

# **Kitesurfing: Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

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# Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Jarret Geenen

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# **Ethics Approval**

This research obtained ethics approval 11/53 from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 30, 2011.

# Abstract

This thesis examines the actions, (inter)action and practices exemplified in the lifestyle sport of kitesurfing. The phenomenon of ‘lifestyle sport’ (Wheaton 2004b) has received increasing empirical attention over the past fifteen years as it has become a prevalent component within contemporary life. Drastic increases in participation, the manifestation of sporting subcultures and the growing adventure tourism industry has given impetus to various academic approaches to investigating the nature of this phenomenon.

This thesis approaches the relatively newly emergent lifestyle sports of kitesurfing from a multimodal mediated theoretical (Norris 2013a) perspective. On the grounds that key characteristics of lifestyle sport are the consumption and employment of emerging technologies and participation in unbounded and liminal spaces, this thesis examines the complex and dynamic ways in which social actors act, (inter)act and employ mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action. The thesis is based on a one-year video-ethnography, as well as empirical methods and methodological notions from Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (Norris 2004, 2011).

This thesis is theoretical in nature and through the employment of ethnographic methods and audio-video analysis, I have developed multiple theoretical notions which are useful in understanding the complexities of mediated action.

First, by conceptualising kitesurfing as a system of mediated action, I have found four characteristics which exemplify the system itself: 1. Systems of mediated action develop to serve socio-cultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational, or creative functions; 2. Systems of mediated action change in direct connection with mediational means/cultural tools; 3. Systems of mediated action manifest embedded

systems; and, 4. Systems of mediated action manifest some of the same actions as belonging to and/or creating different practices.

Second, through developing the concept of actionary pertinence as being the primary organising component in the ways in which social actors read, interpret and value elements of the natural environment. I have found that social actors conceive of kitesurfing locations through the system of mediated action and resultantly, as intimately intertwined with the mediational means through which action occurs.

Third, I have found that mediation is most accurately conceptualised as a property of the interrelationship between multiple interconnected mediational means. The ways in which mediational means function in the equation is always and only in relation to multiple others, therefore, it is analytically necessary to consider the complex interrelationships that manifest through mediated action.

Fourth, I have used the notion of touch/response-feel (Norris 2012); and found that the actions and (inter)actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing are primarily characterisable as a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel whereby social actors co-construct and co-create more complex and temporally fleeting mediational means which are then employed in subsequent mediated actions. In doing so, social actors develop a practice of predication regarding the ways in which particular touch(es) will produce particular response-feel(s).

Finally, in my discussion I articulate utility of participation as a methodological tool showing that it can provide an affective, in-the-moment and material foundation for the analysis of data while ensuring the maintenance of a localised perspective in the approach to haptic, somatic and kinesthetic phenomena.



# **1 Introduction: Kitesurfing: Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

## **1.1 Introduction: Kitesurfing, Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

This thesis is primarily theoretical in nature. The employment of participatory methods of data co-creation, ethnographic methods of interviewing, taking field notes and the analysis of audio-video data exemplifying the real-time mediated actions undertaken by kitesurfing practitioners themselves, has resulted in the development of notions which contribute to the growing body of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b).

The theoretical notions articulated in the analysis sections of this thesis further contribute to championing the mediated action as the most useful unit of sociocultural research. Further, this thesis exemplifies the anti-reductionist ethos of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) and makes significant contributions to understanding the complexities of mediated action, mediation, practice and participation.

Simultaneously, the contributions to theory exemplify the utility of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) for approaching thematically differentiated phenomena through maintaining an analytical orientation towards the moments in time where the complexities of individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes materialise in real-time mediated action (Wertsch 1985, 1991, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2005). The data analysis sections articulate the utility of theoretical notions in elucidating the mediated actions exemplified in kitesurfing and further support the necessity of allocating analytical attention to the local and material realities of the practitioners themselves.

## 1.2 Rationale of the Study

Contemporary research examining the complexities of human action, interaction, and experience has focused on a wide variety of phenomena. Simultaneously, endeavours to explicate the idiosyncrasies and cultural complexities of lifestyle sport participation and practice have gained considerable attention as a result of the burgeoning popularity of the activities, media publicity and the growing adventure tourism industry. Research in the two different domains of sociocultural and semiotic research, namely Multimodality and Sport and Leisure Studies, have progressed in relative isolation of each other, except for a few exploratory investigations (Jones 2011a, 2011c, 2012; Norris 2012).

While there has been a wealth of research investigating the phenomenon of lifestyle sport (Donnelly & Young 1988; Rinehart 1998, 2000; Anderson 1999; Heino 2000; Wheaton & Beal 2003; Wheaton 2003, 2004a, 2013; Booth 1994, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2008; Rinehart & Grenfell 2002; Beal & Weidman 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Young & Dallaire 2008; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Partington, Partington & Olivier 2009; Knijnik et al. 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Nelson 2010) and the idiosyncrasies exemplified in these subcultures, the real-time participation, action, interaction and experiences of these athletes have been almost completely ignored. There have been considerable amounts of empirical work investigating spaces of practice (Irvine & Taysom 1998; Jones & Graves 2000; Borden 2001; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Kidder 2012), identity (Donnelly & Young 1988; Beal 1995; Anderson 1999; Wheaton 2003, 2004a; Beal & Weidman 2003; Booth 2004; Robinson 2004; Vivoni 2009; Thorpe 2010; Langseth 2012), risk (Breivik 2007; Anderson 2007; Krein 2007; McNamee 2007; Self & Findley 2007) and commercialisation (Rinehart 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Palmer 2004; Palmer, Booth & Thorpe 2007; Thorpe & Booth 2007; Atencio, Beal & Wilson

2009; Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Huybers-Withers & Livingston 2010; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) while comparatively little attention has been allocated to the physical performance of practitioners and the ways in which lifestyle sport action is mediated by cultural tools. Where these aspects have been investigated, much of the research is based on post-practice interviews and surveys regarding psychological aspects of the experience (Partington, Partington & Olivier 2009; Olivier, 2010).

In the past thirty years, lifestyle sports have risen to unprecedented popularity among not only youth practitioners, but also adults seeking new and thrilling experiences. The traditionally ‘fringe’ activities, outside the realm of respected competitive sport, have experienced increased media coverage, heavy commercialization and a dramatic increase of participation as a result (Humphreys 2003; Kusz 2004; Edwards & Corte 2010; Nelson 2010). A sport participation survey conducted in the United States of America has shown that between the years 1978 and 2000, traditional sports like golf, basketball and baseball saw a participation increase of 1.8 percent, while sports like kayaking, rock climbing, snowboarding and skateboarding saw an increase of 244.7 percent (Gillis, 2001). In 2002, a fitness and sport research company completed a survey wherein, nearly 13 million people, above the age of six had skateboarded, at least once, and approximately 7.5 million people had tried snowboarding. Despite these staggering figures, a comparatively small amount of scholarship has been dedicated to understanding the real-time in-the-moment mediated actions exemplified in these sports.

Of paramount importance in this investigation, are the ways in which lifestyle sport practitioners of varying competency levels, act, interact and participate through mediational means and/or cultural tools. The employment of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) as a theoretical perspective for investigating the phenomena of

lifestyle sport can help illuminate the complexity of human practice, participation and co-ordination, as it occurs in real-time. Lifestyle sport is the fastest growing sporting domain, and while celebrated as an individualistic art form of sorts, it is exceptionally rare to see individual practitioners in isolation. Their congregation and the balance of this individualistic expression with co-ordinated practice is a fruitful site for empirical investigation and this study gleans new insights into a phenomenon that has received little inquiry regarding the moments in time where individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes manifest materially, in real-time mediated action.

Taking a multimodal mediated theoretical (Norris 2013b) perspective in the approach to investigating the real-time in-the-moment mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing through a video-ethnographic endeavour has explicitly led to the development of new theoretical notions which can assist in elucidating the complexities of mediated action, (inter)action and mediation in and through multiple mediational means. This research endeavour which employed participatory empirical methods as a methodological tool to localise the analysis of data and the investigation of mediated action, (inter)action and mediation has given impetus to theoretical contributions which can help articulate the complexities and dynamisms which manifest in and through real-time mediated action.

### **1.3 Why Kitesurfing?**

Lifestyle sport has always been a personal interest of mine and upon initial reviews of research within the field, the need for a more structured approach to the local and material mediated actions became increasingly clear. Kitesurfing offered a particularly fruitful phenomenon for empirical inquiry because it is one of the most recently emerging lifestyles sports and one in which I had very little knowledge and/or experience with. This provision exemplified unique empirical opportunity for a number

of reasons. First, I would be able to approach the site of investigation with very little experiential knowledge regarding the actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing. Second, I would be able to employ participatory methods as a methodological tool in data co-creation. Third, the complex and highly specialised equipment which is utilised in kitesurfing provided a fruitful site to employ Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) and multimodal methodological tools which prioritise analytical attention towards social actors acting through mediational means and/or cultural tools.

Kitesurfing or kiteboarding is typically considered within the same realm of activities as windsurfing, surfing, snowboarding and wakeboarding. In each case, the practitioner rides a board while standing in a sideways position, moving across some surface propelled by some means for momentum. Kitesurfing and windsurfing employ the wind as a means for propulsion, whereas snowboarding takes advantage of the minimised frictions of snow-covered mountains coupled with gravity. Today, there is a professional kitesurfing tour (PKRA), equipment is available in most shops which cater to outdoor adventure activities and last year there was an announcement that kitesurfing will replace windsurfing racing in the summer Olympics.

Kitesurfing is a historically recent phenomenon whose place and particularities of origination are difficult to factually articulate. It is generally accepted that kitesurfing first appeared in the mid 1990`s when Cory Roeseler took to the water with a two-line powerfoil kite and a large set of water skis. Unofficial documentation has suggested that Cory`s father was an armchair sailor and mathematician who theoretically calculated that a kite would generate substantially more force than a fixed and stable sail. Over the past 15-20 years, rapid technological advancement in equipment, increasing globalisation, increasingly accessible areas for participation, and professional support has led to a proliferation of practitioners and kitesurfing has become a common fixture on many waterways and at many beaches in a variety of countries throughout the world.

Originally, kitesurfing was considered a fringe sport at best. In early incarnations, homemade sails and reconditioned and/or reconfigured windsurfing gear was fashioned to make the sails controllable and steerable. As interest increased, companies began to emerge and the commercial industry which now dominates research and design and equipment manufacturing was spawned. While there are a number of major technological advancements which have occurred making the sport substantially safer, easier and more accessible, few can be considered as central as inflatable kites and the chicken loop control system.

Leading Edge Inflatable kites or LEI kites signalled a major transformation in accessibility by providing a kite which could be re-launched when crashed in the water. Prior to this innovation, a downed powerfoil kite could fill with water becoming nearly impossible to get back in the air. Depending on one's distance from land and comfort in the water, this could quickly become a dangerous situation. Kites with an inflatable leading edge meant that kites could be re-launched when crashed thus maintaining the integrity of the sail as a power producing mechanism to ensure safe return to the beach. The chicken loop control system whereby the two front lines extend through the centre of the bar and attach to a harness wrapped around the kiter's waist signalled another advancement which drastically changed kitesurfing's accessibility. This new control system made it possible to change the kite's angle of attack (angle to the wind) making it substantially easier to control the generation of power and making the use of a large inflatable sail substantially safer as a result. These two technological advancements can be recognised as revolutionising the sport and have had irreversible effects on practitioner demographics and commercialisation.

The kitesurfing kites available on the market today are much stronger, lighter and safer than ever before. Huge amounts of research and design has been made possible with increasing participant interest and the result has been major advancements

in usability and safety. This usability has simultaneously resulted in an increase of practitioners from a diversity of sport, sociocultural and professional backgrounds. Initially, attaching oneself to a nearly uncontrollable, highly powerful kite in the midst of tropical storm winds was nothing less than ‘extreme’. Today, increasing knowledge about weather systems, a proliferation of kitesurfing schools and the growing affordability through the availability of second-hand equipment has largely expanded the accessibility of the sport. One can make kitesurfing as ‘extreme’ or as ‘leisurely’ as is personally preferred.

## **1.4 Why Multimodal Mediated Theory?**

The utility of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) lies in the pragmatism of attending to social action and (inter)action as it unfolds in real-time, through social actors acting in and of the world. Coupled with the acknowledgement that all action is by nature (inter)active (Norris 2011), and with increasing attention allocated to (inter)action through and between social actor and mediational means (Norris 2012), this theoretical perspective provides a comprehensive foundation for approaching the complex interplay between social actors and mediational means.

The analytical occupation with mediational means-in-use espoused in a Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) approach is explicitly congruent with contemporary discussions regarding the centrality and importance of specialised equipment in all lifestyle sports. Wheaton (2004b) outlines that a key characteristic of lifestyle sports is that they revolve around the consumption and employment of new technologies and material goods. While traditionally, the analytical focus regarding technological advancements in lifestyle sports and the proliferation of specialised equipment has centred on aspects of consumerism, commoditisation and commercialisation, there has been very little occupation with the ways in which the

introduction of new objects and materials comprehensively affect the nature of the sports themselves.

Originating in the work of Vygotsky and his contemporaries, and heavily influenced by the work of Wertsch (1985, 1991, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2005) and Scollon (1998, 2001a, 2005, 2008), Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) provides an interdisciplinary framework for approaching a diversity of phenomenon by employing the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis. From Vygotsky, Multimodal Mediated Theory takes the idea of mediation as being paramount in understanding all forms of social action. This idea originates from Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) conceptualisation that all human action is mediated by mediational means and/or cultural tools. While Vygotsky's particular concentration was centred on the ways in which language and other cultural tools affect cognition and mental functioning, the utility of recognising all human action as mediated action was taken up by Wertsch (1991, 1998) and Scollon (1998, 2001a) as a pragmatic way to approach semiotic and discursive phenomena.

As Wertsch (1998) points out, considering human action as always and irreducibly mediated by mediational means and/or cultural tools exemplifies an anti-reductionist ethos whereby the distinction between agent (individual), and mediational means (language) begins to erode. Resultantly, consideration of all action must always involve an articulation of the complex tensions and dynamics exemplified in the individual-acting-with-mediational-means. The utility of conceptualising human action as mediated action lies in the fact that as a unit of analysis, the mediated action and the irreducible tensions between individual and mediational means exemplifies a microcosmic unit maintaining the dynamisms and complexities of the sociocultural, historical and institutional processes which permeate all social life. No longer can one consider the agent in isolation as a completely autonomous actor, nor can one prioritise



the dynamic sociocultural, historical and institutional components of the mediational means themselves. Analytical efforts must be centred on elucidating the ways in which agents *act through* mediational means.

Scollon's (1998, 2001a) uptake of the mediated action as the unit of analysis exemplifies an explicit refutation of the ideas espoused in contemporary linguistic theorisation which would seek to articulate the complexities of linguistics phenomena through reference to the abstract structures of language, grammar and syntax. In doing so, meaning potentials as being primarily situated in language itself are problematical and the analyst is forced to consider the ways in which language (as a mediational means) is acted through by social actors. While this does not marginalise the complex structures of language embedded through sociocultural instantiation, the capitulation exemplifies a pragmatic orientation towards the ways in which *language is used* to accomplish social action. While Scollon's (1998, 2001a) championing of conceptualising discourse in terms of social action exemplifies a turn away from treating language as simply a system of representation with embedded structures to which meaning-making is attributable, the notion implicitly points to the analytical necessity of considering the panopoly of other mediational means through which social action is accomplished.

This notion of the multiplicity of mediational means and/or cultural tools and the centrality of considering social phenomena in terms of *social action* has been further advanced in the development of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b). Recognising the utility of considering language-in-use or language as a mediational means through which social action occurs, coupled with contemporary theorisation in applied linguistics and social semiotics has led to the development of theoretical notions which explicitly point to the multimodal nature of all action, (inter)action and communication.

The term *multimodal* refers to the growing recognition that meaning-making and communicative behaviour occurs through multiple modes of communication, not just language. While initial efforts in the field of Multimodality sought to taxonomise semiotic resources through a Hallidayian (1976, 1978, 1985) tri-functional semiotic perspective (O'Toole 1994; Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001), Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) advances Scollon's (2001a) refutation of referencing *abstract structures* in semiotic resources as the basis for articulating meaning-making. Rather, Multimodal Mediated Theory advances the proposition that multiple and multifarious mediational means are acted through in social (inter)action and therefore, prioritises a pragmatic conceptualisation of mediational-means-in-use. Resultantly, Multimodal Mediated Theory accepts the assertion that all communicative behaviour is *multimodal* by nature while further championing the necessity of understanding modes-in-use, rather than modes as abstract semiotic systems or systems of representation.

Multimodal Mediated Theory takes the re-engineering of equipment, technological advancements and the employment of new and unique objects as a central component of mediated action. New objects comprehensively affect the structure of action and mediated action affects the nature of re-engineering of equipment and material objects. As a key component of lifestyle sports, analytical occupation should centre on the complex dynamics exemplified between social actors and mediational means. Multimodal Mediated Theory provides a comprehensive foundation for the analysis of the ways in which social actors (inter)act with and through these mediational means without marginalising their effects of the structure of that action.

## **1.5 Aims of the Thesis**

The aims of this investigation were twofold: 1) employ contemporary Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) as a theoretical framework for the

investigation of the real-time in-the-moment actions and practices exemplified in the ‘lifestyle sport’ of kitesurfing as a way to maintain local and material perspectives in approaching phenomena of this type; and 2) contribute to the development of Multimodal Mediated Theory through investigating the ways in which social actors act, interact and communicate with and through complex mediational means. As such, the research questions which gave impetus to study design and methodology are as follows;

1. How do technological, bio-mechanical and geological affordances or constraints figure in the practice of kitesurfing?
2. In what way does a kite mediate action, interaction, expression and creativity?
3. Is the practice of kitesurfing typified in any way?
4. How do the geosemiotic affordances figure in the participation and filming of kitesurfing? How do practitioners read and utilise the natural environment?
5. How does the interactive semiotic phenomenon of touch/response-feel (Norris, 2012) function in the practice of kitesurfing?

These five questions functioned as the empirical organising principles of this study. Study design, methodology and the empirical process was explicitly designed in efforts to approach these research questions in a comprehensive manner while maintaining a focus on the real-time local and material realities of practitioners themselves. As is exemplified in the questions, my analytical orientation was explicitly geared towards elucidating the complexities of action, interaction and communication in and through complex and multiple mediational means.

While quite extensive empirical work has been undertaken looking at the ways in which multiple communicative modes are utilised and acted through in social (inter)action, only recently has the idea that all action is primarily (inter)active in nature

come to theoretical fruition (Norris 2011). Resultantly, this research project was designed with an explicit analytical focus towards understanding the real-time, in-the-moment mediated actions exemplified in kitesurfing in efforts to more comprehensively articulate the complexities in action, (inter)action and mediation.

## **1.6 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is dedicated to articulating the complexities of mediated action exemplified in the lifestyle sport of kitesurfing through reference to data which was co-created in a year-long video-ethnographic endeavour. In chapter 2, I provide a review of relevant literature in the broad and interdisciplinary domains of sport sociology, leisure studies, human geography and multimodality. First, I outline contemporary endeavours investigating various aspects of what Wheaton (2004b, 2013) terms ‘lifestyle sports’, exemplifying the ways in which notions of subcultural identity (Donnelly & Young 1988; Beal 1995; Anderson 1999; Wheaton 2003, 2004a; Beal & Weidman 2003; Booth 2004; Robinson 2004; Vivoni 2009; Thorpe 2010; Langseth 2012), commodification (Rinehart 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Palmer 2004; Palmer, Booth & Thorpe 2007; Thorpe & Booth 2007; Atencio, Beal & Wilson 2009; Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Huybers-Withers & Livingston 2010; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) and spatial appropriation (Irvine & Taysom 1998; Jones & Graves 2000; Borden 2001; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Kidder 2012) permeate the majority of theoretical perspectives espoused in the literature. Second, I describe the paradigmatic shifts which have come to characterise efforts in human geography with a provision of the recent theoretical shifts which champion more flexible, fluid and dynamic ‘ensemble ontologies’ (Amin & Thrift 2002; Jones 2009; Merriman 2011). In chapter 3, I review contemporary work in multimodality, specifically developments in Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) that can

provide theoretical notions which situate analytical attention to the moments in time where individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional process manifest materially, in real-time social action. Resultantly, Multimodal Mediated Theory provides a unit of analysis which can help maintain locality and materiality in the analysis of action, interaction and mediation and provide an organising principle to structure the investigation of space and spatiality.

In chapter 4, I provide a detailed description of the design of the study providing an overview of the methods and technologies employed in data co-creation and the ways in which participatory methods figured in the ethnographic process. In this chapter, I describe the nature and amount of data collected with an explicit focus on the utility of employing contemporary audio-video technology in participant-led data co-creation while exemplifying the analytical value of the perspectives provided by line-mounted GoPro cameras. I also describe the nature, extent and value of participatory methods and outline the traditional structure of a day in the field.

In chapter 5, I outline the methodological facets used to analyse my data. Here, I provide a brief description of the empirical utility of employing ethnographic methods like participant-observation (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2001; Delamont 2004) and interviewing (Heyl 2001; Norris 2011) as particularly useful methods of data co-creation. More specifically, I champion *participation* or *participatory methods* as particularly useful in elucidating elements of relevance and/or salience in phenomena that is predominantly haptic, somatic and kinaesthetic. While, this point is taken up extensively in the discussion in chapter 10, here I outline the methodological notions which have oriented my analysis and provide an articulation of their utility for investigating real-time social (inter)action with a focus on the social actor, mediational means and the tension exemplified between the two. In doing so, the analyst is forced to

consider the complex and dynamic relationships between the two and the effect of mediational means on the materiality of social action.

In chapter 6, I elucidate the concept of the system of mediated action (Norris 2013a) as a socioculturally co-produced and instantiated systematicity that manifests in and between constellations of specialised practices which are materially, spatially and temporally situated. Simultaneously, I describe systems of mediated action as complex and dynamic schematic aggregates which manifest in explicit connection and correlation with mediational means and/or cultural tools and function as a perceptual lens through which social actors perceive, conceive and construe existential phenomena. Resultantly, systems of mediated action comprise two irreducible components; the system as a constellation of interrelated and materially, spatially and temporally situated specialised practices, and, the system as a complex schematic aggregate through which perception occurs. I describe the characteristics of systems of mediated action, their manifestation, the salience of mediational means and/or cultural tools and how kitesurfing exemplifies one particular system of mediated action.

In chapter 7, I articulate the relevance and salience of space and location as this manifests in the actions, (inter)actions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing. I introduce a number of methodological notions which can be employed in the analysis of space with an explicit focus on the primary organising principle; actionary pertinence. Stemming from the importance of mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis, actionary pertinence provides an organising principle which can structure approaches to understanding space and spatiality. The concept of actionary pertinence and how elements of location contribute in the manifestation of particular conditions considered safe and/or favourable exemplifies the utility of approaching space with an orientation towards the moments in time where relevance and salience manifests, in real-time mediated action. The analysis of two particular kitesurfing

locations exemplifies the ways in which elements of the environment and elements of space become relevant in explicit connection with mediated action and the mediational means through which action occurs.

In chapter 8 I allocate analytical attention to the theoretical notion of mediation which is an unequivocal characteristic of all mediated action. Mediation refers to the fact that all social action is mediated by mediational means and in the mediated action there is a dialectical tension exemplified between social actor and mediational means. This tension manifests as a result of the ways in which mediational means affect and shape mediated action. Resultantly, efforts to articulate the character of any mediated action must involve the constituents of social actor, mediational means, and mediation. While the multiplicity of mediational means is explicitly alluded to in most theoretical discussions (Wertsch 1985, 1991, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2005; Scollon 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Norris 2004, 2011, 2013a, 2013b), I articulate the ways in which mediation and therefore mediated action always manifests through multiple interconnected and interrelated mediational means. If the character of a mediational means manifests in real-time mediated action, and if mediation is always a property of interrelationship, efforts in elucidating the character of mediational means must always be an articulation of the complex interconnections which manifest in mediated action. Furthermore, this leads to the realisation that individual mediational means cannot have a mediating character in isolation and thus, requires the analysis of the complex interrelationships which manifest in and through mediated action. As a result, there is a redefinition of the ecological unit of analysis to reflect this notion; mediated action is a social actor acting through interrelated mediational means.

Chapter 9 provides an articulation of the learning trajectory of the kitesurfer as inextricably linked to the mediational means through which mediated action occurs. I describe the development of proficiency and/or skill as a haptic dialogic process of

touch/response-feel (Norris 2012) whereby the social actor learns to co-create through the mediational interrelationship, complex and temporally fleeting mediational means in the form of ‘power’ which is then employed to undertake subsequent mediated actions. The development of proficiency is best characterised as the social actor learning how to specifically touch, so as to bring about a response-feel of a particular material character. The more accurately the social actor can co-create a response feel of a predictable character, the more easily the response-feel can be employed as a mediational means in subsequent actions. In this haptic dialogic process, the social actor learns and appropriates a practice of prediction.

In chapter 10, I articulate in detail the utility of employing the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis for the investigation of the local and material realities of lifestyle sport practitioners themselves as these are the moments in time where sociocultural, historical and institutional processes manifest materially. In doing so, I simultaneously champion the employment of participatory methods in ethnographic investigation as an orientation towards elucidating local and material realities in advance of sociocultural abstractions. Simultaneously, I exemplify the utility of conceiving of all actions as primarily interactions with and through mediational means and the environment and articulate the utility of Multimodal Mediated Theory for approaching sociocultural phenomenon of various types.

In chapter 11, I recapitulate the theoretical notions developed through this video-ethnographic investigation of the real-time in-the-moment mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing. I also articulate the utility of the theoretical notions for employment in other social science domains and explicate how the theoretical notions contribute to contemporary developments in Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b). Here, I revisit the aims of the thesis, stating in which chapter each of the questions was answered. I further discuss the weaknesses and strength of the thesis and



provide a view into future possibilities for study resulting from the work presented in this thesis.

