

Waves of Freedom

An exploration of the interplay between the ocean, humans and capitalist processes in Rainbow Bay (Australia) through the lens of surfing


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Master thesis

Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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> Cover Photo of surfers in Rainbow Bay taken by Kyra Lenting

*What if, instead of land-ing the sea,
we try to sea-ing the land?
– Tim Ingold (2011)*

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Contents

<i>Understanding Surfing</i>	1
<i>Prologue</i>	5
Introduction	8
The field	11
Methodology & Operationalisation	14
Ethics and Role of Researcher	17
Outline	18
 <i>Interlude 1</i>	 20
Chapter 1: The Rainbow Bubble	22
The becoming of a popular bubble	23
The diversity of the Bubble	24
The fear of the crowd	26
 Chapter 2: The Rhythms of the Ocean and the Land	 29
The daily routine	29
“Land-locked“ vs. “Land-Sea-figure-8“	32
“We are not in control“	33
 <i>Interlude 2</i>	 36
Chapter 3: Freedom under the Rainbow	38
An anthropological lens on Freedom	38
“I guess it is freedom from the land”	39
“We surfers are like dolphins”	40
 Chapter 4: Capitalist Contestations of the Surfers’ Freedom	 44
Capitalist processes at stake in surfing	44
“Money sucks. We should kill it”	46
“I work to pay my rent, and to buy new surfboards”	48
 <i>Interlude 3</i>	 50
Conclusion	52
 <i>Epilogue</i>	 54
<i>Bibliography</i>	56
<i>Appendix</i>	62

Understanding Surfing

<i>Air</i>	An air, or an aerial, is a manoeuvre in which a surfer launches completely out of the water, lands back upon the wave and continues the ride.
<i>Barrel</i>	A very hollow and fast wave creating a temporary horizontal tunnel of air through which one can surf.
<i>Body-Board</i>	A small foam boards ridden lying down.
<i>Down the Line</i>	Surfing a wave along the sheer face of the wave as it breaks behind the surfer. By riding along the line of the wave, surfers reach greater speeds and harness more of the wave's power than simply riding a wave that has already broken.
<i>Dropping in</i>	Catching a wave that is already be ridden by someone else. It is a serious breach of the universal surfing etiquette.
<i>Foamie</i>	Australian slang word for a soft-top surfboard, a very stable surfboard for beginners with a soft foam topside.
<i>Go out</i>	Surfing slang meaning going in the ocean to surf waves.
<i>Going in</i>	Surfing slang meaning getting out of the ocean, thus going back to the land.
<i>Green Wave</i>	A term to describe a yet unbroken wave.
<i>Kook</i>	A word used to depict incompetent or wanna-be surfers.
<i>Line-up</i>	The area in the ocean behind the breaking waves where surfers position in order to catch a wave.
<i>Longboard</i>	Longboards are 8" plus in length and come with a lot of volume. They offer less mobility and speed but are better suited to catch waves in smaller conditions.

Malibu Surfboard

A surfboard type, similar to a longboard in shape and volume, but smaller. A “Mal” will range from 7’0“ to 8’6“ in length. They are also called fun-boards because they provide easy paddling and take-offs whilst remaining agile.

Mellow

A term used by surfers to describe “easy waves”, waves that are fat in shape and slow paced.

Paddle-out

A memorial ritual within the surfing community, usually to honour the life of a fallen surfer. Surfers paddle out and form a floating circle. Lately the ritual has also been adopted to create awareness for the preservation of the ocean.

Party-wave

A wave surfers voluntarily catch with each other, thus more than one person on a wave.

Priority

Do determine who has priority in a line-up is often hard to determine. There are two main priority rules; 1. The surfer who is closest to the breaking part of the wave has the right of way and priority over all other surfers; 2. The surfer who is farther outside, away from the shore, has priority over all other surfers, even if closer to the breaking part of the wave.

Pop-up

The movement of a surfer jumping up on a surfboard in order to ride a wave.

Shortboard

Shortboards are a type of surfboards that come in many different shapes and styles ranging from 5” to 7”. Shortboards allow more manoeuvrability and are better suited to surf steep and powerful waves.

Snaking

When a surfer deliberately paddles into a position to get priority over another surfer to “steal” a wave.

Surf break/ spot

Describing a (permanent) area in the ocean that causes waves to break. Surfing breaks can be divided into different categories; point breaks, beach breaks and reef breaks. The surf break in Rainbow Bay is a point break.





Overview of different surfers with a diversity of various surfboards (21.04.2019)

Surfboard

The craft used to ride waves. Surfboards come in many different materials, volumes, types and lengths which enable different styles of surfing related to various wave conditions.

Swell

A swell in the context of surfing, is a series of waves generated by distant weather systems that over time and distance build up a large amount of energy beneath the ocean's surface.

Take-off

The take-off is the start of surfing a wave. One needs to align with the energy of a wave through prone timing, efficient paddling and a solid pop-up.

Take-off zone

The area at which a breaking wave can first be caught.

Turtle roll

A manoeuvre of flipping a longboard upside-down to get through breaking waves.

Universal Surfing Etiquette

A universal set of norms that governs behaviour in the line-up. These norms govern which surfer has priority over a wave and safety issues. There are three fundamental norms. The most important one is the norm of "not dropping in" on another surfer. The second norm is the one of "paddling wide," meaning that whilst paddling out, one should always paddle away from the part of the wave most likely to be ridden by others. The third norm concerns safety and is called the "don't-throw-your-board-rule," which encourages surfers not to let go of their board when they are forced to pass through a broken wave.

Quiky Pro

Word used by the Rainbow Bay surf community for the Quiksilver and Boost Mobile Pro professional surf competition.

Wipeout

Falling or being knocked off the surfboard by a wave.

White Water

The foam of an already broken wave.

WSL¹

Abbreviation for World Surf League, the governing body of professional competition surfing.

¹ All information for this list is drawn from Surf Diary and Nazer (2004).

Prologue

I get out of the Greyhound bus, then walk to the back to get my backpack and my surfboard. It is my fourth day in Australia and I finally made it to my research town Coolangatta on the Gold Coast. On the way here I saw the surroundings change from the big city skyline of Brisbane through a less populated area with small houses and back to a landscape of skyscrapers when the bus approached the coastal area. From my previous desk research back home in The Netherlands, I knew that the Gold Coast was famous for its tall buildings, but when driving through it by bus it still feels very overwhelming. The tall buildings make me feel very small. It is nearly as if I am driving through a faded Las Vegas, with all the neon lights and billboards. It feels very odd to me that the coastline is filled with skyscrapers. I catch myself thinking, "What a shame that they turned the nature of the coast into this capitalistic circus! How on earth could they call this city Surfers Paradise?" as we pass a huge shopping mall.

As we are approaching Coolangatta, the density of skyscrapers declines. The buildings are still tall, but not as tall as those in Surfers Paradise. The bus stops and I jump off the bus. I look around and initially I am quite disappointed; "Is this the surf town that the whole surfing world talks about?" The only thing I can see are elderly people walking on the street and flashing billboards indicating all the fast-food deals one can get at the various food stores. I cannot even see the beach, as the front row is filled with hotel flats. It takes me a while to find my accommodation as I get lost in the streets in between the hotel buildings.

After settling into my accommodation my friend Juul picks me up to show me around. She guides me through the streets and then finally, we are there. The beach. For the first time I can see the white sand and the waves rolling in. As we walk closer to the shore, I see that the sea is filled with people. Surfers. They are everywhere. I tried to count them, but there were too many. As we walk on the beach path towards a viewing platform, several surfers pass us. Wet hair, sandy feet and tanned bodies. All of them running. Each with a surfboard under their arm. The male surfers wear boardshorts, the females a bikini or a one-piece. We finally arrive to the viewing platform and that is the very first moment that I get sight of Rainbow Bay.

The water is blue, the waves are big. Surfers ripping the waves. We stand still for a moment to take in the view and watch the surfers catch waves. Wave after wave, after wave. Surfers everywhere. Then Juul starts to point out the different surf breaks to me; "So, we are now standing on Greenmount. Do you see all the surfers here right in front of us where the rocks are? That break is called Greenmount. To the left would be Cooly Beach break. And then when you look all the way to the right... Yeah, there where you see the big rocks. That is Snapper. It is not working right now; the swell is not big enough. But normally that is where the pro's surf. I would not go there if I were you. Only shortboarders and really good people surf there. That is also the place where the Quiky Pro will be held! And then next to it, just in front of the other rocks you see there, that is Little Mali. That is already a bit more mellow to surf compared to Snapper Rocks. And then here... yes, in the middle of the bay, that would be Rainbow. And

then if we look all the way to the left, that is Kirra! The waves there are also really fast. I think the best part for you to go out tomorrow, would be Rainbow. Then you have to paddle out right there behind the rocks of Little Mali. Because the current will take you here to Greenmount pretty fast. But right now, we should not get into the water. It is northerly wind, and then the whole water is filled with blue bottle jellyfish. Their stings are the worst!" While listening to Juul, I cannot believe that all these different areas in the sea have different names. To me it looks like one bay, with one wave coming in. But apparently that is not true.

The more I watch the crowded line-up, the waves breaking and the surfers ripping the waves, I get more and more anxious about going in the water myself. I hadn't been in the water for almost 6 months, and here the sea seems very frightening to me. Me myself, I have surfed for the first time 6 years ago. And the last two years quite regularly in several spots in Europe. But still, I would call myself a beginner. Why could I ever decide to come here and make surfing at one of the most famous surf breaks in the world my research topic? I really feel a sea-land dichotomy in myself. I am not afraid of the land. Even though I do not know the entire area, I feel comfortable pretty fast. I know how to navigate. But when looking out at the sea from this viewing platform, I really cannot imagine how to navigate in the water. Even after I got the information from Juul, I still do not feel as if I have enough knowledge to go out there. The sea feels very distant and unreal. Fluid and elusive.

We turn around and are now facing the land with the big hotel buildings. Static. High. Very present in the landscape. Juul tells me how the Gold Coast has gone through a transition from small surfer's villages where people lived the free surfing lifestyle to a booming tourism area with tall hotel buildings, "The first surfers came to the Gold Coast in the 1920's. Back then the very few surfers went to the beach with horse and carriage. Can you imagine that? People were not looking for uncrowded waves, it was the other way around. They were looking for other people in the water in order to share waves! It was only until the early 2000's that Coolangatta was promoted as a luxury travel destination and most of the hotels you see from here were built. But behind this row of hotels, there are still some small buildings left where surfers live to pursue this lifestyle of freedom."

Introduction

“Like the constraints of society and capitalism don’t really apply to your life anymore when you have a strong connection to the ocean. It like overrides the laws of society. Even like physically you are looking at the land from a completely different perspective. And you get to admire the land from the ocean. It is physically getting perspective.” – Ivy^{<?>}

Imagine standing in front of a world map, a map that represents the world in the two seemingly different surfaces; a fixed green and a fixed blue area. It draws a world of static, permanent and flat surfaces, creating a dualistic division of the land and sea as being separate from each other (Steinberg 2013). However, as a wave surfer myself, a great part of my life pivots upon the interplay of the land and the sea that makes the ocean break into waves. Surfing has given me the freedom to engage with the sea in all its material complexity and broaden the terrestrial perception of the ocean as a static and fixed surface. Put in the words of Anderson (2012, 571); “By taking a look at the sea, in particular through surfers’ interaction with this strange environment, we have an opportunity to engender a new perspective of the geographies of which we are a part.” It was the desire of the West for unmitigated access to the oceans for trade and commerce, which has lead “to capitalist constructions of the ocean-space as an empty, nonterritorial domain defined as an antithetical counterpoint to land-space” and “as an asocial space between societies” (McNiven 2016, 150).

^{<?>} Quote from Interview with Ivy, a local surfer living in Rainbow Bay, 12.04.2019

In order to move beyond this conventional separation of the land and the sea, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011, 131-132) acknowledges the potential of the following mind experiment; “What if, instead of land-ing the sea, we try to sea-ing the land?” Sea-ing the land, so he argues, opens up the possibility to doubt the solidarity of the ground and sea the world in ceaseless motion and change. Ultimately, this approach entails that the sea is recognized as an active participant in social processes which happen on and around it. By sea-ing the land, the conception of place is broadened and recognizes rights not only to the land, but also to the sea (McNiven 2016). This mind experiment opens up both an alternative perception of the sea, and also undermines the on-going supremacy of the land (Brown and Humberstone 2015). Ultimately, it refuses a the cartesian perception of a nature-culture dichotomy, as the sea is perceived as an integral part of culture (Brown 2015).

Like Ivy states in the above quote, surfing creates the possibility to look at the land from a physically different perspective and to put Ingold’s mind experiment into reality. For surfers, the perception of the world and the sense of place does not end where the land ends (Anderson 2012). As with the land, the sea is also bound into their everyday practices; “For many people, surfing defines their way of life, their manner of living - in short, their culture. Surfers organize their lives around the rhythms of the tides and the seasons that determine when, and where, the surf runs” (Booth 2017, 318). With the increased tensions of the twentieth century urban living, surfing started to emerge as an escape from the capitalist society in cities and as a return to nature’s reality (Ormrod 2005, 43). However, what was once a lifestyle of some independent surfers, has now turned into a multi-billion-dollar global industry. The flow of popular media, tourism and consumption, has appropriated and commodified the image of the surfing lifestyle into a desirable, and profitable lifestyle (Buckley 2002a). Lawler (2017, 306) argues that “the surfer is [...] the most prominent and consistent archetype of freedom - freedom from alienated work and clocked time, repressed libido, and material scarcity that this work depends on, and freedom to live spontaneously, within a pleasurable ecological and subcultural connection.” Nowadays, various mainstream industries such as non-surfing corporations have focused on commercial success by commodifying the surfing lifestyle of freedom in order to popularize their products (Booth 2017).

