointly to TIGL and Clare County Council. This was promoted online using the #NatureTrumpsWalls slogan, and also in *Carve* (the major British surf publication), *Stab* (the major Australian surf publication), *Magicseaweed* (the world's most popular surf forecasting website), and many more. The petition quickly gathered over 120,000 signatures. It was in the weeks following this that TIGL withdrew their original proposal.

Figure 6.3: A photograph of Doughmore beach at sunset, taken from the embattled dunes and with the slogan inspired by another from Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign superimposed. From Savedoughmore/Doonbeg beach facebook page.

[52] https://www.savethewaves.org/about-us/our-mission/. Accessed 15/09/2017.

During this time (awaiting the Council's decision regarding the original wall, 2016), the local and international surf community's resistance to the proposals was largely concentrated online. As well as the *Save the Waves* petition, another *Facebook* group was born called "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach." This page posted a template letter of objection to the Council and provided a list of suggestions as to how it should be filled out to increase impact. These online actions were made potent due to the existence of an active Irish and international online surf community. Many Irish surfers follow the "Surfboards for Sale Ireland" *Facebook* page, which posted a link to both the petition and the letter template. Similarly, while very few surfers buy print magazines, the majority follow multiple publications on social media, which also advertised the campaign. Speaking to *Magicseaweed,* Wayne, and administrator of the "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach" group, frames the argument in ethical terms, as a responsibility to respect the beach and the sea;

Figure 6.4: A meme posted to the "Save Doughmore-Doonbeg Beach" Facebook page on 06/06/2017.

''The permanent destruction of a beach can never be the correct, moral and sane choice. There is no risk to buildings, home or people with the erosion that has happened during the recent and largest storms on record. Trump is threatening to close the facility and lay off people, if he doesn't get his way. These are scary threats, there's no question of that. The fear of our friends and neighbours losing work is very scary, and let me reiterate we are in no way trying to close the hotel and golf course, we are just asking for some ethical business practices and some sound environment practices" (Lock, 2016).

The second major factor which influenced the retraction of the original proposal was the attention of the Irish mainstream media. For this, the surfers and environmentalists can thank Donald

Trump himself. The organised opposition to the proposals took place largely during the autumn and winter of 2016, during the US presidential campaign. Ireland traditionally has somewhat of a filial relationship with the US, following presidential elections closely and generally preferring the Democratic candidate. Trumps ability to make headlines worked against the TIGL's proposals for this reason. On almost any surfing website and in all Irish newspapers, the story is always framed as if Trump himself is the party involved, not TIGL (since his election he has stepped down as head of the board and handed his company to his son). It is easy to appreciate why this dispute has angered surfers, but in order to appreciate why it garnered so much negative attention from the wider Irish public it is necessary to understand the political landscape and public mood of the 2015-2016 period in Ireland. The Doughmore wall proposals hit the headlines at a time in Ireland when water dominated the national political agenda. As part of an EU-imposed strict and deep austerity programme which followed the bailout of the Irish economy by the European Central Bank in October 2010, Fine Gael (pronounced fee-anna gale), the ruling centre-right political party, announced a plan to privatise Ireland's fresh water service and impose a system of water charges, which had not yet existed in the State. It was taken by the public as one austerity measure more than the Irish people were willing to bear. The "Right2Water" campaign immediately spread countrywide, successfully inciting mass protests and roadblocks where meters were being installed. Some estimates claimed that the main Dublin city protest attracted 100,000 people, the largest in the state in living memory. This large-scale resistance to water's privatisation fanned the flames of anticorporatism that had taken root after the banking collapse of 2010 and is all-pervasive in the State to this day. As a sign of the frustration felt towards the political class, the general election of 2016 failed to produce any clear winners, and Fine Gael were returned to power but as a minority government for the first time in the State's history. Labour, their previous coalition partners, were wiped out. The discussions undertaken to make this new minority administration viable revolved primarily around water, and in the final deal privatisation was taken off the table, metering was ceased (for now) and water charges were scrapped.

The energy with which surfers and especially Irish non-surfers have thrown themselves behind the Save Doughmore campaign has to be seen in this context. For many Irish people, Donald Trump became the epitome of corporate hegemony during his presidential campaign and his presence in Clare (in the form of the TIGL) is reviled. Here, in the midst of the "water crisis" (as it was dubbed by the media), was another example of corporatism threatening a people's right to (salt)water, with the governing body (in the form of Clare County Council) again complicit. Doughmore beach and its wave Duggie are resources in public ownership in the eyes of surfers and environmentalists, which are already capable of self-management and should be untouched by private corporate hands with the aid of a complicit government.

6.3.3 Intimacies of body and wave part of an empowered nonhuman environment

The relationship between surfers and waves gives rise to a specific conception of coastal "protection," the well-being of coastal environments and the people whose lives take place within them. This is linked to the terms of surfing as a collection of practices. Surfing requires minimal human-led environmental alteration, in fact, surfers tend to imagine their practice as taking place in a pristine environment unaltered by their presence (whether or not this is not actually the case). Rather than sculpting a path or otherwise "building" the terms of their interaction, surfers must use their bodies, boards and skill to identify ways of movement as they appear in the moving environment.

This protection concept is based on a relationship between people and the coast that has three distinguishing features. The first is a positive valuation of "natural" processes, unaltered by human activity. The surfers, environmentalists, and some engineers, locals and non-locals may have different priorities in relation to this dispute, but all share the belief that the Doughmore environment is better in its current, unaltered state, and that any intensive human intervention of any type can only have negative consequences, affecting the "pristine" nature of the bay. The second is a conception of coastal processes as capable of protection. This is demonstrated nicely by Dave's healing metaphor

above. For surfers, waves are not only destructive, but also have a creative side, supplying the conditions of practice and their way of life, but also the sand and stone with which the coast is rebuilt. The protective agency of the coast even extends beyond self-preservation and is also understood to affect the well-being of the human communities in the area. The local surfers contend that sea walls simply relocate flooding, putting other communities at risk. Nature, indeed, trumps walls as an agent of coastal defence.

It is important to acknowledge that this conception of protection is also propagated for the purpose of a (lightly) concealed self-interest, and perhaps also for the reproduction a certain surfer-environmentalist identity of individuals within the group (Horton, 2003; Wheaton, 2007). One of the surfers' foremost concerns is not environmental. The environmental concern happens to overlap with the much more practical concern that a prized wave may be damaged. This is not to say that surfers would not take interest in the case were the wall to be located at a beach with no waves – they may well, in fact they probably would, given their appreciation for the beauty of the coast and also given Trump's involvement. As discussed above, however, surfers are not *necessarily* or always *thoroughly* environmentally concerned, and it is hard to imagine the same energy being invested in the *Save the Waves* campaign at Doughmore was it a surfless bay. All of the above describes how Irish surfers' political relationships with non-surfers at Doughmore have been altered by concepts derived through the specificity of practice, having been shaped by their lives with the sea. This is politics as practiced by channels of The Ocean.

6.4 Building Walls, protecting people and the land

The section turns its attention to a selection of groups that are in favour of the development, and how their practices and discourse has developed an alternative conception of protection. Comparing this concept to that of the surfers will afford a deeper understanding of how surfers' environmental intimacies are tied into wider webs of relations.

6.4.1 The Doughmore Coastal Protection Group

The Doughmore Coastal Protection Group (DCPG) was established at the beginning of 2017, after planning permission for the original wall had been withdrawn. Following the exposure that the wall's opposition received through the petition and the Irish media, the group fears that the interests of local people are not being properly considered or reported. They are also keen to capitalise on a rare offer of private money to fix a problem that they contend will eventually have to be addressed with public funding by the Council (the building of a wall, for the DCPG, is a matter of when, not if). The DCPG's overriding concern is for local jobs;

> "There are 300 people employed there from places like Doonbeg, Cree, Cooraclare, Mullagh and Quilty. We have to protect these jobs. You hear very few announcements about jobs around the country. The greatest gift you can have is a job and that you can live in the area that you want to live in. That's what we want to protect, as well as protecting the houses and the property" (DCPG founding member, in O'Connell, 2017).

This quote is characteristic of a very clear shift in discourse when compared with that of the anti-proposal groups. DCPG is fundamentally concerned with local economics, and it is jobs and property that are in the most immediate need of protection. In this vein, Trump and the TIGL are portrayed in a positive light, as offering a community service. Joe Russell, general manager of the TIGL hotel and golf club, describes the real threat at Doughmore beach to be to people's livelihoods;

> "The golf course needs to be protected. Over the last number of years, the dune face has retreated approximately a yard per year. People have seen a huge retreat in these dunes. If we don't do it, eventually the golf course will go and there is an over-riding question; what generation is going to do it? If it breaches the dunes, a lot of agricultural land behind the club is going to get flooded" (Anon., 2017).

Without these protective measures, Russell contends that TIGL will lose its capacity to provide for the people of West Clare;

> "Expansion of the facilities to include additional accommodation, leisure facilities and banquet hall at the resort are being considered. This will further increase visitor numbers to West Clare and underpin the future economic health of the resort. The realisation of these plans, however, is dependent on the provision of adequate protection from coastal erosion" (ibid).

The DCPG consistently state that the threat to flora and fauna must be considered secondary to the threat to people. But it would be wrong to claim that they simply do not care about environmental health, as is sometimes implied by those who oppose the wall. The DCPG simply imagine the coastal environment as one that requires protecting from humans. Jobs are guaranteed by protecting the land (which requires intensive human intervention), and thereby the environment is protected as the dune habitat is defended from flood damage. Having said that, however, it would be wise also to take this "environmentalist" discourse with a pinch of salt. Just as the surfers use environmental health in part as a means to advance a self-interest, so when arguments by the DCPG are framed in terms of caring for the dunes and preserving the protected area against erosion, it must be acknowledged that these "alternative facts" of environmentalism also function to protect private property and jobs.

The DCPG is highly critical of the manner in which resistance to the proposed wall was organised and allowed such exposure in the media. The *Save the Waves* petition finds itself sharply criticised for this reason. Published online, it was signed by many "people, some of whom have never even set foot in Clare/Ireland but feel it's perfectly ok to call the Clare people idiots and make assumptions about a project which they clearly do not have factually correct" (Doonbeg resident, Fieldnotes, 31/05/2017). The nature of the online campaign allowed it to gather signatures from all over the world. This annoys some Doonbeg residents, who consider the voices illegitimate. They are rather surfers and environmentalists that are happy to tag their name to any cause (or to use it as a

protest against the Trump family in the days after the presidential election), whether or not they have an intimate knowledge of the issue. The conservationist narrative in general has been criticised in this regard. It can tend to suffer from an ignorance of the intricacies of local human issues. In his study of sea turtle conservation on Zakynthos, Theodossopoulos (2004) found that the majority of conservationists were middle-class urbanites, based either in Athens or Zakynthos city, who were disinterested in the lives of the locals whose economic activity was tied to the sea turtles breeding grounds. Instead they espouse what is perceived as an abstract moral argument that separated and elevated the preservation of turtle habitat above any other activity or interest on the island. Back in Clare, the surfers argue that the dune habitat needs to be maintained in its "natural" state, and that humans that live on a flood plain should expect to be flooded from time to time. This argument uses the same appeal to a moral absolute (the sanctity of the natural) to counter the economic argument of the locals and TIGL, vilifying them in the process – not only are they wrong, but they are also bad.