## **1.7 Conclusion: Kitesurfing, Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

Above, I have explicated the rationale behind approaching the lifestyle sport of kitesurfing from a Multimodal mediated theory perspective through championing a more structured analytical endeavour towards the moments in time where individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional trajectories manifest, in real-time mediated action. I have articulated the theoretical nature of this thesis as predominantly contributing to the growing body of theory surrounding the ways in which social actors take action and (inter)act through mediational means. I have provided a brief description of the contemporary sport of kitesurfing and the centrality of objects and materials in its undertaking while simultaneously articulating the utility of approaching the phenomenon from a Multimodal mediated theory perspective. I have outlined the empirical questions which informed empirical design and the analysis of data and have provided an overview of the remainder of this thesis.

## **2 Literature Review: Lifestyle Sport, Space and Time**

### **2.1 Introduction: Lifestyle sport, space and time**

The majority of academic work dedicated to the investigation of what Wheaton (2004b, 2013) calls ‘lifestyle sports’ has been undertaken by scholars traditionally aligned with cultural studies, sport sociology or sport and leisure studies (Rinehart 1998, 2000; Anderson 1999; Heino 2000; Wheaton & Beal 2003; Wheaton 2003, 2004a, 2013; Booth 1994, 2001, 2003, 2004; Rinehart & Grenfell 2002; Beal & Weidman 2003; Humphreys 2003; Kay & Laberge 2003, 2004; Beal & Wilson 2004; Young & Dallaire 2008; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Partington, Partington & Olivier 2009; Knijnik et al. 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Nelson 2010). Themes which have emerged from this disciplinary orientation have been largely culturally based with an explicit focus on the ways in which participation in these new sporting practices manifest particular subcultures characterised by ideological and aesthetic hegemony. With growing concerns regarding elements of space, place and contestation, empirical efforts have simultaneously sought to elucidate the intricacies of the practices themselves with an analytical orientation towards the ‘liminal’ or unbounded spaces in which practitioners engaged in their chosen activities (Irvine & Taysom 1998; Jones & Graves 2000; Borden 2001; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Kidder 2012). The traditional occupation with subcultural theory and emerging directions regarding the investigation of space has led to a championing of a disciplinary reorientation regarding a more localised analytical perspective that is centred on embodiment, immediate experience and practices which take place in-the-moment (Thorpe & Rinehart 2010).

Here, I briefly turn my attention towards Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b), the antecedent work which permeates its theoretical orientation and how it might be employed as a way of attending to embodiment, action and localised practices while simultaneously providing a material starting point for the investigation of space.

New thematic directions and analytical occupations have implicitly invoked theoretical notions and conceptual orientations which are more traditionally aligned with human geography and Multimodal Mediated Theory. Concerns with unbounded spaces and the appropriation of space implicitly enter contemporary debate regarding the ontological nature of space, time, and/or spacetime; a domain in which theoretical notions from human geography may provide important insights. Similarly, the growing awareness of the importance of embodiment, immediate experience, action, practices and the moments in time where representative elements materialise seems to correlate congruently with contemporary theorisation in Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b).

Below, I provide a review of key literature which characterises the thematic and theoretical orientations of cultural studies and sport sociology and introduce the growing concerns with space and spatiality along with action and practice. Next, I provide a brief recount of the major paradigmatic shifts which have occurred in human geography through grappling with notions of space, time, and spacetime and elucidate contemporary directions which champion a more flexible and permeable ‘ensemble ontology’ or the discarding of the primitive markers space and time.

## **2.2 Lifestyle Sport: Literature Review**

With reference to a 2002 poll wherein skateboarder Tony Hawk was recognized as the ‘coolest big time athlete’ in the United States, Wheaton (2004b) suggests that lifestyle sports have come of age. Increasing levels of participation, increasing media

coverage and a multi-million dollar international commercial industry all contribute to the recognition that lifestyle sports are playing an increasingly prevalent role in western society. Despite agreement about the sociocultural importance of these new sporting practices, the exact nature of these emerging forms of physical activity is difficult to conceptually solidify. The terms 'extreme', 'adventure' and 'lifestyle' have all been used, somewhat interchangeably, to refer to new forms of physical activity that appear to be in opposition with conventional western conceptions of sporting practices (Rinehart 2000; Wheaton 2004b). The result has been dichotomous classifications like mainstream/emergent and traditional/new which provide little understanding about the actual practices that makeup these emerging 'sports'. Through the identification of nine classificatory features which all pertain to social aspects of engagement, consumption and identity, Wheaton further exemplifies traditional contemporary academic occupation with sociocultural aspects of 'lifestyle sports'.

Identity and subculture (Donnelly & Young 1988; Beal 1995; Anderson 1999; Wheaton 2003, 2004a; Beal & Weidman 2003; Booth 2004; Robinson 2004; Vivoni 2009; Thorpe 2010; Langseth 2012) along with commercialisation (Rinehart 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Palmer 2004; Palmer, Booth & Thorpe 2007; Thorpe & Booth 2007; Atencio, Beal & Wilson 2009; Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Huybers-Withers & Livingston 2010; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) are the thematic elements which function prominently in most contemporary discussions about lifestyle sports. As phenomena conventionally investigated by sociocultural theorists and sport sociologists, the majority of academic work has taken a postmodernist approach looking at the ways in which sporting subcultures have emerged and are sustained in opposition to traditional western sporting ideology (Wheaton 2003, 2004a; Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010). Sociological concepts have been drawn upon to illuminate the complex ways in which these

contemporary sporting subcultures function through ideological interconnectedness, identity, consumption and masculinity (Wheaton 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2013; Booth 2004; Beal & Weidman 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Knijnik et al. 2010; Stranger 2010) . As popularity increases and various lifestyle sports become legitimized through incorporation into mainstream venues, we can no longer ignore the impacts and importance of these practices in our social world.

Wheaton (2004b, 2013) provides a comprehensive overview of both the thematic concentration of sport sociologists interested in lifestyle sports and their conceptual occupations in explicating the nature of these activities. A wealth of research has been dedicated to understanding the sociocultural nature of these practices and how they interrelate with the larger structures of society. The sociocultural preoccupation has led to many insights regarding macro ideological, personal and structural aspects of these sporting subcultures. However, comparatively little interest has been exemplified regarding the actual physical and material actions, interactions and practices that make up these sports. While notions of identity, ideology, culture and commercialisation offer interesting insights into these phenomena, the perspectives suffer from what Scollon (2008: 7) identifies as the dizzying heights of social and cultural theorisation by “looking for just the broadest outlines of social groups, cultures, classes, or nations”. This is not to suggest that theorization about sporting subcultures involves drawing conceptual lines around large masses of people in general, but rather, that the endeavour “leaps to grand heights of abstraction long before we’ve actually mastered our analysis of local and material realities” (Scollon 2008: 7).

Wheaton does provide a very comprehensive outline of the field to date and thoroughly justifies the sociocultural relevance of lifestyle sport through citing increasing participation, commercialisation and growing incorporation. However, the meta-analytical overview clearly illuminates the lack of attention allocated to

understanding the local realities of the individual practitioners. Conceivably, as the physical practice is the common denominator across commercial enterprise, ideology, identity, masculinity and the multitude of other sociological conceptualisations, it seems appropriate that more critical energy be applied to understanding the physical/material realities and the real-time materialisation of action.

Understandably, theorisation has centred on sociological abstraction as a result of paradigmatic and disciplinary concentration, however, more physical, material and local attention to the actions, interactions and practices that make up these sports would offer a participatory basis for macro sociological enterprises. Specifically, theoretical concepts and methodologies from the trans and inter-disciplinary field of multimodality might enable a more comprehensive understanding of these local realities. In particular, Mediated Multimodal Theory (Norris 2013b) which draws upon applied linguistics, movement studies, and social psychology coupled with contemporary human geography may enable a more concrete analysis of these particular practices.

Based on an 18 month ethnographic endeavour, Wheaton (2003) makes a number of claims about concepts of authenticity, commitment, status and sub-cultural capital as they relate to the practice of windsurfing. Representing a particular *sporting subculture*, Windsurfers have their own system of capital and status relating to skill and commitment in the practice of the activity. While other theorists have tended to focus on images, representation and commoditisation in relation to subcultural capital, Wheaton suggests that paramount in the world of windsurfing is skill and commitment. These two facets closely relate to one's status in the windsurfing community. Those more physically adept at performing highly technical manoeuvres and those who 'live to windsurf' or who dedicate large portions of their life to involvement in the sport are considered to be more 'hard core' than weekend warriors (part time practitioners).

Citing various participant interviews and observational data, Wheaton (2003) suggests that while there may be a differentiation between types of windsurfing and correlated status allocated to the more difficult sub-specialties, common across all areas are concepts of skill and commitment as related to subcultural status. As a large and diverse subculture, Windsurfers have their own status system that is more closely connected to aspects of skill and commitment than to status indicators more conventionally associated with the demographics of the participants. Those who exhibit exceptional physical prowess through technical manoeuvres or those who ride in dangerous conditions are imbued with more respect as a result of their action. Also, those who dedicate large portions of their lives to the pursuit of the activity are viewed as more committed and as a result, more 'Windsurfer' than occasional practitioners. Wheaton situates this discussion within Donnelly and Young's (1988) contestation, that newcomers to a sport subculture construct associated identities for two distinct groups: members of the subculture as signifying similarity, and members of the general public, signifying difference. As acculturation occurs, individuals soon disregard the concerns of the general public and are more occupied with their identity as connected to the members of the subculture. Wheaton's (2003) focus on status as predominantly and intimately connected to members of the culture stems from this idea.

Importantly, Wheaton allocates focus on the construction of identity and status as a phenomenon intimately connected to, and a result of the particular activity in which individuals engage. Too often, theorists inappropriately allocate agentive force to social constructs or entities that conceptually exist outside the realm of practice. Style, symbolic capital and various aspects of commercialization and commodification are often discussed independently of the physical/local realities of the particular sporting practice. Wheaton aptly identifies the key components of subcultural capital in windsurfing as dependant on the practice itself. I would suggest that this intimate

understanding of the ideologies of the participants themselves came from her adopting a “partially covert ‘complete participant’ role” (Wheaton 2003: 76) during the research process.

The discussion of skill and commitment as paramount forms of subcultural capital to windsurfers provides an important insight overlooked by many scholars who study lifestyle sporting practice: that the entirety of all conceptual abstractions based on culture and social organization have their roots in the physical/local realities of the actual physical actions of practitioners. While implicitly touched upon, Wheaton does not provide a comprehensive discussion about the importance of understanding the phenomena through participatory means in order to fully articulate the complex webs that connect physical action and local realities to the larger sociocultural abstractions.

In a similar vein, Booth (2004) argues that the moniker ‘extreme’ is an appropriate adjective to describe surfing through reference to an internal subcultural system of prestige based on danger and risk. First, describing surfing as an irreverent counterculture which appeared in contention to mainstream sporting ethos and competitive ideology, Booth (2004) traces the emergence of this counterculture in Australia and New Zealand. Increasing popularity resulting from technological innovations which made surf boards transportable, lighter and more affordable, in the 60’s and 70’s surf culture exploded on public beaches and “confronted a well-established surf lifesaving movement with club-based structures and its own culture that emphasised discipline and teamwork” (Booth 2004: 95). Predominantly young white males, surfers stood in defiance of traditional sporting and social values. As Booth mentions, they took over public facilities and change rooms, crowded walkways with surfboards and wax, and hollered profanities at passing young girls. The actions and attitudes of this small counterculture group resulted in their marginalization by



mainstream society, one which they embraced and encouraged through anti-social and irreverent behaviour.

Booth (2004) describes the fratriarchical nature of the counterculture in reference to sociologist John Loy (1995). First, sporting fratriarchies revolve around activities and practices which test courage, character and integrity in a public forum and for social evaluation. Second, fratriarchies are large, tribal-like groups which provide young men camaraderie and a sense of community. Third, fratriarchies all have codes of honour and systems of initiation instituted through abusive and sometimes violent behaviour. To exemplify this, Booth references a number of situations and stories about young surfers and the belittling hazing experienced to gain acceptance on the beach. Most importantly, according to Loy (1995) sporting fratriarchies are male-dominated groups which pride the acquisition of social prestige through feats of physical prowess and Booth (2004) claims that the surfing culture allocates prestige according to danger and risk.

Similar to Wheaton's (2003) description of commitment as the integral component of subcultural membership in windsurfing culture, Booth (2004) suggests that corporeal capital is acquired in surf culture through performance based means. In this case it is not one's commitment to engaging in the activity, but the level of prowess displayed through surfing big waves in dangerous conditions. As Ken Bradshaw recalls, "the crowds on the beach may have increased . . . but the number of guys in the water on a big day has stayed about the same (Noll & Gabbard, 1989: 147). Booth (2004) points out that big-wave surfers are surfing's 'warrior caste', who risk life and limb to ride giant waves. The level of skill required and putting oneself in physical danger is considered to be paramount in the acquisition of corporeal capital. Essentially, rank and respect in the culture is based on skill and performance rather than other aesthetic or commercial elements. This further substantiates the implicit argument that the

fundamental component of various sporting subcultures is the material and physical performance of the activity.

As mentioned above, Booth's (2004) discussion compliments other work in sport and leisure studies by suggesting that performance is paramount in the system of capital associated with sporting subcultures. While implicitly touched upon, much of the work investigating elements of performance are simultaneously occupied with the concept of authenticity of subcultural membership. This may be a result of the traditional denotation of 'core' and 'fringe' participatory categories. Essentially, Booth (2004), Wheaton (2003) and Chiu (2009) all describe the ways in which authenticity or level of subcultural membership results from aspects of the material and physical performance of the sport.

For Wheaton (2003), constancy of practice and commitment to the endeavour is understood as integral in the world of windsurfing. Chui (2009) describes the ways in which location plays a role in the representation of authenticity and correlated cultural capital. Booth (2004) suggests that the system of capital is based on physical prowess through skill and risk. In all cases, elements of physical/material performance are paramount in understanding the system of capital as exemplified in the subculture. While it seems as though performance is paramount, very little work has been dedicated to understanding the intricacies of the physical/material actions that make up the practice. And, if performance is paramount, would it not be fruitful to understand the intricacies of that performance?

In more recent years there has been increasing recognition of the limited reach of subcultural theoretical lenses which traditionally champion concepts which implicate dichotomous and/or incongruous classificatory mechanisms. Coates, Clayton & Humberstone (2010: 1083) explicitly cite that "post-subculture researchers highlight that subcultures rarely, if ever, can resist the dominant culture; and that attachment to a

particular subculture is brief, with members flittering from one trend to another”.

However, they aptly point out that despite incorporation of post-subcultural perspectives in traditional sociology, sport sociologists have only recently joined the debates.

Acknowledging the limitations of traditional subcultural theory expounded by the Birmingham Council for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which implicates dichotomous elements like conformity/resistance and mainstream/alternative, Coates, Clayton & Humberstone (2010) contend that Gramscian notions of hegemony are still readily applicable in the contemporary climate of lifestyle sport; most specifically in their study of snowboarding culture.

Drawing upon extensive interview data collected at a Canadian ski resort, the authors suggest that “snowboarders have become less symbolically oppositional to dominant cultural values and instead more involved with actually directing the organisation and progression of snowboarding” (Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010: 1096). While their commentary aptly highlights the limited reach of subcultural theory based in dichotomies, there is a suggestion that the infiltration of snowboarders into ‘mainstream’ organisations exemplifies a means through which to control the alternative nature of snowboarding itself. Furthermore, there are claims that only through this process of mainstreaming can “snowboarding provide a challenge to capitalist sport” (Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010: 1096). Despite initial trepidation regarding classificatory mechanisms which imply dichotomous relationships, the authors implicitly characterise snowboarders and snowboarding as hegemonic and distinct in relation to the mainstream. While there is allowance for the fluidity of the culture which can no longer be classified as oppositional or marginal, there is a continual invocation of classical notions of mainstream/alternative and conformity/resistance; only their articulation characterises conformity as a type of resistance.

Chiu (2009) also employs subcultural theory to describe the ways in which all people, and in this specific instance, skateboarders, utilize public spaces in ways that were architecturally unintended. In 1996, 16 skateparks were built in New York City following the banning of skateboarding on city sidewalks and in plazas. Despite the ban, street skateboarding continues in the face of extensive regulation. It has been suggested that skateboarding is a transgressive activity wherein skaters challenge traditional restrictions and regulations on the use of public space (Borden 1998; Stratford 2002; Nolan 2003). Further, it has been suggested that skateboarders perceive the urban environment differently from non-skaters and through practice, transform conventional architecture by enacting new possibilities of functionality (Snow, 1999; Borden, 2003). However, Chiu (2009) aptly points out that the delineation of skateboarding, as a transgressive activity, challenging the norms and conventions of urban politics, is too simplistic. Chui (2009: 26) argues “that the differences between street skating and park skating are apparent in the uses of built environments, the social control that skaters encounter, and the images constructed through the discursive practice of skateboarding”.

Regarding the use of built environments, Chui (2009) describes the ways in which skaters rearticulate the conventional affordances in contemporary urban architecture and utilize features in new and unique ways. As opposed to the use of purpose built, cage like environments with opening and closing times, the street enables creativity and authenticity through the re-appropriation of the symbolic meaning of social spaces and camaraderie through participation and experiencing the city. Also, the social controls and attempts to exert power over the use of public space have led to many skaters taking refuge in parks in fear of tickets and fines. Skateboarding has been classified as rebellious and indicative of criminality and youthful indolence. Chui (2009) suggests that the risk profile of skateboarders has resulted in contestation for

public spaces which are restricted to their use. Finally, in terms of the discursive construction of skateboarding, the street holds symbolic capital of authenticity and the marketing of skateboard companies attempt to exploit romantic aspects of rebelliousness and anti-establishment through glorifying the urban lifestyle.

Chui (2009) presents a thorough discussion of the spatial politics of urban skateboarding and presents the analysis in a clear and straightforward manner. The method of data collection through participant observation while practicing the sport seems to have enabled a native understanding of the perceptions and experiences of skateboarders and how they understand the environment. A more specific analysis of the actual skateboard spots, correlating layout, trajectory and use with the practice of skateboarding itself would have resulted in a more comprehensive discussion.

It is more than attempts at authenticity and creativity that lead to skateboarding in undesignated areas; it has something to do, intrinsically with the development of the practice, what the body can do, the affordances in movement, space, the board, aesthetics etc. Following the direction of affordance and constraint as well as creativity, Chiu (2009) could have developed a much more comprehensive discussion. The downfall of the argument is the trivialization of the importance of spatial appropriation. There is too much emphasis on building intention and consumerism and not enough focus on the actual practices occurring through the appropriation of contested space. When performing a manoeuvre on a skateboard, it is highly unlikely that one intends to exemplify some anti-establishment agenda through representative contestation against contemporary corporate ethos and/or ideology; one may simply nose slide a planter because it is there (and is adequately waxed). The experiential understanding of the phenomena has been interrupted through an overemphasis of social theory.

Chui (2009) suggests that the continued practice of skateboarding in restricted street areas despite prohibition and legal penalty is a result of the utilization of public

space, restrictions imposed on skateboarding and the discursive representation of skateboarding. The three, interrelated facets culminate in skaters' decisions about where to skate. Chui's article represents an initial departure from much of the contemporary literature about skateboarding with particular focus on location and practice. His work contributes, unknowingly, to current investigations in human geography about the social construction of space, however, aspects of capitalist urban culture figure too prominently in the discussion. Approaching the subject with a specific focus on action and practice would have resulted in a more comprehensive analysis of data.

Beginning by highlighting the fact that "alternative sport research embodies productive tensions between the potential for subcultural resistance (Beal 1995; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie 2008) and key commoditisation processes (Rinehart 1998, 2008) within the social practice of skateboarding" (Vivoni 2009: 130), Vivoni contributes to discussions regarding space and goes on to exemplify this tension through the analysis of skate spots. Claiming that other alternative or lifestyle sports also "hinge on dynamics of contestation and cooption" (Vivoni 2009: 130), the author articulates the ways in which skateboarding is an "alternative sport practice engaged in the production of contradictory spaces". To do so, Vivoni (2009) utilizes a "below the knees" method of experiential sport ethnography with particular focus on the everyday actions of individual participants. The below the knees method refers both to the ordinary actions of typical skateboarders and also to the collection of data that is located below the knees in the form of skateboard magazines and the analysis of scuff marks which signify favourable skateboarding spaces. The author does well in arguing for the investigation of ordinary skateboard practices because "ordinary acts of spatial appropriation harbour the potential for transforming cities into inclusive spaces" (Vivoni 2009: 133).

Specifically, the author claims that the presence of scuff marks resulting from the process of waxing, grinding and board sliding on non-purpose based urban fixtures,

represents a spot of spatial desire for skateboarders. Claiming that “once a potential skatespot is identified, spatial appropriation is enacted through tactical modifications to the built environment” (Vivoni 2009: 140), Vivoni articulates the ways in which tactics such as the application of wax and remnants left behind such as the paint from board art represent meaningful scuff signifying a skatespot in progress. This unique appropriation of public spaces through the physical and material imprinting of scuff is said to signify contestation for public space and the creative appropriation of the urban environment for differentiated social practices.

Vivoni’s research explicitly correlates with Chiu’s (2009) investigation of skateboarding spots as representing contestation and conformity as a result of association with different ideologies. While both endeavours seek to understand the unique appropriation of urban spaces by skateboarders and the meanings associated to these practices, it appears as though social theorizing and abstraction interfere with the physical, material and local realities of the practices they investigate.

Vivoni (2009: 141) fallaciously claims that “a sign of solidarity is achieved when pieces of candle wax are purposely left behind to promote the upkeep and use of a skatespot to unknown skateboarders” exemplifying a misunderstanding of a particular phenomenon resulting from an attempt to make connections between material phenomena and sociocultural theory. Understandably, the researcher is seeking to understand the practices of this subcultural group and has interpreted the phenomena of wax left at one particular skatespot, then used by other skateboarders at the same skatespot, as a subcultural sign of solidarity wherein group interconnectedness helps to maintain practice areas. However, it seems as though the analysis and description of symbolic meaning can be attributed much more to the ontological orientation of the analyst than the realities of the practitioners.

The attribution of the meaning of solidarity as understood by the researcher is indicative of the failings of contemporary investigations of lifestyle sport practice. Too often, grand social abstractions and claims of signification are utilized to illuminate the particular practices of a subcultural group. In trying to make sense of the whole, there has been a manufacturing of meaning and significance to otherwise mundane practices in an attempt to provide the physical/material basis for larger abstractions. In other words, we start with an entire picture and then deconstruct its component parts to understand how they relate to the whole. In doing so, we ascertain meaning and imbue actions with artificial significance in an attempt to maintain the integrity of our theoretical predispositions. A paradigmatic inversion of this process is necessary for us to actually understand the ways in which different groups, cultures or collections of individuals act, interact, conceptualise and create their social worlds.

While it may be theoretically accepted that the actions of individuals create groups, classes and cultures, the academic disposition has been to investigate not the actions that create the categories, but rather the categories of which the actions are a part. The difference is subtle but is undeniably important. Different academic disciplines have come to accept different theories and conceptualizations over the course of paradigmatic maturation. Some theoretical concepts have proved to be incredibly useful to describe a particular state of affairs and as a result, the continuous use of this conceptual entity has become regularised. As immersion to disciplinary practice occurs, we typically draw on the set of tools (conceptual or theoretical notions) that we have learned are useful in explicating particular states of affairs. As a result, when trying to understand some new phenomenon, we implicitly view the particular actions, interactions or practices through the disciplinary lens of conceptual abstraction. We need to find the meaning of this new thing, and since we know that this thing is a



component part of a larger working mechanism, we resolve in describing this thing in relation to the larger construct.

A notable exception to the monopolisation of the lifestyle sports venue by cultural studies perspectives has come in the form of an attempted bridging of thematic concentration with the non-representational theory of cultural-geographer Nigel Thrift (2008). Thorpe and Rinehart (2010: 1268-69) provide what can be best characterised as a call for paradigmatic reorientation citing that “few studies to date have realized the complexities of the emotional, sensual and aesthetic aspects of such experiences . . . [and] experience is too often reduced to language or discourse or representation”. They contend that the non-representational theory of Thrift (2008) which “explores a vast array of sensory experience in a multiplicity of ways . . . may prove fruitful in examining a variety of meanings within alternative sport practices” (Thorpe & Rinehart 2010: 1269).

Their argument is explicitly in favour of a more affectively oriented investigation of embodied experience and real-time, in-the-moment action as a means of departure from the disciplinary occupation with aesthetics and the representational potential of subcultures, their ideologies, identities and consumptive tendencies. In lay terminology, their call is one which champions a more comprehensive understanding of local realities prior to characterisations which float on a level of abstraction high above the actions and practices of practitioners themselves; in the moment, immediate and embodied.

Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) provide a theoretical discussion regarding the possible applicability of Thrift’s (2008) non-representational theory through a brief outlining of the seven tenets of the theory along with examples from past work in alternative sport research and possible directions for future work. The seven tenants of Thrift’s theory (three of which will be covered in some detail below) are: on-flow, Anti-

biographical and pre-individual, practices, things space time and nature, experimental, affect and sensation, and, experience ethics and morals.

Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) point out that *on-flow* relates to the immediacy of lived experience or everyday life and cite previous investigations of surfing and snowboarding which point to the experience of *stoke*, or the indescribable and intangible affectual experiences in-the-moment which are most often claimed as the impetus for participation. While Thrift's conceptualisation of 'on-flow' conceptually relates to the more traditionally recognised utilisation of the term in positive psychology, on-flow for Thrift (2008), and resultantly, for Thorpe and Rinehart (2010), simply relates to immediacy of lived experience. While on-flow is described as a tenant, a more useful characterisation would be as a principle since the remainder of the tenants described by Thrift (2008) unequivocally employ *on-flow* as a constituent component of their utility.