Yet, it took a long time until surfing was part of the mainstream consumer culture. For a couple of decades, the surfing lifestyle was represented as oppositional to the confining values of society, as a casual lifestyle away from the social order to earn money (Canniford 2017). Surfing was an alternative lifestyle, an anti-mainstream way of living whilst surfers were portrayed by the media as “rotten, long-haired, unwashed drug addicts” or as “jobless junkies” (Booth 1994, 266). It was not until 1964, when the first world surfing championship was held, that surfing became part of popular culture. The attitudes towards surfers began to change with the arrival of the biggest surf lifestyle brands, such as Billabong, Quiksilver and Rip Curl. These brands were all founded in Australia, and now rank amongst the top-five surfing industry companies internationally (Stranger 2010). It gave the Australian surfers the

ability to build an image of surfing that was not rejected by society anymore; “The dedicated business interest of surfing have packaged the activity in such a manner that they achieved a shift in its position from the ‘fringe’ of wider society to where it is not only accepted, but where the associated lifestyle is embraced by many diverse groups” (Lanagan 2002, 286). In this sense, Australia, different from other surfing places in the world, is an example of how the commodification of the lifestyle has led to an acceptance of this lifestyle in society.

Even though the surfers’ freedom is perceived, presented and constructed as a) distinct from the global market and b) transcending the human-nature divide, its connection to capitalism through the processes of consumer culture and commodification contests these notions. This raises questions about, for example, how surfers nowadays enact and construct this freedom in a capitalist society, and how this influences their perception of the land and the sea. By exploring the surfers’ perception of freedom in Australia, this thesis will give insight into the interplay of freedom and capitalism, and furthermore into the relationship between the land and the sea, thus culture and nature. Based on these questions, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

How do surfers perceive and give meaning to notions of freedom and human-sea relations as underpinned by capitalist processes in Rainbow Bay, Australia?

In this thesis I will explore the everyday lives of surfers in Rainbow Bay, Australia, in order to illustrate the meaning of freedom to surfers living in a neoliberal era where the “capitalist logic of value has taken of the world” (Tsing 2013, 22). This thesis will highlight the multifaceted characteristics of the concept of freedom and how the capitalist processes of commodification and consumption contest this notion on the one hand, whilst at the same time form the crucial basis of the surfers’ freedom.

Secondly, this thesis outlines a way “in which the sea is not a material or metaphorical void, but alive with embodied human experiences” as well as being a “place with character, agency and personality” (Anderson and Peters 2014, 4-9). The cultural lens of surfing enables to physically getting into the perspective of “sea-ing the land” (Ingold 2011). By physically looking at the land from the perspective of the sea through the act of surfing, this thesis contests the terrestrial perception of the human-sea division. The aim is to enhance empathetic forms of understanding the seascape by telling the story of a community whose perception of freedom is based on living with the rhythm of the sea. This is important because the understanding of the sea and how we perceive our relationship with it has a relevance to how we as humans work to preserve or deplete the ocean (Steinberg 2013, in Brown and Humberstone 2016).

The field

I conducted my research in Rainbow Bay in Coolangatta, which is a suburb of the Gold Coast in Australia. Next to Hawaii and California, Australia is perceived to be a “surf mecca” (Callan 2017). Australia’s esteem for the surf culture can be traced back to its years of entanglement with the beach, or, as Huntsman (2001, 8) says, a “quintessential Australian beach is a surfing beach - that is, one that faces the open ocean, and where waves build in height before crashing as breakers onto the sand.” According to Booth (2001, 3), no other country is so bounded to the beach as Australia, as exemplified by images of the beach diffused all over the inland of Australia. How the beach has become a national preoccupation is exemplified by how beach jargon has intertwined with day to day language; “Surfing applies equally to searching the worldwide web and driving to the coast for the perfect wave; ‘catching-a-wave’ can mean jostling for position in the surf or getting ahead in the business world; ‘wiping-out’ refers just as often to a state of intoxication as to falling off a surfboard” (Booth 2001, 3).

Within Australia, the beaches of the Gold Coast have achieved an iconic status on a national and international level over the last couple of decades (Lazarow 2009, 1130). With a population of approximately half a million people, the Gold Coast is one of the fastest growing cities in Australia (Bosman et al. 2016, 1). Together with the state capital Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast makes up a 200 km long city, which is to become the longest urban coastal strip of the world (Spearritt 2009). What has started as a humble little village for timber-felling in the 18040s, and then an agricultural area, has now turned into a well-known tourism destination (Stimson and Minnery 1998, 194). The region receives over 9 million visitors per year, and every year the number of visitors gets bigger (Lazarow 2009). The coastal strip has turned into an area of high-rise apartments, hotels, tourist resorts and theme parks. However, with the good wave quality throughout the whole year and numerous of surf-breaks, the area has also turned into a “surfer’s paradise” (Bartholomew 2015). It is no coincidence that one suburb of the Gold Coast is named Surfers Paradise. In other words, the Gold Coast area lives the “sun and surf” image to the fullest through the booming economy (Stimson and Minnery 1998, 194) and can be seen as the archetype of the commercialisation of the Australian beach (Spearritt 2003, 35).

Coolangatta, a suburb of the Gold Coast, with a population of about 6’000, is located 25 km from Surfers Paradise and 104 km from Brisbane. Cooly, as the locals call the suburb, is well-known for its various world-famous surf breaks in walking distance. The surf break Snapper Rocks is home to one of the biggest surfing events on the WSL calendar. Every year the Quicksilver and Boost Mobile Pro competition kicks off the WSL Championships Tour, a tour of professional surf competitions with the world’s best male and female surfers in the best surf spots around the globe. This year the event took place from 3rd -13th of April, right in the middle of my fieldwork period. This world-famous event and the most consistent waves of Australia have given Cooly an esteemed reputation within the



A map of Rainbow Bay indicating the different surf breaks. >

surfing culture; “For more than 40 years the Gold Coast of Australia has been a bedrock of professional surfing. It’s produced more World Champions than any other place on the planet, thanks to its ample supply of waves and talent that have made Coolangatta the epicentre of the Australian surf scene” (WSL 2019). Thus, the combination of the Australian entanglement with the beach and the connection with the professional surf scene make Coolangatta the perfect location to do this research.

Methodology & Operationalisation

In order to get access to the local surf community, I lived together with a local surfer girl in an apartment right behind the front row of high hotel buildings at Rainbow Bay. Greta was what O’Reilly (2012, 114) would conceptualize as a gatekeeper. As she herself was a very good surfer, she already had a lot of respect within the community. She was my key informant who enabled me access to many other surfers within the Rainbow Bay surf community. Next to that, she also taught me a lot about the ocean and surfing in general. I would go out surfing with her many times during my fieldwork. This became a very convenient way to get to know more surfers as Greta knew nearly everybody. Almost automatically, I made use of the snowball effect, in which initial contacts are used to generate further contacts (O’Reilly 2012, 44). In the end I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with surfers living in and around Rainbow Bay. I consciously interviewed a mix of female and male surfers; a surfer who owns a local surf school, surfers who are involved with local environmental organizations, surfers who dreamt of becoming a professional surfer, surfers who had an aversion to the professional circuit, surfers who grew up in the area but also surfers who moved here because of the surfing conditions and a surf photographer. Many surfers were Australian, but some also moved to Rainbow Bay from overseas. All those surfers have been anonymized to respect their privacy (O’Reilly 2012).

Alongside semi-structured interviews, I made use of participant observation. Participant observation is a method “through which one takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1). Since surfing was part of the daily routine in Rainbow Bay, participating in and observing the surf community not only meant to actively engage in the daily routine on the land, but also to take part in the surfing activities in the ocean. Thus, increasing my own surfing abilities and being able to join my research participants in the line-up was a crucial part of doing participant observation. Instead of “just being there,” I actively took notes of my participant observation encounters in several fieldnote diaries. Next to a conventional daily diary, this also included a diary in which I wrote down “informal conversations” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011) I had during the day, and an “intellectual diary” in which I kept track of analytical ideas and flashes of insight in relation to my research (O’Reilly 2012, 104).

Next to participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews (O’Reilly 2012), I have chosen to conduct autoethnography and embodied ethnography (Brown and Humberstone 2016), and multisensory and multimedia ethnography (Pink 2015). The choice to combine these methods is based on the *Seascape Epistemology*, conceptualized by Ingersoll (2016, 5-6). Within this methodological approach of the seascapes, Ingersoll (2016, 29), a wave surfer herself, argues for an “embodied sense of knowledge” and a “kinaesthetic involvement with the ocean.” In other words, she argues that one should not think of the world abstractly, but through an engagement with the world. Surfing is such an embodied experience, as in order to ride a wave, one needs all the senses. Thus, to make sense of this physical activity, one needs to open up to the multi-sensoriality of being in the water and riding on waves. The acknowledgment that sensoriality is fundamental to learn about and understand the surfer’s perception of the world, was a fundamental methodological aspect of this study. In order to record this sensoriality of surfing, I related to “the idea that ethnographic experiences are ‘embodied’ - in that the researcher learns and knows through her or his whole experiencing body” (Pink 2015, 27). Therefore, alongside the methods of semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation, I also made use of my own body as a recording method for sensorial data (Clifton 2006), data about surfing I could not gather only through talking to people or observing their performances.

That is the reason why I also kept an autoethnographic surfing diary during my fieldwork, to keep track of my daily experience with the sea, my surfing progress and my own embodied knowledge of the sea. I have processed this diary of more than 60 surf sessions into a prologue, three interludes and an epilogue. Together they create an autoethnographic narrative that explores “how the body learns to be in the world” and expresses “the nexus of senses, embodiment and place” (Humberstone 2016). The interludes are a way of incorporating the sensoriality of the environment in order to get closer to what Brown and Humberstone (2016, 2) describe as creating “an experience of the sea as a lived reality” instead of only creating an imagined notion of the sea.

However, compared to a conventional written diary, my surfing diary was not limited to the written word. The ocean is fluid and “therefore it must be explored through fluid mediums in addition to texts” (Ingersoll 2016, 25). In other words, human beings and their environment are not merely textual beings (Howes 2005), and therefore the study of them needs to go beyond the written word. I appropriated this notion of “fluid mediums” in the way Underberg and Zorn (2013, 1) define multimedia ethnography; “multimedia ethnography involves using digital media to present real-world cultures through environments and narrative techniques. Through the use of digital media, this approach seeks ways to present and, most important, to experience the culture.” Thus, next to writing, my surfing diary also included collecting audioscapes (which I recorded with a portable audio field-recorder), photographs^{<?>} and moving images (which I both recorder with a camera Canon 7D in a water housing).

<?> See the Appendix for a selection of photos. All the photographs added in this thesis are taken by me.



My view whilst doing participant observation in the line-up <

A first layer of “experiencing the culture” of surfers in Rainbow Bay I have created by making the photos part of the research writing and support the “written data by illustrating the argument more forcefully or profoundly than words” (O’Reilly 2012, 171-172). I have chosen this form of ethnographic storytelling in order to represent aspects of life in Rainbow Bay my research participants could not articulate, and I could hardly grasp by the written word. To include more senses, I have also created a video of the surfing experience of ‘being in the water’.^{<?>} This representation entails an assemblage of audio and visual representations in order to “invoke the sensorial, affective and aesthetic dimensions of the lives and environments of the participants” (Pink 2015, 171). Where the photos stay limited to the sense of sight, the video has the potential to soak the viewer into the environment, tickling other senses and creating an immersive experience. In other words, the video is a “storied place” that can engage audiences through “immersion (the re- creation of the sense of a three- dimensional space in a two- dimensional one), and multivocality (the inclusion of multiple voices or perspectives in a way that subverts the traditional hierarchy between a singular, powerful author and a passive audience or reader” (Underberg and Zorn 2013, 18-19). This triangulation of different data collection methods has created a way to gain insights in both life on land and in the sea and to represent the surfing lifestyle in a way that does justice to the sensoriality of this way of living.

Ethics and Role of Researcher

According to Mosse (2006), in ethnographic research there is no objective and neutral knowledge, no sharp separation between researcher and research participant, and no divide between fieldwork and every day social life. As acknowledged by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 93), all researchers and research are biased. However, by reflecting on the „place from which the observer observes“, in the beginning rather than as an end to ethnography, the impact of the observer on the research can be understood (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Therefore, it is important to note that this thesis is based on the referential framework of me as a twenty-six-year-old, white, middle-class, Dutch, female intermediate surfer. I discovered wave surfing about six years ago, when I moved from Switzerland, where I grew up, to the Netherlands. Ever since I learned the basics of surfing during some short trips along the European coast. However, before this fieldwork, I never had the chance to live at a surf break with a high quality of waves for a longer period of time in order make enough progress to become a ‘good’ surfer.

Based on earlier surfing experiences as a beginning surfer, I knew that the surfer’s community sometimes can be somewhat closed to outsiders and to non-surfers (Clifton 2006, 238). Sharing the

<?> You can find a trailer of the video on the USB stick added to this thesis. It will be indicated at which moment of reading this thesis the video should be watched. The video edit is actually meant to be an art installation, a protection on a wall where people can immerse themselves in the moving images. To give you an impression of this installation, I made a trailer of the video. Further multimedia ethnography explorations will take place beyond the scope of this thesis.

experience of surfing and throwing myself in the line-up was my primary approach to acceptance as a researcher, building rapport and getting access to the community (O'Reilly 2012). Being able to understand the inside surfing jargon enabled me to understand the surfers and establish rapport (O'Reilly 2012). After achieving trust by showing my insider knowledge of surfing and sharing the surfers' passion for the ocean by surfing myself on a daily basis, surfers opened up to talk to me. Yet, this was certainly not easy, since the level of surfing in Rainbow Bay was quite high. When the waves were too big for me, I could not share in the experience of surfing bigger waves. Because of my lower level of surfing, I was an outsider to the ocean in these conditions. Therefore, most of the data I have collected about surfing, is based on medium and small waves.