6.4.2 An alternative relationship with waves

Theodossopoulos claims that his farmer informants, for whom the sea turtles' habitat is prime, useable land, "perceive themselves as engaging in an everyday battle with the environment that surrounds them" (Theodossopoulos, 2004, p. 56). Ethnography for this project did not study Irish farmers in anywhere near enough detail to be able to make a similar statement, but certainly those based in the area around Doughmore beach have a similarly antagonistic relationship with waves. For the Doonbeg locals who favour the wall, waves are synonymous with flooding and destruction, from which people must protect themselves. These arguments are also based around a concept of protection that is practically-produced, but it is quite different – even opposed – to that used by the surfers who argue against the wall. Of the Doughmore bay practices associated with the pro-TIGLs, coastal development, farming, and golfing are the most salient. Uniting these practices is an attitude that presumes and encourages human implication in the landscape – farmers must clear land, tend

crops and animals, mend ditches, and otherwise care for their land. TIGL construes a dune system and golf course as under threat from flooding – a problem which is easily overcome by the provision of flood defences. Finally, golfing relies on the careful clearing and manicuring of an open space, with grass cut and weeded daily in order that the area remains (a different kind of) "pristine". By caring for, improving or otherwise altering the landscape, the spirit of these activities cultivates a relationship with the Doughmore environment as something that humans must *act upon*.

In the pro-wall discourse, protection is something that people do to the environment, and not vice versa;

> "If you have two more storms like [those of winter 2014], you can say goodbye to the dunes if something isn't done now. Environmentalists talk about dunes regenerating themselves – but they won't be able to regenerate themselves if they are washed away" (John O'Dea, chairman of Doonbeg Community Development Company. Quoted in Deegan, 2016b).

It follows that protection implies an interventionist attitude towards natural processes, which are conserved, improved, accelerated or halted through technologized human engagements with the nonhuman environment. Interestingly, this type of interventionist protection *also* ends up mirroring another aspect of the classical conservationist narrative, which both sets humans apart from the "natural" world, and "preserves" it, through techniques of control such as breeding programmes (Carrier, 2004). This in itself demonstrates the complexity of understanding the multiple and complex nature of conceptions of environmental protection.

When those in favour of the wall speak of the need to protect, they always stress the sense of urgency with which action is required;

> "It's not something that you can spend 10 years talking about. Something has to happen now. That's the urgency. If it was the council that had to put up the money, we'd have a fight on our hands. Here we have a company that is willing to put €10 million into paying for the coastal protection…" (Business owner Mr. Ryan, quoted in Deegan, 2016b).

The two relationships between human and wave comprise of activity that moves to a different temporal rhythm. This one is accelerated, to be urgently attended to, and always in danger of becoming out of reach. Human intervention takes place on human time, measured in years, seasons, even single storms. Compare the statement above to the following, from Dave Flynn (introduced above in opposition to the wall);

> "I would be happier to lose the beach to the sea over generations rather than rock armour in one generation. We can adapt and we would be happy to" (Dave Flynn, Fieldnotes, 23/05/2017).

This coastal rhythm is imagined as much more gradual, where the passage of time is only legible in the environment over the course of many lifetimes, not one, and certainly not a handful of years. It is human intervention that threatens the dunes with immediate destruction in this temporal order, not storms and floods.

For those who support the wall, storms destroy human interests, environments are inherently unstable, benefiting from being protected by humans, and waves are synonymous with flooding. Thee opposite is true for surfers. Storms cause temporary damage, but energise the coast with its capacity to regenerate, environments reach a natural equilibrium and will support themselves, and waves are something altogether different. Each protection concept is part of an ecology of practice in which the activity of environments on humans, or humans on environments, is experienced. For this reason, however, each concept is *limited.* The problem with speaking of environmental protection in a general sense is that it fails to acknowledge the context-specific nature of protection, and how ecologies as a whole (including humans) might be best protected by appreciating more than one. The next section will attempt to say something reconciliatory about these two conflicting concepts and practices of protection by focusing on Fergal Smith and the waves themselves at Doughmore.

6.5 Living together in Doughmore bay

Fergal Smith is a surfer-farmer (among many other things) whose surfing and farming both bring him to Doughmore on a regular basis. Considering the above discussion, it might be reasonable to assume that to be a surfer-farmer (or a surfer-developer like Dave O'Brien) is to attempt to sustain a contradictory identity whose practices pull Fergal down the middle. This is not how Ferg sees it;

> "Surfers are one of societies groups most connected to nature. Sitting in the ocean is the best way to do this…Being vegetable growers suits surfers. It's on your terms. The three of us running the garden are three surfers. But surfers aren't very connected to the land, they are very sea-oriented. That takes time. We need young healthy enthusiastic growers" (Fergal Smith, Fieldnotes, 19/08/2016).
>
> "We're just down at the white strand. Some epic waves around the corner, not today but just to link [surfing] in with garden – coming down to pick up seaweed at the same time. There are so much micronutrients and trace elements and all that kind of stuff for the garden and its washing up free of charge!" (Smith, 2016).

Disputes expose divisions, and anthropologically it becomes tempting to analyse the ethnographic environment as one characterised only by alterity. As Ferg demonstrates, however, while aspects of practices may diverge, many other aspects continue to hold practices – and communities – together.

Dave O'Brien, the surfer-developer quoted above, also performs the non-contradictory nature of a making a life in the practices of property development and surfing. Doughmore (and the Clare coast more generally) is not a segregated society. Farmers surf, and employees of TIGL drink in the same bar that one local professional surfer works in. The community is too intimate and continuous to be fundamentally split. Putting the wall aside, Doughmore remains a community of people and waves. TIGL, it users, and surfers alike are drawn to Doughmore for waves. The dunes are blown into shape by the same winds as Duggie. The golfers putt and the farmers farm on waves of sand and grass. The process of dispute causes polarisation as each side, by voicing their own concerns, necessarily

juxtaposes themselves to their opponents. This has the effect of overstating divergence at the expense of convergence.

A constructive anthropological analysis of land (and sea) dispute ought to expose not just alterity, but also affinity in practice and community. Dispute aside, both sides implicitly recognise the agency of *both* humans and nonhumans and the lively role taken by both in conserving or destroying environments. The wall's supporters are keenly aware of the power of waves to interfere with the terrestrial affairs of humans, while the surfer-environmentalists too elsewhere promote the preservation of species and environments through human intervention. The two protection concepts, in effect, are two positions drawn from the land, sea, and air that both recognise the fundamental interdependency of humans and their environment. The dispute has forced them to become more extreme.

In a time of widely recognised impending ecological calamity it is critical that practices promote healthy relations with the environment. This will require a certain attitude towards nonhuman others. Kay Milton (2002) outlines what she calls "an ecology of emotion," in which peoples' knowledge of the environment is derived through their emotional responses to it, and thus we fall in love with the pieces and processes of environments which we hold dear. Surfers' intimacy develops not with storms, or seabeds, or winds, but with the push of an incoming surge of energy materialised in salt water, with the bottoming-out of the trough of the wave in front, and perhaps most of all with the feeling of hopping to one's feet and allowing the energy of the wave to work through the body and the board as they search for their line of escape – a movement of creation which overcomes that of the destruction left behind. But as was discussed above, to become intimate using this energy is one thing, to refrain from polluting and to actively care for the health of the Irish coastal environment is another.

While Milton is correct in understanding that the love that surfers feel towards the energy of waves leads them to acknowledge the potency of natural processes and the importance of their

persistence, this intimacy may not always be enough in itself to will people to act in an environmentally friendly manner. In relation to the farmers and developers, their argument that the dunes need protecting from storms becomes valid only insofar as their practices become and remain responsible and sustainable so that they actively protect that habitat. For the surfers, their argument that the coast ought to remain pristine in order that it can go on protecting becomes valid only if they do their utmost to limit the fuel, plastic, and petrochemical pollution that they dump into the ocean. *Surfers Against Sewage's* "two-minute beach clean" is a good example of such a positive aspect that can become a part of surf practice in which surfers are encouraged to fill a bag with rubbish after every surf and post it to online social media accompanied by #twominutebeachclean to spread the word. Perhaps building on love, then, we ought to talk about environmental empathy. If surfers would use their intimacy with waves to reflect on the value of other parts and processes of various environments then a true ethic of care might be possible. Surfers passionately believe Duggie the wave deserves to live; local farmers and TIGL develop practices that care for the waves in the dunes. The challenge is to allow these intimacies to leak outwards; communities of the Irish coast must rediscover their love for their diverse environments again through an empathy for each other's love of salt water and the forces of its animation.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has attempted to extend the type of ecological thought which influences this analysis of surfing by describing how the process by which concepts are produced is tied to ecologies of practice, specifically to the manner in which practices harness, inhibit, or otherwise process environmental energies. As such, concepts are just like surfers' identities, bodies, technologies, and surfable waves. It has also situated the surfer-wave relationship in a wider Irish social context by using the Doughmore bay development dispute as a lens with which to examine relations between surfers and non-surfers. It described how arguments for and against the proposed development are framed around concepts

of protection which, while made distinct by the practicalities of argument, both have the equilibrium of human-nonhuman relations and environmental health at their core. It also demonstrated how Irish surfers' understanding of their environment is derived from their practical relations with the energies through which it is animated. This final analysis of surfers' intimacy with their environment has exposed both the potency of this intimacy to affect sentiments of environmental stewardship but also the destructive tendencies of practice. In doing so, it has called for a vigilant anthropology that not only describes and supports informant views and ways of life, but also critiques where critique is appropriate.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis is about how surfers develop techniques, technologies, terms of social interaction, subjectivities, and open up new spaces of practice as they transform themselves into channels of Oceanic energy by becoming intimate with waves and the Irish coastal environment. This intimacy is corporeal in the sense that invites the communion of human flesh and its technological appendages with the materiality of the near-shore; it is epistemic insofar as it demands that surfers come to know waves, winds, reefs, and the drift of sand banks in a variety of modes (digital, material, immediate, reported, etc.); it is affective as it alters the experience of being human, in which (specific) waves, reefs, and accompanying practices are taken on as identifying elements; this intimacy can also be problematic as it is so seductively alluring that often practitioners find it difficult to hold down regular jobs or indeed allow other of their intimacies to suffer in order to get their fill of waves; finally, it is also deeply fulfilling, as attested to by every surfer whenever they speak on the subject. In many ways, then, it is an intimacy quite like those shared between humans.

The thesis was premised as a counter argument to subject-oriented analyses of surfing and also of the representation of surfing, surfers and the littoral environment as liminal, both of which examine surfing against conceptual yardsticks taken from outside the specificity of surfing culture. Alternatively, I argued for an ecological approach that emphasises 1) the manner in which surfing practice *connects* terrestrial, littoral and oceanic environments, and 2) that an engagement with the energy which animates more-than-human social relations is fundamental to such an explanation of surfing, as it is by becoming a channel for Oceanic energy that Irish surfers transform the littoral from a liminal space into the centre of their social and cultural lives. This conclusion will draw out the significance of such insights for anthropology in general before dwelling briefly on some methodological points and finally considering limitations and potential avenues for further research.

7.1 Theoretical implications

7.1.1 Centring the littoral; dissolving boundaries

Many academic analyses of surfing as a practice (as opposed to a subculture) begin with the individual surfer-as-analytical-unit, and with the momentary experience of riding a wave as the practical context (e.g. Fiske, 1989; Poirer, 2003; Stranger, 1999, 2011). It was argued that the core features of subject-oriented analyses of surfing are that it is *individualist, extraordinary, aesthetically-oriented,* and *momentary*. This thesis proposed to examine surfing from an alternative, more ecological point of view, in which, I claim, it becomes apparent that the core features of surfing practice are that it is *social, ordinary, corporeally-oriented,* and *processual/developmental*.

To work backwards through these features: Surfing is developmental in the sense that neither the human body nor the littoral environment *contain* surfing within them prior to a concerted, creative effort of bodily, skilled and technological development. In this I took theoretical inspiration from Deleuzian philosophy, in which differentiation of virtual and actual is a fundamental mode of being, or more correctly of becoming. From this theoretical base I employed anthropological and geographical ideas of the endless development of bodies, skills, and technologies (Coupaye, 2009b; Ingold, 1996, Parkhurst, 2012; Thrift, 2003), and of the creativity and imagination intrinsic to environment-specific activities (Laviolette, 2009) to guide an explanation of how surfing indeed exhibits these characteristics. Chapter four particularly demonstrated the process of growth, whereby surfboards and surfing bodies continually remake each other, predicated on the recontexualization of materials and technologies from different environments.