The second tenant of relevance though its empirical utility is primarily suspect based on the gross ambiguity of its articulation is that of *practice*. Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) suggest that this tenant helps direct one's attention to the embodied nature of practice and the ways in which practice "approximates to a stable feature of a world that is continually in meltdown" (Thrift 2008: 8). There are components of this tenant which are useful for empirical orientations towards understanding lifestyle sport, despite the fact that the tenant itself is of little practical utility. Where empirical endeavours in lifestyle sport could benefit from a conceptualisation of *practice* as a salient feature of sporting communities is primarily in the acknowledgement that there is one single constituent which binds all members of a sporting subculture; the sport. For some reason, the majority of the literature has left this particular insight without treatment. As a result, the analysis chapters of this thesis take up the notion with material specificity.

Thrift (2008: 8) suggests that “practices are productive concatenations that have been constructed out of all manner of resources and which provide the basic intelligibility of the world”. While the ambiguity of this articulation leaves much to be desired, it appears as though Thrift’s notion of practice sits somewhere within the realm of Bourdieu’s (1977) as related to complexes or constellations of structures which have come to some coherent recognition as related. I will more thoroughly articulate the problematic components of this type of abstract conceptualisation below, for the time being, let it simply be recognised that the employment of non-representational theory for the study of lifestyle sports would unequivocally involve an empirical investigation of the things that people do, and the relative structures of similarity embedded therein.

The final tenant imploring articulation at some length is that of things, space, time, and nature. Admittedly, on the surface this tenant appears to incorporate all aspects of existentiality. However, its utility for my particular purposes extends only insofar as Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) recognise the role of ‘things’, ‘objects’, ‘spaces’ and ‘time’ as components which should be allocated some general empirical attention in the realm of lifestyle sport.

While Thorpe and Rinehart’s (2010) championing of particular elements stemming from Thrift’s (2008) non-representational theory point to some fruitful avenues of investigation, the general ambiguity in specificity and scope exemplified in the articulation of the tenants seems to hearken back to the over-generalised abstractions employed in previous work. Below, I articulate some of the general issues with this type of over-generalisation and/or level of abstraction through a discussion of developments within Multimodal Mediated Theory. First, it is important to highlight that lifestyle sport has begun to receive some attention outside of the realm of cultural studies and sport sociology. This new theoretical orientation has elucidated both the empirical value

of the study of lifestyle sport along with precedent for the employment of Multimodal Mediated Theory to the phenomena itself.

### **2.2.1 Toward a mediated discourse perspective**

Jones (2011a) draws on data from a year-long ethnographically based investigation of inter-city youth skateboarders in Hong Kong, China. Drawing on a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari, Jones (2011a) describes the ways in which the concept of “bodies without organs” can be applied to the contemporary resemiotization of the body as represented through various technological mediums. More specifically, he suggests that in the practice of amateur skateboarding, digital technologies have enabled “representations of our bodies that we or others make use of to take actions in the world” (Jones 2011a: 325). He identifies five main features of bodies without organs: deterritorialization, desynchronization, reproducibility, mutability and mimesis. In other words, “bodies without organs” can be represented and lifted out of and transplanted into other spaces; they can be transported and represented in different times or aspects of temporality; they can be multiply and simultaneously reproduced; they can be manipulated and edited or altered; and they can be representations implying some inherent connection to a real physical body. Jones (2011a) suggests that based on this feature, ‘bodies without organs’ classify as a unique type of cultural tool as a result of the implication of connection with some physical, concrete human body.

Jones (2011a) specifically looks at the practices of amateur skateboarders as they engage in, capture, edit and disseminate video footage of their practice in various socio-cultural forums. Most importantly, he points out that the practice and engagement in the sport is intimately linked to involvement in the capturing, editing and dissemination of skateboard footage. He claims that participants create films with various generic conventions based on industry practices that represent individual skateboarders as

traversing effortlessly through the urban environment involving multiple moves and lines appearing as though fluent and constant. Whereas, in actual practice, skateboarding involves much more falling down than it does successful landing of tricks. But, video technology and the affordances therein, enable participants to represent themselves as they would like to be, as projections of possibilities outside of the temporal and spatial realities of practice and in a realm of professional practitioner. As Jones (2011: 337) points out, “the most important effect is that digital technologies make the body more mutable, more editable, more susceptible to the imagination, and so more resistant to the *reification*”. In doing so, these technologies “problematize the body rather than stabilize it, and this might be in part what people find so threatening about them” (Jones 2011a: 337).

This chapter investigates elements of body representation that are prevalent in all forms of media and resemiotization but which receives little scholarship. Jones (2012) touches upon the ‘genre’ elements of the skateboard video and mentions aspects of movement through space as represented as seamless ‘lines’ while in actuality the performances take place in various locations and at different times. Jones’ (2012) discussion implicitly points to a number of incredibly interesting questions regarding the intersection of mediated action, practices and technology: What bearing do the actual affordances and constraints of the technology have on the practice of skateboarding? Conceivably, the practice of performing moves, tricks, lines and engaging in sessions, existed prior to the capturing of practice on film. Has the technology had an impact on the practice? What is the relationship between the capturing and the process of editing and the consolidation in a finished product?

Jones (2012) also exemplifies the ways in which “creative products aided [his] participants in learning how to skate and how to ‘become skateboarders’” (Jones 2012: 232). The discussion is initiated through detailing the conceptual notion of dynamical

systems wherein learning is a complexity of processes, not occurring in a hierarchical order. Rather, multiple processes on multiple timescales take place in the process of learning. As he points out, “a particular trick, for example, can be seen as made up of various micro-moves, or as a moment in the learning trajectory of a particular skater, or in terms of the evolution of the sport of skateboarding” (Jones 2012: 233). He goes even further in suggesting that “success depends chiefly on one’s ability to play with these different perspectives within complex systems of multiple processes, and to find some way to make connections between information generated on one timescale and information generated on another” (Jones 2012: 233). Through the analysis of the various timescales operating in succession during the practice of skateboarding, Jones posits that creativity enables us to ‘fold time’, making real, the interconnections between information embedded in disparate systems of action.

Jones (2012) also identifies numerous timescales which operate in the production of videos and the practice of skateboarding itself. Beginning with the move, which is located within the trick, situated within the line, the session, individual careers, situated in local histories, global histories and cultural flow, situated in lifetimes, Jones (2012) describes how the semiotic artefact of the skateboarding film enables creation across these timescales. The realization of these interconnections, Jones (2012) suggests is characteristic of dynamical systems of learning. He links this to Lemke’s (2000) investigation of the multiple timescales operating in the dynamical system of scholastic learning wherein micro timescales (chemical changes, neurons firing in the brain), interconnect with macro timescales (lessons, within schooldays, within semesters etc.).

The article contributes to our understandings of the complexity of human action, creation and representation. We are able to see the interconnectivity present when viewing action from a dynamical systems perspective. The work contributes to sociocultural research investigating the construction of culture and maintenance through

the establishment and interconnection of these varying timescales. However, how the move and trick specifically relate to the cultural flow of skateboarding in general is not explicitly outlined in detail.

Jones' (2011a, 2012) discussion of practices, technology, timescales and dynamical systems implicitly relates to Thrift's (2008) tenant of things, space, time and nature. Again, theoretical constituents more traditionally aligned with the domain of human geography appear to take centrality in contemporary work investigating lifestyle sport. As a result, it seems particularly relevant to provide a brief survey of the paradigmatic shifts which have occurred in the discipline of human geography with an eye towards elucidating how contemporary theorisation might provide some insights regarding the study of lifestyle sport.

## **2.3 Space and Time: Literature Review**

The broad trans-disciplinary field of human geography has undergone multiple re-orientations only partially characterisable as paradigmatic shifts. Moving from topographical conceptualisations of space and time as absolute or the ontological backdrop for human activity and social processes towards more flexible notions of relative and relational space, time or spacetime, current trends have sought freedom from the 'ontological baggage' of the traditional primitive markers of space and time (Merriman 2011). Increasingly, the field is dominated by the championing of permeable, mutable, emergent and affective notions which draw attention to the highly situated and fluctuating nature of spatiality through non-representational theory. Below, I provide a brief overview of conceptual developments in the field with an explicit focus towards how theoretical perspectives from Multimodal Mediated Theory might provide analytical acuity for pursuits in understanding space and spatiality.

Jones (2009) articulates, at length, the core paradigmatic shifts which have characterised the loosely definable trans-discipline of human geography (see also, Harvey 2006; Sheppard 2006). While the determination and/or assertion that these paradigms exist as compartmental and bounded entities is reductionist at best, the works which have come to represent the core building blocks of the discipline can be loosely categorised as related to either absolute, relative or relational perspectives. It is only with serious trepidation that one could suggest a provisional surveying of the paradigmatic shifts, though a selective discussion should highlight the core theoretical and conceptual developments which have characterised the now popular 'relational thinking' of which many contemporary endeavours implicitly exemplify. Furthermore, the outline should serve the more general purpose of exemplifying the ways in which paradigmatic reorientation has led the more flexible and permeable theorisation while highlighting to potential benefit which might be provided by approaching space, time and spacetime from a multimodal mediated perspective.

The debate regarding absolute and relative space exemplifies the trajectory of the discipline over the past hundred years. Both conceptual directions are essentially concerned with topography. Absolute space is the conceptualization of space as existing in and of itself, as a container, autonomous of all other actions and processes. Jones (2009) identifies Kant's transcendental idealism as this form of 'container framework' wherein the occupation of geographers is to fill the network of containers with information. Callon and Law (2004) identify this as a 'romantic' approach, which makes the assumption of a type of analytical fixity wherein spaces, things and elements have a relative permanency and stable interrelationship. This perspective would espouse a conceptualisation of distances, scales, regions and territories as unproblematic and unambiguous entities which have an existential and analytical character of immobility or stasis. There is an ontological independence of elements or materials which have



some realisable character a priori. Again, the invocation of a container-like, existential objectivity as the spatial background for all other actions and processes quite adequately articulates this perspective.

In opposition is the concept of relative space suggesting that “space can be defined only in relation to the object(s) and/or processes being considered in space and time . . . [and] there is no defined or fixed relationship for locating things under consideration” (Jones 2009: 489-490). Relative approaches began to gain momentum (no pun intended) when conceptualized within Einstein’s general relativity theory. However, these relative approaches have inherent problems and drawing on Grunbaum (1963), Harvey (1969) suggests that the primary empirical problem facing relative geographic thought is that of selecting an appropriate geometry with which to deal with the complex trajectories and forces. The relativist tradition has been characterised as most acutely concerned with the behaviour of objects, forces and entities, whereby a point in space and/or time is most fruitfully considered as a moment or event in spacetime. This paradigmatic ontology has been identified by Gregory (1978: 73) as an enterprise of “social physics in a spatial context”.

Critics of the relativist tradition have noted the apparent ambiguity in an approach which borders materiality and subjectivity, or the relationship between concept and entity. Coupled with debates regarding exactly how to uncover, articulate and represent interrelationships between objects and space, contemporary endeavours have since abandoned relativist ontology in favour of a more flexible, permeable, momentary and fluctuating ontological orientation; this is traditionally referred to as a relational approach and the majority of contemporary work in the field can be partially characterised as indicative of relational thinking. Jones (2009: 491) points out that “relational thinking is a paradigmatic departure from the concerns of absolute and relative space, because it dissolves the boundaries between objects and space, and

rejects forms of spatial totality”. This disrupts traditional separations between space and things because “in short, objects are space, space is objects, and moreover objects can be understood only in relation to other objects” (Jones 2009: 491). In as far as absolute and relativist ontology exemplifies an implication of close alignment with contemporary mathematical and physical science developments, relational space similarly mirrors (at least conceptually) developments initiated by the work of Leibniz in non-Euclidian geometry. While discussions regarding fluid dynamics and inter-object motion and interconnectivity are beyond the breadth and depth of this thesis, it is relevant to point out the concrete affect that mathematical and geometric advancement has had on the development of philosophical inquiry. A point best exemplified and articulated in Sklar’s (1977) *Space, Time, and Spacetime*.

Sklar (1977) artfully articulates what has been described as a ‘flat ontology’ in the assertion of the philosophical affirmation of the existential primacy of events, material occurrences and processes. Through an explicit critique of the absolute (substantialist) theories, and the implication that conceptualisations regarding space, time, and spacetime are, to draw on Dewey’s (1938) terminology, primarily ‘illusions of perspective’, Sklar (1977: 168) claims that “properly speaking, the relata occupy the appropriate spacetimes only in the sense that they bear spatiotemporal relations to one another”. This implicitly negates the concept of ‘occupation’ because “there is no spacetime itself to be occupied” (Sklar 1977: 168). Sklar (1977: 1968) argues that all kinds of ‘relations’ that manifest, only do so between events and/or things and “cannot have these relations to points of space, instances of time, or event locations in spacetime, for there are no such things over and above the material ‘occupants’ of them”.

To be clear, this is not a suggestion that Sklar’s theoretical enterprise could be encapsulated comfortably within any paradigmatic domain of theorisation, only that his

description of ‘occupation’ and ‘points’ as illusory notions implicitly highlights the ontological orientation of relationist thinking. Admittedly, Sklar is unquestionably chastising of the many holes in relationist theory (at this time), however, this is not a damnation of the entire perspective because, as Earman (1989) has noted, there are nearly as many versions of relationism as there are relationists.

The relationist spatial project of replacing “topography and structure-agency dichotomies with a topological theory of space, place and politics as encountered, performed and fluid” (Jones 2009: 492) is explicitly reminiscent of one of Wheaton’s (2004b) defining characteristics of lifestyle sport. Though there is a theoretical orientation towards describing participation as consumption which in my view is an over-simplified abstraction, Wheaton (2004b: 12) drawing on the empirical work of Shields (1992) and Borden (2001) characterises the ‘spaces of consumption’ as “new or appropriated ‘liminal’ zones . . . mostly without fixed or created boundaries”.

Beyond the relational perspectives which as touched upon above, are theoretically variable and hardly characterisable as paradigmatically congruous, there has been a contemporary shift in the ontological ethos championing new and novel conceptualisations about space, time, and spacetime. As Merriman (2011: 14) explicitly denotes in the introductory statements of *Human geography without time-space* with a proposition regarding “a way forward that does not seek to apprehend events as if they automatically unfold in, produce, or become associated with ontologies situated in, space-times”. Instead, Merriman (2011: 14) draws upon notions of process and non-representational thinking to exemplify the ways in which “other primitive ontological constituents frequently erupt into being and emerge from events, ranging from movement, sensation to affect, to energy, force and rhythm”. Merriman (2011) clearly articulates the theoretical positions of traditional geography and its preoccupation with time-space, space-time or space *and* time. Despite ruminations about departure from a

Newtonian dimensionality, time and space have continued to function as unbreakable and unquestionable units in the process of geographical thought over the past century. Merriman explicitly questions the appropriateness of this direction and suggests the possibility of a new geographical avenue displacing conceptual predispositions around time and space. Through a chronological recount of literature supporting and maintaining, sometimes unintentionally, the conceptual chains of space and time, Merriman suggests the possibility of something called movement-space which he picks up from investigations of dance and driving.

Merriman (2011) thoroughly articulates the ways in which progressive work in human geography and correlated social sciences have carried the onto-epistemological baggage of the existence of space-time, time- space or some combination or abstraction of the two. Despite attempts to reformulate the concepts through the use of geometry, philosophy or social theory, both concepts, in some form, have managed to persist in all theorizations of space, place and human action. Moving beyond Kantian static conceptions of time and space as the backdrop for existence, to more comprehensive understandings of time and space as socially constituted and created through practice, Merriman (2011: 21) maintains that the occupation limits our theoretical understanding. He instead proposes the concept of *movements-space* wherein “the world is in constant movement, flux and becoming, and the qualities of movement cannot simply be reduced to instances in space or moments in time”.

Merriman (2011) provides two different scenarios to exemplify how a re-conceptualisation of sociological primitives could help us escape the epistemological determinism of space-time concentration. From dance, he refers to theorization and practice of experimental dance as occurring, creating and affecting movement-space in a continual process of becoming and change. Next, he introduces investigations on the driving of cars, specifically referring to Smithson’s (1983) work, wherein traditional

primitives of sensory space-time are theorized and multifarious in the kinaesthetic experience of moving-seeing-spacing-being. In other words, Merriman (2011) is championing the investigation of events utilizing different primitive markers other than space and time.

Much is to be said about the redefinition of conceptual primitives in which we take for granted as bounding the existence of all events, however, conceptually, for time and space to have been afforded such prominence in sociocultural experiential thought they must have some relevancy to our everyday experience. Perhaps it would be more advantageous to look at a redefinition of time and space, in correlation with the ancillary experiential primitives identified by Merriman (2011: 21) like “movement, sensation, energy, affect, rhythm and force.”

Jones (2009: 495-496) also identifies a number of epistemological and ontological infelicities in relational thinking and despite its disciplinary momentum, he explicates five particular limits which question: 1) the nature of relations themselves and whether these comprise existential relations or relational properties; 2) how these ‘relations’ exist in spacetime; 3) the material constituents and/or objects of relationship; 4) how distinction between the multifarious states of *motion* or *movement* can occur; and, 5) the problems exemplified in the fracturing of relationist approaches.

Resultantly, Jones (2009:497) proposes an “ensemble ontology that recognizes the co-existence of structure and flow and also acknowledges the evolutionary and developmental nature of spatiality” which he identifies as ‘phase space’. Essentially, Jones proposes a combination of the aforementioned geographic traditions by reference to Poincare’s (1952) work on dynamic systems exemplifying possibility without the necessity to demonstrate existence. Thus, the perspective rejects a priori knowing of space but also rejects the notion that inner-connections take precedence over external structures. In other words, absolute, relativistic and relationist ideas all play a role in

the conceptualization of dynamic system (phase space). This position has been described as one interested in both the variable and the fixed which emerge together, are intimately intertwined and can only be understood together (Gailson 2003). Phase space describes not only what happens, but also what would happen under different circumstances, while also acknowledging that possibility is constrained by present states of affairs, or 'contextual realities' (whatever those are).

While 'phase space' brings together the valuable aspects of the aforementioned perspectives, it does so without dispelling the problematic elements of each conceptual orientation. While much time could be spent tearing apart the theoretical basis of the concept, it would probably be more wise to focus on why exactly the concept is laden with theoretical infelicities.

In the description of phase space and its possible application, Jones (2009: 429) more comprehensively describes what was claimed to be the occupation of relationalists, a theory of "space, place and politics as encountered, performed and fluid". The provision that the concept of *phase space* might adequately cross the boundaries of not only absolute, relative and relationist theory but also extend through physical geography, human geography, contemporary physics, communication studies, philosophy, political science, anthropology and history is a lofty endeavour indeed. Furthermore, that actual description of the concept is too ambiguous for any practical application. Still others have identified new directions for theorisation regarding space and time.

Through the carefully crafted exposition of what can only be considered a metaphysical conceit (ie. an intricate and continuously sustained metaphorical appropriation), Thrift (2006) considers the contemporary geographical occupation with space in reference to the artwork of the Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu. Thrift (2009) identifies four key principles that are a part of her work and which he suggests

should be at the forefront of all contemporary endeavours to understand space, namely: everything is spatially distributed; there is no such thing as boundary; every space is in constant motion; and there is no one kind of space. He continues to outline the intricacies of the four principles and concludes by offering three vignettes as exemplifications of the importance of these principles. Thematically, the vignettes focus on being with others, affecting others, and organizing others.

First, “everything, is spatially distributed, down to the smallest monad . . . [and] every space is shot through with other spaces in ways that are not just consequential outcomes of some other quality but live because they have that distribution” (Thrift 2006: 140). In other words, everything, even the head of a needle, has its own geography or place of being in some sense or another. Second, all spaces are to some extent permeable or porous. Third, despite attempts to concretize such, “there is no static and stabilized space” (Thrift 2006: 141). In other words, flow, flux, becoming and changing is all that exists and all that there is. Finally, “space comes in many guises: points, planes, parabolas; blots blurs and blackouts” (Thrift 2006: 141). Thrift identifies these four principles of space and continues to articulate the ways in which Mehretu’s work exemplifies or represents a turning away from four *other* conceptualizations of space: “space as a place in which everything comes together . . . a search for a space that lies outside metrics . . . space as a site separated from movement . . . [and] the idea of space as somehow separated from time” (Thrift 2006: 141-142).

Thrift illustrates three characteristic aspects of space through reference to Whale-space, British imperialism and modern commercial organizations. Whale-space exemplifies the concept of space as intimately connected to being with others. Describing the territorial relations of whales and interconnectedness across vast expanses of ocean, Thrift (2006) explains the immediacy of interrelation outside the realm of traditionally conceived distance. Togetherness for whales can exist whilst

thousands of kilometres of ocean separate them. Regarding affecting others, Thrift calls upon the practices of gifting and the circuit of departure that sustained imperial rule in India despite overwhelmingly disproportionate numbers of cultural inhabitants. Finally, pertaining to the organization of others, Thrift (2006) describes the ways in which space is produced through exigencies of performance in large commercial organizations.

Through the articulation of the four principles of space which Thrift (2006) argues should be the occupation of contemporary geography, he brings together previously disparate sub-disciplinary specialties. In doing so, we are forced to not pick a side, but rather, consider the (and I use the terms loosely), affordances and constraints (Gibson 1979) of each theoretical direction. This exemplifies the paradigmatic shift that many social science disciplines are undergoing, whereby conventionally opposed theoretical traditions are being called upon to enable a more holistic understanding of particular phenomena.

Thrift's (2006) discussion of the four spatial principles through the invocation of three different vignettes explicitly exemplifies what I consider the central issue with contemporary theorisation regarding space and time; and this is the primary impetus for the inclusion of his arguments outside of a more logical chronology. The occupation of human geographers and philosophers of spatiotemporal components of existentiality have allocated theoretical attention to spatiotemporal totality. While the philosophical rigour of such an endeavour should in no way be trivialised, resultantly, there is an increasing ambiguity from the philosophical attempt to characterise the entirety of spatiotemporality. My particular position on the matter is not whether contemporary theorisation can account for whales, imperialism and commercialism simultaneously. Instead, I would ask whether this theorisation will provide comprehensive direction and/or some utility for empirical work.



## **2.4 Conclusion: Literature Review of Lifestyle Sports and Space and Time**

Investigation into the complexities of lifestyle sport exemplify a thematic orientation towards the ways in which social cohesion, subcultures, identity, argot, dress, attitude and ideology manifest in and between practitioners. There have also been explicit concerns about incorporation, commoditisation, institutionalisation and the ways in which spatial appropriation exemplifies facets of contestation and the alternative. While a few studies have implied that there is something fundamentally relevant about the mediated actions and practices exemplified in the sports themselves (Wheaton 2003; Booth 2004), much of the discussion is oriented around the ways in which skill, prowess or technical proficiency manifest in symbolic capital. Following Thorpe and Rinehart (2010), it seems time to employ new, unique, flexible, embodied and affective methodological tools and theories in approaches to phenomena that are primarily lived and experienced in-the-moment.

The increasing sphere and thematic orientation of contemporary geographic pursuits which range from whale relations to political economy have resulted in a lack of empirical utility. While theorisation has provided some directions from which empirical pursuits might depart, the level of philosophical abstraction makes it difficult to employ theoretical notions to the real-time material and local actions, interactions and practices of social actors. While claims defending the incommensurability of spatiotemporal theorisation and material realities based on different levels of abstraction would be well founded, my particular treatment of space and spatiality in the chapters which follow has sought to localise theorisation through the employment of a singular ecological unit of analysis; the mediated action.

As a result, my employment of the terms space and spatial differ quite drastically from endeavours in human geography, and admittedly, my discussion of

space and locational elements could be considered philosophically mundane when compared to the treatment exemplified by scholars in the field. However, the philosophical simplicity of my employment has been an explicit endeavour to deal with space, spatiality and locational elements with a considerably more material and local analytical orientation. This is made possible primarily through the employment of a theoretical framework which simultaneously champions analytical specificity while provisionally outlining theoretical principles which should guide rather than dictate empirical endeavours.

In the next chapter, I outline some of the core theoretical properties of what can be loosely considered Multimodal Mediated Theory (MMT) (Norris 2013b) with an eye towards elucidating the ways in which MMT may assist in approaching lifestyle sport from a perspective more in line with Thrift's non-representational theory and the possible benefits of MMT to the investigation of space and spatiality through a more localised and material analytical approach.

# 3 Literature Review: Multimodal Mediated Theory

## 3.1 Introduction: Multimodal Mediated Theory

Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) is unequivocally indebted to the theoretical insights and conceptualisations exemplified in Wertsch's (1991, 1995a, 1998) Mediated Action Theory, and Scollon's (1998, 2001a) Mediated Discourse Analysis. While there are quite explicit relationships between the three, their treatment as semi-distinct entities will hopefully serve to elucidate their psychological, discursive and multimodal orientations with an eye towards the ways in which they might collectively serve in the investigation of human action, interaction and communication. Below, I draw upon some of the seminal works which can be conceptualised as relating to *mediated action* in an attempt to articulate some particular insights provided by each emergent recapitulation. In doing so, I will first describe the anti-reductionist ethos championed in the work of Jim Wertsch (1985, 1991, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2005; Wertsch & Rupert 1993) as an analytical and theoretical justification for the employment of mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis. Next, I articulate the uptake and extension of this theorisation exemplified with a disciplinary orientation towards the study of discursive phenomenon (Scollon 1998, 2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2008). Finally, how Scollon's (1998, 2001a) discursive orientation coupled with a burgeoning interest in multi-modal forms of meaning-making led to the development of Multimodal (Inter)Action Analysis (Norris 2004, 2011), and a growing body of theorisation loosely identifiable as Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b).