Furthermore, living in a house with my key informant, constantly contested my role in the field. It was hard to draw a line between me being a surfer, me being a friend and me being a researcher, which made participant observation an ethical challenge. These different roles made it sometimes hard for me, but also for my research participants, to draw a line between me conducting participant observation and every day social life. Even though I often stated that I was a researcher studying the Australian surf culture, it was sometimes a challenge to remind informants that casual interactions and informal conversation may form part of the data used in later analysis (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011).

Lastly, I asked myself how to represent the environment of the field and whether to anonymize the place of research or not. The concept of informed consent is that "people have the right to freely choose whether to participate in a research project or not" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 215). As stated before, all the people have been anonymized. However, this fundamental principle of ethnographic research does not enclose the location of research. Many research participants stated their concern for the increasing popularity of Rainbow Bay. Therefore, I do not want to my research to increase the popularity of the field. At the same time, my research cannot be viewed separately from the specific characteristics of the environment. The interplay of the land and the sea is so specific, and creates such specific waves, that the reality of the environment is a huge part of the life in Rainbow Bay. Anonymizing the location would have made it impossible to build up the arguments of this thesis. I solved this ethical difficulty by doing the best I could to not idealize the field by highlighting the dynamics that increase the popularity of the field in my analysis.

Outline

As stated before, there are two story lines that create the foundation for this written thesis. The first story line is presented through the autoethnographic prologue, three interludes and an epilogue. The story told in this first story-line follows my own becoming as a surfer and exemplifies how through the act of surfing, the perception of the sea can turn from a space of anxiety into a place of meaning and freedom.

These interludes can be read separately from or alongside the second story. This second story line follows the transition described in the interludes in a more theoretical manner. It contains four chapters in which I connect the ethnographic data I have gathered during my fieldwork to anthropological concepts.

The first chapter draws a brief historical background of Rainbow Bay in order to expand the context of the field and put forward a first elaboration on capitalist processes at stake in the field. It will be highlighted that the popularity of the area has increased in the last decade. The high quality and consistency of different levels of waves, has drawn a big variety of surfers into the area. Based on the shared attachment to the surf break, the surfers create a tight community feeling, which they describe as the "Rainbow Bubble." The tight community feeling is manifests itself in localism, through which the surfers defend their 'bubble' from outsiders. This context of the field sets the foundation to explore Ingold's (2011) mind experiment more in depth in chapter two. By analysing the daily routine of the Rainbow Bay surf community, it will be argued that the surf break is not only a place where people surf, it very much influences how they live their daily life. The daily routine exposes the different rhythms of life on land and life with the changing sea, whereby the rhythm of the land is perceived as creating physical and mental anxiety. The terms "land-locked" and "land-sea-figure-8" will outline the reasons why surfers in Rainbow Bay choose to lead border life between land and the sea.

Chapter three will expand on the interplay of the land and the sea, and argue that a balance between the life on land and life in the ocean creates the fundament for the surfers' perception of freedom. The surfers' narrative of freedom will be explored by applying the anthropological lens of Tsing (2015) and outline individual life stories of surfers living in Rainbow Bay. This will show that through a strong attachment to the ocean, the surfers create empathy for the preservation of the ocean. At the same time, this will lead to the argument that land-based structures are perceived as an assault to the surfers' freedom. The last chapter, chapter four, aims to understand the surfers' freedom "in the context of the commodification process and contemporary consumer culture" (Watson and Kopachevsky 1994, 657). This chapter will elaborate on the fragility of the surfers' freedom as a modern social life under capitalism and illustrate that this freedom is not a static given, but something surfers in Rainbow Bay constantly have to safeguard.

Interlude 1

Frustration

is back to 100%! Jeez...

That was bad. If I could, I would have smashed my surfboard on the beach. Another day spent as a kook. Once I was at the back, I had already drifted to Greenmount. I nearly couldn't paddle anymore. But I had to, because there was a big set of waves coming in:

I sit on my Malibu surfboard. I finally made it out to the back behind the breaking waves. I paddle one more time before I push my upper body upwards to sit on my board. I take a deep breath. Put my hair out of my face. Have a quick scanning look around me. When I face the horizon, there are big waves coming towards me. When I look towards the beach, I see a swarm of people paddling. I feel trapped. Trapped between the sea and the land, between the waves and the swarm of people. I feel anxious. I hope to see some familiar faces. I don't. But there are heaps of people out.

I turn back to face the horizon and see a big wave building up right in front of me. The wave starts breaking. I hear it coming. I see the lip of the wave starting to break and move towards me. I quickly lie back down on my board, facing the white water, paddling as hard as I can. One last strong paddle before the white water hits me. I grab my board with both my hands and take a deep breath before I turn around into the water. I hope that I timed the turtle roll well. I feel the wave crushing onto my board. I close my eyes. Hold my breath. Let the energy of the wave float over me. The wave nearly rips my surfboard out of my hands, but I manage to keep hold of it.

My board is pushed towards the surface. My head comes out of the water. I open my eyes, scan my surroundings in a split second. I am out of breath. I see that I have time to get onto my board until the next wave is coming. I push my body back onto my board and start paddling again. As fast and as strong as I can. Next to me other surfers do the same. The only aim I have right now is to not get wiped out again, to be behind the take-off zone before the next set of waves comes in. A young man on his shortboard passes me. He is way quicker than me. Now I paddle right behind him. Looking at his feet as he paddles away from

me. My

back starts hurting. My arms

feel like cooked spaghetti. I keep my head as high as possible. I see another big wave coming. I try to paddle as fast as I can, but I quickly recognize that I won't make it. But there is no other way than forward. I grab my board with both hands, take a deep breath, turn around and close my eyes.

The power of the wave is too strong. Instantly the energy of the waves rips my board out of my hands. There is nothing I can do but let go. I put my hands around my head and wait. My body gets pushed down. I lose every sense of orientation. I feel a pull on my right foot from my leg rope. I don't know how long it takes until I am back up at the surface. While taking a deep breath I instantly search for my board. I grab it at the other end of the leg rope and hold on to it. I feel terrified. Anxious that I hit someone with my board and that I will be wiped out again by the next wave. There are so many people around me. I can only hope that no one got hit by my board. Everybody seems fine. Already back on their boards paddling. I am not that fast.

And then I already see the next wave coming. The only thing I can do is hold onto my surfboard and let the wave take me back to the beach. The white water is all around me and I cannot see anything. Suddenly an elderly man pops up in front of me. The wave pushes me straight at him. There is no chance that I can change my direction. The power of the white water is too strong. I jump off my board and cross my fingers that I won't hit him. The moment I come back up to the surface the man starts shouting at me, "WHAT THE FUCK!! Never EVER lose your board again! I cannot believe this!" I instantly apologize for what happened and ask him whether he and his surfboard are okay. He does not even look at me and paddles off. I feel like such a loser and a kook. I know that it was my fault, but I genuinely did not see him. I instantly lose all my energy and panic. The only thing I want right now is to get out of the water. When I get to the beach, I nearly feel like crying. I feel like such a dumbass. All the waves I have ridden before, all the confidence I had, all washed away. I nearly feel like quitting surfing. For good. And I really feel like smashing my surfboard.

Chapter 1

The Rainbow Bubble

Living in Rainbow Bay, I often heard people describing the bay using the metaphor of a ‘bubble’.^{<?>} With the many actual rainbows appearing over the bay, it sometimes felt as if the boundaries of the area were literally drawn by the natural spectacle of the rainbow.^{<?>} “People tell me that I am in a Cooly Bubble. They also call it the Rainbow Bubble” Greta told me.^{<?>} She explained that people living in Rainbow Bay get very tied to the place, that all their attention goes to the environment and that they do not step outside of the ‘bubble’ if they do not need to. Greta herself only leaves the bubble to work, and sometimes to go on surf trips overseas. Other than that, her life mostly takes place within the bubble, whereby the surf breaks of Rainbow Bay have become the epicentre. Ivy also told me that the surfers of Rainbow Bay act as if “nothing else matters outside the bubble.”^{<?>}

This chapter will illustrate how the characteristics of the land and the sea define the identity of the Rainbow Bay surf community. I first explore the development of the bubble and draw a brief historical background on its increased popularity in the last couple of years. After that, I will show why the Rainbow Bay surfing community is not one homogenous group. However, even though there is a large variety of surfers within the bubble, a sense of community is maintained based on the shared in-depth-knowledge of the surf breaks (Usher 2017). In the end, the aspect of localism will be discussed in order to understand the “feelings of territoriality and the need to defend the surf break from outsiders” (Usher 2017, 216).

^{<?>} Field notes, Informal Conversation Diary, 16.04.2019/ 19.04.2019

^{<?>} Field notes, Surf Diary, 13.03.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Greta, 04.05.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

The becoming of a popular bubble

The story goes that the Hawaiian winner of several Olympic medals in swimming, Duke Kahanamoku, has introduced the act of surfing to Australia and to the Gold Coast. *The Duke* came to Brisbane for a swimming carnival in January 1915. During his stay, he visited Greenmount to introduce surfing to the locals. A boy called Sid Chapman, who was only 15 years at the time, was so fascinated by the Duke’s ability to ride waves, that he started to craft his own solid timber surfboards then becoming the first person to produce surfboards in Queensland. The consistent and perfect wave formation of the beach breaks on the Gold Coast were well known not only within Australia but also in other surfing communities around the world. Mainly because of the many professional surfers and world champions that arose from this area. However, it was the first Gold Coast Pro^{<?>} held at Snapper Rocks in 1996, that enabled the surfing culture to become popular on the Gold Coast.^{<?>}

Nowadays, because of the easy accessibility and the high consistency of waves on the Gold Coast, most of the surf industry are based on the Gold Coast (Lazarow 2009) – with most of them in Coolangatta. When walking in the streets of Coolangatta, everything breathes surfing. Yet, it is not something very visible to outsiders as it is not as obnoxious as for example the well-known Byron Bay, a town where many tourists go that want to submerge themselves in the ‘Australian surfing culture’ for a little while. Coolangatta is not a standard, laid-back surfing town in that sense. It has no “cute little hippie vibe”^{<?>}, and there is no “beautiful natural scenery”^{<?>}, like for example in Noosa, another world-famous and well-visited ‘surfing village’. Therefore, Coolangatta is not (yet) overrun by backpackers from all round the world.

Nonetheless, within the surfing community, the town has turned into a popular and famous place. Ivy and Mila both state that the Gold Coast, especially Coolangatta, has turned into the hub of Australian surfing. “It is like the LA of the movie industry. All the industry is built here... Not that I really care for that, but this is where it goes down. And also the history of pro surfers... you know, like Steph, Mick, Joel^{<?>}... I don’t know how many world champions have come out of this town... There is something good about it!”^{<?>} Mila says. And Ivy adds; “I guess it is like being an actor and going to Hollywood. Everyone knows Australia for the Gold Coast. And if you are a surfer and you are coming

^{<?>} A World Championship Tour competition, today this event is the Quiky Pro.

^{<?>} Field Notes, Daily Diary, 24.04.2019; Visit to Surf World Museum in Currumbin

^{<?>} Field notes, Daily Diary, 21.02.2019

^{<?>} Field notes, Daily Diary, 03.03.2019

^{<?>} Here Mila talks about Stephanie Gilmore (Australian professional surfer and seven-time world champion on the Women’s Championship World Tour), Mick Fanning (Former Australian professional surfer, three times world champion on the Men’s Championship World Tour, living near Coolangatta) and Joel Parkinson (Former Australian professional surfer who grew up on the Gold Coast)

^{<?>} Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019

to Australia, you are going to the Gold Coast. Because that is what it is about.”^{<?>} In their perception, reasons for this transition are a unique combination of facilities which is perceived as creating a high standard of living and a hub for potential opportunities. The WSL main office, many big surf brand headquarters, the high-performance centre for Australian surfing athletes and the Quiky Pro, all located in Cooly, creates many opportunities for professional surfers. Or for surfers who have the ambition to become one. At the same time, Rainbow Bay is small enough to maintain a tight community. “Wherever you go to a good surf break in Australia, there is also a little tight community. What is different here at Rainbow, Snapper and Coolangatta, is that it has a really long and sort of prestigious history of surfing here. Because of that, it has an extra focus, or an extra air around it”^{<?>} Josh explains to me.

Despite this prestigious history of surfing, many surfers do not have the ambition to become a professional surfer, or even to make a big career and earn a lot of money. “My lifestyle is that I can surf more than I work. Most people that you talk to around here who surf will have it quite high on their list of priorities,” Leo explains the work ethic in the Rainbow Bubble to me, “It’s not CEOs, or... you’re not talking to engineers or surgeons. I think you’re talking more to, say the different parts of the middle class. We’re lucky in Australia ... you don’t have to do much to make a living.”^{<?>} By that, Leo points out the economic prosperity in Australia that makes it easy for surfers to work flexible hours in a simple job to earn enough money to sustain their lifestyle. The popularity of the Gold Coast creates many nearby job opportunities, which makes it possible to stay close to the bubble and have enough spare time to surf on a daily basis. Yet, surfers^{<?>} often indicated that the specific formation of the land meeting the swell, tide and current formation of the sea, creating a consistent and high quality of waves, was their main reason to stay within the Rainbow Bubble. Drawing from Anderson (2014), the metaphor of the bubble illustrates the strong attachment surfers can feel for a surf break. Through the physical interaction with the surf on a regular basis, a strong bond with the specifics of the place is created. Ultimately, the surf break becomes a part of their identity.