The notions of development and process are obviously linked, and the main claim about the processual nature of surfing was that it related to the *experience* – that peak experience is not a momentary phenomenon, but rather an ongoing duration, with climaxes and anti-climaxes throughout. In order to demonstrate this, chapter three married surfers' own conceptions of

atmosphere with anthropological theory in order to analyse how surfers are made in the process of becoming affected by place, and by each other-in place. It is by being immersed in/creating atmospheres (at once meteorological and affective) that surfing identity and subjectivity take on attributes of their environment of practice. Chapter five deepened such an understanding by comparing surfing in the "real" environments of the rest of the thesis with the "artificial" environment of a wave pool. It is by being removed from the energy which animates surf breaks that the surfer-wave relationship becomes artificial in wave pools.

The fact that surfing is corporeally-oriented has been attested to in almost every chapter of this thesis. Chapter two and five described how surf breaks emerge as areas of the relational movement (Anderson, 2012) of bodies and atmosphere, and chapter four analysed the processes of enskillment which is generative not just of skills and tools, but also of new human bodies. This gradual, transformative, hard, frustrating aspect to practice comprises the everyday reality of surfing – and it is indeed everyday. I described surfing as ordinary to demonstrate the central role it takes in the daily lives of my informants – in autumn and spring, during holidays, or during specific periods of their lives, my informants sometimes surf as often per week as they sleep, and they do not meet waves only – certainly not largely – in exotic, extraordinary locations, but rather at the beaches and reefs with which they are so intimately acquainted such that they become described as 'home.'

Finally, surfing is far from individualist, but rather provides occasion for the cultivation of intimacy with other surfers and also with the environment. Chapter two described the social nature of predicting swells, and chapter four examined the social nature of enskillment. In chapter six, the surfer-wave relationship met other human-wave relationships, the outcome in this instance being dispute. This dispute, however, was not characterised as a cessation of sociality, but rather a deep and intense form of communication given shape by the intimacy and proximity with which surfers and nonsurfers share place.

7.1.2 Critiquing liminality

As a whole, this explanation of surfing, based on theory which works with these core features, produces an ecological framework which demonstrates that by becoming channels for Oceanic energy, Irish surfers deconstruct physical and conceptual barriers that separate terrestrial, oceanic and littoral environments. By developing surfing bodies surfers deconstruct these barriers at a bodily level, becoming water-borne and capable of conducting wave energy. They also do this by developing techniques of moving between these environments or drawing one into the other. The centrality of the car to surfing practice and sociality maintains a strong connection between different surf breaks, surfers' homes, towns with familiar lunch stops, rural areas and city centres. All are part of the surfing experience. More recently, the digital representation of swells has transported oceanic conditions into Irish surfers' living rooms and pockets. Finally, surfers deconstruct the conceptual boundary between familiar land and unfamiliar coast/sea by developing environmentally-situated terms of sociality and hierarchy that draw on surfers' knowledge and skill at negotiating the littoral in the production of Irish surfing social life.

It is because the littoral is produced as the centre of Irish surfing life while at the same time being weaved into the ocean *and* the land that I argue that liminality is an inappropriate concept (at least in its current sense) to use in an analysis of surfers and surfing spaces. As chapter two to four argued at length, to take a surfing point of view of the Irish coast is to appreciate the manifold ways that the alteration of bodily and technological dispositions to the littoral creates the social and conceptual context in which the status of liminality shifts. From the conceptual context of Irish surfing culture, what is liminal is whatever is *removed* or otherwise alienated from waves and from the animating energy of The Ocean. Such an insight has significant consequences for anthropological theory.

Liminality is a central concept of social anthropology. Through the work of Van Gennep (1960), Turner (1969; 1883), and later theorists who have exported liminality from the study of ritual to study

social and cultural transformation in general (Szakolczai, 2014), the concept has become a tool for analysing the transformative, arresting and/or interrupting effect of the imposition of a mutating social structure or social space on the lives of individuals or groups. Liminal states/spaces are by definition *extraordinary,* not part of normal life but rather awaiting a return to a more ordinary social state or for the emergence of something new. It is this normative definition of what constitutes normality – which becomes enshrined in liminal theory – that I take issue with. Liminal theory begins analysis having already defined what is normal, what social structure looks like, what constitutes such a structure in transition, and how one might spot the conditions which mark the end of a transition period. For example, in Siganporia's (2016) work on Tibetan exiles liminality is used to explain the experience of being separated from an imagined homeland, and the transition period's end would be marked by a "return" to an at once nostalgic yet transformed free Tibet. In Szakolczai's (2014) analysis of contemporary Ireland, liminality becomes permanent (and decidedly negative), an effect of accelerating cultural change brought about by modernity. What liminal theory offers is a tool for analysing the manner in which a transitional social structure impinges on or otherwise transforms the normal lives of the individuals or groups. What it does less well is offer an explanation of the social, political, and technological skills and concepts that are developed by individuals or groups which allow them to get by, transforming what might be liminal from one point of view into conditions in which meaningful lives can be made.

Choosing theories is very much a political affair (Behar, 1993; Collins, 1991; de La Cadena, 2015). For instance, recent 'decolonising' attempts in anthropology have demonstrated persuasively how disciplinary tendencies to analyse data through theories and concepts developed by white, male, western anthropologists and philosophers risk distorting or blunting the explanatory potency of indigenous philosophies (Harrison, 1992; Smith, 1999). This recognition of the political nature of theoretical exposition is the inspiration behind the 'ontological turn,' described by Henare et al. (2007) and Holbraad & Pedersen (2017) as an attempt to explain anthropological data regarding a certain culture 'on its own terms' by "asking ontological questions" of one's data (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017,

p. 68). For instance, 'what might the world have to be like such that the littoral would be at its centre and not periphery? How might a human being become something which is animated by Oceanic energy? How might human social relations be understood as *depending* on the materiality of the littoral environment, as opposed to being interrupted by it? It is this form of metaphysical questioning that I have used throughout my research which has invited Irish surfers to demonstrate how they transform themselves and the littoral and make surfing practice, people, and spaces ordinary. Politically, this mode of theorisation demonstrates a very different relationship between surfing practice and social structure than does liminality. In this ecological explanation Irish surfers have been empowered to transform social structure in practice – to turn what might be a liminal space from a non-surfing point of view into something completely natural or normal. In liminal explanations, on the other hand, social structure is defined from the outset from a decidedly non-surfing point of view. From such a perspective, surfing can only remain extraordinary, removed from civilisation, and perhaps function primarily as an escape from whatever constitutes 'everyday' life.

Given this argument, two recommendations might be made about the use of liminality in the study of surfing (and more generally). Given the ability of surfers to develop technology and social forms in the littoral, perhaps liminality is simply an inappropriate concept with which to analyse Irish surf culture. There is, however, something significant about the manner in which the littoral slowly *becomes* ordinary through a lifetime of repetitive practice. What might have once been liminal is no more. In keeping with the ontological methodology, then, anthropology could take such an ethnographic fact as an opportunity to rethink liminality as a concept. Instead of investigating the effect of structural abnormality on the ability of groups or individuals to live 'normal' lives, a liminal state could be reimagined as one in which individuals or groups creatively *distort* structure in the creation of novel social forms. This actually resonates with Turner's own emphasis on the transformative nature of ritual activity. His work signalled a departure from the structuralist tradition he was educated under which foregrounded the role of ritual in affecting social reproduction, as opposed to transformation (Turner, 1983, for extensive discussion see Deflem, 1991). An

understanding of the potential for ritual subjects to instigate structural transformation is an aspect of liminality theory that has been lost since its migration from ritual studies. Importantly and in contrast to Turner, however, such efforts at transforming social structure need not lead to an experience of anti-structure or communitas – in which those undergoing a liminal experience "are treated as equals to one another, creating a generic bond and a sentiment of "humankindness" between them" (Deflem, 1991, p. 17). Conversely, I argue that the study of surfing suggests the development of a concept of liminality in which those who live in what might seem to be 'abnormal' circumstances or spaces very quickly produce an alternative structure of social hierarchies, in this case by offering cultural definitions of prestige, terms upon which humans may dominate a watery space, and normative definitions of what constitutes a normal environment, among other things but which nonetheless provide a new set of social rules which gives the lives of the group in question social shape and meaning. Instead of submitting to the seemingly unliveable betweenness described in contemporary liminality theory, an alternative analytical emphasis on how groups create the social and cultural terms upon which this new state can become normal transforms liminality from a state (and theory) imposed from outside, to one that is actively redefined in the production of social and cultural novelty.

7.1.3 Animating theory

Surfers can teach anthropologists to pay greater attention to these animating forces in analysis. To treat landscape and environment as the symbolisation of spatial structure (Bender, 1993; Hirsch, 1995; Strang, 1997), as has been the hegemonic theoretical style for at least two decades, does little to incorporate this as a central element of human experience and practical development. Alternatively, to treat environment as surfers do – as a set of material and practical conditions for potential action (Gibson, 2014; Grasseni, 2007, Ingold, 1996, 2000, 2011, 2015; Milton, 2002; Pálsson, 1998, Pink, 2011) brings such affective processes into analytical focus. By beginning with an

understanding of surfers as "nodes in a field of relationships" (Ingold, 2000, p. 4), the anthropological explanation is invited to make sense of that very field in a theoretical language that does justice to the intimacy with nonhuman things and the manner in which humans and their concepts can become channels for environmental forces. Waves are communications of atmospheric force in the saline material of the ocean with which surfers have developed a mode of corporeal communication. Considering this ethnographic particularity, this thesis makes a strong claim for the interdependence of the anthropology of affect and the anthropology of environment. In the surfing context at least (but I suspect in many more) one cannot provide explanation without heavy doses of the other. Environmental anthropology already acknowledges the role of affect in the sense of the creation of empathy or a love of the environment (Milton, 2002), or the role of environments in the reproduction of identity (Munn, 1973), but less as a collection of animating forces that create the texture of environments and, importantly, the human lives therein.

7.2 Anthropological analysis and the production of theory

7.2.1 The production of theory

The argument of this thesis as a whole developed from a concerted effort to take informants' concepts seriously (in this I have been greatly influenced by the works of Roy Wagner (1981), Marisol de la Cadena (2015), and especially by Martin Holbraad (2012; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017)). There is an important difference between anthropology in which its informants and their concepts appear as objects of analysis, and anthropology in which informants are understood as collaborators in research and in which the concepts that organise their world are received in an effort of correspondence (Ingold, 2015) between theory and lifeworld. The difference hinges upon the perceived role of anthropological explanation. A "self-aware" anthropology (Wagner, 1981, p. 15) ought always to consider the origins of its chosen terms of explanation. If it is to make sense of informants' discourse

and practice on terms that are already anthropologically-sensical, the informants remain objects of analysis. If, on the other hand, the explanation is forced to make sense of the various ethnographic phenomena on terms that make sense within a conceptual framework derived directly from the terms of informants' discourse and practice, then it becomes an effort in the latter, in correspondence.

The insights into the role of energy and atmosphere in the production of waves, surfers and the relationships between them (around which everything else in this thesis is based) came from the method (wielded so skilfully by the authors mentioned above) of presuming anthropological naivety in the face of surfable waves and the weather, which may superficially seem relatively straightforward and well-known phenomena. This analytic step provided the opportunity to allow surfers to define their liquid partners, leading to an anthropological explanation of surfing as becoming a channel of Oceanic energy. This in turn suggests the fruitfulness of an anthropology of the land, sea, and air based on an ecology of energies, as discussed above. For these insights, I only have Irish surfers to thank.