Consistent among the theoretical perspectives and exemplified in the term *mediated* is the championing of a single ecological unit of analysis: the *mediated action*. Originally introduced by Wertsch (1991) citing the theoretical incommensurability

exemplified in psychological traditions which allocate analytical priority to either universals *or* sociocultural situatedness, Wertsch proposes a unit of analysis which seeks to ‘live in the middle’ and keep alive the complex and intersecting individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes which permeate cognition, action and communication. Scollon (2001a: 119) has described the endeavour as “Wertsch’s move to finesse the now perennial debates about whether it is most useful to conceive of the human individual as the core building block out of which all else is fashioned . . . or the society . . . as the primary entity from which the behaviour of individuals may be derived”. In doing so, Wertsch (1991, 1998) proposes a kind of middle ground, flouting the individual – society antinomy through proposing a unit of analysis which irreducibly involves both constituents. Claiming the mediated action as the most useful unit of sociocultural analysis on the ground that it exemplifies an anti-reductionist sentiment through maintaining the complexities of the phenomenon itself, there is a reconstitution of the agent as the ‘individual-acting-with-mediational-means’.

Wertsch’s invocation of the mediated action as the unit of analysis and the core tenants surrounding its utility explicitly links Mediated Action Theory with various perspectives which all loosely correlate in a theoretical disposition to highlight the analytical relevance of human action. Most explicitly, Wertsch draws on Kenneth Burke’s (1966, 1969, 1989) occupation with human action and his articulation of the analytical utility of the ‘pentad’ in opposition to traditional deterministic and/or monistic theoretical perspectives. Much of Wertsch’s theoretical argument regarding the necessity of a unit of analysis which in and of itself espouses anti-reductionism seems to correlate quite explicitly with Burke’s contention regarding the fallibility and/or theoretical determinism exemplified in disciplinary compartmentalisation.

As the key impetus for the employment of the mediated action as the unit of analysis and, as the theoretical backbone of Mediated Action Theory, Mediated

Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Mediated Theory, the inherent problematic of fragmentary compartmentalisation and monistic perspectives deserves some general consideration and treatment.

First, it should be acknowledged that the mediated action was initially introduced on the grounds that “the discipline of psychology seems less capable than ever of providing a coherent account of the human mind” (Wertsch 1991: 1) and while multiple insights into individual aspects of mental processing or functioning have emerged “we have many isolated, often arcane pieces to a larger puzzle, but we have no coherent, integrative picture of the whole”. In these introductory remarks to *Voices of the Mind*, Wertsch (1991) highlight what will resultantly be exemplified as the endemic problems of fragmentation and compartmentalisation which increasingly characterise contemporary academic endeavours. While this is by no means a novel insight, and draws comprehensively on arguments embedded in Burke’s dramatisic approach, its salience and relevance still applies in the contemporary climate of the social sciences.

Wertsch (1998) invokes Burke’s concept of ‘terministic screens’ as an exemplification of the ontological shortcomings of theoretical determinism and disciplinarity whereby Burke claims that “even if any terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (Burke 1989:115, emphasis original). While the assertion would seem to implicitly champion efforts towards escaping the determinism or blinding effect of terministic screens, the reality of the situation is such that terministic screens are inescapable; resultantly, Wertsch (1998: 17) claims “again, we are back to seeking a way to live in the middle”.

This middle ground is explicitly exemplified in the employment of the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis. The mediated action always and irreducibly involves a social actor acting with or through mediational means and/or cultural tools.

Resultantly, the mediated action always and unequivocally involves the interconnections between the individual and society, or the pentadic elements of agent and agency. While the mediated action as the unit of analysis “gives less emphasis to other elements in the pentad such as scene and purpose . . . it makes sense to give the relationship between agent and instrument a privileged position” (Wertsch 1998: 24). First, such a dialectical focus helps to overcome ‘methodological individualism’. Second, Wertsch (1998) suggests that an acute focus on the actor-mediational means can provide an entry point and can illuminate other elements of the pentad like scene, purpose or act. While warning of the implications of attempts to reduce the other pentadic elements to the mediated action, “it provides a kind of natural link between action, including mental action, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which such action occurs (Wertsch 1998: 24).

Based on the fact that mediational means and/or cultural tools are always and irreducibly involved or embedded in the unit of analysis itself, one is forced to recognise the sociocultural, institutional and historical processes and trajectories which live in the tools themselves, and thus, in the action itself. It is on these grounds that the mediated action is championed as the most useful unit of sociocultural analysis; because in the unit itself, the complexities of individual, sociocultural, institutional and historical facets are irreducibly alive and permeating. An anti-reductionist sentiment exists in the unit itself, and thus, permeates its employment in analysis.

In the articulation of ten basic claims regarding the ontological nature and analytical utility of the mediated action as a unit of analysis, the first and conceivably most important is the irreducible tension between the social actor and mediational means. This focus on the social actor (Wertsch uses the term agent) and mediational means simultaneously is an attempt to employ an analytical ‘unit’ which attempts to maintain as much of the complexity of the phenomenon itself. This endeavour can be

seen as deriving directly from the work of Vygotsky (1987: 45) who warned of the decomposition of phenomena into elements for analysis because “when one approaches the problem of thinking and speech by decomposing it into its elements, one adopts the strategy of the man who resorts to the decomposition of water into hydrogen and oxygen” in the search for explanations regarding its ability to extinguish fire. Vygotsky (1987: 45) claims that “this man will discover, to his chagrin, that hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains combustion” and therefore “will never succeed in explaining the characteristics of the whole by analyzing the characteristics of its elements”.

The gravity of this particular insight will become increasingly salient in relation to the theoretical conceptualisations espoused in the contemporary field of Multimodality (to be discussed below). For the time being, it is important to highlight the ways in which the mediated action as a unit of analysis always and irreducibly involves a tension between the social actor and mediational means resulting in an obscuring and/or blurring of the classificatory lines distinguishing the two.

Wertsch (1998) articulates this embedded tension using the example of a pole vaulter and the act of completing a multiplication problem. His employment of the pole vaulter scenario is extended throughout many of the claims surrounding the utility of the mediated action as a unit of analysis. Wertsch employs this particular example suggesting that a pole vaulter’s pole is an explicitly material instance of a mediational means, while many of the mediational means involved in other types of mediated action (including cognition, speaking, writing etc.) involve mediational means and/or cultural tools of ephemeral materiality (language, mathematics). This is not to suggest that they do not have materiality, only that a pole vaulter’s pole provides a very clear exemplification.

Citing some historical/developmental facts about the sport of pole vaulting (a discussion which is extended in later sections), Wertsch notes the irreducible tension

exemplified in the mediated action of pole vaulting through an attempt to answer the question, who is performing the action? While it seems commonplace to allocate an agency to the social actor themselves, after all, without the pole vaulter, there can be no pole vaulting, Wertsch points out the irresolvable tension between the vaulter and his pole in explaining that “it is futile, if not ridiculous, to try to understand the action of pole vaulting in terms of the mediational means – the pole – or the agent in isolation” (Wertsch 1998: 27). The pole cannot “magically propel vaulters over a cross bar . . . an agent without a pole or with an inappropriate pole is incapable of participating in the event”. However, there is an explicit warning of attempting to conceptualise mediated action as an undifferentiated whole, because many of the strategies employed in the analysis of mediated action are made possible by the ability to differentiate between the elements in the equation. This momentary isolation must always and only occur with “an eye to how the pieces fit together in the end, but it cannot really get off the ground if mediated action is treated as an undifferentiated whole” (Wertsch 1998: 27).

There is an implication of pragmatism in Wertsch’s championing of the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis through the irresolvable tensions exemplified between the social actor and mediational means. In the mediated action, neither the individual or the mediational means can ever be treated as isolated elements primarily because all human action is mediated in some manner, through some complex or constellation of mediational means; similarly, mediational means only come into existence or ‘play their role’ when a social actor employs them in action. If one endeavours to examine the ways in which social actors act, interact and communicate, there is an ontological necessity towards the invocation of this irreducible dialectic. Wertsch (1998) highlights the issues associated with treatment in isolation by suggesting that any investigation which allocates analytical priority to the elements in isolation is not really a study of action, but of mediational means and/or cultural tools in



the abstract; which provides little information regarding the ways in which they are used.

The relevance of this position lies in the fact that the mediational means and/or cultural tools employed in mediated action “shape the action in essential ways” (Wertsch 1991: 12). Resultantly, the character of any and all human action is not simply attributable to the individual as the autonomous and completely agentive social actor, there exist in the tools themselves complex affordances and constraints which unequivocally affect, influence and shape the action itself. To exemplify this idea, Wertsch (1998) again invokes the scenario of pole vaulting and articulates the ways in which both social actor and mediational means are co-constitutive in the developmental trajectories which have manifested historically. Beginning as an activity whereby distance travelled was the primary determinate of skill and/or prowess, the technological developments and employment of different materials in pole construction have shaped the activity itself. The result has been an activity which now places competitive priority on one’s ability to jump over a bar located at a considerable height. The transformations involved in the activity itself must be conceptualised in coordination with the mediational means through which the jumping or vaulting is accomplished.

Throughout his articulation of the ten properties of mediated action, there is an acute focus on the effects of mediational means on the actions humans take. This may be attributable to the disciplinary dominance of individual cognition, motive and agency in contemporary psychological endeavours coupled with the general concern for recognising the prevalence of the sociocultural, historical and institutional facets of the phenomenon itself. Resultantly, Wertsch’s analytical occupation seems to fluctuate through a displacement of priority on either the action itself, or the mediational means through which the action is taken (Scollon 2001a). While there has been an implicit chastising of the increasingly abstract and ambiguous nature of the mediational means

incorporated into Wertsch's ten principles of mediated action and his more thorough discussion of narrative as a cultural tool, there is an explicit aversion to this task. He claims that "my goal in this and the following sections is not to provide a rigid definition or system of categorisation . . . any attempt to do so would be either so abstract or so expansive as to have little meaning" (Wertsch 1998: 25).

While there does seem to be an explicit aversion to rigid definitions and classificatory efforts which would quite explicitly oppose the theoretical value of the anti-reductionist sentiments embedded in employing the mediated action as a unit of analysis, there is undoubtedly an ambiguity surrounding the nature of mediational means. Scollon (2001a: 120) points out that "as Wertsch has developed the concept of the mediational means, and consequently the concept of the mediated action, there is an ambiguity of scope and an ambiguity of concreteness or specificity". While some mediational means like the pole vaulter's pole are objects, others are "highly semiotized, psychological objects, such as the official history of the Soviet Union" (Scollon 2001a: 120). In an effort to clarify some of this ambiguity, Scollon (2001a) recapitulates Wertsch's ten properties into five characteristics including four originally proposed (with some reformation) and the inclusion of another not dealt with by Wertsch. However, in order to situate Scollon's (2001a) attempt to concretise the characteristics of mediational means and the role they play in mediated action, it is important to consider the relevance and salience of Scollon's particular uptake of certain theoretical tenants in his Mediated Discourse Theory.

Mediated Discourse Theory (MDT) (Scollon 2001a) is an eclectic constellation of theoretical notions brought together in the service of understanding social action, communication and the historical and sociocultural trajectories which permeate the real-time unfolding of discursive events. In explicit alignment with Wertsch (1998), Scollon (2001a: 3) champions the employment of the mediated action as the ecological unit of

analysis on the pragmatic grounds that “these are the moments in social life when the Discourses in which we are interested are instantiated in the social world as social action, not simply as material objects”. As touched upon above, there are marked compatibilities between Wertsch’s (1998) Mediated Action Theory, and Scollon’s (2001a) Mediated Discourse Theory and above the explicit disciplinary foci (psychology and linguistics), MDT provides a much more expansive theoretical lens through which to view social action, communication and history. While not explicitly articulated by Scollon himself, MDT seems to take up the concentration on mediated action, with an implicit focus on what the mediated action can tell us about the other pentadic elements from Burkes (1966, 1969) dramatisitic approach.

Scollon (2001a: 6) explicitly claims that mediated discourse theory “is a theory about social action with a specific focus on discourse as a kind of social action as well as upon discourse as a component of social action”. While there is a comprehensive focus on discourse, communication and the linguistic components of social action, to interpret MDT as a theory holistically concerned with discourse would be a semantically informed marginalisation of its theoretical reach. A description of the primary theoretical notions which comprise the backbone of MDT and the methodological constituents which occupy central concern for mediated discourse analysis will exemplify the highly trans-disciplinary nature and broad applicability for investigating real-time social action, interaction and communication.

Mediated Discourse Theory is heavily influenced by theoretical notions traditionally aligned with anthropological linguistics, discourse analysis, sociocultural psychology, sociology, literacy studies and practice theory. The primary principles of social action, communication and history which include multiple corollary components are permeated by work in the aforementioned disciplines and Scollon (2001a: 6) admits that the principles are not “unique to mediated discourse; indeed, it is my hope that the

only originality, if there is originality at all in these ideas, is in the degree of explicitness of the underlying principles I am trying to achieve”. While an implicitly humble admission, the coordination of various previously disparate theoretical notions in the service of a more comprehensive approach to the study of human action, interaction and communication permeates the anti-reductionist sentiments explicitly championed in the work of Vygotsky (1976, 1978) and Wertsch (1991, 1995a, 1998). Resultantly, Scollon’s (2001a) Mediated Discourse Theory and methodological component, Mediated Discourse Analysis can be viewed in the same vein, as an attempt to maintain the complexity of the individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes and trajectories which permeate social action itself.

As an explicit invocation of this theoretical necessity; that is, towards a perspective of constellation and complexity rather than efforts in pursuit of elemental reduction and classification, Scollon (2001a: 10) claims that “we need to have not just a theory of discourse and its relationship to action, and not just a psychological theory of the internalization of social life, and not just a theory of the connections between language and culture or language and thought”. Instead, we must conceptualise “social action as being grounded in the concrete day-to-day actions which are themselves produced at the intersection of practice, discourse, technology, and analysis” (Scollon 2001a: 11). This commentary poignantly addresses the bilateral imperative of a theoretical perspective which seeks not only descriptive and explanatory power in elucidating the complex sociocultural and historical processes which produce and reproduce structures of social organisation, but the analytical necessity of grounding any theoretical abstractions in the real-time, immediate and material moments in social life where these structures manifest.

Scollon’s central claim regarding MDT, and a marked departure from the representational, semiotic and systemic approaches (Halliday 1973, 1978, 1985; Martin

1992, 1995, 2000; Eggins 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Thompson 2004; Martin & Rose 2008) which characterise much contemporary thought regarding the nature of language, discourse and communication, is that “discourse is best conceived of as a matter of social action, not systems of representation or thoughts or values” (Scollon 2001a: 6). The centrality of this notion cannot be overstated; it is the pivotal crux of MDT, and there is an admission that the second two guiding principles are “definitional extensions of the first”. Indeed, the corollaries identified as constituent components of this first principle extend to notions regarding communication and history.

The principle of social action comprises six corollary elements, three of which I would like to discuss at some length, primarily in support of exemplifying the ways in which *social action* implicitly and irreducibly includes notions of communication and history. First, Scollon’s (1998, 2001a) employment of the term social action, and resultantly, his championing of social action as the primordial concept in MDT quite explicitly invokes Wertsch’s (1991, 1995a, 1998) exemplification of the analytical utility of mediated action as a way to avoid allocating undue priority to either the agent or mediational means and/or cultural tools in isolation. In this vein, and accepting the discursive orientation of Scollon’s theoretical perspective, language is conceptualised as a mediational means through which human beings take actions in the world. Again, this reiterates the pragmatism of this position and the departure from what Scollon (2001a: 6) identifies as theories with “an interest in the abstract formal structures of language, of which we seem to have a surplus”.

While a theoretical concern with language as a mediational means is not a novel idea (Vygotsky and Wertsch were both interested in language as a mediational means), it does mark a paralinguistic turn in contemporary discourse studies through an implication that language is only one of many mediational means; and as will become increasingly clear, there are many cases whereby language cannot be attributed with

communicative priority (Norris 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Furthermore, while Scollon admits to employing the term *mediated discourse* with some liberty, his particular analytical concern regarding the acquisition of a particular practice, and the ontogenesis of the social actor who acquires a practice through various mediational means and/or cultural tools, implicitly displaces the ontological priority of language in favour of a more localised perspective on the social actions involved.

Extending the notion of mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis which comprises corollary one of the property of social action, Scollon implicitly highlights the communicative nature of mediated action through the term *social*. In contrast to some of Wertsch's (1998) discussion regarding mediated action and mediational means and/or cultural tools, MDT is oriented towards the social and interactional components of mediated action. Resultantly, Scollon (2001a:7) points out that the term social implies both a system of shared meaning and that an action must be communicative.

The second corollary of the principle of social action and intimately connected with the communicative nature of social action itself is the notion of practice. The incredibly broad and ambiguous employment of this term necessitates some refinement, insofar as Scollon's use (while loosely connected to the traditional semantic associations attributed) is conceptualised as intimately related to mediated action, but as a means to articulate the ways in which there have come to be some component of regularity in both the undertaking of mediated action and the interpretation. Straightforwardly, though this is an incredibly simplistic definitional attempt; a practice is a mediated action with a history.

The conceptualisation of practice, as Scollon puts it, is much more in accordance with practice as a count noun rather than a mass noun. By this, Scollon is referring to a reorientation away from the traditional use of the term which has been employed to

articulate complex social arrangements and/or structures. Practice within MDT is more specifically conceptualised as regularised mediated actions accumulated through experiential aggregation into the habitus (Bourdieu 1977) of a social actor over-time. In this manner, social practice in Scollon's terms is much more material and concrete. Rather than referring to complexes of various and highly differentiated mediated action, involved in say having dinner, Scollon's attention is allocated to individual practices like that of handing, the ways in which these practices are socially co-constituted dialogically and thus through interaction, and the manifestation of practices within the habitus of the social actor.

Scollon (2001a) argues that it is precisely within the domain of practices whereby mediated actions occur naturally, unconsciously and tacitly, involving little explicit negotiation (unless the practice goes wrong for some reason). An experiential aggregation of mediated actions as manifest in the habitus of the social actor is a pivotal concern regarding the nature of practice. Resultantly, practice simultaneously relates to all three of MDT's theoretical principles, manifesting through mediated actions and the aggregation therein; permeating out of communicative behaviour and being situated historically.

There is considerable attention allocated to the articulation of the notion of practice and to the process of acquisition through intersecting discursive trajectories and experiences. In doing so, there is a simultaneous attempt to more thoroughly articulate the ontological nature of mediational means as they manifest in and through mediated action.

Scollon (2001a) argues that mediational means refers not to things themselves but to a category of 'things' which can be and are often employed in the undertaking of social action and practices. Through this articulation, a central component in theorisation about the nature of mediational means is the contingent nature of

mediational means themselves. Scollon (2001a) points out the ways in which various household items can all function as mediating the practice of handing; simultaneously noting the ways in which kitchen utensils can mediate that actions of noise making, placating a crying child, and handing. The results of this analysis point to the necessity of always considering mediational means in-use as they are used to undertake social action and various practices. Resultantly, objects acquire a particular character through their employment as mediational means through which social action is accomplished. Again, there is an implicit pragmatism towards an analytical strategy which seeks to understand the manifestation of social action and practice rather than provide commentary regarding the onto-epistemological nature of mediational means and/or cultural tools which simply exist.

While Scollon does highlight the marked ambiguity regarding the classification of mediational means, the theoretical arguments espoused through his analysis appear to more explicitly support Wertsch's (1998) claim regarding the futility in classification as a result of the contingent nature of mediational means which always and only manifest in-use. While this component of mediational means-in-use seems quite commonplace, it is a pivotal theoretical notion and deserves considerable articulation based on its ramifications for contemporary Multimodality.

Wertsch's (1998) discussion of 'spin off' uses of mediational means which come to be employed for mediated actions they were not necessarily designed to facilitate, and Scollon's (2001a) articulation of the contingent nature of mediational means-in-use which manifest through social action and practice have very serious theoretical ramifications in relation to the field of multimodality. If analytical focus is allocated towards the ways in which mediational means and/or cultural tools acquire a particular character or 'play their role' in and through mediated action, there is an implicit trivialising of endeavours which would seek to develop a description of mediational



means and/or cultural tools as entities outside or as distinct from mediated action. Indeed, Wertsch (1998) points to this notion in his assertion that efforts in categorising mediational means or types of mediated actions would result in such expansive abstraction that the endeavour would have little empirical value. However, the original empirical trajectory of Multimodality which initially stemmed from systemic functional linguistics exemplified this particular orientation. Resultantly, efforts towards employing MDA with a multimodal orientation required a notable break from a primarily social semiotic perspective. Below, I outline the origins of the term Multimodality, initial empirical efforts which spawned the now highly trans and interdisciplinary approaches which can be considered under this heading, and the contribution of Multimodal Mediated Theory which exemplifies a break from traditional social semiotics towards an approach to multimodal phenomena much more aligned with the anti-reductionist ethos exemplified in MAT and MDT.

### **3.2 Mediated Discourse Theory**

Scollon and many of those who have employed concepts and theoretical notions from MDT in their investigation of social action, interaction and communication (see De Saint-Georges 2005; Jones 2005a, 2005b; Neville 2005) can be abstractly aligned with the loosely definable field of Multimodality. Explicitly present in much of Scollon's work, and implicitly resulting from a reorientation towards a focus on social action more holistically and the ways in which discourse functions *as* and *in* social action, there is an unequivocal acceptance that language, and linguistically oriented processes are not solely responsible for communicative phenomena. While there is a discursive orientation in MDT, as exemplified in the empirical study of the ontogenesis of the child as a social actor and the acquisition of the social practice of handing, much of Scollon's theorising, and indeed, much of his empirical work implicitly directs one's

attention to the multiple other modes of meaning making which manifest in social interaction. While a more comprehensive discussion regarding the extension of MDT with a particularly multimodal orientation (Norris 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Jones 2005a, 2005b, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012; Frommerz 2012; Rowe 2012; White 2010, 2012; Sissons 2012) will be provided below, first, it is necessary to articulate what Multimodality as a term refers to, and the broad trans and interdisciplinary foci that have come to dominate the domain.

Despite contemporary usage, Multimodality is not necessarily a field of research as much as it is a term which was originally employed to highlight an empirical orientation towards the study of the multiple modes through which meaning-making and communication occur; as opposed to a unitary focus on language. The term multimodal is uniquely linguistic, insofar as the seminal works which most scholars would champion as the earliest manifestations of multimodal research do not accurately represent the professional interest in meaning-making behaviour and/or semiosis of a non-linguistic nature.

The earliest manifestations of empirical work considered to have spawned the discipline (see O'Toole 1994; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) appeared in the early 90's. At this time, academics working primarily in a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework (Halliday 1973; Halliday & Hasan 1976; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) began to extend M. A. K. Halliday's (1973, 1978) theoretical discussions regarding the tri-functional nature of all social semiotic systems to non-linguistic phenomena. Resultantly, the terms multimodal and/or multimodality were originally employed to exemplify the fact that human communication and social semiosis occurs through *multiple modes* of communication; not just language.

Kress and Van Leeuwen can be attributed as conceptualising the first, and still widely employed definition of what a communicative mode is; a system of

representation with socially instantiated rules and regularities attached to it (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; 2006). Much of their early work, and indeed, the majority of efforts during the emergence of a multimodal perspective were explicitly directed at articulating the systemic properties of communicative modes other than language. At this time, Halliday's tri-functional social semiotic theorisation played an integral role in these developments.

While it is not within the breadth of this thesis to completely articulate social semiotic theory as espoused in Halliday's early work on language as a social semiotic, it is important to outline the manifestation of the term *multimodal* as it is one that will be employed on occasion.

Halliday's social semiotic perspective and Systemic Functional Linguistic Theory posits that all semiotic systems construct three simultaneous strands of meaning; ideational, interpersonal and textual. With an acute orientation towards the functionality of social semiotic systems, Halliday calls these properties metafunctions. While his own work was acutely oriented towards articulating the tri-functional nature of language, contemporaries of a Hallidayian systemic framework extended his theoretical notions and employed them in the analysis of meaning-making systems like art (O'Toole 1994) pictures, drawings and visual media (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001, 2006) sound and/or music (1999) and most recently colour (Van Leeuwen 2011).

The core tenant behind a social semiotic perspective on meaning-making and communication posits that humans draw upon multiple modes (linguistic, visual and other) when they engage in meaning-making behaviour. Furthermore, the material manifestations of the modes (writing, spoken language, gestures, pictures, music etc.) exemplifies a series of choices and/or oppositions based on the fact that the mode is a semiotic system. Semiotic systems are representative in nature insofar as a symbol, or constellation of symbols, are representative of something else. Embedded in this

conceptualisation is the notion of choice. Thus, when one says, does, draws, sings, etc., the materialisation of the phenomena has meaning insofar as it represents a set of tacit choices made in opposition to a plethora of other possibilities. Resultantly, all meaning-making behaviour is conceived of as exemplifying a series of choices between alternative forms of representation, and where there is choice, there is meaning (Halliday & Hasan 1976; Halliday 1978; Hodge & Kress 1988).

Initially, the vast majority of empirical work in multimodality took a textual approach (see Iedema 1997, 2000, 2003; Thibault 2000; Jewitt & Oyama 2001; Chouliaraki 2004, 2005, 2006; Lemke 2002; Van Leeuwen 2005; Bowcher 2007). Quite possibly as empirical remnants from occupations with writing and language use in the textual form, the majority of work exemplifying multimodality at the time, sought to investigate material instantiations of meaning making behaviour as they exist rather than as they are used. This is not to suggest that the semantic-functional properties of the multiple and interrelated social semiotic systems were ignored, only that there seemed to be a more comprehensive focus on meanings espoused as a result of a systemic nature embedded in the system, rather than meanings intended and/or interpreted by real human beings. Resultantly, taxonomic and systemic efforts towards outlining of the meaning potentials embedded in the modes themselves were quite prolific (O'Toole 1990, 1994; Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001, 2006; Van Leeuwen 1999; Baldry & Thibault 2006; O'Halloran 2005, 2011).