The diversity of the Bubble

The characteristics of the land, firstly the space to accommodate a large amount of people because of proximity to a bigger city, and also the characteristics of the sea, the several surf breaks with different level of waves next to each other, create the fundament for the identity of the Rainbow Bubble community;

^{<?>} Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Leo, 17.04.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Ava, 08.04.2019; Interview, Toby, 28.04.2019; Interview, Leo, 17.04.2019

“Snapper Rocks, Rainbow Bay and Duranbah are the most consistent surf breaks in Australia. And out in the surf there are different sub cultures. And part of the reason for that I think is the different surf conditions here. If we wouldn’t have the varied surf, it wouldn’t have as many sub cultures. If it would only be a heavy barrelling wave, we wouldn’t have all the girls out there on Mal’s. You have got all the different sections of the break that allow all different levels of surf. And because it is such a big break, it can accommodate so many people.”^{<?>}

Drawing on Brown and Humberstone (2016, 6), this explanation from Josh highlights the role of the surf break in shaping the individual and collective identity of the surf community. The construction of a surfer’s identity is linked to different aspects, such as gender, ethnicity, activism and a particular manner of speech and dress (Usher 2017). Based on the characteristics of the waves, Rainbow Bay attracts a variety of people. This highlights the ocean as the defining aspect of the identity of the surfer community (Usher 2017).

The variety of surfers was something that already stood out to me from the very beginning. When surfing in the early morning, there often was a group of elderly men in the line-up, between 60-80 years old, that could barely carry their longboards from their home to the water. However, once in the water, they caught many waves on their longboards. They knew exactly how to read the waves and how to navigate in the sea, they were always in the right position when catching a wave. Some wore helmets, and one even wore diving glasses to protect his eyes. Another one had a surfboard with a little engine to support him whilst paddling for a wave.

In bigger wave conditions, younger guys, between 20 and 30 years, would be out on their shortboards. Most of them were not interacting with each other, they would mostly just focus on their own waves. The majority had long hair, wore boardshorts and was covered with tattoos. Sometimes there were also some girls on shortboards, but mostly women were a minority. In these wave conditions, some teenagers would be out too. Around the age of 12, surfing on a very high level. In the afternoon, when the waves were clean and mellow, there would always be a group of girls on longboards. Most of them wore a bikini or a one piece. All very tanned. Sometimes chatting with each other and laughing when catching party-waves. These conditions were also the time when parents took their kids out and pushed them into waves.^{<?>}

Despite the big variety of surfers, all of them described the community within the bubble as ‘tight’.^{<?>} “I have had so much support from everyone that is out there in the surf. And then became

^{<?>} Quote from Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019

^{<?>} Drawn from fieldnotes in daily diary, 14.02.2019

^{<?>} Field notes, Informal Conversations Diary, 05.04.2019

friends with all of them,” Zoe tells me, “every time we go out surfing, we see everyone, and everyone is sharing waves. And helping each other. And like seeing each other improve.”^{<?>} What Zoe describes here, illustrates that even a diverse group of surfers can feel very connected to each other simply through the shared experience of the ocean. Through sharing experiences and thorough knowledge about the qualities of the waves, surfers can strongly bond with other surfers (Usher 2017). Whenever I was on the beach or in the surf with somebody, I always recognized that nearly everybody knew each other. It was not uncommon that people in Rainbow Bay related to fellow surfers as “friends”^{<?>} and “family”.^{<?>}

In this sense, the act of surfing in the Rainbow Bubble can be analysed as creating value way beyond simply being a physical or competitive activity. Considering this dynamic, it can be argued that the sea turns into an “integral space of society” and moves away from the more land-based perspective of a *mare liberum*, a capitalist construction of the ocean-space as an “empty, non-territorial domain, an asocial space between societies” (Brown 2016, 16–17). Social life is extended from the landscape into the seascape. Through the shared experience of the sea, the ocean creates social structures of a community and turns into a social meeting place.^{<?>} Such an account implies that the social life of the surf community in Rainbow Bay is as much characterized by its relationship to the ocean as it is to the land (Anderson 2013).

The fear of the crowd

When reflecting on this tight community feeling, many surfers stated their concern about the increasing popularity of the Rainbow Bubble in the last couple of years. “I just feel like it could eventually turn out like [Surfers Paradise] here. Which would suck!” Chloe said angrily. She traces the transition back to the commodification of the wave at Snapper Rocks by the annual professional surfing competition; “Quiky Pro promotes it so much. And everyone wants to surf Snapper Rocks. It is famous. When I first moved here, it definitely wasn’t as busy. I could go out in the middle of the day during the week and there wouldn’t be that many people out. Maybe 10 people. It is really getting bad these days!”^{<?>} Usher and Gomez (2016) state that the increasing crowd of surf-breaks can be linked back to the commodification of surfing through popular media and competition events. As an extension to this, Booth (2017, 334) articulates the suspicion towards commercialism within the surfing culture as follows; “Many dedicated surfers have an axe to grind with the surf industry, the pro tour, surf mags, surf schools or anyone else they feel is profiteering from surfing at the expense of their next wave.” Based on Daskalos (2007) it

^{<?>} Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Stella, 30.04.2019, Interview, Toby, 28.04.2019; Interview, Ava, 08.04.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019

^{<?>} Field notes, Surf Diary, 27.04.2019

^{<?>} Interview, Chloe, 27.03.2019

can be argued that the change in the social order of the Rainbow Bubble is an example of the effects of globalization, for instance increased transportation infrastructures, mass media communication and technological advances in surfboard constructions, which have all made surfing available to the masses.

The increasing crowd in the water was a topic that was discussed nearly every day during my fieldwork. Next to asking how the conditions of the waves were, people would also always ask how busy it was in the water. There have been several conversations in the water when surfers angrily told me that they would go in because they got frustrated by “all the other surfers in the water who catch every wave right in front of them.”^{<?>} This frustration can be understood considering the context of the exceeding carrying capacity of the surf breaks, a phenomenon common in communities of world-famous waves (Usher and Gomez 2016). The negative sentiment arises from an uneven “ratio of number of waves which the surfer is in a position to ride, but which are in fact taken or spoilt by someone else” and the “number of waves which a surfer does actually ride” (Buckley 2002, 429). Surfing in such a crowded surf break gets really tricky because it is hard to maintain the universal surfing etiquette. Usher and Gomez (2016, 196) argue that the result of an increasingly crowded surf break, where surfers constantly have to compete for waves, is localism. Localism in surfing is conceptualized as the social construction of boundaries around a surf break whereby the ones in control can regulate the rules. In each surf spot, localism has been manifested differently, ranging from heavy localism to more mild forms of defending a surf break from outsiders. The enactment of heavy localism often entails physical violence and property damage in order to exclude visiting surfers from surf spots and enact the universal surfing etiquette. Milder forms on the other hand, express themselves more through verbal aggression and ignoring a newcomer’s priority in the surf break (Usher 2017).

Surprisingly, as Rainbow Bay seems to have all the attributes which could enact a strong sentiment of localism, namely being a world-famous and mass-commercialized surf spot (Usher and Gomez 2016), I have hardly witnessed any physical violence or damage to properties. Localism in Rainbow Bay did not occur in the form of one group of surfers claiming the right to the surf break and “not allowing visiting surfers access to the surf” or “allowing access to the surf, but inflicting heavy punishment for breaking surf rules” (Usher and Gómez 2016, 198). Yet, only because there is no local group inflicting heavy punishment on people who break the surfing rules (Usher and Gomez 2017), it does not mean that there was no localism in Rainbow Bay. Since no one is enforcing the surfing rules, ultimately, no one is respecting them either. “Here it is more like you go out with your friends and you share waves. Whereas back home everyone gets their own waves, because there are so many waves. And you have rules. You don’t snake. You don’t drop in. If you do, it’s like such a huge deal,” Chloe explains it to me, “Whereas here, it is not. I snake everyone out here. Because that is just what everyone does. If you don’t do that, you will never get waves.” Because of the increased popularity of the bubble, and the

^{<?>} Field notes, Informal Conversation Diary, 29.04.2019

growing crowd in the water, localism in the Rainbow Bubble manifests itself in the lack of respecting the universal surfing etiquette in the line-up (Usher and Gomez 2017).

Another reason for this form of localism depends on the “locals” being able to differentiate outsiders (Nazer 2004). In conversation about the tension between the tight community feeling and the popularity of the Rainbow Bubble, Ella stated; “I reckon [the community] was a lot tighter. But with a lot of new people coming in to it, it is hard to keep track. Sometimes you go out surfing and I don’t know anyone out here. I haven’t seen any of these people before in my life. Whereas you used to go out and you would be like ‘How are you going? What’s up?’”^{<?>} Through the increasing crowd, a certain anonymity in the line-up is created and it gets harder for surfers to meet familiar faces in the line-up and indicate outsiders from insiders. This pressure from the increasing crowd, is not only something that creates frustration amongst the Rainbow Bay surf community and leading them to disrespect outsiders in the line-up, it also starts bursting the ‘bubble’. I asked Ella whether the Rainbow Bubble was a place she would like to stay in the future. “I will probably end up going a bit more south, with how busy it goes. But we will see how it goes in 10 years. Maybe then you will need a hovercraft to get into the surf,” Ella answered with a laugh and a sad undertone at the same time.



There are surf spots all around the world, however, as this chapter has illustrated by drawing the unique composition of people and the environment in the Rainbow Bubble, every surfing community has a specific social order and composition of people in the line-up (Daskalos 2007). Anderson (2013, 240) puts it in the following words; “surfers are constitutively defined not only by their co-ingredience with terrestrial places, but also to the space of the surf zone.” It can be concluded that describing Rainbow Bay as a bubble, is a way of the surfing community defining their fear of the growing crowd and the increasing popularity of the waves. This is manifested in the form of what Usher (2017) conceptualizes as “mild localism,” whereby the universal surf etiquette deliberately is ignored. At the same time, this also creates a strong bond between the variety of surfers based on their attachment to the same surf break. Whereas this chapter has set a context of the field and made the argument that there is a strong relation between the identity of a surfing community and the ocean, the next chapter will elaborate more on the consideration that a surf break is not just a place where people surf, but an influences on the way people live (Anderson 2013, 241).

^{<?>} Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019

Chapter 2

The Rhythms of the Ocean and the Land

The previous chapter illustrated the relation between the identity of a surfing community and the characteristics of a surf break. This chapter will continue analysing the interplay of the land and the sea by firstly describing the daily routine of the surfers in the Rainbow Bubble. This will illustrate, that through the eyes of the surfers, the ocean is not just a huge mass of water, but like Ingold (2011) argues, a meshwork of earth, sky, wind and weather. The daily routine points out the differences between the rhythm of the ocean and the rhythm on land. After that, it will examine the terms “land-sea-figure-8” and “land-locked”, in order to explain why surfers in Rainbow Bay “live a border life between the land and the sea” (Anderson 2016, 57). In the end, the argument will be made that by accepting that the rhythm of the ocean cannot be controlled, the surfers in Rainbow Ray also review the structures on land.

The daily routine

It is 5.30am and I just woke up. I am standing on the beach with a cup of tea. I am still in my pyjama’s whilst staring at the ocean. The sun has not risen yet. The birds are singing in the twilight. As I am standing there, trying to see how the wave conditions are today, my friend Ava walks up to me. “Good morning! How are the waves today?” she asks me with sleepy eyes. We stare into the dark and try to see where the waves are breaking the best today. There are already some surfers in the ocean. Every now

and then another one passes us and hurries into the water. The sky is clear, and the first sunlight is slowly colouring the sky into pink and orange. There is no wind today, the waves are mellow. “The swell is too small for Snapper to be working, it seems like Little Mali and Greenmount are our best options” Ava states while analysing the ocean.<?>

Without knowing, I have adapted to the daily routine of the Rainbow Bay surf community. Every morning I wake up early to check what the surf is doing in order to arrange my day. “We just wake up and go check the surf. And then get a coffee and talk to everyone who is also checking the surf. And then just everyone is doing that. Everyone is relying on what the surf is doing to sort out their day,” Zoe explained the daily routine in Rainbow Bay to me.<?> The incorporation of the ocean into daily life exemplifies how surfers in Rainbow Bay compose their daily routine in the first place by the constant change of the weather rather than by the fixed grid of the landscape (Ingold 2011, 67). “It is such a nice place to be in, because it makes you become aware of the environment, the weather and the weather patterns” Zoe continued. To an outsider, as I was in the very beginning when I entered the field, the ocean in Rainbow Bay might seem one “largely unknowable space that surrounds the huge land mass” (Wattchow 2016, 136). Yet, whenever I would ask someone how the conditions of the waves would be the next day, they would always be able to give me a very clear overview of the wind, the swell and the tide forecast, answering my question by stating what time would be best to go surfing. That is how I for example learned that I could sleep when there was northerly wind in the morning, since the wind would blow out the waves and bring bluebottle jellyfishes into the bay. Or, another example, that I should time my surf sessions based on the tides, since mid-tide would be the best for the waves to break clean.<?>

Building on Ingold (2011, 119), I argue that the “inhabitants [of Rainbow Bay] know how to read the [sea] as an intimate register of wind and weather.” By being focussed on how the weather is influencing the waves, the surfers extend the perception of the land-based notions of ocean as being static, fixed and bounded (Anderson 2012). Through keeping track of the weather, the surfers knew that the ocean could change any minute. They used different apps on their smartphones to keep track of the wind, the swell and tides. At the same time, they also checked the wave conditions several times a day by going to or driving past the beach.<?> Keeping track of the weather pattern was something the surfers in Rainbow Bay were constantly busy with. “It is the beginning, the middle and the end of every day. Of every moment. Surfing, the ocean. It is constantly in my mind,” Jack states passionately, “I am sure that is with most surfers. It does not matter what kind of job they have. Surfing would come into their heads quite a few times in a day!”<?>

<?> Field notes, Informal Conversations Diary, 19.04.2019

<?> Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019

<?> Fieldnotes, Surf Diary, 25.03.2019

<?> Field notes, Informal Conversations Diary, 28.03.2019

<?> Interview, Jack, 24.03.2019

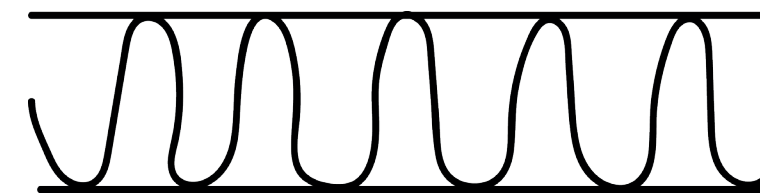


Figure 1: An illustration of the rhythm of the land, a rhythm that is the same nearly every day restricted by the static structures of clocked time and work.