Obviously it must be conceded that this does not create the possibility of claiming that a truly "emic" theory of surfing is represented between these covers. Irish surfers' understanding of their practices have been washed through with *my* understanding of what they say and do, as well as the literature which I have brought to it. These theoretical schemata, however, are taken in an analytically methodological (and not metaphysical) light: To follow Holbraad & Pedersen (2017), I do not claim that the ecology of energy and things described in this thesis represents the world of Irish surfing verbatim. I do, however, assert that this thesis remains true to the world *as an explanation,* derived from surfers' real practices and a body of anthropological theory that has been produced in correspondence with this world (Ingold, 2015). It is a representation, no doubt, necessarily *not* equivalent to real world phenomena but related to it in an important way. Perhaps this is better characterised as a claim that sits between the methodological and the metaphysical: The explanation offered herein ought to be taken methodologically as a useful understanding of surfing *for anthropology*, but which nonetheless is drawn from the world and retains a significant claim of

relevance when corresponding with it. I believe this remains both responsible (insofar as its metaphysical claim is not too strong), and relevant (insofar as it is not anthropology aimed only at itself).

7.2.2 The political role of contemporary anthropology

The final point of the previous section is worth expanding further. Over the past few decades anthropology has become less and less visible in public debate, to the point that it has "almost gone underground in the English-speaking world" (Eriksen, 2006). This is extremely regrettable, but perhaps understanding considering the postmodern self-examination that busied the discipline during the final decades of the twentieth century. There is no doubt that this has strengthened the discipline, uncovering the racist and colonialist tendencies in the early development of anthropology and providing it with the kind of reflexivity that allows the uniquely anthropological encounter with other people on their terms. In the current global political and environmental context, however, this is unsustainable. Environmental anthropology is right to take the fact that human activity is ecologically damaging as axiomatic *prior* to any informant reports that may suggest otherwise. The American Anthropological Association was similarly legitimated in its 2014 call for a debate on a boycott of Israeli institutions in the face of that State's degenerating treatment of the rights of Palestinian people. A similar claim could be made with respect to the extreme anti-Trump and anti-Brexit sentiments of the contemporary disciplinary debate. Anthropology must be sufficiently brave to express an opinion on where informants are to be applauded, but also where they are to be criticised.

This thesis positions itself as part of this interventional moment in contemporary anthropology. Chapter six attempted to describe two sides of a political debate in detail to illustrate both the strengths and the environmental shortcomings of the actions and narratives of *both* sides. An ecologically-minded, politically-sensitive, interventional anthropology ought not to observe from the side lines of culture, as it was once thought that anthropology could, but rather involve itself tooth

and nail in the global issues that define the temporal, social, and political contexts in which contemporary research takes place (see Peter Armitage's work (2006, 2007) for a good example of this activist style of anthropology). "What does the field offer the world and the discipline?" is one question. Another of equal importance is "what can the world and the discipline offer to the field?" To ask both is to create a truly "correspondent" anthropology.

7.3 Methodology for practice-based research

This thesis provides proof of the value – perhaps the necessity – of a commitment to deep, long-term learning in the anthropological engagement with practice. The participant-observation of surfing for this project went far beyond attempting to surf and instead cast the ethnographer deep within a "community of learning" (Pálsson, 1994). Through such commitments to learning as a way of life and not a research method (Harris, 2007, Stoller, 2009), researchers of practice ought to become proficient, tracking the evolution of their understanding of the practice and the corresponding terms of sociality which are based around it. The analysis of how a surf break is produced in action (chapter two) could not have taken place were I not sufficiently skilled to engage with such surf breaks; the artificiality of the wave at *Surf Snowdonia* (chapter five) had first to be comprehended in use before I could properly appreciate how informants were reporting it as phenomenally different to surfing at the coast; and finally, the section on beginners enskillment of chapter four was suggested by my own memory of being incapable of surfing, the important changes that take place during that period in the production of the surfer, and later from a different point of view as I too coached beginners into their first waves. This is not at all to call for autobiographical research, such as some ethnographers of practice have produced (e.g Waquant, 2004). It is simply to state that understanding has a more-than-cognitive dimension (Harris, 2007), and so an indispensable part of practice-based ethnography is to become proficient. This reaffirms anthropology's call for a long, slow (Stewart, 2011), deep engagement with the field, which remains the discipline's foremost demarcation criterion.

7.4 Limitations and avenues for further research

In researching the channelling of Oceanic energy by surfing bodies I have taken a decidedly postmodern, posthuman approach which "insists on the co-evolutionary embodiment and embeddedness of the human animal with the world" (Whatmore, 2013, p. 34). It is the nature of this embeddedness – of the socio-material meshwork of surfing practice – that has been my analytical object. In this thesis I have concentrated on the work undertaken by bodies and things to bridge the ontologically distinct realms (from a surfing perspective) of human lives and ocean-driving energy and how this is productive of its own form of sociality, distinct (although of course influenced by) local terrestrial forms and with some characteristics that seem universal to surfers' engagement with waves. This has meant that I have been less interested in producing an ethnography of Ireland in a more traditional sense, as an examination of how Irishness finds itself expressed in the search for waves, for instance. My critique of liminality is premised on the fact that the liminal space is traditionally analysed through concepts and conventions that surround it as opposed to those that emerge in the negotiation of such spaces. In the introduction I described how such an approach has led Duggan (2012) to wrongly characterise Irish surfing as an escape from post-2008 terrestrial atmosphere of doom and gloom, causing him to miss both the negative aspects to the surfing experience and also the seriousness of surfing sociality. Rather than engaging surfing as an Irish cultural space in a more classically anthropological sense, my aim has been to engage with surfing as a socioenvironmental process. I have been more interested in the emergence of culture from the environment than I have been of relations between sub and parent cultures.

However, the postmodern approach I take to describe how surfing dissolves boundaries that might separate terrestrial, liminal and oceanic environments, and how surf culture complicates regional/ethnic essentialisms as it spreads globally clearly resonates with now-established trends in the anthropology of Ireland that critique approaches to Irish life which draw strict divisions between the urban and rural (Ruane, 1989), traditional and modern (Curtin & Wilson, 1989; Wilson & Donnan,

2006), or secular and spiritual (Mc Farlane, 1994; Jenkins, 1986; Murphy, 2000). On a broader scale, the anthropology of Europe (especially since the late 1990s) is equally emphatic of how Irish society is intimately connected to others in Europe and beyond (Bellier & Wilson, 2000; Goddard et al., 1994; Shutes, 1993), just as regional surf cultures are somewhat distinct yet connected. There is certainly room for a future project which need not attempt to represent an essential Irishness through surfing, but rather examine surfing as a mobile phenomenon, perhaps investigating how it is so successful at embedding itself in diverse global contexts while retaining many seemingly universal characteristics. There is of course a negative aspect of this. The spread of surfing might be (I think correctly) seen as part of the Americanisation of global cultures. Surf media, surf language, surfing gestures, surfing style, surf fashion, etc. are all US exports (I have heard local children in rural Nicaragua use the Californian word 'gnarly' to describe their on-the-water experiences). There is also plenty of surf tourism literature which examines the colonial nature of surfing development, in which Western-owned companies effectively take over the development process of entire rural towns around the world (Jorden, 2018). These developments often have a segregating effect, separating surfing spaces from other local spaces and populations (Erin-Usher, 2013), which might be one (negative) reason explaining surf culture/sociality's ability to move from region to region and remain so 'intact.'

This globalist perspective is clearly relevant and, to come back to my particular interest in relations between groups of surfers and the sea, it would be interesting to see comparative work undertaken in regions outside of Ireland to investigate the universal and/or regionally-specific nature of the narratives and practices attached to becoming a channel for Oceanic energy through surfing. In Ireland the narrative is heavily modernist, revolving around encounters with 'nature,' or the powers of the ocean and *presumes* an original separation between modern human and oceanic realms. I would love to see analogous work carried out in a non-Western context such as Fiji, where the ocean takes a more central role in the social and cultural lives of humans historically and which also has a flourishing indigenous surfing population. To examine those narratives and practices of littoral and

oceanic engagement *in comparison* to their Irish analogues would yield more traditional culturally-comparative anthropological data but in terms specific to those local *surfing* cultures, and not (at least primarily) as instances of broader cultural essentialisms.

As acknowledged in the introduction to this thesis, this research lacks an explicit emphasis on gender as an important aspect of the field. To problematise gender in surfing is important in the context of a continuing (although *slowly* waning) male dominance of the practice and social life. It is also important in the context of this research, on surfer-wave relations. It would be wise to at least hypothesise that the surfer-wave relation might not be universal. It could also have a gendered aspect. This is another avenue for further research – the extension of an examination of surfer-wave relations beyond the Irish context and in which gender is explicitly problematised. Issues surrounding race and ethnicity are also strikingly absent from studies of surfing (and many other practices). I have never seen a non-white surfer in Ireland. Although researching the absent other is notoriously difficult, this absence in itself may speak of ethnic separations in wider Irish society, the economic difficulty minority groups encounter in accessing equipment or time to travel, or a host of other facts regarding social relations of contemporary Ireland that deserve anthropological attention.

Bibliography

Abramson, A., 2000. Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries: Wondering about Landscape and Other Tracts. In: A. Abramson & D. Theodossopoulos, eds. *Land, Law and Environment: Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries.* London: Pluto Books, pp. 1-30.

Abramson, A. & Fletcher, R., 2007. Recreating the Vertical: Rock-Climbing as Epic and Deep Eco-Play. *Anthropology Today,* 23(6), pp. 3-7.

Abu-Lughod, L., 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Adey, P., 2006. If Mobility is Everything Then it is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities. *Mobilities,* 1(1), pp. 75-94.

Adey, P., 2009. Facing Airport Security: Affect, Biopolitics, and the Preemptive Securatisation of the Mobile Body. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Volume 27, pp. 274-295.

Allen-Collinson, J., 2003. Running into Injury Time: Distance Running and Temporality. *Sociology of Sport Journal,* 20(4), pp. 331-350.

Allen-Collinson, J., 2008. Running the Routes Together: Corunning and Knowledge in Action. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 37(1), pp. 38-61.

Allen-Collinson, J., 2015. Feminist Phenomenology and the Woman in the Running Body. In: I. Martínková & J. Parry, eds. *Phenomenological Approaches to Sport.* London: Routledge, pp. 113-129.

Allen-Collinson, J. & Owton, H., 2014. Take a Deep Breath: Asthma, Sporting Embodiment and 'Auditory Work'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 49(5), pp. 592-608.

Anderson, B., 2009. Affective Atmospheres. *Emotion, Space, Society,* 2, pp. 77-81.

Anderson, J., 2004. Spatial Politics in Practice: The Style and Substance of Environmental Direct Action. *Antipode,* 36, pp. 106-125.

Anderson, J., 2012. Relational Places: The Surfed Wave as Assemblage and Convergence. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Volume 30, pp. 570-587.

Anderson, J., 2016. On Being Shaped by Surfing: Experiencing the World of the Littoral Zone. In: M. Brown & B. Humberstone, eds. *Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea.* New York: Routledge, pp. 66-79.

Anon., 2015. *Wavelength*, 23 January, Issue 237, p. 38.

Anon., 2017. Doonbeg Expansion Dependent on Coastal Works. *The Clare Champion,* http://clarechampion.ie/doonbeg-expansion-dependent-on-coastal-works/. Accessed 17/09/2017.

Anon., 2017. *O'Neill Blue: Our Ocean Mission.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.oneill.com/gb/en/shop/inspiration/collections/oneill-blue
[Accessed 12 06 2017].

Archambault, J. S., 2016. Taking Love Seriously in Human-Plant Relations in Mozambique: Toward an Anthropology of Affective Encounters. *Cultural Anthropology,* 31(2), pp. 244-271.

Archambault, J. S., 2017. *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretene in Mozambique.* London: University of Chicago Press.

Armantas, C. & Diehm, R., 2004. Surfing: An Avenue for Socially Acceptable Risk-Taking, Satisfying the Needs for Sensation Seeking and Experience Seeking. *Personality and Individual Differences,* 36, pp. 663-677.

Armitage, P., 2006. *Report on the Fieldtrip to Ushkan- Shipiss, October 14. Report to Innu Nation.* Submitted to the Joint Review Panel for the Environmental Assessment of the Lower Churchill Hydroelectric Generation Project: www.kuekuatsheu.ca.