The occupation with elucidating the socially instantiated systematicity exemplified in the multiple modes through which communication occurs is explicitly reminiscent of Scollon's (2001a: 6) claim regarding what MDT is not, "a theory with an interest in the abstract formal structures of language". As touched upon above, much of Scollon's theorisation regarding MDT and MDA can be conceived as exemplifying a multimodal orientation towards communicative phenomena, even articulating this

component of his empirical work admitting the difficulty in orthographically representing components of discursive social action like tone of voice and intonation fluctuation. Consequently, Scollon (2001a: 170) points out how new forms of technology and the increasing ability to represent real-time phenomena in a multimodal manner “is a significant area into which mediated discourse analysis will move in seeking to achieve an understanding of human social action in our contemporary world”.

Recently, this foresight has come to fruition with an increasing employment of MDA and more generally MDT for investigating real-time social interaction, identity production (Norris 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), free-choice learning (Rowe 2012; Rowe & Kisiel 2012), advertising (White 2010, 2012), public relations (Sissons 2012), online interactions, (Jones 2005a, 2005b, 2011b) and skateboarding (Jones 2011a, 2011c, 2012) to name a small few. The increasing thematic variability of empirical endeavours and the conceptualisation of material semiosis *as mediated action* (Al Zidjaly 2007, 2012; Jones 2005a, 2005b, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012) has solidified the utility of MDT for approaching phenomena of a multimodal nature; simultaneously, this utility has led to further developments in methodological frameworks which can be employed for the transcription and analysis of modes less partial to orthographic representation, and an increasing body of theory in the form of Multimodal Mediated Theory (MMT).

While many of the theoretical principles espoused in MMT relate quite comprehensively with those articulated by Scollon (2001a), the subtle terminological restructuring mirrors and exemplifies the increasing acceptance that prioritising language as the primordial organising component “limits our understanding of the complexity of interaction” (Norris 2004: 2). While many times language *can* play a superordinate role in interaction, this is not always the case and “gesture, gaze and head

movement also may take the superior position in a given interaction, while language may be subordinate or absent altogether” (Norris 2004: 2). This is not to suggest that Multimodal Mediated Theory explicitly questions the pertinence and complexity of language as a communicative mode, or that a singular focus on linguistic mediational means in social interaction is unwarranted; only that if one intends to investigate social interaction as it manifests in real-time through social action, the centrality of language (or any other mediational means and/or cultural tool) is a question of an empirical nature.

It should be acknowledged that this usurping of language as the primordial organising component of communicative action and interaction stems primarily from the conceptualisation of the importance of real-time social action as the moments wherein discourses, identity, social structure and sociocultural or historical trajectories manifest materially. Prior to this orientation toward real-time social action, the empirical occupation with textual phenomena would have seemed to support claims of the centrality of linguistically based mediational means. While for years, imagery, pictures, the placement of texts, the use of texts and the organisation of textual phenomena was readily apparent as being a prevalent component of the communicative equation, the informative priority of language continued to dominate academic endeavours. However, an empirical turn towards language in use and the analysis of real-time interaction supported by increasingly affordable and portable audio- video recording equipment has contributed to a usurpation of the centrality of language. The experience of a chastising glare from a disapproving parent and the resultant cessation of a child who appears to be playing with something they should not be provide enough empirical evidence to support the claim that in real-time social interaction, other modes of communication can and often do take informative priority.

While as mentioned above, MDT has always implicitly highlighted the relevance and salience of the multiple modes through which communication occurs (multiple mediational means with function in social action), the first efforts to bridge MDT and theoretical notions from social semiotics and Multimodality can be seen in Norris' (2004) publication of *Analysing Multimodal Interaction* as a methodological framework which can be employed in the analysis of real-time social interaction. While Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) (Norris 2004, 2011) is primarily a methodological framework which outlines a protocol for the transcription and analysis of real-time social interaction drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, movement studies, visual studies and social semiotics, there are multiple theoretical tenants championed in the methodological framework, some of which I will outline below. The increasing employment of MIA has simultaneously resulted in a proliferation of theoretical components which are intimately correlated to the methodological framework and can be loosely identified under the umbrella of Multimodal Mediated Theory (MMT).

A major shift in the analytical occupation of a multimodal approach to real-time social interaction is an attempt to theorise and employ analytical tools to elucidate the complexities of what discourse analysts or conversation analysts might term *context*. The term context has traditionally been used to refer to all things that situate an interaction and thus, relate to the meanings exchanged, constructed and espoused. These contextual things include in-the-moment material components of the situation including where the interaction takes place, what is the distance between individuals, how are they situated towards one another, what material artefacts are in the space, who else is present etc. Contextual elements also include the affective dispositions of the participants, their relationship to one another, their habitus (Bourdieu 1977), what happened prior to their meeting etc. In a traditional discourse analysis or conversational

analysis, the prioritisation of linguistic meaning-making mechanisms has resulted in an overly ambiguous treatment of contextual elements. While there is an acknowledgement that context plays a role, the focus on language, discourse, turn taking and meaning-making through language has resulted in an implicit marginalisation of the communicative value of contextual facets. In recent years there has been a shift in orientation and a more comprehensive approach to dealing with context (see Van Dijk 2008), though the continued utilisation of the term itself implies a consequential prioritisation, and simultaneously, a continued marginalisation of non-discursive phenomena.

Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (Norris 2004, 2011) and Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) rejects the implication that material phenomena of a non-discursive nature can be treated as ancillary or outside of the communicative equation. Many times, non-linguistic means, visual elements of the environment and other components traditionally treated as *contextual*, occupy a central role in social interaction rather than as subordinate to language. This theoretical championing of the relevance and salience of non-linguistic phenomena as equally important to linguistically based means for communication manifests in MIA through the outlining of a methodological framework which can be employed to strategically analyse traditionally conceived contextual components in a manner that does not marginalise their communicative value. As a result, there is a simultaneous analytical focus on the multiple and multifarious modes through which communication occurs; proxemics, posture, gesture, head movement, gaze, music, print and layout are all equally important if one endeavours to analyse real-time social interaction.

Another theoretical implication highlighted in an approach to real-time social interaction which utilises the mediated action as the unit of analysis and stemming from Wertsch's (1998) occupation with the irreducibility of the mediated action which



always involves the social actor *and* mediational means is the notion that all action is (inter)action. Norris (2011), in detailing the ways in which identity is (co)produced in real-time through multiple modes of communication deviates from the more traditional term *interaction*, by employing parenthesis resulting in *(inter)action*. Norris (2011: 1) claims the utility of this as a broadening of scope, as “(inter)action potentially encompasses each and every action that an individual produces with tools, the environment, and other individuals . . . [because] even when one individual acts with objects, acting within the environment, these actions are viewed as (inter)actions that produce identity”.

The notion that all actions are (inter)actions highlights an important theoretical point and one which will be more comprehensively articulated in later chapters. Traditionally in discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, conversational analysis and other discursively oriented fields, interaction is typically conceptualised as always and only occurring between two social actors. As a result, communicative theorisation and empirical attention has been centred on elucidating the complexities of interaction as it occurs between human beings. However, the increasing thematic diversity of studies with a multimodal orientation and burgeoning empirical fields like Human Computer Interaction (HCI) have pointed to the notion that, in many cases and on many occasions, social actors interact with objects, materials, forces or the environment. This should not trivialise the relevance of interaction between two social actors, but rather, highlight that interaction between a social actor and an object, material, force or the environment is a phenomena of equal complexity and equal empirical value.

While Norris’ (2011) particular occupation with human – mediational means interaction is primarily in service of articulating the ways in which this (inter)action produces identity, the proposition that interaction can and does occur between social

actors and objects, materials, forces or the environment, opens up a plethora of empirical opportunities regarding the nature of that interaction. How do social actors interact with the mediational means employed in action? In what ways is this interaction different from interaction with other social actors? What information do social actors perceive in the environment, objects or materials and how do they respond, act and interact based on this information? All of these questions provide valuable avenues of investigation, and as will be shown in following chapters, the (inter)actions between social actors and mediational means, or (inter)actions between social actors and the environment through mediational means can be equally as complex and equally telling regarding interactive structures as when social actors interact.

As touched upon above, Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis can be conceptualised as Norris' (2004, 2011) attempt to extend Mediated Discourse Analysis in the service of allocating more considerable analytical attention to the multiple modes through which communication and real-time social interaction occur. However, there is a seeming incompatibility or incommensurability between the concept of mode as championed in traditional multimodality which stems from social semiotics and the concepts of mediated action and mediational means. Mode, as a semiotic system with socially instantiated rules and regularities attached to it (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 2001) is not easily reconcilable within the theoretical structure of MDT or MMT since as Scollon (2001a) points out MDT is concerned with the ways in which language and/or discourse functions in and as social action, resultantly there is a pragmatic focus on how language is acted through rather than language as a representational system with abstract formal structures.

Norris (2004: 12) finesses this seeming incompatibility with a serious yet often overlooked explication that "a communicative mode is never a bounded or static unit, but always and only a *heuristic* unit". This explicitly "highlights the plainly explanatory

function” of the conceptualisation of mode, “and also accentuates the constant tension and contradiction between the system of representation and the real-time interaction among social actors” (Norris 2004: 12). This articulation functions to highlight the purely heuristic basis of modes as “units that allow analysts to dissect complex interactions and enable the analysis of small parts before analyzing how these parts work together to construct the complexity of face-to-face interaction” (Norris 2004: 51). This is explicitly reminiscent of both Wertsch’s (1991, 1995a, 1998) suggestion that the deconstruction of the mediated action must always and only occur with an eye towards how the pieces fit together in the end, and Scollon’s (1998, 2001a) assertion that mediational means refers to a class of object or thing and not the thing itself. In all cases, there is an explicit exemplification of the explanatory, descriptive and theoretical nature of the analytical endeavour. While this may seem straightforward enough, it is an acknowledgment of theoretical abstraction for the utility of explanation that often goes unarticulated in many other theoretical perspectives. This exemplifies the explicit reflexivity of the theoretical perspectives themselves, insofar as the notions and principles involved are not meant to stand in place of real-time material things, processes, situations and occurrences, but rather provide a means for explanation and articulation. This is an incredibly important ontological constituent of Multimodal Mediated Theory and the utility of Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis; the theoretical notions espoused therein and the methodological tools championed for employment in the analysis of real-time social action are *not meant to be*, nor should they be *interpreted as* standing in place for the real-time material processes of the existential world or the complex ways in which social actors, act, interact and communicate. This is a seemingly implicit acceptance of Burke’s (1989: 115) highlighting of the function of terministic screens in favour of providing useful theoretical notions and

methodological concepts which can help to better understand the complexity of existential reality.

### **3.3 Conclusion: Multimodal Mediated Theory**

I have shown that Multimodal Mediated Theory is growing and changing quite rapidly through the increasing employment of theoretical and methodological notions in the analysis of real-time social action, interaction and communication. MMT takes up positions articulated in MAT and MDA while simultaneously championing an orientation toward the non-linguistics mediational means through which real-time social action occurs. Resultantly, concepts like the irreducibility of the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis and a conceptualisation of the agent as ‘individual-acting-through-mediational-means’ is taken up with an explicit interest in the multiple and multifarious mediational means through which real-time social interaction occurs. MMT is reminiscent of Wertsch’s (1991, 1995a, 1998) anti-reductionist ethos through acknowledging the simultaneity of multiple modes of communication and the imperative of allocating analytical interest to the ways in which the constituent parts construct the complex whole. Simultaneously, MMT accepts Scollon’s principles of social action, communication and history with an analytical focus on the ways in which these things manifest in real-time through social actors acting in the world.

Unique to Multimodal Mediated Theory is the theoretical acknowledgement that all social action is (inter)active which champions the possibility of empirical efforts toward elucidating the complex (inter)actions between social actors and mediational means.

Thus, Multimodal Mediated Theory displaces linguistic phenomena as maintaining communicative priority while championing a localised analytical

perspective which more comprehensively focuses on elucidating the complex interplay in and between communicative modes and/or mediational means.

While MAT (Wertsch 1991, 1995a, 1998) is primarily a theoretical perspective, MDT and MMT draw on theoretical insights provided in MAT while simultaneously articulating correlated methodological frameworks through which to engage in the analysis of real-time social action, interaction and communication. Resultantly, below I more comprehensively outline a number of methodological constituents espoused in Mediated Discourse Analysis and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis through a detailed articulation of the methodology employed in this video-ethnographic endeavour.

## **4 Design of Study**

### **4.1 Introduction: Design of Study**

As a video-supported ethnographic research project investigating the actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing, the study design and methods of data collection were informed by theoretical orientations towards localisation and mediated action.

There were two simultaneous methodological goals:

- 1) facilitate the collection of data which would support the analysis of real-time mediated actions and practices in the sport of kitesurfing; and,
- 2) maintain (as far possible) a level of authenticity in participatory engagement and data co-creation through the employment of audio-video technology.

As a result, particular methods of data collection including personal participation, observational note-taking, semi-structured participant led interviews, a tripod supported camera and line-mounted go-pro cameras, were employed.

### **4.2 Methods of Collection**

#### **4.2.1 Participant-observation**

Participant-observation occurred with an emphasis on participatory methods as a means of data collection. The nature and extent of participation, its utility as a form of embodied, haptic and kinaesthetic data collection and self-reflexivity regarding participation as an analytical tool will be outlined below and will comprise a recurrent theme throughout the course of this thesis.

### 4.2.2 Tripod supported video-camera

I employed a stationary tripod supported video camera to record both interactions and equipment set-up off the water and actions during ‘sessions’. Through initial testing, the capabilities and limitations of the tripod supported video camera become apparent. While valuable and useful during spatially contained elements of kitesurfing (such as set up or launching, Figure 4.1), the vast distances travelled by practitioners while on the water limited the ability to record phenomena of analytical value (Figure 4.2). Practitioners often travel great distances at substantial speeds, and the digital zoom along with auto-focusing capabilities of the camera disrupted recording. Moreover, when individuals are riding in the surf, the ebbs, pitches and troughs created by the surf interfere with capturing the kiter in real-time (Figure 4.3). As a result, the camera was often left in a stationary position, with practitioners moving in and out of the frame depending on their trajectory of travel. Resultantly, line-mounted GoPro cameras were employed to provide a more useful perspective.



Figure 4.1: Set up



**Figure 4.2: Kiter at a distance**



**Figure 4.3: Kiting in small surf**

### **4.2.3 Line-mounted GoPro cameras**

Line-mounted GoPro cameras were employed to capture in-the-moment actions of practitioners as they engaged in kitesurfing. The utility of this method rests in the fact that the camera does not need to be operated. Once attached to the front lines using a specially modified mounting system, the camera can be turned on, and will record for the duration of approximately two hours. The camera is mounted to the kiter's lines, and



thus maintains a perspective on the kiter during the duration of recording (Figure 4.4). The placement of the camera is analytically valuable; because it is mounted on the front lines of the kite, the camera perspective (changing frame orientation) is indicative of the movements of the kite itself. Barring some equipment failure, the front lines of the kite always extend towards the leading edge of the kite. As a result, the video footage captured by the line mounted GoPro cameras provide an intimate perspective on the actions undertaken by practitioners while simultaneously exemplifying the position of the kite in the sky.



**Figure 4.4: Example of line-mounted GoPro perspective**

#### **4.2.4 Still images**

Still images were collected on nearly every day of participant-observation. Still images were particularly useful in capturing the composition/materiality of the set-up areas (Figure 4.5) and the locations themselves (Figure 4.6). Pictures of equipment,

interesting views during travel, and particularities of various locations were taken regularly.



**Figure 4.5: Set up area at Te Haruhi Bay**



**Figure 4.6: Shoal Bay, Auckland City**

#### **4.2.5 Observational notes**

The nature of the activity itself and the undertaking of participant-observation with emphasis on participation as a key component of data collection resulted in difficulties with taking observational notes. Often, the weather which precipitates wind

brings considerable amounts of rain and occasionally sleet. Carrying a notebook and taking observational notes while maintaining the integrity of the paper medium was simply not possible in most cases. This was compounded by methodological efforts towards participation as a form of data co-creation. Resultantly, observational notes were always taken after the completion of a session with specific emphasis on particular elements of interest on the specific day. Often, these elements involved ‘unusual situations’, travelling to new or previously un-kited locations, equipment problems or malfunctions, and observations regarding weather changes and other atmospheric activity. Occasionally, I recorded myself making verbal notes which later informed more detailed observational notes. However, the possibility of this was often limited due to the imperatives of ‘getting kiting’.

#### **4.2.6 Interviews**

Interviews occurred in a semi-naturalised form, often during discussions while at a particular location prior to equipment set-up, or while waiting for predicted wind to arrive (Figure 4.7). Three more structured and lengthy interviews regarding the impetus for learning to kite, experiences kiting, perceptions of space and the determination of favourable locations were conducted. However, the majority of verbalisations often occurred during moments when recording devices were unable to adequately capture audio information such as during rest periods (Figure 4.8), or during equipment change. High wind speeds (a typical characteristic of good kiting conditions) create obstructive white noise which interferes with the capabilities of camera microphones.



**Figure 4.7: Interview**



**Figure 4.8: Talking during rest period**

## **4.3 Data Table**

Below is a data table outlining the type and approximate duration / amount of data collected during this study. A small portion (approximately 3 hours) of the tripod supported video camera and line-mounted GoPro camera footage are redundant (recording at the same time).

<b>Type</b>	<b>Duration / Amount</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Participant-Observation</b>	Approximately 72 days over the duration of 1 year. A day comprises travel and kiting which can range from between 3 hours to 8 hours	Participant-observation occurred in a naturalistic manner, often through collaborative kiting journeys. Cameras were only employed when logistically feasible (i.e. not feasible if set-up area is far away from riding area)
<b>Tripod Supported Video Camera</b>	17.5 Hours	Capturing set-up
<b>GoPro Line Mounted Cameras</b>	36.5 Hours	Capturing all actions and practices during on the water participation. Unfortunately, camera battery life limited the amount of data possible to collect on any individual day.
<b>Still Images</b>	900	Typically of location specifics (often at new locations). Also of set-up areas, and equipment.
<b>Observational Notes</b>	72 days of observational notes were taken.	Outlining of salient and/or relevant occurrences of the day. Often specifically oriented around ‘unusual occurrences’ and or ‘close calls’ (i.e. when a large storm cloud spotted in the distance forced us to land kites and wait-out dangerous amounts of atmospheric turbulence
<b>Interviews</b>	4 Hours	Three long, semi-structured interviews and unquantifiable discussions at, on the way to or after kiting with cameras still recording.

Table 1: Data collected and participant-observation time

## 4.4 Participants

Over the course of my empirical work, I spent the majority of time participating with, filming and co-creating data with three primary participants. This primarily resulted from their own willingness to participate and personal dispositions to have their experiences and actions recorded while kitesurfing. Each kiter varied in age, experience, skill level and commitment, but each was explicitly interested in recording their own participation on the water. While the majority of audio-video data, interactions before, during and after engagement on the water, observational notes and interviews were collected in collaboration with these three individual kites, a unitary focus on three individuals marginalises the affect and influence of the many other kites we engaged and participated with during the period of data collection.

Unless explicitly travelling long distances to new kiting locations, there were always large numbers of kites at the locations frequented during the collection period. Conversations with various individuals during the course of my fieldwork have unquestionably contributed a great deal to my understanding of the sport and the analysis of the actions and practices exemplified therein. My continuous presence on the beach was always welcomed (and often mocked), as I steadily became “that Canadian doing research”. My explanation of the research project was always met with interest and most predominantly, laughter, often coupled with a disbelieving “how did you manage that?” On occasion I would be asked if I was going to be able to “justify my (kiter’s) life”, whether my findings indicated that kiting “is fucking awesome”, and one individual claimed “that’s the first time I’ve heard of my tax dollars going towards something I would actually support”.

## 4.5 Site Selection and Personal Background

The decision to investigate the actions, interactions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing was influenced by a number of factors, all of which bear heavily on the process through which the research was engaged. From a young age I have always been interested in ‘adventure’, ‘extreme’ or ‘lifestyle’ sports, depending on the moniker one chooses to use. As an avid snowboarder, skateboarder and wakeboarder, I have been personally drawn to board sports and the dedication, skill and risk inherent in participation. Initially, these activities were purely a source of exercise and enjoyment while simultaneously, an organizing principle of social relationships. Often the camaraderie developed through shared interest in these specific sporting practices materialised into long term friendships. They were in fact, and continue to be an organising principle of my social existence. Becoming acculturated into the particular practices of various board sports, I always noticed similarities across the physical actions associated with the sports and interrelations that exist. This may be a result of the fact that numerous technological innovations coupled with individual invention and creativity has expanded the ways in which a board could be utilised in different environments.

Materially and historically, all board sports are indebted to the practice of surfing and the emergence of new board sports can be attributed to the application of the physical properties of surfing to new environments. This process has occurred in coordination with utilising new materials to suit differentiated surfaces and finding suitable forms of propulsion. For instance, in surfing, floatation and gravity create momentum and a smooth silicone fibreglass board reduces friction with the water. Whereas in skateboarding, wheels, bearings and trucks enable a wooden board to roll on a hard surface and propulsion is created by a declining grade in the surface or by means of pushing with one’s foot. Snowboarding takes advantage of steep gradients and an

epoxy base to enable low friction sliding over the snow surface. Despite variability in environment, propulsive means and board materials, in each sport, an individual rides a board while standing up in a sideways position.

The primary impetus for selecting kitesurfing as a phenomenon of interest was due to its recent manifestation as a 'lifestyle sport' and its explicitly large presence in New Zealand. The vast coastline, plentiful inlets, bays and estuaries coupled with notoriously turbulent weather patterns, New Zealand offers a plethora of opportunity for individuals seeking to draw upon components of the natural environment in the pursuit of enjoyment and/or exhilarations. New Zealand is unofficially known throughout the western world as the capital of 'extreme' or 'adventure' sports and the variable and untouched natural landscape provides a 'playground' for all sorts of different lifestyle sports.

Kitesurfing also presented a number of methodological challenges including the difficulties associated with audio-video recording (at least when on a budget), the variability in temporal components of data collection (when the wind is blowing), and it is notoriously difficult to learn. Resultantly, kitesurfing offered a number of advantages; first, it was necessary to co-operatively trouble-shoot with participants around audio-video recording methods and this endeavour provided valuable insights regarding participants' own perspectives, interests and values related to the capturing of 'footage'. Second, data collection was heavily participant led, insofar as their ability to take advantage of a windy day (acknowledging other work related responsibilities) primarily led data collection. This often resulted in co-consideration and co-operation in the determination of where and when to go kiting (analytical utility to be described below). Finally, I had rudimentary understanding of the sport itself, very little knowledge of weather patterns, wind forecasts and water behaviour or how these things might affect a wind and water based sport. My rudimentary knowledge and very basic skill set, also



afforded an opportunity to learn in and through the research process as another method of data collection. Therefore, I was not only engaged in an ethnographically oriented pursuit employing various methods of data collection more traditionally aligned with ethnomethodology. The pursuit was simultaneously supported through my acculturation and socialisation into the sport through my own ontogenesis as a kitesurfer. This level of participation (as a kiter), manifested in multiple salient, and analytically useful situations which might not have developed if I had occupied a more traditional position in the research endeavour.

While I had been introduced to the sport through YouTube videos of professional practitioners engaging in gravity defying physical feats, my formal introduction came through volunteering to assist at a kitesurfing school in Auckland, New Zealand. I offered my assistance in exchange for introductory lessons wherein I could use the school's equipment and receive instruction from a qualified instructor. This experience provided me with some rudimentary understanding about equipment set up, care and maintenance and allowed me to gain general proficiency (while still considered a learner, I could participate *safely* in the sport and *not endanger* others around me). This development of general proficiency and my own participation in the sport proved indispensable in participant recruitment and provided an unthreatening means for my presence on the beach.

#### **4.5.1 Ethnography and site selection**

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) provide a detailed outlining of the various ways in which ethnographers come to select specific research areas. Citing numerous seminal investigations (Freilich 1970; Henslin 1990; Curren 1992; Pieke 1995), they detail how various facets of academic, intercultural and social experience can influence the development of interest and subsequent study of a particular domain of social life.

Accepting that institutional demands such as funding accessibility may play a role in one's decision, they explicitly acknowledge that impetus can come from various experiential domains.

While academic, personal and social reasons for the selection of a research site may be explicated in ethnographic accounts of research endeavours, the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of site selection often escape the 'analytical reflexivity' continuously championed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). This is not to suggest that ethnographers ignore the relevance of impetus, or the importance of existing ideological, theoretical and subjective orientations towards the research site, however, these facets of the research process are rarely subjected to the same analytical scrutiny as others (ie. participant selection, interview design, data analysis). It may be that there is an unspoken understanding that site selection undeniably bears a great deal on the research process itself (one could even say that the research depends on it), however, site selection escaping the same analytical scrutiny as other facets of the endeavour usurps our methodological championing of reflexivity and simultaneously makes our understanding of the ethnographic process problematic.

It is traditionally acknowledged that ethnography as a method of research employs an exploratory orientation (Beckett 2004; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Smart 2008) wherein research questions change and researchers are continuously forced to make decisions sensitive to both their own research aims and the site of investigation. This particular exploratory element has been discussed in reference to difficulties in the teaching of 'ethnographic method'. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) cite a humorous example provided by Nader (1986: 20) about a graduate student asking for advice before embarking on an anthropological ethnography wherein "Kroeber was said to have taken the largest, fattest ethnography book off his shelf, and said, 'Go forth and do likewise'".