Figure 2: An illustration of the always changing rhythm of the sea. The comparison with the rhythm of the land shows that the two rhythms do not align.

Thus, the perception of the sea of surfers in Rainbow Bay extends the land-based notions of the ocean as being static, fixed and bounded (Anderson 2012). The in-depth knowledge of the changing conditions of the weather pattern creates a sense of the sea, which differs from land-locked notions where the ocean “appears as blue, flat, and unchanging: stable in both space and time” (Steinberg 2013, 159). The incorporation of the changing sea in the daily routine of the surfers illustrates that the sea cannot be written off as a space beyond society (Steinberg 2013, 160). Reflecting on the daily routine of surfers in Rainbow Bay, the sea is not just a place where surfers surf, it is a rhythm that dictates their daily lives. To explain their daily routine, many surfers discussed their work ethics with me.<?> Like Stranger (2010, 1120), who argues that that “a surfer needs a combination of flexible lifestyle and luck in order to be in the right place at the right time,” surfers in Rainbow Bay pointed out the great importance of flexibility in their work. “I can start at 7 and finish at 3. Or I can start at 9 and finish at 5. Or if there is nothing pressing on, I can just say I am not coming in tomorrow. So that helps. That really makes a difference. I think it would not be sustainable working full time” Zoe explains. Many surfers in Rainbow Bay have turned down full time jobs, simply for the fact that they want to be able to arrange their day based on the changing rhythm of the ocean. When all the elements are in harmony and create great waves, which may only be for an hour or two before the conditions change again (Stranger 2010), surfers want to be able to surf in the morning before work and in the afternoon after work. If the waves are really good, they want to be able to surf the whole day. And if the waves are good in the middle of the day, they want to be able to take a break and go surfing.

<?> Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019; Interview, Jack, 24.03.2019; Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019; Interview, Chloe, 27.03.2019; Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019; Interview, Leo, 17.04.2019

“Land-Locked” vs. “Land-Sea-Figure-8”

To be able to surf the best wave conditions, the daily rhythm of the land has to be aligned with the changing rhythm of the waves. Ivy explained this dynamic of living with the rhythm of the ocean instead of clocked time to me as follows:

“Our life revolves around surfing; we are not doing anything else when the waves are good. When your friends surf, then the commitments are off. Like tonight, it would be nice to have sunset dinner, but everybody will be surfing at sunset. Because the waves are good. And that is acceptable. My sister, my brother and my mom don’t surf. My life is so different to theirs. But they understand my life. They are so used to having to be bend around it. Because everything revolves around surfing. If dinner is at 6, but the sun goes down at 6.30 and the surf is good, I will not be home until after the sun goes down. If you know a surfer, or your partner is a surfer, or your friends are surfers, and you don’t surf, eventually it shows very quickly that it is there. They are almost really selfish when there are waves. They don’t care about anything but being in the ocean.”

A balanced intertwinement of life on land and life in the sea has been stressed to be very important by all of the surfers I have talked to. Surfing on a daily basis creates a “healthy” balance for them, and therefore a reason to arrange their daily life based on the rhythm of the ocean. “It is like a big figure 8 movement,” Ella described the land-sea relationship by drawing a figure 8 on a paper for me, “What you see on the land influences how you surf in the water. What you do in the water can influence your impact of what you do on the land. A big figure 8 movement that is constantly cycling.” Living on the edge of the land and the sea, being able to surf on a daily basis creates the structure for this balanced life. “Surfing has a huge impact on me. On everything I do... especially on my mental clarity. As I said before, when I wasn’t surfing for when I was overseas, I started to feel quite down,” Chloe stresses the importance of a balanced land-sea-figure-8.

If for any reason, surfers were drawn away from the sea, the term “land-locked” came up in conversations. “Being land-locked” was described as a way of living away from the ocean for a longer period of time. They used the metaphor of a downwards spiral, to explain the mental and physical anxiety they felt when being away from the ocean. The rhythm of the land was perceived as creating a claustrophobic feeling, a tightening spiral. “Living in places where there is no surf, you get quite

Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

Interview, Greta, 04.05.2019; Interview, Harvey, 27.04.2019; Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019; Interview, Jack, 24.03.2019; Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019; Interview, Chloe, 27.03.2019; Interview, Zoe and Josh, 28.03.2019; Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019

Interview, Chloe, 27.03.2019

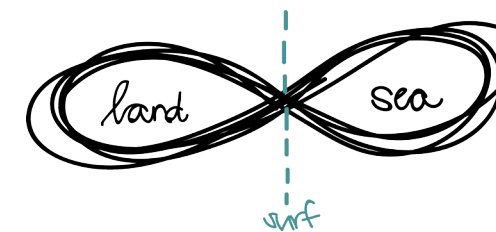


Figure 3: Illustration of a balanced life; the land-sea relationship based on a figure 8.



Figure 4: Illustration of a downwards spiral as a representation of the term land-locked.

depressed. It is really crazy” Chloe told me when discussing the phenomenon. And when I asked Ivy if she would go inland for a longer period of time, she answered; “No, I don’t think so. I would go stir crazy!” Mila answered similar when saying, “It wasn’t until I got a bit older that I realized how good the ocean is. And that I could never live without it. Just like the change of state when you dive in and pop up... In an instant you are a different human. It is pretty powerful that it can change you mentally in like half a second.”

“We are not in control”

During one our interview, Michael explained his appeal to the changing rhythm of the ocean. “I think surfing is more interesting and challenging. You know why? Because surfing is always different. I have this theory. I call it ‘The theory of the variables of surfing’. You know with surfing; the only constant variable is your surfboard, as long as you just ride the same board of course,” he explained, “But everything else changes all the time. Your mood, your mental state, your body, the waves, the current, the wind. It is always different. That is what I like about surfing. It is fascinating!” Michael’s ‘theory of the variables of surfing’ illustrates that even though one can forecast the weather pattern and have an idea of how it will influence the waves, there are too many other variables in the surf that one cannot control.

On the 25th of February, a large swell originated by a huge tropical storm in front of the coast, came in Rainbow Bay. For four days, there were waves of approximately six meters. This big swell

Interview, Michael, 30.03.2019

illustrates that the surf-place only exists in constant interaction with the long term movement of the ocean floor (Brown and Humberstone 2016, xii; Steinberg 2016, xiii). Because of the large swell, all the sandbanks of Rainbow Bay were washed away. Where before the storm the waves would break beautifully at Rainbow, after the storm the surf break was completely gone. “Maybe we should all get a shovel and dig out the sand. Maybe that would bring back the sand banks” Greta joked about the fact that they could not master or tame the rhythm of the natural (Tsing 2013).

According to Mila, we are not in control of anything anyway; “You might to get out at the back and it does not matter whether you are Kelly Slater or not. It could be that the ocean says no today. And you are just this vulnerable, insignificant piece of matter that is in the waves, in the ocean. Kicked around.” She told me that the question of how much control we have is a major question in her life. “If you think about it... We are dictated by the sun, but actually we are in this galaxy,” Mila looks up and spreads her arms, “If that sun gets a bit hotter, we are all screwed right? Then we are going to die. We think that we are in control. But compared to the bigger picture, like the macro scale... We are not really!” This acceptance of the fact that certain elements are out of our reach to control, contrasts the assumption put forward by land-based structures, such as clocked-time and fixed work hours, that control is necessary and needs to be maintained (Brymer and Schweitzer 2013). By accepting that the rhythm of the sea cannot be controlled, the surfers in Rainbow Bay also review the structures on land. Ivy explains this dynamic when comparing the way of living in a city to the life of surfers:

“I think that people in cities are to more likely to forget... They lose connection, they lose touch with the important kind of things. It is like a mass movement. Whenever you have a lot of people doing a certain thing, you are kind of incapable of thinking individually. People don't often get to escape that. Whether they realize that it is like that or not. But surfers get to do that often. They kind of breach that. When you are out in the water, it is really easy to think individually and think about the problems that... why they are problems. And what they mean to you.”

Thus, adapting the fluidity, flexibility and changing nature of the ocean, creates the possibility to open up and create a “condition of being alive to the world, characterised by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next” (Ingold 2011, 67–68). This condition creates the ability to literally take a step

<?> Field notes, Informal Conversation Diary, 23.04.2019

<?> Kelly Slater is said to be the best surfer of all times. He has set a record by winning the WSL Champion tour 11 times and is still on the tour this year.

<?> Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019

<?> Quote from Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

away from the societal structures of the land, to ‘sea’ the land, and throw the solidity of the ground itself into doubt (Ingold 2011, 131). By accepting that the rhythm of the sea cannot be controlled, the surfers in Rainbow Bay also review the structures on land. and think about what matters. To reflect on and take time to think about possibilities within the land-based structures which for land-locked people might seem fixed and stable.



This chapter has illustrated that the rhythm of the ocean is influenced by many elements of nature; wind, swell, currents and tides. The rhythm is constantly changing, every day the rhythm is different. The rhythm of the land on the other hand, is mainly dictated by societal structures such as clocked time and work. These structures are perceived as restrictions, since they produce a rhythm which is not aligned with the changing rhythm of the ocean. To align the rhythm of the land with the changing rhythm of the ocean is a big challenge for the surfers in Rainbow Bay. However, if surfers manage to create enough flexibility in their land rhythm, in order to go along with the rhythm of the ocean, a balanced figure-8-movement between the land and the sea is created. The matter of the next chapter will be to show that this balance between life on land and life in the sea creates the fundament for a sense of ‘freedom’.

Interlude 2

This was probably the most important surf session during my time in Australia. Maybe even the most important in my whole life. Whilst walking to the beach with my friend Noah, he suddenly started analysing my surfing ability; "You know, yesterday we were watching you. And actually, you are doing great. Your pop-up is really good and fast. We all think that you are ready for the next step. Now you need to surf green waves. Don't do the white-water waves anymore. I know you can surf down the line. You just have to do it!" I tell him that once I paddle for a wave, I never know what to do. I still feel very insecure. "I know the feeling, exactly, you know. It also took me a very long time to get it. But once you have popped up on a normal wave, you will get that it is actually way easier than popping up in the white-water," he explains and continues, "I will help you. Just paddle really hard when I tell you to. And then when you feel that the wave is pushing you forwards, before the wave breaks, you just pop up and then surf down the line. I know that you can do it!" His confidence inspires me, and I answer, "Ok, you make me feel more confident. Let's try it!"

We paddle out together, which is very easy today. The waves are small. Clean and glassy. No wind at all and the current is not too bad. And then just after two minutes of looking at the horizon and trying to read the incoming waves, Noah tells me to paddle. I paddle hard, feel the wave underneath me and then I just pop up without even thinking about it. I don't really know what is happening. I gasp. I am on the wave, had a good fluent take off and am now surfing the wave down the line. I can't believe it is really happening. I feel the adrenaline rushing through my body. When I jump off my board at the end of the wave, I can't wait to get back to get another one. I feel like the happiest girl in the world. All the tiredness of the last couple of days is just washed away in these few seconds. I know I can do this again. Noah is cheering for me from the line-up.

I take a deep breath, position my body right on my surfboard and start paddling back out again. My shoulders are already a bit sore. But I keep on paddling. Trying to find a rhythm. "Don't forget to breathe. 1,2,3,4. Again. 1,2,3,4," I tell myself and count my paddles. I need to paddle a bit faster to not get wiped out. "Only a few more meters," is what I tell my body. And then I am back in the line-up. I push my body up and sit

*on
my board.*

Another deep breath. And a little break to soak in the beauty of the environment. The sky is completely clear, and the sun is shining. The water is crystal clear. Turquoise. Bright. I can see my feet while sitting on my board. The light of the sun and the movement of the water surface creates a beautiful play of shadow on my legs. Soaking in positivity and energy. Constantly watching the horizon and keeping track of the movement of the water. And then the blue water turns into a wave, rolling towards me. The lip of the wave starts to foam. I turn my surfboard around, have a quick look over my shoulder while paddling as hard as I can. I look to the front again. The only thing I can see is the nose of my board gliding over the water. My back is hollow. My abs contracted. My arms are diving into the water one after the other. I don't have to think about it. I feel the wave coming closer. I hear it coming. I hear the foam. I paddle even harder. Another quick look over my left shoulder to check whether there is no one else on the wave and to check how close the wave is. I feel the energy of the wave pushing my surfboard forwards. Without really thinking about it I pop up. First a quick glance at my feet. Yes, they are on the board. I feel the wax underneath my feet. I feel the grip it gives me. Then my head goes up and I look what the wave is doing. I try to anticipate. Keep on riding. Trying to stay as high on the lip as possible. Ride the wave in a wavy flow. Up and down. I go lower with my body to make some more speed. To get as far as possible before I slow down and lose the energy of the wave. My board stops gliding. I keep standing on it for one last second. Then I jump off my board. The best feeling. Still high on positivity for a second. I close my eyes and let my body hit the water.

Again, a perfect take off. I just went down the line the fastest I have ever gone. I can't believe that I actually did it. It feels like a major breakthrough. A major step forward. I feel strong and confident. I feel like I finally know the pattern of the surf break and that I can read the waves properly. I come back up to the surface with a big smile on my face.