Armitage, P., 2007. *Innu Kaishitshissenitak Mishta- Shipu: Innu Environmental Knowledge of the Mishta- Shipu (Churchill River) Area of Labrador in Relation to the Proposed Lower Churchill Project.* Committee to the joint Innu Nation – Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro Task: www.kuekuatsheu.ca.

Barratt, P., 2011. Vertical Worlds: Technology, Hybridity and the Climbing body. *Social and Cultural Geography,* 12(4), pp. 397-412.

BBC, 2017. Rescued Surfer Matthew Bryce 'Had Prepared for Death'. *BBC News Scotland,* http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-39802553. Accessed 01/11/2017.

Behar, R., 1993. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Bellier, I. & Wilson, T., 2000. Building, Imagining, and Experiencing Europe: Institutions and Identities in the European Union. In Irene Bellier and Thomas M. Wilson (eds), *An Anthropology of the European Union: Building, Imagining and Experiencing the New Europe.* Oxford: Berg.

Bender, B., 1993. *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives.* Oxford: Berg.

Bender, B., 2001. Landscapes On-the-Move. *Journal of Social Archaeology,* 1(1), pp. 75-89.

Bender, B., 2006. Place and Landscape. In: C. Tilley, et al. eds. *Handbook of Material Culture.* London: Sage, pp. 303-314.

Bennett, A., 1999. Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste. *Sociology,* 33(3).

Bennett, J., 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham: Duke Univerity Press.

Bessas, Y., 1982. *La Glisse.* Paris: Arthème Fayard.

Bille, M., 2013. Lighting Up Cosy Atmospheres in Denmark. *Emotion, Space and Society,* 15, pp. 56-63.

Bird-David, N., 1999. “Animism” Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology. *Current Anthropology,* 40(S1), pp. S67-S91.

Bloch, M., 1995. People into Places: Zafimaniry Concepts of Clarity. In: E. Hirsch & M. O'Hanlon, eds. *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 63-77.

Blok, A. & Jensen, T. E., 2011. *Bruno Latour: Hybrid Thoughts in a Hybrid World.* Oxon: Routledge.

Böhme, G., 2017. *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres.* New York: Routledge.

Booth, D., 1999. Surfing: The Cultural and Technological Determinants of a Dance. *Culture, Sport, Society,* 2(1), pp. 36-55.

Booth, D., 2001. From Bikinis to Boardshorts: Wahines and the Paradoxes of Surfing Culture. *Journal of Sport History,* 28(1), pp. 36-55.

Borden, I., 2001. *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Bouissac, P., 2012. *Circus as Multimodal Discourse: Performance, Meaning, and Ritual.* London: A&C Black.

Bourdieu, P., 1970. The Berber House or the World Reversed. *Social Science Information,* 9(2), pp. 151-170.

Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Braidotti, R., 2011. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory.* New York: Colombia University Press.

Bresnihan, P., 2013. From Land to Sea: Unsettling Subectivities. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology,* 4(1), pp. 1-19.

Britton, E., 2012. Women as Agents of Wellbeing in Northern Ireland's Fishing Households. *Maritime Studies,* 11, pp. 1-22.

Britton, E., 2015. The Pink Nose Revolution. *Maptia Online,* https://maptia.com/easkey/stories/the-pink-nose-revolution. Last accessed 27/10/15.

Britton, E., 2016. *Surfing to Conservation and Social Change with Dr. Easkey Britton* [Interview] (17 08 2016).

Brown, D. & Ford, N., 2006. *Surfing and Social Theory: Experience, Embodiment and Narrative of the Dream Glide.* New York: Routledge.

Brown, M. & Humberstone, B., 2016a. *Seascapes: Shaped by the Sea.* New York: Routledge.

Brown, M. & Humberstone, B., 2016b. Introduction. In: M. Brown & B. Humberstone, eds. *Seascapes: Shaped by the sea.* New York: Routledge, pp. 18-27.

Brown, S., 2006. The Criminology of Hybrids: Rethinking Crime and Law in Technosocial Networks. *Theoretical Criminology,* 10(2), pp. 223-244.

Buchli, V., 2002. Introduction. In: *The Material Culture Reader.* Oxford: Berg, pp. 1-22.

Carrier, J. G., 2004. Introduction. In: *Confronting Environments: Local Understandings in a Globalizing World.* California: Rowman Altamira.

Chaiklin, S. & Lave, J., 1993. *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chamberlain, C. & Johnson, G., 2018. From Long-Term Homelessness to Stable Housing: Investigating Liminality. *Housing Studies,* pp. 1-18.

Clare County Council, 2017. *Request for Further Information: Proposed Development by TIGL Ireland Enterprises Ltd, reference # R2 6497 7254 5IE*.

Clifford, J., 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Coates, E., Clayton, B. & Humberstone, B., 2010. A Battle for Control: Exchanges of Power in the Subculture of Snowboarding. *Sport in Society,* 13(7-8), pp. 1082-1101.

Collins, P.H., 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J., 1998. Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony. *American Ethnologist,* 26(3), pp. 279-301.

Comer, K., 2010. *Surfer Girls in the New World Order.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Corbin, A., 1994. *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840.* Oakland: University of California Press.

Corker, M. (Dir.), 2016. *Beneath the Surface* [Film]. Ireland: Red Bull Media House.

Couch, J., 2017. 'Neither Here nor There': Refugee Young People and Homelessness in Australia. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 74, pp. 1-7.

Coupaye, L., 2009a. Ways of Enchanting: Chaines Opératoires and Yam Cultivation in Nyamikum Village, Maprik, Papua New Guinea. *Journal of Material Culture,* 14(4), pp. 433-458.

Coupaye, L., 2009b. Whats the Matter with Technology? Long (and Short) Yams, Materialisms and Technology in Nyamikum Village, Maprik District, Papua New Guinea. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology,* Volume 20, pp. 93-111.

Coupaye, L., 2013. *Growing Artefacts, Displaying Relationships: Yams, Art and Technology Amongst the Nyamikum Abelam of Papua New Guinea.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Crossley, N., 1995. Merleau-Ponty, the Elusive Body and Carnal Sociology. *Body and Society,* 1(1), pp. 43-63.

Crossley, N., 2007. Researching Embodiment by Way of 'Body Techniques'. *The Sociological Review,* 55(1), pp. 80-94.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., 1975. *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Csordas, T. J., 1994. *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Curtain, C. & Wilson, T., 1989. *Ireland from Below: Social Change and Local Communities.* Galway: Galway University Press.

Damasio, A. R., 1999. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace.

de la Cadena, M., 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Deegan, G., 2016a. Tiny Snail May Topple Donald Trump in Barrier Battle at Dunebeg. *The Irish Examiner,* 05 07. http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/tiny-snail-may-topple-donald-trump-in-barrier-battle-at-doonbeg-408465.html. Accessed 15/09/2017.

Deegan, G., 2016b. Donald Trump €10m Plan for Doonbeg Welcome, Says Lobbyist. *The Irish Times,* 09 03. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/donald-trump-10m-plan-for-doonbeg-welcome-says-lobbyist-1.2566365. Accessed 19/09/2017.

Deflem, M., 1991. Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 30(1), pp. 1-25.

deGaris, L., 1999. Experiments in Pro Wrestling: Toward a Performative and Sensuous Sport Ethnography. *Sociology of Sport Journal ,* Volume 16, pp. 65-74.

Deleuze, G., 1991. *Bergsonism.* New York: Zone.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* London: Bloomsbury Publising.

Descola, P., 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Descola, P. & Pálsson, G., 1996. *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives.* New York: Routledge.

Diamond, J., 1999. *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies.* New York: Norton.

Donnelly, M., 2006. Studying Extreme Sports: Beyond the Core Participants. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues,* 30(2), pp. 219-224.

Donnelly, P., 1981. Towards a Definition of Sport Subcultures. In: *Sport in the Sociocultural Process.* Dubunque: W.C. Brown.

Donnelly, P., 1985. Sport Subcultures. *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews ,* 13(1), pp. 539-578.

Downey, G., 2007. Seeing with a 'Sideways Glance': Visuomotor 'Knowing' and the Plasticity of Perception. In: *Ways of Knowing: New Approaches in the Anthropology of Experience and Learning.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 222-241.

Duggan, K., 2012. *Cliffs of Insanity: A Winter on Ireland's Big Waves.* London: Transworld Ireland.

Dunn, M., 2017. I have Absolutely Zero Interest in Wave Pools. *The Inertia,* http://www.theinertia.com/surf/i-have-absolutely-zero-interest-in-wave-pools/. Accessed 10/10/2017.

Dyck, N., 2000. *Games, Sports and Cultures.* Oxford: Berg.

Edensor, T., 2015. Producing Atmospheres at the Match: Fan Cultures, Commercialisation and Mood Management in English Football. *Emotion, Space and Society,* 15, pp. 82-89.

Elliot, A., Norum, R. & Salazar, N. B., 2017. *Methodologies of Mobility: Ethnography and Experiment.* London: Berghahn.

Ellis, D. M., 2003. Changing Earth and Sky: Movement, Environmental Variability, and Responses to El Nino in the Pio-Tura Region of Papua New Guinea. In: *Weather, Climate, Culture.* New York: Berg.

Eriksen, T. H., 2006. *Engaging Anthropology: The Case for a Public Presence.* Oxford: Berg.

Erin-Usher, L., 2013. *"We Share Our Territory": Re-Defining Surf Localism and Human Territoriality on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua*. Pennsylvania State University: Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Evans, P., 2015. *How to Test Drive a Surfboard - That Tricky First Surf.* [Online]
Available at: https://surfeuropemag.com/surf-tips/how-to-test-drive-a-surfboard.html#zSuwBUoSoKMr2vEs.97
[Accessed 29 08 2017].

Evers, C., 2005. *Becoming-Man, Becoming-Wave.* University of Sydney: Unpublished Phd Thesis.

Evers, C., 2013. Men Who Surf. *Cultural Studies Review,* 10(1), pp. 27-41.

Farmer, R., 1992. Surfing. Motivations, Values and Culture. *Journal of Sports Behavior,* 15, pp. 241-257.

Farnell, B., 2003. Kinesthetic Sense and Dynamically Embodied Action. *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement,* 12(4), pp. 132-144.

Ferrell, J., 2005. The Only Possible Adventure: Edgework and Anarchy. In: *Edgework: The Sociology of Risk Taking.* New York: Routledge.

Fiske, J., 1989. *Reading the Popular.* USA: Unwin Hyman.

Foucault, M., 1988. Technologies of the Self. In: *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault.* London: Tavistock Publications, pp. 16-49.

Foucault, M., 1990. *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure.* New York: Vintage Books.

George, M., 2005. Making Sense of Muscle: The Body Experiences of Collegiate Women Athletes. *Sociological Enquiry,* 75(3), pp. 317-345.

Gibson, J. J., 1977. The Theory of Affordances. In: R. Shaw & J. Bransford, eds. *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Towards an Ecological Psychology.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 67-82.

Gibson, J. J., 2014. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Gilbert, A., 2016. *Family, Flights and the End of the World.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.driftsurfing.eu/family-flights-end-world-fergal-smith/
[Accessed 22 06 2017].

Gil, J., 1998. *Metamorphoses of the Body.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gilroy, P., 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goddard, A., Llobera, J., and Shore, C., 1994. *The Anthropology of Europe: Identity and Boundaries in Conflict.* Oxford: Berg.

Gosling, E. & Williams, K. J. H., 2010. Connectedness to Nature, Place Attachment and Conservation Behaviour: Testing Connectedness Theory among Farmers. *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* 30(3), pp. 298-304.

Grassini, C., 2007. Communities of Practice and Forms of Life: Towards a Rehabilitation of Vision?. In: *Ways of Knowing: New Approaches in the Anthropology of Experience and Learning.* New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 203-221.