As an exploratory method of investigation, the process in which the ethnographer engages varies drastically across research sites. As articulated by most who engage in ethnographic inquiry, and I agree, this methodological flexibility is paramount in the study of social existence which is itself continuously in flux (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994; Dewalt & Dewalt 2010; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2001; Gans 1999; Fetterman 2010). The researcher must be adaptable and it is important to be able to make decisions about what to do, when and how, in the moment while participating in the social world. However, these decisions as made in the process of research should not simply be understood as irrelevant, inconsequential and pertaining to the participatory method of ethnographic investigation. As will be outlined below, the decisions made in the field bear heavily on the site of investigation and consequently on data collection and interpretation of phenomenon. Similarly, academic, theoretical and subjective dispositions which lead one to select a particular site of investigation provide insights which inform the process of research and the analysis of data. Thus, site selection and the impetus thereof should be explicitly used to more comprehensively understand our approach to the research site. As such, site selection should be subjected to methodological reflexivity in the same manner as other processual elements.

#### **4.5.2 Understanding site selection: Methodological reflexivity**

As briefly touched upon above, personal interest and a review of contemporary academic literature about ‘lifestyle sport’ participation gave impetus to the current research endeavour. My subjective insider knowledge of the actions, interactions and practices exemplified in skateboarding, snowboarding and wakeboarding played an important role in my determining the necessity of systematic study. As a linguist, initial predispositions led me to think more about the representation of experience in discursive forms wherein one might undertake investigating the ways in which

practitioners interact during practice. Most importantly, I was interested in the possibility of distinct discursive practices and specialised language as pertaining to the sport. Simultaneously, my understanding of social semiotics and the field of multimodality informed a conceptualisation of a research study consisting of the analysis of visual communication along with language.

These initial thoughts illuminate a number of predispositions only realisable in retrospect. My acute focus on language and visual communication between social actors exemplifies a conceptualisation of physical actions involved and socialising in the form of discourse as two semi-distinct spheres of social activity. This was historically informed by the experiential assumption that very little explicit communication occurs between individuals in the form of language while engaging in such physically demanding practices.

Regarding the selection of kitesurfing as a phenomenon to investigate, various assumptions and predispositions influenced initial conceptualisations and it is paramount to articulate these facets of the impetus in order to exercise critical reflexivity and understand how predispositions influenced the research itself. First, my understanding and interest in kitesurfing came through an experiential lens of board sport practitioner. I assumed that similar people with similar backgrounds and social dispositions would participate in the sport of kitesurfing. In my experience, often skateboarders snowboard, and snowboarders wakeboard. Thus, I initially envisioned kitesurfing as belonging to that category of practices and initial research design ruminations were made in reference to experiential understandings of those other practices. Furthermore, initial engagement in the research site was heavily influenced by my understanding of social sentiment in other board sports.

For example, I assumed that the recruitment of participants for participation in the research endeavour would be difficult due to the demographic composition of

practitioners. Board sports traditionally attract young and athletic male practitioners who, in my experience, have little concern for academic study and may be resistant to participating. I also assumed that attempts to recruit participants may be difficult as a 'beginner' kitesurfer as technical ability often carries symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Wheaton 2003; Booth 2004) in sporting groups. These assumptions and predispositions (though incorrect), heavily informed decisions regarding how best to investigate the phenomenon and the process by which participant recruitment and data collection occurred.

## **4.6 Site Access and Participant Recruitment**

Site access and participant recruitment were initially conceptualised as large obstacles to overcome if the research was to proceed in the fashion theorised.

Imperative to the research process regarding site access, participant recruitment and data collection was becoming a familiar face in the Auckland kitesurfing community. Before any attempts to solicit participants, paramount was individual engagement in the practice of kitesurfing and as importantly, development of technical prowess. As detailed by academics who have investigated various facets of lifestyle sport, technical ability, skill and knowledge can be indicative of respect and inclusion in the life worlds of practitioners (Wheaton 2003; Booth 2004). Thus, to engage in data collection as initially theorised, it was paramount to gain acceptance and respect by the community. I thought that this would assist in gaining trust as not only a researcher, but more importantly, *a good kitesurfer* and thereby limit apprehension from prospective participants.

During initial engagement in the research site as a practitioner, my goals were threefold: first, to become an insider in the community through consistency of practice; second, to develop technical skill and hopefully gain respect and trust; and third, to

desensitise practitioners to the presence of audio-video technology and encourage interest in the practice of filming by exemplification. While the use of video technology in other lifestyle sport may be commonplace, the logistic difficulties presented by the practice of kitesurfing have resulted in comparably less amateur filming. Furthermore, the expense of waterproof video equipment is considered an obstacle in the filming of kitesurfing. As a result of this, my intentions were to utilise the technology at my disposal to film myself and hopefully this would naturally generate interest in the practice and function as a naturalistic participant recruitment tool.

However, before engaging in personal filming practices, it was paramount to develop technical skill for similar reasons stated above. From personal experience in other lifestyle sports, my assumption was that engaging in filming oneself without being at a particular level of proficiency would be viewed as juvenile and would make me appear foolish to others in the kitesurfing community. Essentially, I worked under the assumption that there must be something worth filming in order to legitimise my use of the technology. Thus, by spending substantial time on the water, by developing technical prowess and by utilising technology to film myself, I sought to encourage engagement in the research project through exemplifying the value of recording one's own practices. While my particular interest was not directed solely at highly skilled practitioners and I was not only interested in things 'worth filming', I felt as though exemplification in the manner specified would encourage willingness to participate and facilitate naturalistic engagement with technological mediums for the participant's own sake.

During my acculturation into the action, interactions and practices of kitesurfing at various locations around the Auckland area, I met numerous individuals and cultivated passing social relationships simultaneously. My continual presence on the beach or near the water made me a familiar face to those who frequented kitesurfing

locales. As a primarily weather dependant practice, I would often be at different kitesurfing spots on weekdays and during traditional work hours. Social interaction and conversations revolving around kitesurfing would often turn semi-personal with source of income or occupation a relatively common subject. At these times, I would briefly describe my research endeavour providing enough information to be social but limiting discussion in a passive manner. The information was met with diversified reactions ranging from complete disinterest signalled through a change of discursive subject matter to keen interest signalled by further questioning about the research and what I was trying to do. When met with what appeared to be general interest, I would often describe the equipment at my disposal for the recording of kitesurfing and in passing, mention that if they had any interest in utilising such equipment, to just 'let me know'.

While initially met with an abundance of general interest, material manifestation of actual participants progressed at a *slower than imagined* rate. People seemed interested in using the technology and less apprehensive about the prospect of their actions being analysed but few actively sought to make use of the equipment. Over time, my presence and my own continual use of audio-video technology became a common fixture on the beach and many individuals would ask about the footage, ease of equipment use etc. At this point, individuals became more interested in using the equipment to record their own actions.

The ultimate determination of participatory nature occurred naturalistically by virtue of individual desires to 'ride together' and 'meet up' on days when the wind blew. Indeed, I had a professional disposition to collect data and learn about practitioner's experiences, actions and interactions, however, the fabrication of situations conducive to conceptualised data collection would have been detrimental to the research process holistically. When I caught myself forcing situations to suit research purpose, I would continually return to a phrase uttered in consultation with my

secondary supervisor explaining that “you will get what you get and that is exactly what you are supposed to get”. While mentioned in passing, this information has been paramount in my understanding of the research process and relates explicitly to all aspects of this research endeavour.

#### **4.6.1 Site access, participant recruitment and field relations**

Site access, participant recruitment and field relations are continuously elements of discussion in much of the literature pertaining to ethnographic research endeavours (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, for a more comprehensive literature review). The ethnographer’s intentions are to study/research/investigate a phenomenon or state of affairs as it is instantiated in real-time and co-created by the individuals involved. In order to do so, the researcher must be explicitly aware of managing research aims and goals alongside attempts to maintain the authenticity of phenomena and the naturalism of the situations both in terms of participant action and one’s own engagement. To liken the nature of this situation to a ‘balancing act’ simplifies and minimises the epistemological and methodological complexity of what is occurring. While it is important to rely on intuition and social sensitivity while navigating the site of research, it is equally important to retrospectively understand our own actions, interactions and decisions as key components of the research process and as subject to analytical scrutiny in the same manner that we treat the behaviour of participants. To suggest that our interest lay only in the actions, interactions and behaviours of others clearly negates the actuality of the situation and can limit our understanding of the phenomena occurring. We must accept that attempts to understand our own engagement in the research process with analytical scrutiny is laden with theoretical, conceptual and personal dispositions and reflexivity may also be coloured by personally favourable recollections. However, every aspect of the research process is laden with theoretical,



conceptual and personal dispositions and if we are interested in understanding phenomena as they occur and maintaining authenticity in our description of a research site, it is paramount to subject our own actions to the same analytical rigour as those we watch and participate with.

The lack of comprehensive prescription in the literature regarding site access, participant recruitment and field relations can be considered as acceptably problematic resulting from the variations in and diversity of research sites. Every situation facilitates a different approach by the researcher and methodologically we have championed personal and social flexibility as a key component of engaging in ethnographic endeavours. However, we must simultaneously accept that this methodological ambiguity regarding process and actual engagement in the research process leaves us open to empirical chastising regarding our actual practices in the research site. Individual approaches may indeed be categorically unsystematic and due to the participatory nature of phenomenological investigation. It is important to negotiate the research site in a socially sensitive yet empirically rigorous manner. Arguments for individual flexibility and negotiation regarding site access, participant recruitment and field relations may be substantiated through reference to ontology and the variability of the situations researchers may be faced with. However, I feel as though philosophical ambivalence towards systematising practice to some extent makes methodological rigour problematic. We may have little desire to change what we do and how we do it because, and I agree, the flexibility and social sensitivity in navigating social situations is paramount and research practice and output has thrived as a result. However, it is possible to systematise the flexibility and naturalness of our engagement through what I call experiential self-reflexivity.

Experiential self-reflexivity is the process through which the ethnographer retrospectively explicates the nature of their actions, interactions and decisions

pertaining to all aspects of the research process as a data type to be analysed in triangulation with other data. Methodologically, experiential self-reflexivity serves a number of functions. First, it forces the researcher to investigate their own dispositions, ideologies and beliefs as core components of engagement. One does not find themselves engaged in an ethnographically based research endeavour as a matter of happenstance. Interests, predispositions and theoretical orientation all play formative roles in the research process and bear heavily on each step of that process. It does not suffice to explicate subjective elements of experience and personal orientation as a crystallisation of situational perspective. Rather, this information must be utilised in consort and as a form of data to be analysed in consolidation with other data types to illuminate the complex interrelationships between them.

Second, in an ethnographic endeavour the researcher *creates* data and henceforth, the materialisation of phenomena by means of observational notes, audio-video recordings, photographs, internet screen grabs and interviews will be referred to as *co-created data* with the process of engagement discussed as *data co-creation*. During the research process, the ethnographer as a perceptive and autonomous human being co-creates their own empirical reality and more explicitly, co-creates the data types and content of the data which will later be used in a more structured analytical manner. On the most basic level, we have entered a particular social world and in doing so, have changed the dynamic of that world in irreparable ways. As discussed in Norris (2011), things cannot and will not be as they would be without our presence and we are therefore a participant co-creator of the situations with which we engage. We could well ignore the problematic epistemological ramifications of our role in the research site as a matter of methodological imperative. And, indeed, for years we have accepted that the ethnographer as individual changes the research site in drastic ways and this is a categorical element of ethnographic endeavours. However, if we consider the research

site and our position as participant co-creator of the realities we investigate, we may come to a more comprehensive understanding of our own role as individuals and in doing so, enable a more authentic understanding of the research reality of which we are an undisputable faction.

The extent to which we engage in the co-creating of the ethnographic empirical reality fluctuates continuously and we are forced to consider the extent to which we, as individuals, affect the nature of phenomena as they unfold. For instance, my engagement in social interactions in a car while travelling to a kitesurfing spot or on the beach in conversation about some facet of the day would rank very high on the continuum of co-creation; it is quite obvious that my involvement in the unfolding of phenomena is a key component of the empirical reality. Conversations would not occur without my presence, were they to occur, they would be completely different in nearly every facet. Perhaps, individuals may not even congregate in the fashion they have when I am there. Participants may not have travelled to the beach that day etc. There is an unending list of possibilities were I not a co-creator of the unfolding phenomena. This is not to suggest that we should occupy ourselves with what would be were I not here; the conceptualisations are important only insofar as they enable us to better understand one's participatory role in the empirical realities under investigation.

On another end of the continuum, the data created through utilising kite-line mounted GoPro cameras would be very low on a continuum of co-creation. The individual has complete autonomy insofar as the situation affords and I, as individual play an insignificant role regarding the materialisation of phenomena as created data through audio-video capture. This is not to say that I as individual play no part in the equation; I have provided access to means and knowledge about the safe mounting of the camera. I have also ensured the utilisation of anti-fog inserts to maintain the clarity of the waterproof housing. I may have even mounted the camera to ensure safe

operation on the water. In a large way, I have co-created this phenomenon and thus co-created the data, but the extent to which my personage affects the unfolding of phenomena on the water is substantially less than in conversation on the beach. Again, conceptualisation regarding the nature of involvement is important for our own understanding of the phenomena and more explicitly, imperative to the practice of experiential self-reflexivity.

Coming to an understanding about the nature of co-created data can enable the researcher to then more comprehensively understand the ways in which predispositions, personal opinion, ideology, and theoretical leaning affect the process. In doing so, one is then able to view the data as it is; as a material manifestation of particular phenomena, co-created in a participatory manner for the purpose of analysis. This is the epistemological nature of the data we create, and treating it as such exemplifies methodological clarity and epistemological honesty and thereby, a more comprehensive understanding of the research endeavour and phenomena as a whole.

I am in no way suggesting that we alter or attempt to systematically predetermine the nature of our engagement in a research site, only that we embrace our subjective participatory co-creation of the research reality through the utilisation of experiential information as another form of data creation. In so doing, we enable a more authentic conceptualisation of the site of investigation which includes subjective perceptual and experientially created data to be analysed in consort with the other data we as researchers co-create. Through exercising experiential self-reflexivity, we not only account for our position in the social world we investigate, we enable the collating of this information to be used for analytical purposes and thereby a more comprehensive representation of the research site as a whole, with one's experiences, decisions and actions subject to the same analytical scrutiny as our informants.

#### **4.6.2 Site access, participant recruitment and field relations: Methodological considerations**

The ways in which I proceeded regarding site access, participant recruitment and initial field relations occurred in a methodologically strategic manner but materially, the process unfolded quite naturally. Inferences based in experience with other ‘board sports’ and academic ruminations in the field of sport and leisure studies informed the conceptualisation of an experiential socialisation into the practice of kitesurfing for the purpose of study. Granted, there are quite a number of ways in which the project could have taken shape, and it is possible that a strict researcher role with systematically defined data collection methods and quantities could have led to a very fruitful research endeavour. However, to understand phenomena is not simply a matter of asking individuals about their experiences, watching what they do and creating data about various facets of our perceptual world. Indeed, from the position of observer, we can come to know things through strategic inquiry and we may eventually come to some general understanding about the nature of the phenomena we are interested in, and in many cases, this will suffice. However, attempts to comprehend the actual nature of some facet of human experience should, in my opinion, be based at least partly, in experience. Below, I detail two key components of the ethnographic process that need reconceptualising: the phenomenology of participatory-observation and the importance of becoming native.

In Atkinson et. al’s comprehensive 2001 edited collection *Handbook of Ethnography*, Reed-Danahay (2001) provides a complete articulation of autoethnographic and biographical ethnographic endeavours while highlighting the ontological and epistemological tensions exemplified in discourse relating to the practices. The review of biographical ethnographic accounts and the prevalence of ‘life stories’ or ‘personal narratives’ in contemporary ethnographic practice points to emerging hermeneutic and phenomenological trends which champion subjectivity as an

empirical perspective to be cultivated in field research (Ellis & Bochner 2000; Plummer 2001). Poignantly, Reed-Danahay cites Keil (1976: 253) in what is claimed to be a foreshadowing of critiques which arose in the 70's and 80's wherein Keil champions "extended autobiographies before fieldwork and candid diaries during fieldwork". While the majority of attention is allocated to the practice of positioning oneself (the ethnographer) within the research account as a means of exemplifying the experiential and personal perspective, comparatively less discussion revolves around the personal experience in the field. Indeed, 'autoethnographies', 'life stories' and 'personal narratives' implicitly point to the subjective experiential facets of the research process, however, discussion regarding the nature of *accounts* is a matter of exposition and not particularly empirical practice. Furthermore, the ontological tensions in methodological practices of personalisation dominated by the 'personal vs objective' and 'humanist vs scientific' are more indicative of paradigmatic stringency than ontological and epistemological consideration.

The above mention of participatory-observation is a slight lexical reconfiguration of the more traditionally accepted participant observation (Becker & Geer 1957, 1960; Platt 1983; Gans 1999; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2001; Delamont 2004; Dewalt & Dewalt 2010). Seemingly mundane, the semantically intensified processual nature implied by the reworking serves to highlight a methodological imperative, particularly regarding the study of what people *do*. If our empirical interest is of phenomena wherein individuals or collections of people undertake some particular action/s, I believe it is empirically imperative to experientially participate (to the best of one's ability) in the phenomena under consideration. The proprioceptive nature of lived experience has socially and historically been allocated elevated status as signifying particularly intimate knowledge about certain activities. Going further, in many situations we consider intimate knowledge acquired through experiential means to

be more important than theoretical or conceptual knowledge. For instance, if we are going to select ourselves a scuba-diving instructor for our first decent in natural waters, and we are faced with an option between an instructor that has seen many dives before, has read every book about diving theory, knows intimately the physics of pressurisation and the human body, but has never been in the water, or, an instructor who has very little theoretical and conceptual knowledge but has made 1500 successful dives in this specific locale; we may be predisposed to select the less theoretically knowledgeable but far more experientially knowledgeable individual. Similar comparisons can be made in a number of situations like driving, building, trekking, hunting and sailing to name a small few. Whether it be traditionally accepted or not, in our daily lives we prioritise lived experience as generating a type of intimate knowledge about particular phenomena which cannot be attained in any other way. It seems philosophically problematic that we might risk our lives in the hands of intimate knowledge experientially generated, but simultaneously dispel the generation of knowledge through experiential phenomena as academically inferior to observation and more classically structured inquiry.

One argument which could be made in opposition to the championing of developing intimate knowledge through experiential facets would be the blurring of boundaries between researcher and participant. I accept that this is a methodologically strong argument and at times it may be important to balance one's participatory role, however, I disagree that this should be done to maintain some abstracted objective perspective towards the phenomena under investigation. As researchers interested in the life worlds of our participants and the immediacy of experience in various facets of human life, we are not seeking to construct knowledge in an objective form. We accept, and even champion the ontological nature of experiential subjectivity and this is mirrored by the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of qualitative

endeavour. Therefore, maintaining objectivity towards the subject matter we investigate falls in direct opposition to our methodological, ontological and epistemological ideology. Furthermore, our ideological position would suggest that it is impossible to be objective towards our subject matter and thus, the exercise seems dubious at best. Granted, participatory roles must be negotiated in and through the research process, however, this can be done through exercising experiential self-reflexivity and through explicitness and transparency we can better understand our own perception of, experience of and participatory role in the phenomena under investigation, rather than attempt to do something we do not ideologically support as possible. Furthermore, the traditional dichotomy between researcher and participant is empirically and philosophically ungrounded and we may do more to dispel the stringent categories.

It is categorically fallacious to suggest that an individual can only be one thing at one time. Contemporary research in identity production (Norris, 2011) explicitly describes the ways in which individuals can embed multiple identity elements in social situations simultaneously. One can, and often does, enact multiple identity elements simultaneously and while particular identities may be foregrounded phenomenologically, the others do not cease to exist completely. One example might be a mother at work receiving a call from a child regarding some familial related issue. Indeed, the individual may enact the identity element of mother as indicative of her prosody, lexis, body movements and other communicative modes, however, other particularities in lexis, gaze, gestures and posture may also enact the identity element of professional at work. She is sitting at a desk, holding a corded phone with a base located on a desk, sitting in an ergonomically correct office chair, perhaps speaking with more formal lexical and prosodic choices than she might in the home. It is quite obvious that she is enacting two different identity elements simultaneously. We could suggest that she is enacting the identity element 'working mother' but this is just a semantic



conflation of two separate identity elements. While admittedly not a categorically perfect comparison, we should at least accept that we can enact two different identities at one time or, be multiple things simultaneously.

Is it not then possible to simultaneously be participant and observer or experiencer and researcher simultaneously? I would suggest that it is impossible to do anything but. Decisions made in the research site are made as both participant and researcher. Furthermore, it may be methodologically beneficial to participate as completely as possible. This does not mean that one must abandon their analytical gaze on the experiential phenomena. As academics and researchers, it is seldom that our analytical gaze ever subsists in social situations. We are researchers, and we are individuals with thoughts, feelings and ideologies. We accept this in most facets of the research process, should we not deem it also possible, or methodologically beneficial in understanding participatory roles and experiential perspective? This leads to the championing of becoming native in certain research situations.

## **4.7 Data Collection: Participatory Observation**

It seems discursively redundant and methodologically obvious that I describe the collection of data and participatory-observation as occurring in a naturalistic manner. However, a complete disclosure of the process of engagement in the research site will further exemplify what I deem as methodological imperatives in this form of social science research.

It quickly became apparent that data collection as originally conceptualised would be problematic for a number of reasons. First, the role of researcher-with-camera would practically isolate me from the actions, interactions and practices of the individuals around me and, without being involved in what was happening, my knowledge of the phenomena would be restricted to a pure observational level.

Furthermore, without being in-the-middle-of-things, I would fail to recognise what might be deemed as video-worthy by participants and my participatory position as an individual engaged in kitesurfing would be explicitly questioned. Original data collection plans which placed me on the beach recording activity with a video camera began to seem practically incongruous to the phenomena I was seeking to understand. The experiential and personal uncertainty I felt by the prospect of being ‘beach bound observer’ led to a reconfiguration of methodological practice. The reconfiguration of methods was at the time, strategically worrying as I would have far less control over the nature, amount, and collection of data; however, the participatory observational role I came to take up led to a more phenomenologically authentic data creation process.

Retrospectively, uneasiness about becoming a ‘beach-bound-observer’ stemmed from personal and professional unease about ‘creating a situation for research’ rather than ‘creating a research situation’. The difference is subtle but it is methodologically important. As an individual engaged in camera operation (an empirical position I attempted to take up initially), I was explicitly acknowledged as being outside the realm of participation. Actions, interactions and practices were occurring from which I was spatially isolated. Worse still, the technological affordances of the video equipment failed to enable the capturing of any discernible footage. Digital zoom and inability to mitigate the stationary position dictated by the necessity of a tripod resulted in failed efforts to capture anything on film. This isolation was further reaffirmed when participants would ask, “did you get that” referring to some manoeuvre which was performed, and I would ashamedly have to respond “I’m not sure”, knowing that an “unfortunately not” could have been said with relative certainty. As a result of these early failings, I resolved to pursue a far less controllable situation wherein I would simply bring the technology along, and allow participants to dictate the nature of use. While initially I felt as though this situation was methodologically problematic, I soon

realised that this form of naturalistic participatory engagement would be the only way to co-create data in an authentic manner.

As I was obviously missing something by remaining outside the realm of practical activity, I strategized a way in which to be engaged with participants in the practice of kitesurfing while simultaneously co-creating data. The most effective means of achieving this was the utilisation of the GoPro line-mounted video cameras. These conspicuous high definition and waterproof cameras could be mounted on the kite lines, turned on, and left to record the actions of the individual whose kite the camera was mounted on. Furthermore, operation and the determination of when to record would be left to the desires of participants which minimised the amount to which I would be creating a situation for research, rather than facilitating a research situation. The latter resulted from a more participatory role in the research site allowing participants to dictate the utilisation of technology and the resulting creation of data. This accomplished two primary objectives: allowing me to be more naturally and authentically a part of the phenomena and minimising the extent to which I was the co-creator of data. As mentioned earlier, the extent to which the researcher co-creates data can be categorised on a continuum taking into consideration the material use of technology, one's role in that utilisation and the extent to which participation in phenomena is centred around data creation (Scollon, 2001a; Pan, Scolon, and Scollon, 2002). A participant dictated strategy for the co-creation of data led to a more authentic capturing of material realities, however, this did limit the extent to which I was able to dictate data creation. At times, weeks passed with very little technology use occurring and as a primary form of data, this became methodologically troubling. However, the autonomy participants had regarding the use of technology, while troubling at times, led to more comprehensive insights about the phenomena as a whole.

Thus, the co-creation of data occurred through an experiential and participatory manner wherein I would have the technology available, and participants would dictate the extent of use. Extrapolation regarding the process of collection day to day is not possible as each day was categorically different. However, detailed observational notes were always compiled following a day on the water describing the structure of the day and observational data regarding when, why and how participants used the technology. These notes were used in connection with video data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the days transpired. While a concrete description of each day is not possible, the general structure of a day-in-the-field is detailed below.

## **4.8 Typical Day**

Typically, text messages would be exchanged via mobile phone a day prior to an outing. The conversation would consist of negotiating wind strength, direction and possible locations for riding on the following day. At the end of the discussion, temporal and location based decisions would be semi-finalised with shared agreement that plans were solidified for the following day. Simultaneously, negotiation would occur regarding who was driving, when and where pickup would be made and if there may be extra room for other people. Equipment use and the borrowing of various pieces of equipment may also be negotiated with reference to location, wind direction and strength. The included parties would resolve in the agreed upon arrangements and communication would cease until the following day.