Chapter 3

Freedom under the Rainbow

This chapter will extend on the ideas of the „land-sea-figure-8“ and „land-locked“ described in the previous chapter, by linking them to the concept of freedom. I will indicate how freedom acquires meaning in Rainbow Bay by illustrating how different narratives of freedom are constructed in relation to the land and the sea. I first draw a brief overview of the concept of freedom under the anthropological lens of Tsing (2015). Afterwards, I will illustrate the different aspects of freedom in Rainbow Bay by drawing on life stories of surfers I met during my fieldwork.

An anthropological lens on Freedom

An anthropological lens on the concept of freedom acknowledges that cultures perform their ideas of freedom differently. These ideas of freedom all construct their own set of norms and values and new senses of freedom can constantly be created (Humphrey 2007). This approach highlights that freedom is a culture-specific concept creating different worlds of value and meaning on an individual and collective level (Humphrey 2007, 9). Deriving from this anthropological lens, there is no such thing as a universal ideal of freedom (Wierzbicka 1997, 153).

Surfers describe the feeling of riding a wave as a form of self-transcendence and happiness, but above all, as a feeling of freedom (James 2017, 41-42). The connection with the natural environment can be considered as key to the surfers' perception of freedom. Without a wave, one cannot surf. And without surfing this feeling of freedom could not even exist (Ormrod 2005). Ultimately a wave in itself can be seen as the basis of feelings of freedom. Taussig (1998, 260) points out the fragility of this freedom as it comes and goes with the movement of the wave. Riding a wave, to him, is a magical but

temporary escape. The moment and experience of this freedom is hard to grasp since the waves are in constant motion. In this sense, the construction of the perception of freedom is not only cultural, but very much entangled with the natural environment.

Therefore, in order to understand the surfers' freedom in Rainbow Bay, I am making use of Tsing's (2015) conceptualization of freedom. Freedom, put by Tsing, is a collaboration of multiple species, an assemblage of human and non-human activity. Thus, by displacing the human-centric perspective of freedom, this lens on freedom makes it possible to incorporate the significance of environmental contributions. By understanding the surfers' freedom through the lens of Tsing, the ocean can be viewed as an actor in the construction of freedom. Furthermore, this lens also highlights the fluidity of the concept of freedom. Freedom, so she essentially points out, can become many different things and gain many different meanings. Therefore, it should not be seen as static and homogeneously defined. By analysing various individual narratives, Tsing (2015) unravels the multifaceted characteristic of the concept of freedom. Her exploration of the different interpretations of the concept of freedom, exemplifies that "one must allow it to be an emic term" (Tsing 2013, 28). In the subsequent two parts, I will therefore analyse the surfers' perception of freedom of in Rainbow Bay by displaying their individual narratives of freedom.

“I guess it is freedom from the land”

“Working less than surfing,” is one of the first things Leo tells me when we start talking about freedom. His choices in life exemplify that he values a balance between “working for money” and “free leisure time” the most. Leo is a 34-year-old man who grew up in Brisbane and moved to the Gold Coast six years ago. Ever since, he decided that the lifestyle of a surfer is the way he wants to live the rest of his life. “I wouldn't be able to move back to Brisbane or somewhere land-locked, where there aren't waves.” By saying that, he gives a deeper notion to the idea of “being land-locked” and links it to freedom. Staying flexible and having not too many responsibilities is something that influences many of his life choices. To him, being land-locked and having a nine-to-five-job is a restriction to his freedom; “I can't do a nine to five.... My whole thing with my Uni degree and everything else that I'm doing, is to stay flexible. Like I'm more lifestyle orientated. It's probably naive to think that I can tie in exactly what I want to do with the lifestyle I want to live. But my priorities, they're more on the lifestyle next to work.”

Next to his study, Leo works for a car renting company. He works flexible hours and earns just as much to sustain the lifestyle of surfing more than working. The place where he lives is not fancy, but it has everything he needs. He tells me that it is his conscious choice to not have kids, being married, having a mortgage and a big house. He is well aware that materialistically speaking, he has got “nothing really,” but the fact of not having too much responsibilities makes him feel “liberated” and “sleep easy

at night.” We move on to the topic of money. “You know, money is all relative,” he states, “I’ve got enough money for myself. I’ve got my savings. I’ve got my rainy-day fund. I’m not totally irresponsible to that.” Leo does not value money as much as the time he is able to spend in the ocean. He perceives the independency he deliberately creates in his life of not being locked down by social and economic responsibilities as “just a little bit more freedom” compared to non-surfers.⁴⁴

His girlfriend Greta, however, has a slightly different narrative of freedom. Greta started surfing together with her twin sister Lily, when she was 6 years old. They grew up in Sydney, about 15 minutes from the beach and would ride their bikes with surf racks on them to carry a surfboard to the beach every day before school. “We would surf until 8.45am, go in, have a shower and stash our boards in the bush. Then go to school and then do the same thing after school until dark. Then ride home and not do homework” Greta told me nostalgically. Without finishing high school, she moved up to a flat in Coolangatta when she was 17 to become a professional surfer. However, during the three years that she was competing on the Qualifying Series,⁴⁵ the pressure of the competition scene took away her love for surfing. “But now I love it again. And I ride all kinds of different boards. It’s my favourite thing in the whole entire world” she explains to me with a big smile on her face. Free surfing⁴⁶ makes her mentally and physically balanced in life. When I ask what she feels when being out in the water there is only one word, she keeps on saying, namely “happiness”. Greta’s adds the element of mental liberation and physical freedom when saying; “I guess it is freedom from the land. Which is freedom from whatever is going on in your life. You can kind of leave that at the shore. You are kind of free from the weight and what holds you down on land. Like a physical part of freedom. Being able to dance on the water, that you usually sink into, makes you feel free and alive.”⁴⁷ Compared to the land, there are no stable structures in the ocean within which one has to move. Therefore, Greta’s narrative illustrates how freedom linked to surfing can create an experience of physical liberation next to unknotting from socio-cultural restraints on land (Brymer and Schweitzer 2013, 870).

Whereas Greta’s idea of freedom is very much entangled to Rainbow Bay, as being free to surf in this exact spot every day, Ivy’s story adds a slightly different notion to it. Like Greta, Ivy also tried to be a professional surfer but also said farewell to this dream a couple of years ago. Now she mainly aspires to become a big wave surfer.⁴⁸ Unlike any other surfer I have interviewed during my fieldwork, Ivy does not live in Rainbow Bay. She has consciously decided to live in a van, to be even more flexible and mobile. “I live in a van so that I don’t have to pay rent. So that I can move around and chase waves

44 Drawn from Interview, Leo, 17.04.2019

45 The Qualifying Series is a series of competition events to qualify for the World Championship Tour, like for example the Quiky Pro.

46 Free surfing here refers to surfing without being in a contest.

47 Drawn from Interview, Greta, 04.05.2019

48 Surfing in waves which are at least 20 feet (6.2 m) high.

and surf,” she argues, “I want to be able to travel and go surfing. And I also wanted to live out at Streaky Bay where I can wait for the swells that this wave gets to like 20feet on. I don’t want to be stuck in a city.” The perks of living in a van, to her, is being able to save money whenever she is away. Rather than paying 1000 dollar rent, by living in her van, she can spend that money on surfing. To sustain the highest possible flexibility in her life, she also only works part time and studies externally. “I don’t want to be scheduled to have to go to Uni on this day or that day. I don’t want to be tied down anywhere,” she explains, “Everything kind of shifts into allowing more surf time in better waves.” The highest value for Ivy is mobility. She wants to be free from being locked down to a place or a time schedule. In other words, she wants to be free from the rhythm of the land; “The rules that are in society on land are not applicable to the ocean. The rules that we have, are the rules of courtesy. They are not actual laws and rules. The fact that we are no longer governed by these laws and rules, makes us feel free when we are out there as well. It is like an escape!”⁴⁹



Figure 5: Illustration of a sense of freedom generated from applying the rhythm of the sea to the structures of the land.

Reflecting on Chapter two, in all the narratives of freedom so far, it repeatedly appears that the surfers are looking for a way to align the rhythm of the land and the rhythm of the ocean. When they manage to live by the rhythm of the ocean within the structures of the land, a sense of freedom is created. Relating this back to Tsing’s (2015) anthropological lens on freedom, the surfers’ narratives of freedom in Rainbow Bay exemplifies an assemblage of human and environmental activity. Without incorporating the ocean as an actor, only a very limited understanding of freedom could have been illustrated.

“We surfers are like dolphins”

Thomas, a former professional surfer and now the owner of a surf school, told me the following whilst talking about the role of the ocean in the surfers’ freedom; “There are a lot of companies out there that can ruin the ocean. You know, we surfers are like dolphins. We live in the ocean. What if there is something like an oil spill and we cannot go surfing anymore? The psych of people will definitely be affected then. If no one can go surfing, people will get very frustrated and angry!” By pointing out the precarity of the ocean, Thomas links the fundament of the surfers’ freedom to the environment and like

49 Drawn from Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

dolphins, he perceives the surf-place as his habitat. In Thomas' narrative, freedom is derived from being at one and in peace with a healthy ocean.⁵⁰

Chloe also stressed the importance of a healthy ocean to me, however, went one step further my stating that surfers are the ones to protect the ocean; "It is just a common for surfers, for us to protect the ocean. Even though it wouldn't even reach us up here. If there was a spill... It's just the fact that these big companies are coming near... they are not doing things properly. The effects it could have on the environment are huge."⁵¹ Here Chloe refers to the Norwegian company *Equinor*, that wants to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight, home to many famous and great surf breaks in the South of Australia. On March 17th, I joined Chloe and Greta to a protest against this company. The protest was held in the form of a paddle-out, organized by Patagonia, Surfrider Foundation Australia and the Great Australian Bight Alliance. From the very moment Greta and Chloe heard of the paddle-out, they started to prepare for the "big day". Chloe came over to our house and we sat on the kitchen floor the whole afternoon to make signs with texts saying "#fightforthebight", "no drill, no oil" and "Fuck off Equinor!". On the day itself we drove to Burleigh Heads, where the paddle-out was held, very early in the morning, to make sure that we would get a parking spot. During our wait on the beach for the paddle-out to start, Greta and Chloe proudly presented their signs to the many friends we ran into. It was a huge turn up, around 3000 surfers joined the paddle-out.⁵²

Protesting against Equinor has illustrated that if anything, or anyone, comes and threatens the healthy existence of the ocean, the surfers unite to protect the fundament of their freedom; namely the ocean. Even though the surfers not all act on acutely developed ecological ethics and realization of environmental justice, but rather out of self-preservation, they were the ones who stood up against the multinational giant. This sense of environmentalism, or even activism, illustrates that the surfers of Rainbow Bay perceive the structures of the land not as static and unchangeable. If they want, they can bend the structures on the land by standing up for themselves and withhold others to maintain control over the ocean and their freedom. At the same time, this also draws attention to the fragility of the surfers' freedom, since, as we have seen, the structures of the land are constantly challenging the surfers to life by the rhythm of the ocean.



This chapter has displayed that when surfers in Rainbow Bay speak of freedom, they mainly narrate freedom as in "being free from the land." Any land-based regulations, such as working or paying rent

⁵⁰ Drawn from Interview, Thomas, 27.03.2019

⁵¹ Interview, Chloe, 27.03.2019

⁵² Drawn from field notes, Daily Diary, 17.03.2019. To get a sense of the paddle out, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VzS9p6QMDc>.

and being locked down to one place, are believed to be an assault of their freedom (Nazar 2004). It can be said that the surfers' freedom in Rainbow Bay is narrated as an alignment of the rhythm of the land with the rhythm of the ocean. Ultimately, the ocean is perceived as the surfer's habitat and therefore also as the fundament of their freedom. The paddle-out protest has exemplified how surfers are willing to unite to protect their habitat, and thus their freedom. Yet at the same time, threat of a multinational to gain control over the ocean, has also illustrated the fragility of the surfers' freedom. Therefore, the next chapter will take the understanding of the fragility of the surfers' freedom to a next level, by elaborating more in depth on how the surfers' freedom exists simultaneously inside and outside of land-based capitalist structures.⁵³

⁵³ Before continuing to the next chapter, I recommend watching the video on the attached USB stick.

Capitalist Contestations of the Surfers' Freedom

The previous chapter has illustrated how the surfers' freedom is narrated and at the same time how land-based structures are perceived as a restriction to this freedom. Tsing (2015, 61) argues that the structures of capitalism have taken over the land like "a giant bulldozer." Nowadays, everyone and everything depends on the logic of capitalism. Based on this argument, freedom exists "simultaneously inside and outside of capitalism" (2015, 63). Here I refer back to Ivy's quote, with which I started the introduction of this thesis. In that quote, Ivy links the structures of the land to capitalism and explains how surfers can look at these structures from a different perspective.

To understand the surfers' freedom in the context of contemporary capitalist structures, this last chapter will elaborate on the fragility of the surfers' freedom as a modern social way of living under capitalism. The surfers' freedom will be analysed in the context of the capitalist processes of commodification and consumer culture. This will lead to the final argument that the surfers' freedom as "being free from the land" is not a static given, but something surfers in Rainbow Bay constantly have to safeguard.

Capitalist processes at stake in surfing

Before continuing on the surfers' perception of freedom, I briefly examine the notion of capitalism and its processes. Tsing (2015, 133) conceptualizes capitalism as a translation machine which turns humans and non-humans into capital, whereby the process of creating capital is described as follows;

"Alienation is that form of disentanglement that allows the making of capitalist assets. Capitalist commodities are removed from their life-worlds to serve as counters in the making of further investments [...] Thus, too, alienation makes possible accumulation – the amassing of investment capital." (Tsing 2015, 133)

Ultimately, capitalism can be seen as a system of alienation for concentrating wealth by turning both humans and the environment into resources of investment. Tsing (2015, 63) indicates that freedom in itself is a value produced without capitalist control. In other words, the object of exchange, which would be freedom in this context, cannot be produced as for example a surfboard or a wetsuit, because it has no material content. In order to create economic capital from an abstract idea like freedom, capitalists have to alienate it and turn it into a stand-alone object.