Groven, K. S., Råheim, M. & Engelsrud, G., 2012. Dis-appearance and Dys-appearance Anew: Living with Excess Skin and Intestinal Changes Following Weight Loss Surgery. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy,* 16(3), pp. 507-523.

Haro, A., 2016. Surf Snowdonia Just Released Their First-Season Stats, and the Number Will Shock You. *The Inertia,* http://www.theinertia.com/surf/surf-snowdonia-just-released-their-first-season-stats-and-the-number-will-shock-you/. Accessed 13/10/2017.

Haro, A., 2017a. This is the Dystopian Future of Surf. *The Inertia,* http://www.theinertia.com/surf/dystopia/. Accessed 10/10/2017.

Haro, A., 2017b. Opinion: Wave Pools are the Best Things That Ever Happened to Surfers. *The Intertia,* http://www.theinertia.com/surf/opinion-wave-pools-are-the-best-things-that-ever-happened-to-surfers/. Accessed 11/10/2017.

Harris, M., 2007. *Ways of Knowing: New Approaches in the Anthropology of Experience and Learning.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Harrison, F. V., 1992. Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation. *Anthropology News,* 33(3), p. 24.

Hart, M. M. & Birrell, S., 1981. *Sport in the Sociocultural Process.* Dubunque: W.c. Brown.

Healy, S., 2014. Atmospheres of Consumption: Shopping as Involuntary Vulnerability. *Emotion, Space and Society,* Volume 10, pp. 35-43.

Helmreich, S., 2009. *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Helmreich, S., 2011. Nature/Culture/Seawater. *American Anthropologist,* 113, pp. 132-144.

Henare, A., Holbraad, M. & Wastell, S., 2007. *Thinking through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically.* New York: Routledge.

Henderson, M., 2001. A Shifting Line Up: Men, Women and Tracks Surfing Magazine. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies,* 15(3).

Hill, L. L. & Abbott, J. A., 2009. Surfacing Tension: Toward a Political Ecological Critique of Surfing Representations. *Geography Compass,* 3(1), pp. 275-296.

Hirsch, E., 1995. Landscape: Between Place and Space. In: *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-30.

Hockey, J. & Allen-Collinson, J., 2007. Grasping the Phenomenology of Sporting Bodies. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 42(2), pp. 115-131.

Holbraad, M., 2012. *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holbraad, M., 2016. *Three Ontological Turn Ons,* Lecture given at the Institute for Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw: available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-SQBe-V7Jw&t=2s. Accessed 15/08/2017.

Holbraad, M. & Pedersen, M. A., 2017. *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horst, H. & Miller, D., 2006. *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication.* Oxford: Berg.

Horton, D., 2003. Green Distinctions: The Performance of Identity Among Environmental Activists. In: *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance.* Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 63-77.

Howard, J., 2017. The Olympic Surf Teams Have a Pool Party at The Cove. *Stab,* http://stabmag.com/news/the-olympic-surf-team-pool-party-at-the-cove/. Accessed 03/10/2017.

Huizinga, J. 1949. *Homo Ludens.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Humberstone, B., 2009. Inside/outside the Western 'Bubble': The Nexus of Adventure, Adventure Sports and the Perceptions of Risk in UK and Mauritius. *Leisure Studies Association ,* 104, pp. 1-14.

Ihde, D., 1990. *Technology and the Lifeworld.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ingold, T., 1996. Situating Action V: The History and Evolution of Bodily Skills. *Ecological Psychology,* 8(2), pp. 171-182.

Ingold, T., 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill.* New York: Routledge.

Ingold, T., 2006. Rethinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought. *Ethnos,* 71(1), pp. 9-20.

Ingold, T., 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description.* UK: Ashgate.

Ingold, T., 2015. *The Life of Lines.* Oxon: Routledge.

Ingold, T., 2017. Environmental Anthropology. *Royal Anthropological Institute: Discover Anthropology,* https://www.discoveranthropology.org.uk/about-anthropology/specialist-areas/ecological-environmental-anthropology.html. Accessed 13/12/2017.

Jarman, N., 1993. Intersecting Belfast. In: B. Bender, ed. *Landscape Politics and Perspectives.* Oxford: Berg.

Jenkins, R., 1986. Northern Ireland: In What Sense 'Religions' in Conflict? In Richard Jenkins, Hastings Donnan and Graham Mc Farlane, *The Sectarian Divide in Northern Ireland Today.* Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Occasional Paper no. 41.

Jennings, M., 2017. How Wave Pools Could Change Surfing Forever. *Vice,* https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/3bjvq9/will-wave-pools-make-surfing-weird-and-lame. Accessed 03/10/2017.

Jones, O., 2011. Lunar-Solar Rhytmpatterns: Towards the Material Culture of Tides. *Environment and Planning A,* 43, pp. 2285-2303.

Jöns, H., 2006. Dynamic Hybrids and the Geographies of Technoscience: Discussing Conceptual Resources Beyond the Human/non-human Binary. *Social & Cultural Geography,* 7(4), pp. 559-580.

Jorden, R., 2018. Surf Tourism: The Good, The Bad, and The Waves. *Ethical Traveller, https://ethicaltraveler.org/2018/04/surf-tourism-the-good-the-bad-and-the-waves/.* Last accessed 04/08/18.

Just, R., 1995. The Meganisiot Fishing System: Equity and Self-Interest. In: S. Damianakos, ed. *Les amis et les Autres. Brothers and Others: Mélanges et L'Honneur de John Peristiany.* Athens: Centre National de Récherces Sociales.

Kaplan, M., 2017. *What are the Steps for Learning to Surf.* [Online]
Available at: https://surfboardsoceanside.com/what-are-the-steps-for-learning-to-surf/
[Accessed 30 08 2017].

Kaul, A., 2018. That "Awful Margin": Tourism, Risk, and Death at the Cliffs of Moher. In: A. Kaul & J. Skinner, eds. *Leisure and Death: An Anthropological Tour of Risk, Death, and Dying.* Colorado: University Press.

Kemeny, J., 2010. Authors of the Storm: Meteorologists and the Culture of Prediction [Book Review]. *Housing, Theory and Society,* 27(3), pp. 276-278.

Kohn, E., 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kopytoff, I., 1986. The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In: A. Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64-91.

Kotler, S., 2014. *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Kottak, C. P., 2010. *Anthropology: Appreciating human diversity.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Krause, F. & Strang, V., 2016. Thinking Relationships Through Water. *Society and Natural Resources,* 29(6), pp. 633-638.

Kusz, K., 2004. The Cultural Politics of Extreme Sports in 1990s America. In: B. Wheaton, ed. *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity and Difference.* London: Routledge, pp. 197-213.

Laderman, S., 2014. *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lanagan, D., 2002. Surfing in the Third Millennium: Commodifying the Visual Argot. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology,* 13(3), pp. 283-291.

Latour, B., 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Latour, B., 1996. On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications. *Soziale Welt ,* pp. 369-381.

Latour, B., 2004. Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck. *Common Knowledge,* 10(3), pp. 450-462.

Latour, B., 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory.* USA: Oxford University Press.

Laviolette, P., 2006. Green and Extreme: Free-Flowing through Seascape and Sewer. *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion,* 10(2), pp. 178-204.

Laviolette, P., 2009. Fearless Trembling: A Leap of Faith into the Devil's Frying Pan. *Senses and Society,* 4(3), pp. 303-322.

Laviolette, P., 2016. *Extreme Landscapes of Leisure: Not a Hap-Hazardous Sport.* London: Routledge.

Law, J., 2004. *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research.* New York: Routledge.

Leach, E., 1961. The Structural Implications of Matrilinial Cross-Cousin Marriage. In: *Rethinking Anthropology.* London: Athlone.

Leder, D., 1990. *The Absent Body.* Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Lemmonier, P., 1992. *Elements for an Anthropology of Technology.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Lemonnier, P., 1986. The Study of Material Culture Today: Toward an Anthropology of Technical Systems. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology,* 5(2), pp. 147-186.

Lencek, L. & Bosker, G., 1999. *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth.* London: Pimlico.

Lewis, N., 2000. The Climbing Body, Nature and the Experience of Modernity. *Body and Society,* 3(4), pp. 58-80.

Linbergh, A. M., 1955. *Gift from the Sea.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Lock, J., 2016. Donald Trump Wants to Ruin This Picturesque Beach and Surf Spot in Ireland. *Magicseaweed,* 14 04. http://magicseaweed.com/news/donald-trump-wants-to-ruin-this-picturesque-beach-in-ireland/8908/. Accessed 16/09/2017.

Lock, J., 2016. *How Big Wave Chargers Handle Fear.* [Online]
Available at: http://magicseaweed.com/news/how-big-wave-chargers-handle-fear/8829/
[Accessed 09 02 2017].

Luna, S., 2018. Affective Atmospheres of Terror on the Mexico-U.S. Border: Rumors of violence in Reynosa's Prostitution Zone. *Cultural Anthropology,* 33(1), pp. 58-84.

Lutz, C., 2017. What Matters. *Cultural Anthropology,* 32(2), pp. 181-191.

Lutz, C. A., 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lyng, S., 1990. Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking. *American Journal of Sociology ,* 95(4), pp. 851-886.

Lyng, S., 2005. *Edgework: The Sociology of Risk-Taking.* Abingdon: Psychology Press.

Maffesoli, M., 1996. *The Time of the Tribes.* London: Sage.

Malinowski, B., 1932. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea.* London: Routledge.

Mandel, R., 2008. *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Marcus, B., 2011. *The Skateboard: The Good, the Rad, and the Gnarly: An Illustrated History.* Minneapolis: MVP Books.

Massey, D., 2004. Geographies of Responsibility. *Geografiska Annaler B,* 86(1), pp. 5-18.

Massumi, B., 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Mauss, M., 1973. Techniques of the Body. *Economy and Society,* 2(1), pp. 70-88.

McCormack, D. P., 2008. Engineering Affective Atmospheres on the Moving Geographies of the 1897 Andrée Expedition. *Cultural Geographies,* 15, pp. 413-430.

McFarlane, G., 1994. A Soft Voice: The Anthropology of Religion in Ireland. In Pól Ó Muirí (ed.), *The Unheard Voice: Social Anthropology in Ireland.* Belfast: Fortnight Educational Trust.

Merleau-Ponty, M., 1962. *The Phenomenology of Perception.* New York: Routledge.

Miller, D., 2001. *Car Cultures.* Oxford: Berg.

Milton, K., 2002. *Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotion.* New York: Routledge.

Moitessier, B., 1974. *The Long Way.* London: Granada.

Mol, A., 1999. Ontological Politics. A Word and Some Questions. In: *Actor Network Theory and After.* Oxford: Blackwell and the Sociological Review, pp. 74-89.

More, T., 1965 [1516]. *Utopia.* Harmondworth: Penguin.

Mori, Y., 2011. *"From Shaking Islands, A Nation Divided." Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology website.* [Online] Available at: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/265-from-shaking-islands-a-nation-divided [Accessed 20 07 2017].

Muggleton, D. & Weinzierl, R., 2003. *The Post-Subcultures Reader.* Oxford: Berg.

Munn, N., 1973. The Spatial Presentation of Cosmic Order in Walbiri Iconography. In: *Primitive Art and Society .* London: Oxford University Press.

Murch, C., 2017. *Natxo Gonzalez and "The Heaviest Wave on the Planet".* [Online]
Available at: http://magicseaweed.com/news/natxo-and-the-heaviest-wave-on-the-planet-mullaghmore/10381/
[Accessed 26 07 2017].

Murdock, G. P., 1941. Anthropology and Human Relations. *Sociometry,* 4(2), pp. 140-149.

Murphy, L., 2000. The Name of Our God is Dialogue: Millennial Visions in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 14(2): 4-15.

Myers, F. R., 1986. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Myers, N., 2017. Rooting in the Planthropocene. *Keynote Address, Knowledge, Culture, Ecologies Conference, Santiago, Chile, 15/11/2017.*

Nadel-Klein, J., 2003. *Fishing for Heritage: Modernity and Loss along the Scottish Coast.* Oxford: Berg.