Depending on the time agreed upon, text messaging would resume sometime the next day with more accurate environmental information being shared between myself and individuals who may be ‘going out’ that day. Also, more discussion regarding equipment, wind direction and strength, location and travel plans would lead to a finalised agenda. The equipment would be selected, fine tuning may occur (tightening

of bolts and ensuring the usability of various pieces of equipment) and the vehicle would be packed. Pick up would occur at the specified time and location, or we would meet arriving in separate vehicles at the agreed upon time and place. If travelling together, conversation would typically consist of equipment, discussion of the wind that day, ruminations about recent days past and conversation about new manoeuvres and how the day might proceed. If travelling to a new location, maps were used and food stops might be discussed with the occasional checking of a GPS to ensure we were on the right track. Upon arrival, activities would occur in a much more generic and structurally categorical form.

Upon arrival and after finding a suitable place to park the vehicle, the first order of business is to walk to a spot, typically on the beach but occasionally on a grassy area, within 25 metres of the water facing directly into the wind, and wait approximately 7 to 10 seconds. During this time, light social banter may be exchanged but immediately following the brief period of waiting upon arrival, discussions would typically turn to tidal activity, wind strength and equipment use. During the walk to and from a wind check spot, it is normal to pass individuals engaging in a similar activity or individuals coming back from a 'session' and typically a communicative exchange surrounding riding conditions would occur. Thematic concentration would typically revolve around wind strength, consistency, gusts, surf and equipment use. After the assessment of environmental conditions, decisions would be made regarding equipment selection and equipment would be retrieved from the vehicle and set up would begin. The walk back to the vehicle to retrieve equipment would typically be the time at which negotiation regarding if, what, and how audio-video recording may occur on that particular day.

At this point, audio-video recording would begin if situationally feasible. That is, depending on the presence of other individuals and the availability of a spot to situate the tripod. The camera would remain stationary and capture the pumping up of kites and

unpacking of bar and lines from the kite bag. Then, the camera may need repositioning as the 'pump-up' area at a busy location is typically only used for pumping and deflating kites. Pump-up areas are usually grass covered to ensure the safety of the kite from shells and other foreign objects during the process of inflation. As there may be limited space, it is expected that once a kite is pumped up, it is moved to a location on the beach and placed on the ground for further rigging to occur. Thus, after inflation occurs, the camera is typically repositioned to capture the rigging of the kite and initial assisted launching. After appropriate rigging and equipment checks have occurred, at the participants wish, I would attach the line mounted GoPro cameras and secure the mount and lines with heavy duty duct tape (to ensure lines do not catch in mount crevasses). At this point, my influence over the data creation situation would cease. I would either start recording upon mounting, or the participants would signal that they themselves would turn the camera on.

Simultaneously, and at unspecified intervals, wet suits would be adorned, board shorts put on over wet suits, the securing of ancillary gear (bags etc) and locking of the vehicle would occur. These actions may occur at times during the pump-up and rigging of kites depending on individual disposition and environmental factors. For instance, on particularly cold days, it is typical to finish rigging completely in traditional (and warm) clothing before putting on a cold (usually wet from previous sessions) wet suit. The process changes day to day for most individuals and may also be dictated by availability of changing facilities, the amount of kitesurfers present and how social interactions might transpire during the process of pumping and rigging.

Once all gear has been prepared, including video equipment, assisted launching of kites on the beach would occur. With larger crowds present, other kitesurfers would assist in the launching, as is common practice, otherwise, dual launching would be performed wherein the individual who received the first launch would then help the

other to safely launch their kite. Once in the air, most explicit communication would cease and individuals would begin to go separate directions (at least at first as a measure of safety to avoid kite line crossings and other spatially related equipment dangers). The session would typically be punctuated by periods of rest, equipment readjustment or kite changing depending on the weather conditions and individual stamina.

## **4.9 Conclusion: Design of Study**

As described above, this study was explicitly designed with the employment of participatory methods as a methodological tool for data co-creation with a particular orientation towards facilitating the employment of video-technology for practitioners to record their own practices. Resultantly, the nature and extent of participant-observation and the amount of data which was co-created was explicitly participant-led. This strategy facilitated a more naturalised site of investigation whereby the research endeavour was primarily a collaborative endeavour. This empirical design facilitated a more autonomous production of data by the participants involved and provided an experiential socialisation into the world of kitesurfing which contributed to maintaining a local and material analytical perspective. Simultaneously, the nature of participant-observation contributed to elucidating salient and relevant elements of the phenomena which could be fruitfully elucidated using other ethnographic methods like interviews.

# 5 Methodology

## 5.1 Methodology: Introduction

Ethnography as an empirical methodology has traditionally been employed in anthropological and sociocultural endeavours seeking to articulate the social and culturally situated actions, practices, rituals, meaning-making and co-constructed realities of particular groupings of people. Originally championed as a primarily useful methodology for understanding *cultural others*, more recently, ethnography has manifested in a diversity of academic fields and ethnography as an investigative method has been a topic of increasing attention for scholars working in the field of Multimodality (Norris 2004, 2011; Dicks, Soyinka & Coffee 2006; Jones 2011a, 2012; Kress 2011; Pink 2011; Knoblauch 2011; Dicks et.al. 2011; Flewitt 2011; Hurdley & Dicks 2011). While debates regarding the utility of ethnographic methods and their compatibility and/or congruency with the ontological and epistemological foundations of Multimodality have been explicitly questioned (Kress 2011; Dicks et.al. 2011), ethnography is being increasingly employed to understand communicative phenomena and meaning-making in its diversity of forms.

While in traditional anthropological endeavours, ethnography has usually been discussed as a methodology which has explicit theoretical, ontological and epistemological foundations, ethnography supplies little provision for the actual analysis of data generated through ethnographic pursuits. In explicit alignment with Norris (2004, 2011) and Smart (2008), and as a result for this unarticulated provision for approaching data analysis, I prefer to discuss ethnography where its utility is explicitly exemplified, as a method of data collection. When considering ethnography not as a methodology but as an empirical method for the collection of data, arguments over ontological and epistemological compatibility between ethnography and



multimodality begin to lose their theoretical foundations. Ethnography is a particularly useful method for data collection, whereas contemporary methodological notions in multimodality help strategically structure one's approach to the analysis of data. Thus, discussions about ethnography and multimodality are really about two different things, data collection and data analysis.

This is not to suggest that one does not inform the other or that the two are distinct entities in and of themselves; only that acknowledging them as individual processes in an empirical endeavour nullifies the necessity to debate their compatibility. Moreover, traditionally, social semiotic and/or multimodal research has provided little direction regarding the collection of data, and as original methodologies centered on static textual representations, there seemed little necessity for provision. More recently, with a focus on real-time social (inter)action and the ways in which meaning-making occurs by real people acting in and of the world, ethnographic methods of data collection have proved particularly useful while methodological frameworks like Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon 2001a) and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (Norris 2004, 2011) have provided a structure for data analysis.

## **5.2 Participant-Observation**

As a method of data collection, participant-observation is arguably the method most explicitly correlated to ethnography. Moreover, the increasing acknowledgment that in order to research the social, one must necessarily be a part of it (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) has seen participant-observation championed outside its origin of manifestation in traditional ethnography.

Participant-observation refers to an empirical method of investigation whereby the researcher actively, consciously, and reflexively participates in the research site as a means to generating other forms of data (videos, pictures, field notes) (Emerson, Fretz

& Shaw 2001; Delamont 2004). Participant-observation enables the researcher to live with, co-construct and actively engage in the types of actions, practices, rituals, ceremonies, events and activities exemplified in the research site. This participant-observation is the primary method through which field notes are generated (often taking place simultaneously) and can provide a point of entry whereby other data collection methods (picture taking, interviews, etc) can help further elucidate the complexities of practices, events or phenomena.

Traditionally, discussions of participant-observation have centred on the generation of data and the utility of the method in terms of observation with little provision towards the methodological importance of the participatory facet of the method (See Discussion for more complete articulation). However, in this video-ethnography investigating the actions, interactions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing, participatory methods have proved methodologically valuable for the generation of data, analytically valuable as a provision of immersion into the system of mediated action of kitesurfing, and enabled an embodied understanding of the phenomenon which could not be generated in any other way.

In a wide variety of social phenomena and especially in kitesurfing which is characterisable as largely haptic, somatic and kinaesthetic, participation as an empirical method contributes to an experiential understanding of the actions, interactions and practices exemplified in participation in the sport. Participation simultaneously contributes to an empirical elucidation of salient features which can be more strategically investigated through the employment of other data collections methods like audio-video recording, photography and interviews. Finally, participatory methods can facilitate a more localised, material and experiential orientation in the analysis of data. Through participating in the sport of kitesurfing and/or *doing what your participants do*, the researcher acquires a more authentic interpretive perspective through an experiential

prioritising of salient elements which manifest as relevant in the sport itself. This serves as both an interpretive lens which informs data analysis, and as a means to situate analytical attention on the local and material realities of practitioners themselves.

The embodied mode of touch figures quite comprehensively in the ways in which social actors undertake mediated actions in kitesurfing. Furthermore, the materiality of various touches can be difficult to articulate through reference to visual facets of the phenomena. Mediated actions like bodyweight redistribution and pulling on the control bar often occur quickly and can be difficult to distinguish in the material composition of body movement. However, participatory methods have contributed to an experiential understanding regarding the ways in which subtle mediated actions materialise in and through the mediational means themselves. As a result, touches, pulls and bodyweight distribution as mediated actions can be *read* and *analysed* in other elements of the phenomena like the composition of the water surface and kite trajectory (frame orientation). Participation as an empirical method has facilitated the manifestation of an analytical perspective which might not have been possible in any other way.

Simultaneously, participatory methods can help situate analytical orientation towards the local and material realities of practitioners themselves through the development of an experiential understanding of the phenomenon. This contributes to analytical methods of data analysis which are locally authentic and can keep the analyst away from symbolic interpretations that have little material pertinence to practitioners themselves. In many scenarios, there are often local utilities to complex mediated actions and practices which manifest in real-time in a site of engagement. In kitesurfing, various mediated actions occur in favour of safety or favourability, however, without the manifestation of an experiential knowledge about the salience or importance of safety while engaging in the sport of kitesurfing, mediated actions of various kinds

could be imbued with symbolic meanings which are abstracted from the local realities of practitioners themselves. When this occurs, it can be attributable to a lack of experiential knowledge and the theoretical dispositions of the analyst. Resultantly, mundane and or mediated actions of local utility can be inappropriately imbued with symbolic and/or social significance. Participation as an empirical method can help ensure/maintain a level of locality or material reality in the analysis of data.

### **5.3 Mediated Discourse Analysis and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis**

Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) is methodological framework for investigating the complexities of social action and the mediational means by which the action occurs without giving undue importance or prominence to one or the other (Scollon 2001a). Incorporating a number of well-developed sociolinguistic theoretical elements, MDA is an investigative framework which asks two primary questions: “What is the action going on here? and how does discourse figure into these actions” (Scollon 2001a: 1). A definitive characteristic of MDA, as opposed to other applied and sociolinguistic frameworks, is the concentration on mediated action as the unit of analysis. While it is commonly accepted that discourse and social action are intricately linked in a variety of ways (Miller 1984; Artemeva & Freedman 2006), MDA endeavours to articulate the idiosyncrasies and complexities of this link through the analysis of social action.

As a holistic approach, MDA is not simply a discursive, psychological or sociocultural methodological framework, but rather, views “social action as being grounded in the concrete day-to-day actions which are themselves produced at the intersection of practice, discourse, technology, and analysis” (Scollon 2001a: 11). MDA identifies five central concepts as paramount in understanding this intersection, four of

which will be articulated at some length: mediated action, mediational means, site of engagement and practice.

### **5.3.1 Mediated action**

Wertsch's (1991, 1995a, 1998) original outlining of Mediated Action Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for employing the mediated action as the unit of analysis in socioculturally oriented research through a collation of theoretical notions from a diversity of academics concerned with the utility of conceptualising the world in terms of human action. From the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1987), Wertsch takes the concept of mediated action insofar as all human action is mediated through some constellation of mediational means and/or cultural tools. To exemplify the utility of conceptualising all human action as mediated action, Wertsch (1998) explicitly outlines how the unit of analysis provides a microcosmic manifestation of the diverse individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional components which permeate all action. Simultaneously, he articulates the ways in which the mediated action as a unit of analysis enables the analyst to focus on the pentadic elements of agent and agency and while the other pentadic elements do not simply *live* in this unit, it does provide a starting point for the articulation of act, scene and purpose (Burke 1969).

The uptake of employing the mediated action as a unit of analysis for discursive phenomena (Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris & Jones 2005) and multimodal interaction (Norris 2003, 2004, 2011, 2012) has explicitly led to the development of methodological tools which can be employed in the analysis of social action. Scollon's (1998, 2001a) mediated discourse analysis and the extension of various methodological notions in Norris's (2004, 2011) Multimodal (Inter)action analysis have provided a plethora of analytical tools which can be employed in the analysis of real-time social (inter)action. Below, I provide an outline of the methodological tools which have

guided the analysis of audio-video data collected for investigating the real-time mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing.

The analytical utility of the methodological notions outlined below comes from the unitary focus on the mediated action as the unit of analysis. Resultantly, all methodological notions permeate outwards from the mediated action and exemplify an analytical orientation towards the moments in time where individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes manifest materially in real-time. Conceiving of sociocultural phenomena in terms of action helps unify analytical attention to social actors acting with and through multiple mediational means and/or cultural tools thereby concretising focus on social actors, mediational means, and the irreducible tensions exemplified at this intersection.

The theoretical advantage of situating analytical attention on the mediated action has been thoroughly articulated above. However, the methodological advantage of this notion rests in the utility of a unified analytical perspective. Employing the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis “emphasises the fact that social action is grounded in social actors and objects in the world, highlighting the irresolvable dialectic between social action and mediational means” (Norris 2011: 37). Simultaneously, this exemplifies the aspect of mediation as a central constituent of all analytical endeavours. As Wertsch (1998: 25) articulates, “the essence of examining agent and cultural tools in mediated action is to examine them as they interact” and this unquestionably involves the analysis of mediation as exemplified in the phenomenon itself.

Methodologically, this forces the analyst to articulate the elements of social actor, mediational means and the irresolvable tensions between the two. In so doing, there is an implicit pragmatism exemplified in always and only analysing mediational means in-use and “any analytical exercise involving the isolation of elements in mediated action must be carried out with an eye to how the pieces fit together in the

end” (Wertsch 1998: 27). The anti-reductionism which permeates the mediated action as the most useful unit of analysis is a central component while bypassed are fragmentary analytical exercises which might prioritise some constituent of the equation in isolation.

Norris’s (2004, 2011) uptake of employing the mediated action as the unit of analysis with an explicit orientation towards articulating real-time social (inter)action and the multiple modes of communication drawn upon and acted through by social actors has led to the development of new methodological notions which are valuable for understanding Multimodal (inter)action. Recognising the utility of the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis, Norris (2004, 2011) has championed conceptualising action in terms of lower-level actions, higher-level actions and frozen actions. In doing so, Norris explicitly draws together contemporary theorisation regarding the ways in which all communication and social interaction is primarily multimodal by nature, while simultaneously situating analytical attention to the moments in time where these communicative modes manifest materially, in real-time social action.

Norris (2004, 2011) describes a lower-level action as the smallest interactional meaning unit of any communicative mode. As Norris (2004, 2011) points out, communicative modes, both embodied and disembodied vary drastically in their structure, materiality and temporal longevity. As Norris explains, “spoken language is neither visible nor enduring, but it does have audible materiality” whereas gesture “has visible materiality but is also quite fleeting” (Norris 2004: 3). The variability in structure, materiality and temporal longevity creates a distinct methodological problem which Norris overcomes with a reorientation back to mediated action. With an analytical focus on the ways in which modes function in the communicative equation as mediational means, Norris identifies the lower-level action as the smallest interactional meaning unit of any communicative mode. Thus, the lower-level action as the smallest unit of any mode simultaneously orients focus to the ways in which modes function in

mediated action while allowing for the variability in structural, material and temporal properties. As opposed to the original methodological conceptualisations in the field of Multimodality which sought to taxonomize meaning-making resources through the invocation of Halliday's tri-functional semiotic structure, Norris's capitulation allows for variability in the composition of modes and their properties with a return to the mediated action as the primary organising principle.

Through acknowledging that communicative modes are 'heuristic units' highlighting the purely explanatory nature of distinguishing real-time social interaction in terms of individual modes, and, the articulation of the lower-level action as the smallest interactional meaning unit of any mode, Norris streamlines the methodological framework. First, what constitutes a 'communicative mode' is explicitly left unbounded and fluid insofar as modes do not have to share structural, material or temporal properties. Second, communicative modes are always and only partial elements of a more intricate (inter)actional framework since individual modes do not carry inherent communicative value in their abstract properties. Finally, there is always a dialectical focus on the social actor and the mediational means, or the social actor and the mode of communication (as a heuristic unit) being employed in communicative phenomena.

Thus, the lower-level action becomes the unit of analysis in Multimodal (inter)action analysis and this marks an explicit attempt to align theorisation regarding modes as systems of representation and the anti-reductionism exemplified through employing mediated action as the unit of analysis. Simultaneously, Norris (2004, 2011) introduces the methodological notion of the higher-level action which is comprised of multiple chains of lower-level actions explaining that "a higher-level action is produced through a multiplicity of chained lower-level actions that interlink and play together in diverse ways" (Norris 2011: 39). In this way, higher-level actions are produced simultaneously *through* complex chains of lower-level actions. More specifically, a



higher-level action refers to a complex of lower-level actions which “are bracketed by an opening/closing” (Norris 2004: 11) like a conversation, a dinner party or a university class. In each case, multiple social actors might (inter)act through multiple modes of communication. In doing so, many simultaneous, interlinked and dynamic chains of lower-level actions manifest through social actors acting in real-time and these chains collaboratively comprise the higher-level action. A conversation for instance, has a very specific opening and closing (depending on where it takes place), typically exemplified through some semi-ritualised greeting and departure.

Higher-level actions can also be embedded in other higher-level actions and this notion is explicitly valuable in articulating the situatedness of various embedded higher-level actions. For instance, over the course of a dinner party as a higher-level action, multiple embedded higher-level actions may occur like the eating of the main course, a conversation of a particular thematic orientation, or the saying of grace. In each case, the embedded higher-level actions are bracketed by semi-ritualised openings and closings but also manifest within or as embedded in another higher-level action, the dinner party.

Therefore, in Norris’s (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011) Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, there are three different forms of actions: the smallest unit of analysis which is the *lower-level action*; there are *higher-level actions* which are made up of chains of lower-level actions and are partially ritualized; and *frozen actions* which are historically perceivable higher-level actions embedded in material objects. As “the smallest interactional meaning unit” (Norris 2004: 11), a lower-level action refers to a pragmatically recognizable meaning unit in the form of a single gesture, utterance or other form of action.

In kitesurfing, a single movement functioning to differentiate line length in an attempt to force the kite in a specific direction and for a specific purpose could be

considered a lower-level action. This single arm movement to generate lift by manipulating line length is also part of the higher-level action of getting up and going on the board by using the kite to generate propulsive power. The ‘getting up and going’ which would be initiated by establishing a start position and would finish with the establishment of an end position where the kite is generating consistent power, would be made up of numerous lower-level actions like the one mentioned previously.

Others may include, extending one’s back foot, erecting one’s body, re-adjusting line length to ensure steady ‘power strokes’, twisting hips, etc. All of these lower-level actions would chain together in the higher-level action of getting up and going on the board. The higher-level action has partially ritualized beginnings (i.e. setting kite in stable position, sitting in the water with knees bent and board on) and ends (setting the kite in a position of stable power and lift, moving in a straight trajectory). At the same time, this site of engagement may include frozen actions, which are material entities that have higher-level actions embedded in them as a result of their specific existence. For example, the rider-less board in the water is a frozen action of a kitesurfing fall, wherein the practitioner has lost control and inadvertently separated from his board. The higher-level action is embedded in the lone board floating without a rider<sup>1</sup>.

### **5.3.2 Mediation means**

As Scollon (2001a) describes, mediational means refers to the material means through which social action occurs. All mediated actions are “carried out through material objects in the world (including the materiality of social actors – their bodies, dress, movements) in a dialectical interaction with structures of the habitus” (Scollon 2001a: 4). As such, mediational means are integral in the analysis and understanding of social action because without mediational means, social action is not possible.

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<sup>1</sup> While the notions of lower-level actions and frozen actions do not comprehensively figure in the data analysis sections, they have explicitly informed analysis.

As an integral component of mediated action, analytical focus on the multiple mediational means through which action occurs helps situate and structure analysis squarely within the dialectical tension between social actor and mediational means. As Wertsch (1998), Scollon (2001a) and Norris (2004, 2011) articulate, mediational means play an integral role in all social action because mediational means both afford and constrain social action, resultantly, shape that action, and affect action, cognition and communication in complex ways. Employing the mediated action as the unit of analysis unequivocally involves the analysis of social actor, mediational means and the tension exemplified between the two. In doing so, the analyst must articulate the comprehensive ways in which mediational means affect action, interaction and communication.

In kitesurfing, social actors act, (inter)act and communicate through complex mediational means like equipment (kite, bar and lines, board) and aspects of the natural environment (wind, water). The material composition of these mediational means affect and shapes that action in comprehensive ways. Resultantly, an analysis of the mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing must unequivocally involve the analysis of mediational means, their materiality and the ways in which the figure in mediated action.

### **5.3.3 Practice**

The concepts of mediated action, mediational means and site of engagement allow us to focus our attention on the culmination of people, material objects and the real-time window opened through the intersection of both, as integral components in understanding the complexity of social action. Scollon (2001a: 4) points out, that “for this mediated action to take place in this way there is a necessary intersection of social practices and mediational means which in themselves reproduce social groups, histories and identities . . . [and] a mediated action is only interpretable within practices”.

The multiple actions and interactions occurring in and around the sport of kitesurfing are complexly linked and culminate as specific practices. Going further, the individual actions and interactions occurring are only interpretable as they relate and interrelate to other actions and interactions as typified instantiations of particular activity. These typified actions and their interrelation culminate as specific practices and these practices, produce and reproduce histories, identities, sub-cultural mores and systems of mediated action.

#### **5.3.4 Touch/response-feel**

Touch/Response-Feel is a methodological notion introduced by Norris (2012) which is explicitly useful in the analysis of the mode of touch. While there has been quite extensive theorisation about the ways in which social actors draw upon and act through modes of language, gesture, gaze and other embodied modes of communication, Norris (2012) introduces a methodological notion which can be used in the analysis of how social actors communicate through the mode of touch.

Touch/Response-feel refers to the (inter)active phenomenon whereby a social actor *touches* (a mediational means or other social actor) and this touch results in a *response*, which is *felt* (feel) by the social actor who initially touched. The notion of touch/response feel implicitly acknowledges what has been described as the counter-perceptual nature of all touch (in so far as feel occurs simultaneously as touch) and this is embedded in the notion of touch itself. Touch then, includes counter-perception exemplified in the touch, and response/feel refers to a haptic phenomenon of a differentiated nature. Response-feel is not simply the counter-perception of touch but rather, the differentiated response from the mediational means or social actor which is precipitated by touch and then felt.

This notion is particularly useful in the analysis of kitesurfing as the majority of action, interaction and communication that occurs with and through multiple mediational means occurs through the mode of touch. Social actors employ various parts of their body in touching and feeling various mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action and this comprises a central component of the phenomenon.

### **5.3.5 Transcription**

In order to analyse the types of action occurring in a site of engagement, one must in some way capture this event through some medium and represent it in a material manner prior to the actual analysis. As Norris (2011) points out, once the phenomena are captured using a recording device, we face the difficulty of accurately representing this real-time occurrence in some tacit form. For this, Norris (2011) outlines a detailed method for multimodal transcription enabling a more accurate representation through prioritizing imagery in a holistic manner.

As naturally occurring interaction does not unfold in a sequentially predetermined manner, adhering to prefabricated temporal imperatives in transcription and analysis would be problematic. Furthermore, it is understood that a transcription system “guides – or even forces – the analyst into a certain direction of analysis, which, of course, simultaneously constrains the analyst to a certain interpretation as well” (Norris 2011: 81) and as a result, Norris proposes the use of a flexible transcription system which adheres to particularities in the data rather than forcing the data to adhere to the system. Thus, MIA proposes a transcription system which correlates with the ecological unit of analysis, that being the mediated action. While it is true that a “transcript is a theoretically loaded representation of an event” (Norris 2011: 82), prioritizing the smallest unit of analysis allows the data to lead transcription in a cohesive and integrative manner.

Moving forward, considering the complex interplay of communicative modes in the authentic interaction of multiple participants, Norris (2004) proposes a mono-modal process of analysis and transcription in order to adequately attend to the phenomena occurring in the recorded event. Thus, numerous transcripts will be constructed for the same event with an analytical focus on individual modes which can “then be collated with the help of time as the reference, to produce” (Norris 2011: 83) a final transcription of the communicative event. For both the individual transcripts and the final multimodal transcript, Norris (2011) has devised specific conventions which assist the researcher in identifying lower-level actions, representing single modes in individual transcripts and finally, representing the event as a whole through image based multimodal transcripts.

The complexity of action exemplified in the practice of kitesurfing is problematic when analysing audio-video data. The interplay, interrelation and interaction of various modes and mediational means occur at different times and in varying complexities. A flexible transcription system and protocol enabled the analysis to focus specifically on the mediated action. Going further, analysing individual modes in isolation enables the complete articulation of the intricacies of that mode before collating individual transcripts in an attempt to accurately represent the action occurring. Attending to individual modes in analysing the action in kitesurfing will enable the analyst to articulate particular intricacies of various modes that may otherwise be overlooked as a result of high-speed and complexly linked lower-level actions.

While there are constraints to the methodological framework, MIA enables the systematic analysis of the various communicative modes functioning in any social interaction through carefully articulated methods for transcription and analysis. With a definitive concentration on the mediated action as the unit of analysis, MIA accommodates for the variability in structure and materiality across communicative

modes. In doing so, differentiation between levels of action and a context based explication of the communicative event as a whole is made possible. With explicitly outlined protocol for transcription and analysis, MIA provides a data grounded process for the analysis of social phenomena. No other multimodal methodological framework enables the same breadth and depth in the analysis of authentic real-time social action, interaction and communication.