This process of alienation is reflected in the history of the surfing lifestyle. Back in the 1950's, surfing was identified as a counterculture against consumer culture and standardized mass production (Booth 2017). What once started as a lifestyle of freedom at the periphery of mainstream capitalism with some independent surfers, now turned into a multi-billion-dollar global industry (Buckley 2002; Usher 2017). The flow of popular media, tourism and consumption, has appropriated the image of the surfers' freedom into a desirable, and even more important, into a profitable lifestyle (Buckley 2002a). In *The Making and Breaking of Surfers Paradise*, Wayne Bartholomew (2015, 8-13), former Australian professional surfer, talks about how he has witnessed the Gold Coast in Australia morphing from "a sleepy coastal strip of sun, sand, surf and fishing into Australia's tourist capital." He points out that suddenly the area around the Gold Coast was portrayed by the surf media and other advertising narratives as *'the Surfers Paradise'*.⁵⁴ However, Bartholomew argues that from a surfer's perspective, the 'real' surfers paradise was the untouched, perfectly foiled sand bottom and uncrowded point breaks before this transition.

Reflecting on Tsing's (2015) conceptualization of alienation, commodification of the surfers' freedom can be boiled down to putting a monetary value on it that it didn't have in the first place (Devine 2017, 635) through mechanisms of standardization and appropriation (Duffy 2008). Booth (2017, 321) even states that the counterculture of surfing has come to a turning point through the capitalist process of commodification; "Mainstream industries, motivated by profit, appropriated surfing. In so doing they helped popularize the sport. Hollywood was the classic example. [...] Hollywood alienated surfing." Hereby he stresses the role of popular media as a key marketing tool in turning the surfers' freedom into an exchangeable good and integrating it in the global economy of consumption.

⁵⁴ An example of advertisement in which the area is described as "Surfers Paradise to me means fun and freedom" can be watched with this link; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUXnn9uXYng>.

“Money sucks. We should kill it”

Many surfers stated their concern about how marketing practices have appropriated the image of the surfers' freedom and sold it to the mainstream market. “Since I have been surfing, it has become really Americanised. With all the merchandise and... trying to make money of the sport”⁵⁵ Ivy points out her worry about the appropriation of surfing by the media in the last decade. Overall, there is a strong anti-capitalist tendency within the Rainbow Bay surf community; “It sucks. Money sucks. We should kill it. It sucks! It makes me really mad about surfing. It kind of puts you off it a little bit. It kind of makes you sad. With people and their marketing... It is just sucks!”⁵⁶ and “I am kind of against materialism and capitalism. But it is gonna continue, whether I like it or not!”⁵⁷ are two examples of strong statements against capitalist structures. Mila interprets the dilemma of commodification a bit more nuanced, when stating that “we do have an amazing lifestyle, so it makes sense to me that it is utilized for business. It is funny... You kind of want to share the amazingness of surfing, but then there are too many others. We are all out in the surf and getting in each other's way.”⁵⁸ These statements illustrate that in the narrative of freedom in Rainbow Bay a countercultural notion, as put forward by Booth (2017), still prevails. The professional competition scene perfectly illustrates this anti-commodification-sentiment of the surfing community.

From the 3rd until the 13th of April, the Quiky Pro was held at Snapper Rocks. Every year again, the first event of the World Championship Tour of surfing is held in Rainbow Bay. Two weeks before the event, the management started to build an event village with big tents to sell merchandise. All the brands who sponsored the event had a stand to put their merchandise in the spotlights. They also build a party tent for all the VIP's, a tent for the panel of the judges and a tent for the professional surfers. During the competition, the whole town was filled with spectators, a part of the ocean was enclosed only for the professional surfers and the voice of the sports caster echoed continually over the beach; “Keep your eyes on the line up folks... another beautiful ripping wave coming in... here goes mister Florence, the two times world champion... an air reverse, unbelievable... look at this... bam... showing us his style... these are the highlights we came to see... Florence takes the lead with a 6.67 and a 5.76... Ladies and gentlemen, don't forget to pick up some nice little merchandise from this year's competition!” The spectators on the beach were constantly reminded to visit the merchandise tents. The sportscast gave the feeling as if the merchandise was as important, or maybe even more important, than the surfing contest itself. ⁵⁹ Even though the Quiky Pro brought the best shortboarders of the world into town, most of my research participants did not watch the competition. Ella shared her negative sentiment about the event

55 Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

56 Quote from Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019

57 Quote from Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

58 Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019

59 Drawn from Field notes, Informal Conversations Diary, 03.09.04.2019

in the following words with me; “I mean there are probably some good thing about the Quiky Pro, I just have yet to find them. But I'll let you know when I do... It boosts the economy! That is the big reason they love to say. But... for what price?”

What distresses the surfers in Rainbow Bay the most, is the fact that they cannot influence the commodification of the surfers' lifestyle of freedom.⁶⁰ Like Watson and Kopachevsky (1994, 646) argue, “the question, in short, turns on who has the freedom to commoditize and manipulate the signs and images which are so central to modern consumer culture.” Drawing from Ella, the surfers in Rainbow Bay clearly do not experience the freedom to influence the commodified image of their lifestyle. This firstly exemplifies a resistance to the subsumption by mainstream popular culture. Secondly, it also illustrates a rejection of the colonization of the surfers' freedom by mainstream media and capitalist structure of commodification (Stranger 2010). The rejection and resistance towards the commodification of surfing mainly comes forward from the fact that the commodified image that is sold in popular media by the big brands, such as Rip Curl, Quiksilver and Billabong, does not correspond with the life surfers in Rainbow Bay lead. On the question whether the image surfing brands sell as surfing has anything to do with her, Ella stated that the commodified image was pretty different from her daily life as a surfer; “I see that they just promote what they think is popular. Really it is money again. It is literally just promoting this person to fill their pockets. There is so much they could do that would be different, like promoting people that are really good at surfing, not because of their status to make their clothes sell and to make their brand look better!”

Ella's statement highlights the process of the alienation of the surfing lifestyle in order to sell commodities. Stranger (2010, 1122) conceptualizes this process as hypercommodification, through which the media create symbolic tokens in order to create a stereotyped and fetishized narrative of the surfers' freedom. When looking at the advertisements of these large surfing brands myself, all that is shown are the lives of professional surfers.⁶¹ The daily lived reality of the surfers in Rainbow Bay are not portrayed. Reflecting on the conceptualized intertwining of freedom and capitalism by Tsing (2015), the process of hypercommodification illustrates how the surfers' freedom is alienated under capitalism and turned into a stand-alone object that barely has any relation to the personal lifeworlds of surfers in Rainbow Bay. Thus, it is not only the surfers in Rainbow Bay themselves who construct the perception of the surfers' freedom, but the narrative of freedom is also reinforced through fetishized storytelling presented by the surfing media and surf brands on a global scale.

The above described commodification processes have illustrated that the “relationship between the [capitalist] industry and the subculture [of surfing] is complex, sometimes inconsistent, sometimes

60 Interview, Ella, 04.04.2019; Interview, Mila, 23.04.2019

61 Examples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLL-2Vwdm4s>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2hLKOgcCEE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZD0ahZHgBM..>

turbulent, and as might be expected, inherently fluid” (Stranger 2010, 1120). By looking into the surfer’s relationship to the consumption of commodities, I will show that relationship between the surfers’ freedom and capitalist structures is even more complex.

“I work to pay my rent, and to buy new surfboards”

Even though the surfers of Rainbow Bay reject the big mainstream surfing brands and the consumption of their commodities, there is one commodity which they all spend a lot of money on; their surfboards. “I work to pay my rent, and to buy new surfboards. Haha!”⁶² Harvey joked when I was looking at the many different surfboards stashed in a surf rack in his house. All the surfers I spoke to have several boards. Even in the house I lived in, the living room was filled with surfboards. The following fragment of the interview with Ivy gives an example of the addiction of consuming surfboards:

K: How many surfboards do you have?

I: In total?! Uhm... To be honest I don't know! I have got 3 up here with me. I think there are 2 in my van. There is 3 sitting in back home. There is quite a few in my mom's shed, and then in my room in her house there is probably a few more. So that is like... 11, 12, 13. They are just short small wave boards. And then I have got 4 big wave boards. A 9"2, a 9"7, 7"8, 8"8. Yeah, maybe a few more. A couple of foamie's. I also have got a longboard. Pretty much all surfers... you want a new board. The best thing is getting a new board. And it doesn't matter how many you get; you will always be like 'oh I wouldn't mind one of those or one of those!'”⁶³

Hill and Abbott (2009, 283) argue that the consumption of surfboards is the biggest contradiction of the surfing lifestyle. Surfing, like most other sports, contains material content (Booth 2017). In order to surf, one needs lot of equipment, whereby the surfboard is the most essential piece. If it is cold, one also needs a wetsuit. If the sun is shining bright, one needs zinc to protect the skin. A leg rope is also handy. And not to forget, the surfing wax in order not to lose grip of the surfboard whilst riding a wave. All these commodities require a market for trading between production and consumption. When looking at consumption of goods in the surfing culture, Booth (2017, 318) talks about a cultural paradox, since “irrespective of its social, artistic, or spiritual content, surfing, like all cultures, contains material content.” In other words, the fact that surfing requires material content and the addiction of surfers to consume surfboards, creates a paradox in the notion of freedom as “being free from the land.”

⁶² Interview, Harvey, 27.04.2019

⁶³ Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

When it comes to the consumption of surfboards, the ideology of surfers freeing themselves from the land-based structures of capitalism, is continually contested. It is a constant negotiation between the capitalist structures and the safeguarding of individual morals and values. “Most young people want to surf like Kelly Slater, Mick Fanning, or Joel Parkinson. So they buy surfboards that are in the same style as what those guys ride,” Jack told me sarcastically, “But they are not going to be able to surf that properly. Haha, bloody idiots! They all think that they can surf like Kelly Slater. I mean, get real!”⁶⁴ Jack’s analysis of the consumption behaviour of surfers shows that surfers are indeed influenced by the above elaborated commodification processes. The glorification of the surfing skills of these surfers, therefore, creates the fact that surf equipment is not only consumed for its use value, but also for attached sign value of a lifestyle of freedom and resistance associated with surfing (Lanagan 2002). “I definitely do not think that the answer lies in moving into the middle of nowhere, riding a bike, not having a car. Yeah you need to be modern about it,” Ivy argues when we talk about the dilemma of a surfer living within a capitalist era, “You need to understand surfing in our current, like our modern times. You can’t just go back to living how you could in 1940’s.”⁶⁵ If the surfers would really implement the idea to create a lifestyle away from land-based structures, they would no longer be able to surf. Thus, even though the narrative of the surfers’ freedom is constructed as being free from structures of capitalism tied to the land, the heavy consumption of surfboards illustrates that they are very much entangled in these structures. Concludingly, even though the surfers in Rainbow Bay share an anti-capitalist sentiment, the surfers’ freedom could not exist without these structures on the land.



By extending the anthropological lens of Tsing (2015) on freedom and look into the interplay of capitalism and freedom, this last chapter has exposed the complexity of the surfers’ freedom. The surfers themselves are not the only ones narrating this freedom. Through the process of commodification, the notion of the surfers’ freedom has been appropriated and fetishized by the media and big surfing brands in order “to fill their pockets.” A resistance to the subsumption of the mainstream media and big surfing brands prevails within the Rainbow Bay surfing community. However, the addiction of consuming surfboards has exposed a cultural paradox in the narrative of freedom as “being free from the land.” Even though the surfers reject the structures of the land, by pursuing their addiction of consumption surfboards, they very much make use of these structures. Concludingly, it can be argued, that the surfers’ freedom, even though narrated as resistant to the capitalist structures on land, can only exist because of a relationship with the land.

⁶⁴ Interview, Jack, 24.03.2019

⁶⁵ Interview, Ivy, 12.04.2019

Interlude 3

My very last sunset surf session. I can't believe that it has been already three months of surfing in this bay. I lost count of the waves I have ridden these last days. Nearly every wave I paddled for, I easily caught. Surfing these last few days has given me so much energy. After every session I could not wait to get out into the line-up again. I feel really calm in the water now. More patient than in the beginning. Not stressed at all. Totally focused on the movement of the water, not thinking about anything related to the land.

I told all my friends that this would be my last sunset surf before I leave this place and go back to The Netherlands. At around 4pm Greta and I changed into our bathers, waxed our surfboards and walked to the beach. On the way to the beach we met Chloe and Ella. We walked to the water with the four of us, chatting and laughing. Catching up with each other. We paddled out together near the rocks of Little Mali.

Greta already takes off on her first wave. Chloe, Ella and I paddle out a little further. Before surfing some waves, we just sit on our boards to chat a little bit more. With the next wave coming in, Ella and Chloe turn around their longboards and start paddling to catch a wave together. As they take off, I hear them laughing.

Greta is paddling back towards me with a big smile on her face. "Kyra, start paddling NOW! I will give you a push, this is a perfect wave for you!" she shouts. I have a quick look behind me, and indeed there is a beautiful wave coming towards me without anyone else paddling for it. I turn around and start paddling. Greta is right behind me. When I feel the energy of the wave pushing my surfboard forward, Greta gives me a push. Now I am perfectly aligned with the speed of the wave. I pop up, turn around and surf all the way down to Greenmount. The sun is nearly going down. The sky is coloured in orange, pink and yellow. I ride towards the sun. What do I feel on that wave? I truly feel liberated. And very happy. In that very moment I believe I finally understand what the people were trying to articulate during the interviews when we

talked about freedom. My own surfing ability is finally good enough to be totally aligned with the flow of the ocean. I move freely down the line on the wave. My mind and body are in total balance and my friends are in the water too, with whom I can share this experience. And above all, nature is creating this beautiful picture of colours deepening my appreciation. I smile.