Newmahr, S., 2011. Chaos, Order, Collaboration: Toward a Feminist Conception of Edgework. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 40(6), pp. 682-712.

Nunn, T., 2016. *Instigators of the Revolution.* [Online]
Available at: https://theplastic-project.com/2016/08/24/instigators-of-the-revolution/
[Accessed 23 06 2017].

O'Connell, P., 2017. Doughmore Group Wants Jobs Protected. *The Clare Champion,* http://clarechampion.ie/doughmore-group-wants-jobs-protected/. Accessed 17/09/2017.

Odriozola, J., 2015. The Destruction of Surfing, or the Contradiction of the Surfer. *Surf Europe,* https://surfeuropemag.com/longform/the-destruction-of-surfing-or-the-contradiction-of-the-surfer#7LqSlH3R0ePSb9e6.97. Accessed 03/10/2017.

Öhman, J., Öhman, M. & Sandell, K., 2016. Outdoor Recreation in Exergames: A New Step in the Detachment from Nature. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning,* 16(4), pp. 285-302.

Olafsson, A.-R., 2015. *Getting to Know Jamie Sterling.* [Online]
Available at: http://info.lululemon.com/features/up-close-and-personal/get-to-know-jamie-sterling
[Accessed 26 04 2017].

Olive, R., 2013. 'Making Friends with the Neighbours': Blogging as a Research Method. *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* 16(1), pp. 71-84.

Ots, T., 1994. The Silenced Body - the Expressive Lieb: On the Dialectic of Mind and Life in Chinese Cathartic Healing. In: *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Otsuki, G. J., 2013. *Field Notes: Disaster. Correspondences, Cultural Anthropology website.* [Online]
Available at: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/141-field-notes-disaster
[Accessed 20 07 2017].

Pálsson, G., 1991. *Coastal Economies, Cultural Accounts: Human Ecology and Icelandic Discourse.* Manchester: Mancherster University Press.

Pálsson, G., 1994. Enskilment at Sea. *Man,* 29(4), pp. 901-927.

Pálsson, G., 1998. Learning by Fishing: Practical Engagement and Environmental Concerns. In: *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parkhurst, A., 2012. Becoming Cyborgian: Procrastinating the Singularity. *The New Bioethics,* 18(1), pp. 68-80.

Peralta, S. (Dir.), 2004. *Riding Giants* [Film]. Agi Orsi Productions.

Pfaffenberger, B., 1988. Fetishised Objects and Humanised Nature: Towards an Anthropology of Technology. *Man, New Series,* 23(2), pp. 236-252.

Pfaffenberger, B., 1992. Social Anthropology of Technology. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 21, pp. 491-516.

Pine, J. & Gilmour, J., 1999. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Pink, S., 2011. From Embodiment to Emplacement: Re-thinking Competing Bodies, Senses and Spatialities. *Sport, Education and Society,* 16(3), pp. 343-355.

Poirer, J.-É., 2003. *Dancing the Wave.* Boston: Shambhala Publications.

Poizeau, M. (Dir.), 2014. *Into the Sea* [Film]. Edited by Bahman Kiarostami.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., 1940. On Social Structure. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland ,* 70(1), pp. 1-12.

Reiner, R. (Dir.) 1987. *The Princess Bride* [Film]. USA: Act III Communications.

Rinehart, R. E. & Sydnor, S., 2012. *To the Extreme: Alternative Sports, Inside and Out.* New York: Suny Press.

Roche, B., 2016. New Campaign against Trump's Plans for Doonbeg Wall. *The Irish Times,* 17 09, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/new-campaign-against-trump-s-plans-for-doonbeg-wall-1.2795344. Accessed 14/09/2017.

Rott, M., 2016. The End of Neoprene Wetsuits/ Patagonia Pioneers Yulex Technology. *Magicseaweed,* https://magicseaweed.com/news/patagonia-starts-phasing-out-neoprene-wetsuits/9231/. Accessed 17/10/2017.

Ruane, J., 1989. Success and failure in a West of Ireland Factory. In Chris Curtain and Thomas M. Wilson (eds), *Ireland from Below: Social Change and Local Communities.* Galway: Galway University Press.

Sandell, K. & Öhman, J., 2010. Educational Potentials of Encounters with Nature: Reflections from a Swedish Outdoor Perspective. *Environmental Education Research,* 16(1), pp. 113-132.

Shapiro, N., 2015. Attuning to the Chemosphere: Domestic formaldehyde, bodily reasoning and the chemical sublime. *Cultural Anthropology,* 30(3), pp. 368-393.

Shutes, M., 1993. Rural Communities without Family Farms? Family Dairy Farming in the Post-1993 EC. In Thomas M. Wilson and M. Estellie Smith (eds), *Cultural Change and the New Europe.* Boulder, CO Oxford: Westview Press.

Siganporia, H., 2016. Seeking Dhasa; Finding Lhasa: Liminality and narrative in the Tibetan refugee capital of Dharamsala. *Culture Unbound,* 8, pp. 62-73.

Slater, D. H., 2011. *3.11 Politics in Disaster Japan: Fear and Anger, Possibility and Hope." Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology website.* [Online]
Available at: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/416-3-11-politics-in-disaster-japan-fear-and-anger-possibility-and-hope
[Accessed 20 07 2017].

Smith, F., 2016. Episode 7, Seaweed and Single Fins. *Growing,* http://www.fergalsmith.com/blog/?p=1467. Accessed 26/11/2017.

Smith, L. T., 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London: Zed Books.

Sparkes, A., 2004. *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health.* London: Routledge.

Stengers, I., 2011. *Cosmopolitics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stengers, I., 2013. Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices. *Cultural Studies Review,* 11(1), pp. 183-196.

Steve, 2016. Trumps Wall of Shame - Save Doughmore. *Carve,* http://www.carvemag.com/2016/09/trumps-wall-shame-save-doughmore-beach/. Accessed 14/09/2017.

Steve, 2017. *Reflections of Mundaka.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.carvemag.com/2017/06/reflections-of-mundaka/
[Accessed 2017 07 2017].

Stewart, K., 2011. Atmospheric Attunements. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 29, pp. 445-453.

Stewart, K., 2017. In the World that Affect Proposed. *Cultural Anthropology,* 32(2), pp. 192-198.

Stoller, P., 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stoller, P., 1997. *Sensuous Scholarship.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stoller, P., 2009. *The Powers of the Between: An Anthropological Odyssey.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stranger, M., 1999. The Aesthetics of Risk: A Study of Surfing. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 34(3), pp. 265-76.

Stranger, M., 2011. *Surfing Life: Surface, Substructure and the Commodification of the Sublime.* UK: Ashgate.

Strang, V., 1997. *Uncommon Ground: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Value.* Oxford: Berg.

Strang, V., 2015. *Water, Nature and Culture.* London: Reaktion.

Strathern, A. J., 1996. *Body Thoughts.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Strathern, M., 1995. *The Relation: Issues in Complexity and Scale.* Cambridge: Prickly Pear.

Strauss, S. & Orlove, B., 2003. *Weather, Climate, Culture.* New York: Berg.

Sunderland, P. L., 1999. Fieldwork and the Phone. *Anthropological Quarterly,* 72(3), pp. 105-117.

Szakolczai, A., 2014. Living Permanent Liminality: The recent transition experience in Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology,* 22(1), pp. 28-50.

Szerszynski, B., 2003. Introduction. In: B. Szerszynski, W. Heim & C. Waterton, eds. *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance.* USA: Blackwell.

Taylor, M., 2008. Hugh Bradner, UC's Inventor of Wetsuit, Dies. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 May.

Theodossopoulos, D., 2004. "Working in Nature,"Caring for Nature": Diverse Views of the Environment in the Context of an Environmental Dispute . In: J. G. Carrier, ed. *Confronting Environments: Local Understanding in a Globalizing World.* California: Rowman Altamira.

Thomas, J., 2006. Phenomenology and Material Culture. In: C. Tilley, et al. eds. *Handbook of Material Culture.* London: Sage, pp. 43-59.

Thomassen, B., 2006. Liminality. In: *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory.* London: Psychology Press, pp. 322-323.

Thornton, S., 1996. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital.* USA: Wesleyan University Press.

Thorpe, H. & Wheaton, B., 2011. 'Generation X Games', Action Sports and the Olympic Movement: Understanding the Cultural Politics of Incorporation. *Sociology,* 455, pp. 830-847.

Thrift, N., 2003. Still Life in the Nearly Present Time: The Object of Nature. In: *Country Visions.* Harlow: Pearson, pp. 308-331.

Tilley, C., 1994. *A Phenomenology of Landscapes: Places, Paths, and Monuments.* Oxford: Berg.

Tilley, C., 2002. The Metaphorical Transformations of Wala Canoes. In: *The Material Culture Reader.* Oxford: Berg, pp. 27-55.

Townsend, P. K., 2009. *Environmental Anthropology: From Pigs to Policies.* Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Turner, V. 1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.

Turner, V., 1983. Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology. In: J. C. Harris & R. J. Park, eds. *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts.* Champaign: Human Kinetics, pp. 123-164.

van Bottenburg, M. & Salome, L., 2010. The Indoorisation of Outdoor Sports: An Exploration of the Rise of Lifestyle Sports in Artificial Settings. *Leisure Studies,* 29(2), pp. 143-160.

Van Gennep, A., 1960. *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vannini, P., 2015. *Nonrepresentational Methodologies: Re-envisioning Research.* New York: Routledge.

Vannini, P., Waskul, D. & Gotschalk, S., 2012. *The Senses in Self, Culture, and Society.* New York: Routledge.

Vannini, P., Waskul, D., Gottschalk, S. & Ellis-Newstead, T., 2011. Making Sense of the Weather: Dwelling and Weathering on Canada's Rain Coast. *Space and Culture,* 15(4), pp. 361-380.

Varley, P., 2011. Sea Kayakers at the Margins: The Liminoid Character of Contemporary Adventures. *Leisure Studies*, 30(1), pp. 85-98.

Venkatesan, S. et al., 2013. The Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT), The University of Manchester: The 2011 annual debate – Non-Dualism is Philosophy not Ethnography. *Critique of Anthropology,* 33(3), pp. 300-360.

Venkatesan, S. et al., 2013. The Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT), The University of Manchester: The 2011 annual debate – Non-Dualism is Philosophy not Ethnography. *Critique of Anthropology,* 33(3), pp. 300-360.

Vitebsky, P., 2006. *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia.* Dublin: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Viveiros de Castro, E., 1998. Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 4(3), pp. 469-488.

Wacquant, L., 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Wagner, R., 1981. *The Invention of Culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

Warren, A., 2012. *Soulful Work or Selling the Soul? Cultural Production and the Custom Surfboard Industry.* Ph.D. dissertation: University of Wollongong.

Warren, A. & Gibson, C., 2013. Making Things in a High-Dollar Australia: The Case of the Surfboard Industry. *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 71(1), pp. 26-50.

Watson, J., 2010. *True Spirit: The Aussie Girls Who Took on the World.* Sydney: Hachette.

Wattchow, B., 2016. Standing then Floating: Searching for a sense of Sea-Place on the South Coast of Australia. In: M. Brown & B. Humberstone, eds. *Seascapes: Shaped by the sea.* New York: Routledge, pp. 131-145.

Webmaster, 2016. Trump Scraps Plans for Doonbeg Wall. *The Clare Herald,* 06 12, http://clareherald.com/2016/12/trump-scraps-plans-for-doonbeg-wall-40263/. Accessed 14/09/2017.

Weisberg, Z., 2015. I Surfed the Wavegarden, and Now I Believe in Artificial Waves. *The Inertia,* 28 10. http://www.theinertia.com/surf/i-surfed-the-wavegarden-and-now-i-believe-in-artificial-waves/. Accessed 03/10/2017.