The wave comes to an end and I jump off my board into the water. For a little moment everything stands still. I come back up to the surface and see Leo and Rose sitting on their board. "Wow Kyra, that was a really nice one, ey!" Leos says with a big smile on his face. Together we paddle back to Little Mali, where we bump into Ava and Ryan. "Hey Kyra, how are you doing? Are you getting any?" Ryan asks. "Hey, nice to see you! Thanks, I am good. How are you?" I answer. We all sit on our boards next to each other, chatting about all the waves we have ridden today and watching the spectacle of the sunset. Enjoying and sharing this moment.

As we are sitting there, watching the horizon and scanning the water for waves, we suddenly see about five dolphins swimming in a wave in front of us. As the wave rolls towards us, two dolphins jump out of the water right next to us. The other dolphins swim underneath us as the wave moves on. We all laugh full of excitement. "I can't believe this. As if they came for you, Kyra. To say goodbye!" Ava cheers.

Conclusion

This thesis has depicted the lived reality of surfers in Rainbow Bay, a neighbourhood of the Gold Coast in Australia, through a triangulation of ethnographic methods based on the *Seascape Epistemology* (Ingersoll 2016). The academic written word has been supported by autoethnographic interludes, photos and a video. This form of ethnographic storytelling has been chosen to envisage Ingold's (2011) mind experiment of "sea-ing the land instead of land-ing the sea" and to broaden the dominant terrestrial perception of the world in which our planet is mapped out in two seemingly separate static and flat surfaces (Steinberg 2013). Sea-ing the land through the eyes of surfers in Rainbow Bay has questioned the solidity of land structures by showing how complex and dynamic the relationship between culture and nature is when viewed from the perspective of the ocean, rather than the land-locked perceptions that the world depicts. Telling the story of the surfing community in Rainbow Bay, enabled this narrative to contest the land-based ideas of the sea as a blank public space beyond society (Brown and Humberstone 2016, 16) by illustrating how living with the rhythm of the ocean can create a sense of freedom. The multifaceted characteristics of freedom have been laid out by placing the concept into the context of contemporary capitalist structures as suggested by the anthropological lens on freedom by Tsing (2015).

By outlining the context of the field, the environmental characteristics and the Rainbow Bay surf community, the thesis has begun to build up these arguments. The description of the area through the metaphor of a bubble has illustrated the strong bond that the Rainbow Bay surf community has with this particular surf break. It has been shown that the identity of the surf community is based on the different levels of waves. Therefore, the surf break of Rainbow Bay is not just a place where surfers surf, it very much influences how they live their daily lives. The interplay of the life on land and the life in the sea has been displayed by analysing each independent rhythm. It has been clarified that aligning these two rhythms is a big challenge for surfers in Rainbow Bay. A disconnection of these two rhythms is explained with the idea of being "land-locked." However, if surfers manage to create enough flexibility to create a "balanced-figure-8-movement" between the land and the sea, it has been argued that a sense of freedom is created. By analysing how various narratives of freedom are constructed by surfers in Rainbow Bay, the multifaceted characteristic of freedom has been highlighted. The surfers' freedom has emerged as "being free from the land." In other words, the surfers' freedom in Rainbow Bay is narrated

by applying the rhythm of the sea to the structures of the land. Thereby, land-based regulations, such as working or paying rent and being locked down to one terrestrial place, are perceived as an assault on their freedom.

In the end I have placed the surfers' freedom in the context of the contemporary capitalist structures of consumer culture and commodification, in order to elaborate on the fragility and complexity of the concept of freedom in a neoliberal era (Tsing 2013). On the one hand, the surfers reject the commodification of the surfers' freedom by mainstream media and big surfing brands in order to sell commodities. On the other hand, the addiction of consuming surfboards has exposed a cultural paradox in the narrative of freedom as being free from land-based structures. Even though the surfers perceive capitalism and its processes as an "enemy" to their freedom, the addiction of consuming surfboards has exemplified how the surfers' freedom is very much entangled with these capitalist structures. Therefore, even though in the narrative of the surfers, capitalist structures are constructed as an assault on their 'freedom', at the same time, these structures also create the fundament on which this freedom is built on. Without the capitalist system providing them economic stability, the sense of freedom narrated by the surfers of Rainbow Bay would be hard to establish in the first place. Unlike in many other countries, the economic prosperity in Australia makes it possible to work flexible hours in a simple job to earn enough money to sustain the surfer's lifestyle of freedom. Furthermore, the flexible working hours also illustrate that the surfers of Rainbow Bay do not blindly adapt the capitalist logic of progress and making big money and a career. Value is given to life not by a meaningful and important career, but much more by ways to create as less obligations as possible to live a life based on the rhythm of the ocean.

Reflecting on the research questions stated in the introduction of this thesis, "sea-ing the land" through the eyes of surfers in Rainbow Bay has put a step in the direction of broadening the knowledge of the human-sea relations and enhance empathetic forms of understanding the seascape. Thereupon, the complexity of the concept of freedom, in an era in which the capitalist logic of value has taken over the world, has been exposed.

One final note

By approaching human-sea relations through Ingold's (2011) mind experiment of "sea-ing the land," and freedom through the anthropological lens of Tsing (2015), this research broadens the academic knowledge of these concepts. Yet, as stated before, this research has been conducted by me, an intermediate female surfer on a Malibu surfboard. Limited by my own surfing abilities, the data collected about surfing and the daily interactions in the line-up are mainly based on mellow longboard waves. As put forward by Nazer (2004) and indicated by many surfers during my fieldwork, however, longboarding and shortboarding are two divergent ways of surfing with different social behaviour in the line-up. Furthermore, the subject of gender is attached to it, since most shortboard surf breaks are dominated by men (Waitt 2008). Within the scope of this thesis, unfortunately there has been no room for further discussion on the topic of gender within the surfers' freedom. Therefore, for prospective studies on the surfers' freedom and their relationship with the ocean, I suggest taking this aspect into account and research the surfing lifestyle with extended skills of riding a wave.

Epilogue

“Welcome back to the real life!”, everybody said to me. But who says that this life is more real than the life people have in Rainbow Bay? It feels really weird to be back in Utrecht. Back in the structures of the land. The anxiety I felt when first entering the sea in Rainbow Bay, is the same anxiety I feel now. Everything is fixed, tied to the static-ness of the land. Walking through the streets feels claustrophobic to my mind. So many people who rush through the fixed landscape of buildings and streets. There is no room for flexibility. The flow of time feels structured too. Not much has changed. Life just went on in the static frames made to live in. Whereas in Rainbow Bay every day was a new surprise of how the wind, the sun, the tides and the currents would be, here there are not many changing elements.

I instantly not only feel disconnected with my body; but I feel that same disconnection to nature. As if there is a layer put between me and the earth. I feel trapped in these land structures. Not free to move, not free to think. There is no room for flexibility. Everything is already shaped. Predetermined. I don't have the space to think. I am very aware of being land-locked again. Far away from the flexibility and balance the rhythm of the ocean gave me in Rainbow Bay.

I think back to what Ava told me whilst checking out the surf one day. “Know what you want and act according to that. It is so easy to let these structures shape your life, your way of thinking and your interests. Don't let your life be influenced by structures, cultural expectations and other people. Adapting to changes brings you forward, staying in pre-shaped structures slows you down,” she explained. I have learned that the surfers' freedom starts with confidence. Confidence to make choices and confidence to believe in yourself. “Surfing is one of the best lessons to teach you that. You can go surfing with other people, but in the end, you paddle for a wave. No one else can ride a wave for you. Never hesitate too long, otherwise the wave has either already gone or someone else takes it.”

This may sound selfish to others, but in my opinion, it shows strength. Unlike here in Utrecht, the people in Rainbow Bay do not let their daily rhythm be dictated by the structures of time and money. They are confident enough to choose for themselves and not get trapped in these structures. They have found creative ways to life a free life within these land-locking structures. A way of living that has truly inspired me as a surfer, as a person, and as a researcher.

*Somewhere at Rainbow Bay,
Blue waves are ridden every day.
And dreams of freedom,
They really do come true.*

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Appendix

A selection of the visual recordings of my surfing diary to broaden the representation and understanding of the surfing lifestyle in Rainbow Bay.



> The land with skyscrapers and surf shops (01.05.2019)



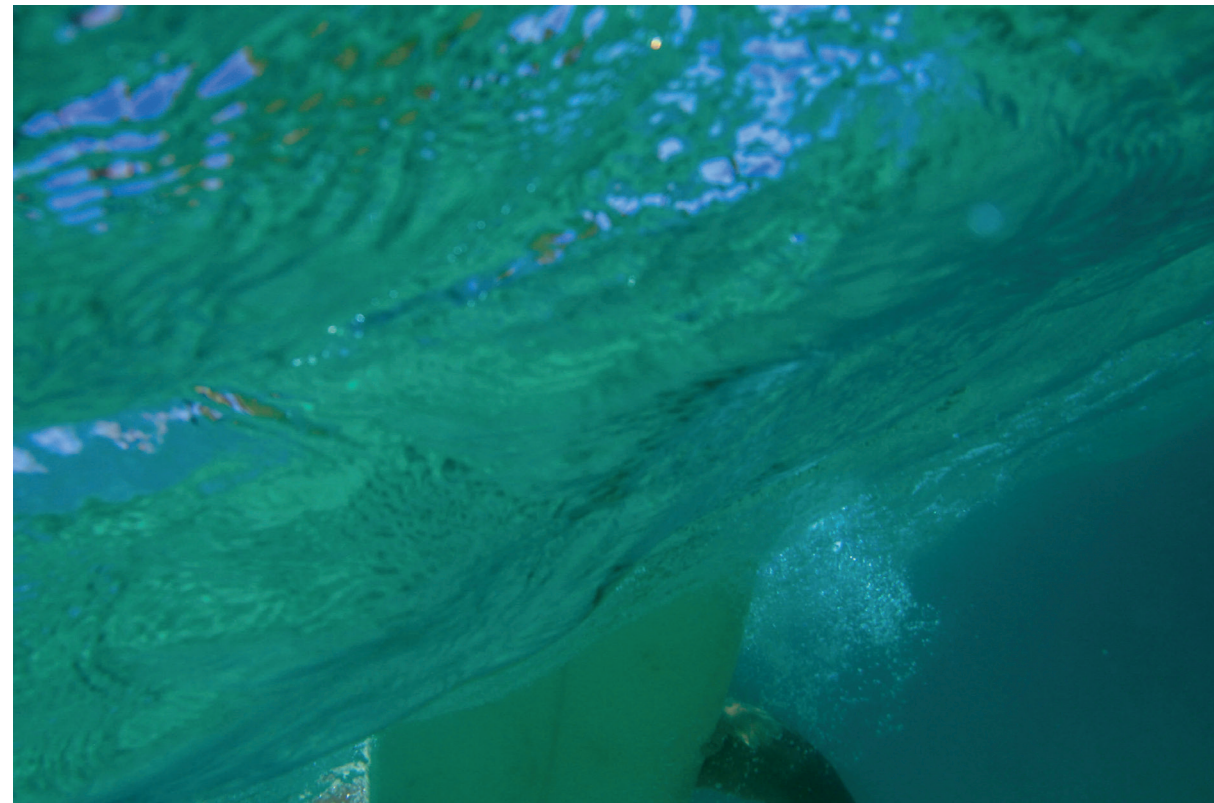
> *The fluid surface of the sea (28.04.2019)*





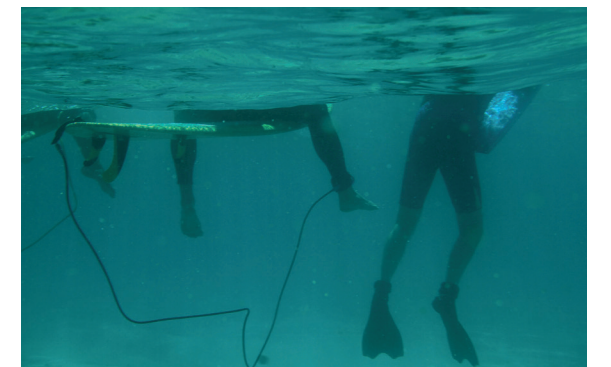
> Sea-ing the land (on the left) vs.
Land-ing the sea (on the right)
(21.04.2019)

> The structure of the sea floor creating the water to break into waves. Without the sand, no waves (28.04.2019)



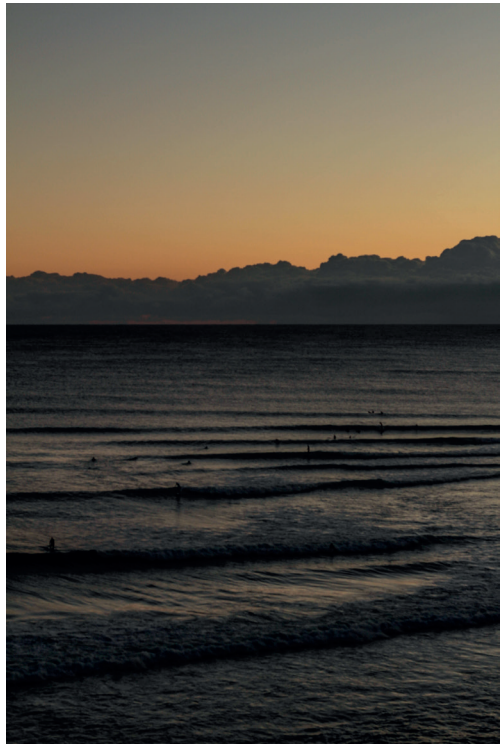


> *The dynamic in the line-up, a constant interaction between rushing to paddle for a wave as a selfish act, and waiting for a new set to come in whilst socialising with other surfers (28.04.2019)*





> A crowded line-up. In the above photo the woman drops in on the guy on the right, while the guy on the left is about to drop in on the woman (31.03.2019)



> From dusk until dawn, there are always heaps of surfers in the water (29.04.2019)