Whatmore, S. J., 2013. Earthly Powers and Affective Environments: An ontological politics of flood risk. *Theory, Culture & Society,* 30(7-8), pp. 33-50.

Wheaton, B., 2000. "Just Do It": Consumption, Commitment, and Identity in the Windsurfing Subculture. *Sociology of Sport Journal,* 17(3), pp. 254-274.

Wheaton, B., 2004. *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity and Difference.* USA: Routledge.

Wheaton, B., 2007. After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post Subcultural Theory. *Journal of Sport adn Social Issues,* 31(3), pp. 283-307.

Wheaton, B., 2007. Identity, Politics, and the Beach: Environmental Activism in Surfers Against Sewage. *Leisure Studies,* 26(3), pp. 279-302.

White, S., 2015. *The Inertia.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.theinertia.com/surf/why-behind-the-lines-is-about-more-than-just-big-wave-surfing/
[Accessed 08 02 2017].

Whyte, D., 2014. *Will to Risk: An Ethnographic Study of Edgework in Contemporary Britian and Ireland.* UCL: unpublished MSc thesis.

Williams, T. & Donnelly, P., 1985. Subcultural Production, Reproduction and Transformation in Climbing. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* pp. 283-307.

WSL, 2016. WSL Holdings to Acquire Kelly Slater Wave Company. *World Surf League,* http://www.worldsurfleague.com/posts/206563/wsl-holdings-to-acquire-kelly-slater-wave-company. Accessed 12/10/2017.

Yates, D. (Dir.), 2009. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* [Film]. Heyday Films.

Yinger, J. M., 1960. Contraculture and Subculture. *American Sociological Review,* 25(5), pp. 625-635.

Appendix A: Surfing Terminology

Note: While many surfing terms (perhaps most) used in Ireland are American or Australian imports, I have left out some that I have never heard in Ireland but are common elsewhere and have included some that I have never heard elsewhere but are common in Ireland.

A-frame: A perfect barrelling wave that you can ride left or right, and breaks from the middle point out on both sides, creating a shape like a capital A

Air: A manoeuvre whereby both surfer and board leave the face of the wave.

Backdoor: Entering a barrel from behind the peak. Also the name of a famous Hawaiian wave.

Backhand: Surfing a wave with your body pointed towards the land instead of towards the wave – a harder position. Different people stand with different legs forward so different people will surf the same wave either "on their backhand" or “on their fronthand.”

Banks: Mounds of sand underneath the water that cause the waves to break and dictate some of their characteristics.

Barrel: When a waves lip curls over to make a hollow tube that the surfer surf through. Surfers tend to agree that "getting barrelled" is one of the most intensely rewarding experiences possible.

Beach break: A wave that breaks over sand, as opposed to rock.

Big-wave: Big-wave is a certain style of surfing which, unsurprisingly, takes place on rather large waves. It is hard to pin point when waves are officially "big;" perhaps 10-15 foot+ faces. It is more accurate to describe it as a style. These waves generally break so fast that they have to be literally outrun, no time for tricks or turns.

Blown out: When an onshore wind has such a negative effect on conditions as to make them unsurfable.

Boiling: When a wave is travelling over very shallow reef, the almost exposed rock causes a disturbance on the surface of the face – a sign that it might be time to jump off the wave.

Bomb: A huge, dangerous wave.

Carve/carving: A long turn manoeuvre up and down a wave's face.

Caught inside: To be caught inside is to become stuck where the waves have turned into white water while trying to paddle back out. As you attempt to get out you are repeatedly pushed back by the broken waves. This can be dangerous in heavy conditions when the walls of whitewater coming against you could be 10-20 feet high and travelling fast.

Charger/charging: To really commit to a wave, to a dangerous situation, to push ability levels.

Choppy: When the surface of the water is rough. Caused by wind or waves breaking in quick succession. The opposite of glassy.

Clean: When a wave breaks neatly from one end to the other, with minimal negative effects from wind. One of the most desirable surf conditions.

Close-out: When a wave break along its entire length at once, effectively eliminating the path for the surfer. Closing out is a very undesirable condition.

Cross-shore: A wind is cross-shore when it blows parallel to the coast and across the incoming waves. Better than onshore, not as good as offshore.

Cut-back: A full turn manoeuvre that reverses the direction of travel so that the surfer is aimed momentarily back towards the breaking wave that is chasing him or her. This is performed to get back into the critical section of the wave so that it is not outrun.

Dawn patrol: Arriving at to surf at first light. Also called a dawny.

Deck: The part of the surfboard that you stand on.

Ding A dent in a surfboard, or other damage.

Dredging: When a wave sucks water off the beach with great power such that the wave is full of sand. Signifies a heavy wave.

Drop: The moment the surfer gets to his or her feet and travels down the face of the wave. All waves necessarily begin like this, and different wave shapes and powers will produce different kinds of drops (steep, late, easy, difficult etc.)

Dropping-in: The ultimate breakdown of etiquette in surfing. Dropping in is when you take off on a wave “out of position” i.e there is someone already on the wave. If both surfers are still paddling the one closest to the peak has priority.

Duck-dive: A technique for getting through oncoming waves. The surfer must paddle towards the oncoming wave until it is about three to five metres away. At this point the surfer stops paddling and grips the top of the board with straight arms, as if about to do a press up. This forces the nose of the board down, which the surfer follows with their body and finally kicks the tail forward with their knee. This scoops the board up through the back of the wave, dragging the surfer with it.

Face: The unbroken part of the wave

Fin: The curved triangular appendages on the bottom of the tail of the surfboard. they function to keep the board driving straight and not sliding down the face of the wave, much like a boats keel.

Firing: A positive description of conditions; waves consistently breaking with good quality.

Fish: A shorter, thicker shape of surfboard for small, weak waves.

Flat: A lack of waves.

Fronthand: To surf a wave while facing it, as opposed to facing land with your back to the wave. The opposite of backhand.

Glassy: When the surface of the sea is very clean, not choppy and undisturbed by wind. Waves breaking under these conditions tend to have good shape.

Gnarly: Dangerous surf conditions, or a dangerous action.

Going dry: A reef is going dry when the water is getting so shallow that there is a danger that the fins are going to hit rock literally inches under the surface. What happens shortly after a wave boils or warbles (see definitions).

Going-off: If a surf spot is "going-off" it means there are currently good waves there.

Goofy-footed: Surfing with the right (as opposed to left) foot forward. Less common than regular (left foot forward). Everyone will have a preferred stance that feels more natural, similar to being left or right handed.

Grom: A young, inexperienced surfer.

Gun: A board designed for big waves. They have to be longer than regular surfboards in order to catch the waves while they are still mounds of water instead of vertical faces, so that the surfer has time to outrun the faster and more dangerous wave.

Heavy : Refers to the weight of water in the lip of the wave when it throws. Heavy waves are much more powerful, usually move faster, hold you down for longer, and are more difficult to surf and generally more dangerous, liable to snap boards and bodies. Obviously, it is a relation of degree - waves are heavier and weaker when compared to others. The opposite to heavy is weak.

Hollow: A wave that folds over creating a barrel.

Impact zone: The spot on the water where the waves are breaking.

Inside: The area between where the waves begin to break and where the white-water has disappeared again. An undesirable place to be.

Kick out: Finishing riding a wave and steering over the shoulder.

Kook: A derogatory term for a bad surfer, or anyone who overtly represents themselves as surfers on land, by dressing head to toe in “surf fashion,” for instance.

Leash: The cord that is attached from a surfer’s leg to their board. This prevents the board from becoming lost during a fall.

Left: A wave that breaks from right to left from the surfer’s point of view when facing the shore.

Longboard: A type of surfboard that is generally over 7 feet in length and is more rounded at the ends than a shortboard, its high-performance cousin. These boards float well and catch waves easily but are difficult to manoeuvre, making them good for beginners or in very weak waves.

Line-up: The people sitting just beyond the breaking waves waiting to catch a wave.

Lip: The part of the crest of the wave that begins to fold over when it breaks.

Lull: An elongated period between waves where the ocean goes flat and everyone has to sit and wait. It could last as little as 5 minutes to perhaps 30 minutes or longer.

Messy: A negative description of surfing conditions. Messiness is caused by onshore winds, waves closing out or breaking irregularly.

Nose: The tip of a surfboard on the opposite side to the tail.

Offshore: When wind blows from land to sea. The optimal wind conditions for surfing. This helps hold the faces of the waves up and gives the waves a better shape as they break.

Onshore: When wind moves from sea to land. This generally forces waves to collapse prematurely and creates poor surfing conditions.

Out-back: The surface of the sea just beyond the breaking waves.

Overhead: An alternative to describing wave height in feet. When face of the wave is taller than a surfer standing on it. Term can be multiplied: "double-overhead, triple-overhead, etc.."

Peak: The position along the length of a wave where it first begins to break.

Pocket: The most powerful part of the wave, just ahead of where the wave is breaking.

Pop-up: The movement of pushing oneself from a lying down position when paddling to a standing position for surfing a wave.

Pumping: i) A general description of good waves.

ii) a technique to generate speed on a board by creating a swinging motion along the face of a wave.

Quiver: A surfer's collection of boards.

Rail: The left and right sides of a surfboard.

Reef break: A wave that breaks over rock, as opposed to sand.

Regular footed: Surfing with your left foot forward. The majority of people surf this way. The opposite of goofy. everyone will have a preferred stance that feels more natural, similar to being left or right handed.

Rip/rip current: A strong current heading out to sea. Can be very dangerous if the water user is unaware of them. Can also be useful in getting out back as they drag the surfer outwards.

Sucking/sucky: When a wave drags a lot of water quickly up its face. This usually happens when a heavy wave hits a shallow plateau and the wave is forced to break quickly.

Sick: Good, impressive, exciting or fun.

Sketchy: Describes conditions or a person’s actions. Meaning dangerous or ominous.

Shutting down: When a swell that is too large to be surfed is present.

Soft-racks: Specially designed roof racks for transporting boards on top of a car. They comprise of a soft thick under-layer that lies on the roof and a length of black seatbelt-like cord that loops around the inside of the car doors and over the boards on the roof.

Snake/snaking: To snake someone is to drop in on them or otherwise violate the rules of etiquette to the benefit of your own wave count. A snake is someone who surfs like this.

Spit: When water is sprayed out of a closing barrel. Being spat out of a barrel is when the spray leaves before the surfer, which literally looks like they were spat out – a desirable achievement.

Stoke: To be stoked is to be content, happy or ecstatic from surfing.

Swell: The movement of water across oceans. It comes in different sizes with differing time between waves. All of these factors, along with direction of movement relate to the quality of the swell in relation to a specific spot.

Tail: The end of the surfboard opposite the nose.

Take-off: The moment of hopping to one's feet as a wave is caught. Also refers to the amount of time available from when the wave hits the tail of the surfboard to when the surfer has to have paddled to match its speed and have gotten to their feet. A slow take-off could be three to five seconds, and a fast take-off could be a fraction of one second. Obviously take-offs get harder the faster they have to be accomplished.

Take-off Zone: The area on the surface of the water where waves consistently begin their breaking.

Tow-In: Catching waves by being towed with a rope attached to a jet-ski already in the standing up position. A development in surfing resented by purists.

Tube: Another word for barrel. A hollow wave.

Warbling: When a wave is running against very shallow reef, the almost exposed rock causes a disturbance on the surface of the face; a good sign that you are about to run out of ocean. also see "boiling".

Wax: A tacky substance designed to be applied to the deck of the surf board for traction. Without it, the fibreglass of a surfboard is very slippery.

Weak: A wave that has very little power, is generally flatter rather than steep and the lip may not throw, but crumble. hard to paddle into and not much fun to surf.

Wipe-out: To fall off a surfboard.

X-foot: The measure of the height of the wave, measured from the back, such that the face will be twice the size. To complicate things, the USA does not follow this scheme, measuring instead from the face of the wave. To complicate things still further, this does not include Hawaii, where the former method was actually developed.