## **5.4 Conclusion: Methodology**

The utility of the methodological notions from Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon 1998, 2001a) and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011) lay in their pragmatic orientation towards the ways in which mediational means are used in real-time by social actors acting in the world. Furthermore, as methodological frameworks, MDA and MIA are extremely flexible insofar as their utility is explicitly in the analysis of data. MDA provides a comprehensive detailing of the ways in which to approach phenomena of a discursive nature whereas the extension of methodological notions in MIA can prove useful for the analysis of multimodal (inter)action.

While ethnographic methods have been employed for the collection and co-creation of various data types, methodological notions from MDA and MIA have proved indispensable when approaching audio-video recorded social action. If debating the complementarity between Ethnography and Multimodality, it seems that the two explicitly provide what the other explicitly needs. Ethnography provides little direction about particular methods of data analysis but articulates in great depth the best ways to undertake participant-observation, take field notes, conduct interviews and engage in the process of data co-creation. Multimodal methodologies, and in particular Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, provides a comprehensive methodological framework for

approaching the data generated in an ethnographic pursuit. Resultantly, it seems as though ethnographic methods and multimodal methodological frameworks are not only congruent and/or compatible, but that their collaborative employment might provide the most rigorous means to undertake the empirical investigation of naturally occurring social action, (inter)action and phenomena.



## 6 Kitesurfing as System of Mediated Action: Exhibiting four Characteristics

*It is not true that I am observing, in this way, raw behaviours not yet interpreted, as if I were observing graphic signs laid out on this page only without reading them. In reality I know that certain people are waiting for somebody, that others are going to catch their train, others the subway, on their way to work, the movies and so on. I know that what they are doing takes place within the limits of an easily imaginable series of ordinary, plausible actions . . .*

(Bazin 2003:424)

*We cannot understand what is happening before knowing the code.*

(Bazin 2003:421)

*In fact, we are not observing human behaviours of which it would be necessary, in addition, to look for the meaning. **We are witnesses to actions.***

(Bazin 2003:422, emphasis original)

*By theorizing modes as systems of mediated action, the mere definition of the term mode includes the irreducible tension between social actor and mediational means. This tension is easily missed when defining modes as semiotic systems or as systems of representation; but it is also missed when we define modes as mediational means or cultural tools because in either case the system seems dislodged from social actors. Yet, it is social actors that multimodal (inter)action analysis is interested in and who are at the heart of communication, not semiotic systems or systems of representation nor mediational means or cultural tools.*

(Norris, 2013b: 274-275)

### 6.1 Introduction: Kitesurfing as a System of Mediated Action

The first two quotations above come from an article entitled “Questions of meaning” by Jean Bazin “an anthropologist of social action” (2003:416). The arguments therein, some of which will be referred to throughout this chapter, explicitly problematise traditional conceptualisations of action, meaning and interpretation. The epistemological fallacies exemplified in a conceptualisation of “unproblematic fieldwork” help illuminate the necessity for perceptual, interpretive and ontological

compatibility. Bazin's fracturing and problematisation of the traditional ethnographic endeavour helps socioculturally situate the analytical position as one of knowledge; knowledge of action, of behaviour, of meaning and of culture. If it is that we, by means of a social and/or cultural othering, do not possess knowledge of action, behaviour, meaning and culture, we must, as he would attest, learn the code.

This assertion implies the existence of differentiated and highly situated codes through which human beings act, interpret and give meaning to the broad spectrum of existential and phenomenological life. Some codes (in keeping with Bazin's terminology) are highly semiotic and representational like that of speaking and writing (Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris 2004, 2011). Others, highly physical, habituated and inferentially representational like that of walking (Norris 2013a). Many codes manifest simultaneously and interrelate in multimodal meaning making, behaviour and social action (Kress 2011; Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris 2004, 2011). All codes are learned and all codes permeate our perception and manifest as inextricably linked to our interpretation of behaviour and meaning (Norris 2013a).

The following chapter seeks to elucidate Bazin's championing of 'knowing the code' with an analytical occupation towards a specialised, highly situated, socioculturally constituted and valued kinaesthetic, haptic and somatic code of human action; kitesurfing. The analysis exemplifies kitesurfing as a system of mediated action (or, in Bazin's terms, highly situated and specialised code) through the articulation of the ways in which elements of materiality, spatiality and temporality manifest as pertinent or salient. As an ethnographic endeavour, the analysis is implicitly a product and representation of learning a complex of codes through the process of socialisation. Over the course of approximately one year, through engagement within a specific community of kitesurfers, I came to know a complex and dynamic system of mediated action with what I call socioculturally *valuated* specialised practices that has manifested

as a complex *schematic aggregate* through which the materiality of real-time human action is perceived, interpreted and construed (Norris 2012, 2013b). The collection and analysis of data, as understanding the actions practices and behaviours of a particular group of people, can be loosely characterised as *learning a code*.

The term valuation will be used repeatedly in reference to the attribution of character as socioculturally co-produced that practices historically acquire in relation to other practices within a system of mediated action. Valuation is a term traditionally employed in financial sectors and disciplines regarding monetary value, or what something is worth financially. Thus, my employment of the term requires some articulation specifically around how I am using it, and for what purpose.

Traditionally, valuation refers both to the process of determining worth, and, the actual worth determined or estimated (merriam-webster.com, 2013). As such, valuation refers to both process and product depending on the context in which it is used. In both manifestations, valuation ontologically points to, or references the other. Thus, description of the process of valuation unequivocally invokes the attribution of some determination or estimate. Simultaneously, valuation in reference to the determined or estimated worth, invokes the product as a result of the process. It is this character of bilateralism that I seek to maintain in my employment.

Valuation as a product is also determined within the financial and/or economic climate of a specific time. As such, valuation as a product is never a finite or stable characteristic. Valuation is a characteristic attributed to some material entity which lives between its material character as an object, in explicit relation to the economic climate through which valuation is determined. Valuation is therefore a characteristic of worth as attributed, in relation to other objects.

Finally, valuation is always and only an estimation of worth and the actual number produced through valuation will differ (if even only slightly) as it is dependent

on individuals and their particular analysis of the various factors that influence valuation. Thus, valuation incorporates process and product in relation to other things and as individually differentiated.

For my purpose, the employment of valuation is in an explicit attempt to keep these semantic associations alive in an abstract and theoretical manner. Valuation of a practice then, maintains the historical and chronological component of process while acknowledging how that process manifests in the product. Valuation is the attribution of character, not necessarily scalar (though sometimes this is the case) but predominantly in relation to other practices. While valuation of capital entities in a financial sense, is always within the economic climate of the time, and in relation to other capital entities, so too is the valuation of a practice situated within a particular sociocultural climate and in relation to other practices within a system of mediated action. While valuation as the character of particular practices within a system of mediated action may be similar, there are individual discrepancies based on various sociocultural, historical and personal factors.

While Bazin's (2003) terminology may have archaic semantic undertones, it seems appropriate to draw upon this concept of *a code*, as a point of departure for the present discussion. Admittedly, in a traditional sense, codes are often collections of designed and complex meaning structures that are typically a further ambiguation of some representational scripting in an attempt to hide meanings. Members of a singular or unified group *know the code*, and thus know how to interpret the specialised and multilayered abstractions; that is, how to read something that is seemingly unintelligible, as something that is quite so.

There are many other generalised social codes, which are intimately intertwined with the various technologies that permeate our social lives (Wertsch 1991, 1995a, 1998; Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris & Jones 2005; Norris 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

The vast array of cultural tools and/or mediational means through which human beings act are both structured by action and in turn structure action. According to Wertsch (1991, 1998) an irreducible tension exists between social actors and the cultural tools and/or mediational means through which action occurs. In order to understand the complex and dynamic codes which manifest in social life, one must be explicitly oriented towards the moments wherein the codes manifest materially in social action.

The remainder of this chapter explicates the notion *system of mediated action* as a theoretical and heuristic concept through which to understand complex, socioculturally and historically co-constructed regularities and typifications in human action. The concept of system of mediated action, which develops through regularised and typified real-time mediated actions (Norris 2013a, 2013b) serves methodological imperatives in maintaining an analytical orientation to moments in real-time mediated action. Simultaneously, the concept of a system of mediated action helps elucidate the interconnection of highly situated and specialised practices, how these practices acquire particular valuations in connection with other practices and the ways in which systems of mediated action become internalised and manifest as complex schematic aggregates through which social actors perceive, interpret and understand real-time mediated actions (Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris & Jones 2005; Norris 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The concept of a system of mediated action introduced by Norris (2013a) is further theorised below.

The characteristics of the concept outlined below, grew out of the analysis of real-time audio-video data. Thus, *system of mediated action* is a theoretical concept with explicit methodological practicalities. It describes not only a higher level abstraction above the concept of practices, but also the cognitive lens through which we schematise, concretise and classify phenomenological perception.

## 6.2 Characteristics of Systems of Mediated Action: Theoretical Development

A system of mediated action, as shown in the third quotation in the beginning of this chapter, refers to a *mode* such as furniture, walking or kitesurfing. Rather than using the term *mode*, however, I shall speak of socioculturally instantiated collection of interrelated practices that are materially, spatially and temporally situated in order to unpack and develop the theoretical notion. Systems of mediated action manifest in real-time through social actors acting in the world and naturally develop patterns of regularity (Norris 2013a, 2013b). The patterns of regularity are socially constituted and thereby flexible insofar as systematic relationships between practices are relatively stable but may change over time. It is theorized that all actions and practices are perceived and interpreted through systems of mediated action. As such, a system of mediated action describes not only the interrelationship of practices as materially, spatially and temporally situated, but also describes the experiential lens through which social actors perceive and interpret material phenomena. Thus, the system is both the interrelationships between constellations of practices and, a complex and dynamic schematic aggregate through which perception occurs.

Therefore, a comprehensive description of systems of mediated action requires the articulation of two irreducible and identifiable components:

1. A system of mediated action = A systematic relationship between practices;  
and,
2. A system of mediated action = A complex and dynamic schematic aggregate  
functioning as a lens through which material phenomena are perceived,  
construed and interpreted.

From this perspective, systems of mediated action are not simply the domain of the individual nor are they distinctly sociocultural in nature. Systematicity or the

intangible patterns between mediated actions which constitute a system are socioculturally constituted and simultaneously individually differentiated.

The above distinction is explicitly aligned with Wertsch's (1991, 1998) breaking of the individual – society antinomy wherein neither conceptual entity maintains analytical priority. Transgressed is the conventional dichotomy championing either the individual as “the core building block out of which all else is fashioned – groups, classes, societies, cultures –or the society (group, class, culture) as the primary entity from which the behaviour of individuals may be derived” (Scollon 2001a: 119).

In explicit alignment with Norris' (2004, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) articulation of communicative modes, a system of mediated action is a heuristic unit employed in describing phenomena in theoretical terms. A system of mediated action is a higher-order heuristic which describes a set of intangible relationships between material phenomena. According to my findings, a *system of mediated action* may exhibit the following characteristics:

1. Serve socio-cultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational, or creative functions
2. Change in direct connection with mediational means/cultural tools
3. Develop embedded systems
4. Manifest some of the same actions as belonging to/creating different practices

Systems of mediated action manifest through the undertaking of real-time mediated action which through repetition, become *regularised* and *typified*. Through regularisation and typification, mediated actions concretise as particular practices which become internalised for social actors (Norris 2013a). This is directly comparable to the ways in which cultural tools and/or psychological tools undergo internalisation from the intermental plane to the intramental plane (Vygotsky 1978). In kitesurfing, mediated

actions like pulling in on the control bar, pulling on one side of the control bar, redistribution of body weight etc., must be explicitly and consciously considered and performed. Through regularisation and typification, these specialised practices become internalised or naturalised whereby social actors no longer allocate considerable attention to their undertaking.

### **6.2.1 System of mediated action: Serving socio-cultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational, or creative functions**

Development of a system of mediated action such as kitesurfing occurs to serve some socio-cultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational or creative function. Often, development occurs to fulfil multiple functions simultaneously. As can be extrapolated from the development of kitesurfing, systems of mediated action develop from antecedent systems and development is often motivated by creativity, innovation and technological change. Kitesurfing has developed as a system of mediated action primarily for the purpose of fun, exhilaration and enjoyment. While it is claimed that the impetus may have been a desire to set the world speed record, the transformations which have occurred have primarily been oriented towards ‘making the pursuit of enjoyment easier and safer’. As a system of mediated action, kitesurfing can be seen to have its roots in Windsurfing and surfing. Earliest enterprises were exemplified by practitioners re-engineering available Windsurfing equipment in the service of using a kite for propulsion. More recently, various styles have manifest which can be loosely aligned with windsurfing or wakeboarding.

Kitesurfing as a system of mediated action is irreducibly and irresolvable intertwined with the cultural tools employed as mediational means in its performance. Technological advancements, innovation, creativity, commercialisation and industrialisation have led to the proliferation of new kite designs (Figure 6.1), control systems (Figure 6.2), boards (Figure 6.3) and other equipment (Figure 6.4). This



technological development (creation of new cultural tools) has affected the system of mediated action itself. Learning trajectories, manoeuvres, and the most basic practices of riding turning and transitioning are all notably different as a result of this material and commercial innovation. See the kiter putting his board on using the handle (Figure 6.5, 6.6) which most kiteboards are fashioned with. Putting a board on would comprise a drastically different set of mediated actions without the provision of a handle.



**Figure 6.1: Kite design**



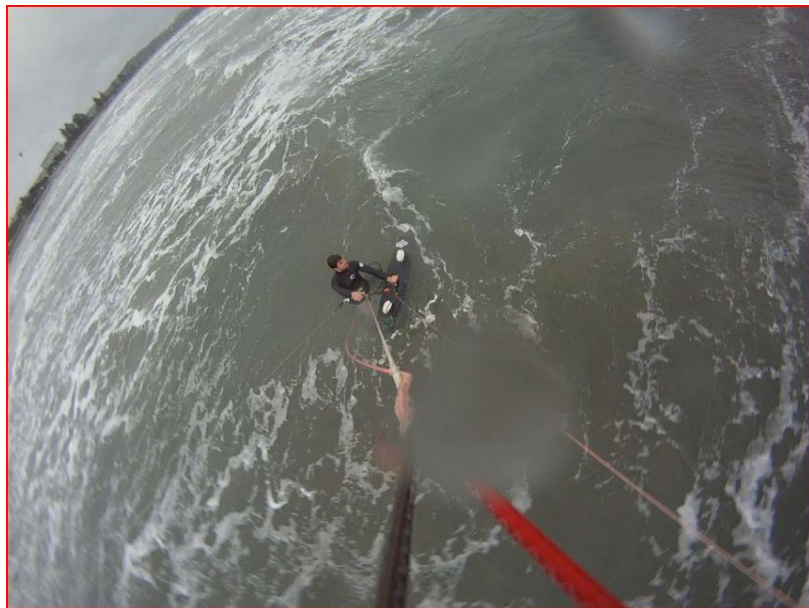
**Figure 6.2: Control systems**



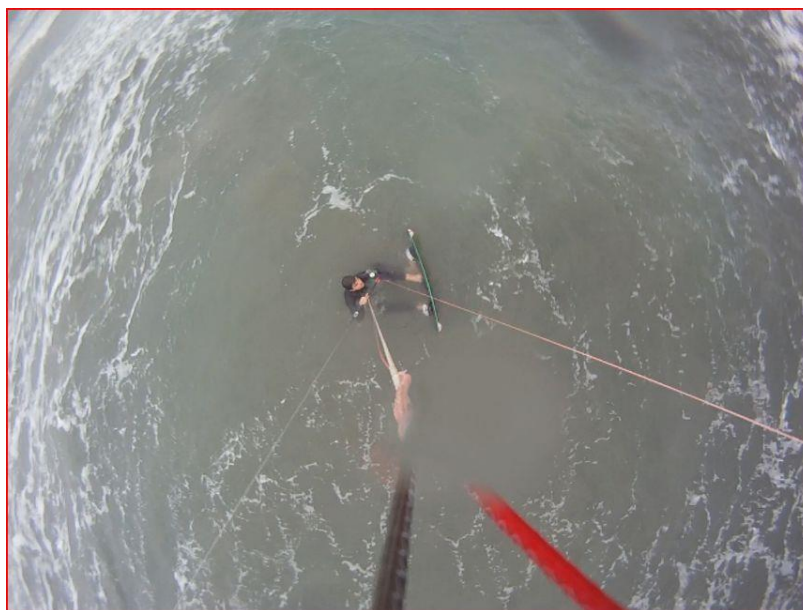
**Figure 6.3: Boards**



**Figure 6.4: Other equipment**



**Figure 6.5: Using the handle**



**Figure 6.6: Using the handle differently**

### **6.2.2 System of mediated action: Changing in direct connection with mediational means/cultural tools**

Systems of mediated action develop in explicit connection with the mediational means and/or cultural tools through which action is taken. The systems continuously change in connection with the mediational means and/or cultural tools.

Kitesurfing as a system of mediated action manifested through a developmental process in direct correlation with multiple mediational means and/or cultural tools. This explication is for theoretical purposes only and the evidence comes from a variety of unstructured and unofficial institutional sources. There are few sources which document the realisation of kitesurfing as the sport it has come to be, but the discussion provided is informed by articulation of manifestation by the practitioners who have been recognised as pioneers within the industry. Without personally experiencing and documenting initial endeavours in the manifestation of kitesurfing as a sport and with very little official documentation, the evidence provided seeks to articulate a theoretical characteristic drawing upon the best evidence available. Therefore, the discussion provided and all reference to manifestation of the system of mediated action and

antecedent systems of mediated action is informed by unstructured conversations in the field with various practitioners, internet sources outlining the characteristic nature of kitesurfing and a movie entitled “Upwind: The launch of a sport” which provides video evidence of and commentary by pioneering practitioners.

As mentioned previously, systems of mediated action manifest naturally over time in direct correlation and connection with cultural tools and/or mediational means. The ways in which systems of mediated action come into existence is primarily sociocultural and historical insofar as regularity and typification are abstract levels of similarity in reference to other actions and practices that have come before and which permeate the material character of the action itself. A definitive tracing of the historical manifestation of any system of mediated action is an endeavour rife with ontological assumptions but it is at least acceptable to suggest that a system, as a collection or constellation of specialised practices has come to be through some historically embedded process.

The historically embedded manifestation of any system of mediated action is difficult to adequately articulate as a result of the antecedent systems of mediated action that give impetus for the development of a new system; so is the difficulty in identifying the historical separation point of a system itself from its antecedents. Even considerably young and newly emerged systems of mediated action are difficult to trace in a temporal manner. Kitesurfing is a system of mediated action that has developed through regularised and typified real-time mediated actions but the interrelationships between practices which exemplify the intangible systematicity embedded in the practices themselves is both a product of real-time mediated action and the solidification of practices as ontologically related through the development of cognitive schematic aggregates which render the material, spatial and temporal composition of practices as systematic and of a different ontological character than other constellations of practices.



Historically, it is explicitly conceivable that at some point, a social actor, drawing upon the kinaesthetic and haptic affordances of a manoeuvrable/steerable kite, generated force in some direction while standing upon a board travelling across the surface of the water. However, the who, what, why, when and where of this real-time unrepeatable mediated action is of very little consequence to the valuation of practices within the system of mediated action as socioculturally and historically instantiated. Systematicity is a sociocultural and historical developmental product, and as such, multiple and multifarious social, material, institutional, commercial and geographic processes and trajectories permeate its manifestation in complex and dynamic ways. As touched upon above, attempting to trace the material manifestation of the individual mediated actions which gave impetus to the development of systematicity is a near impossible endeavour. However, sociocultural and historical development as a characteristic property of systems of mediated action is ontologically and epistemologically pertinent insofar as antecedent systems of mediated action permeate the constellation of practices which make up the system as a whole. As such, it is possible to identify the material, spatial, and temporal specificities which characterise the system of mediated action as a quality of difference between antecedent systems of mediated action.

It is generally accepted (with little structural, material and chronological evidence), that kitesurfing as a sport has antecedent relationships with numerous other sports. Most explicitly cited are stunt kite flying or power kiting, wakeboarding and windsurfing (along with its antecedents, surfing and sailing). These antecedent sports permeate various ontological elements of kitesurfing and this is explicitly describable through the analysis of the practices and cultural tools which manifest as salient in and between the sports. The extent to which, affect and influence each antecedent had on kitesurfing as a specific system of mediated action is debatable, however, their influence

and permeation into the current systems of mediated action as it has come to be, is much more relevant in the delineation of the embedded systems that have manifested within the system (to be discussed below).

While it may not be necessary, or even fruitful, to unravel the complex, spatially dispersed and dynamic coming to be of a particular system of mediated action as a constellation of interrelated and regularised or typified specialised practices, maintaining an ontological distinction about their development as permeating outwards from the initial undertaking of real-time irreversible mediated actions which become specialised practices through repetition and sociocultural co-construction is paramount. The earliest manifestations of the mediated actions which will, retrospectively, be recognised as giving way to a new system are first perceived and/or interpreted through other systems of mediated action as a means to concretise, situate and categorised experience, but may be recognized as novel or, outside systematicity as it has come to be known. This is often perceived, understood or interpreted as innovative in some way and may be best conceived of as social actors creating new affordances through a complex of mediational means and/or cultural tools.

Similarly, as a methodological construct, systems of mediated action manifest as cognitive schematic aggregates through which interpretation and perception of material phenomena occur. In coordination with the ways in which systems manifest in a developmental fashion through a socio-culturally and historically instantiated valuation of practices as having some continuity ontologically, so too do systems of mediated action manifest in a developmental socioculturally situated manner.

Also, and in coordination with the ways in which systems of mediated action manifest from and through antecedent systems, systems of mediated action for individuals, as a cognitive lens through which material phenomena are perceived and interpreted, manifest through processes loosely definable as accommodation,

assimilation and modification (Piaget 1973). While Piaget's theory of development primarily focused on schemata and the cognitive processes of accommodation and assimilation, the ways in which social actors acquire a system of mediated action as a cognitive lens through which perception occurs differs.

The primary difference lies in what Piaget identified as disequilibrium, which is in explicit contrast to equilibrium. Essentially, disequilibrium occurs when perceptual stimuli does not fit into existing schematic structures which creates an unpleasant state, and is rectified through assimilation in a return to equilibrium. However, while this process may fit the discussion of basic visual schemata, complex schematic aggregates as systems of mediated action are substantially more flexible and thus, manifest in comfortable, natural and regularised manners. Further, they build through mediated actions and are inextricably linked to the tensions exemplified between social actor and mediational means.

Systems of mediated action as typified and regularised constellations of practices that have some material, spatial and temporal continuity and stability, manifest as cognitive lenses through which we perceive and interpret material phenomena. It is not that the social actor, as a result of lacking a particular system of mediated action, is forced to assimilate information as a reactionary cognitive measure resulting from inability to accommodate. Rather, it appears that the perception and interpretation itself occurs through rendering the material phenomena intelligible and "within the limits of an easily imaginable series of ordinary, plausible actions" (Bazin 2003: 424). This is not to suggest that perception, interpretation and construal of material phenomena is correct, only that the schematic structures which have manifested through processes of socialization and acculturation permeate and structure perception.

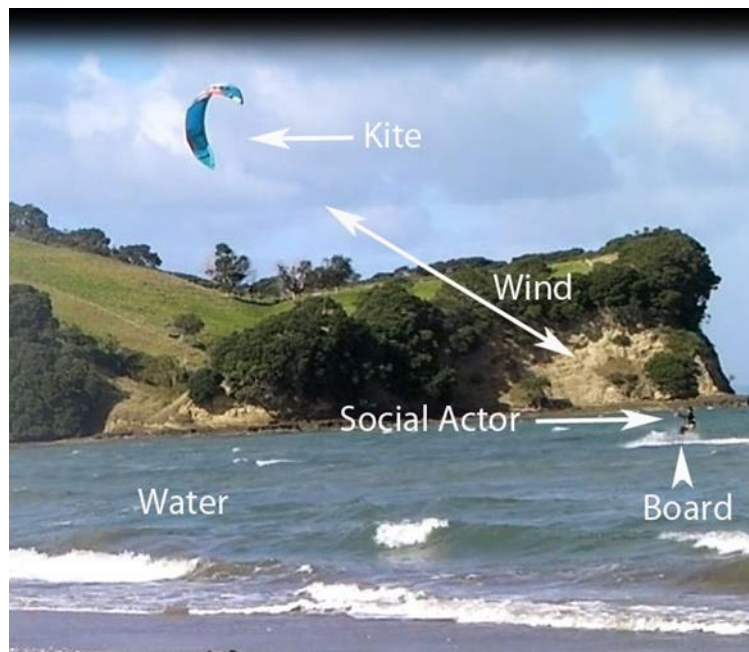
As such, all material phenomena is perceived through one or multiple socioculturally and historically instantiated systems of mediated action. As such, social



actors render intelligible a vast plethora of largely differentiated material phenomena. This is not to suggest that social actors perceive material phenomena, and then undertake processes of assimilation and/or accommodation as a means to render the phenomena as categorically structured, but rather, structuration occurs in the process of perception itself.

Kitesurfing, as a phenomena experienced by an individual who does not know the system of mediated action in any comprehensive manner is often grouped into a class of mediated action alongside windsurfing (a more conventional board sport utilising wind as propulsion). When mentioned in conversation, it is typical for lay individuals to clarify particular meaning with statements like ‘oh, you mean windsurfing?’, or ‘is that the one that is kind of like windsurfing?’. My own impetus and interest in the phenomena came first in the form of a desire to windsurf and only after some consultation with a more knowledgeable individual, did particularities between the two phenomena begin to emerge.

As a perceptual phenomenon, the mediated action of kitesurfing is in the most basic sense, an individual, propelled through some means of force (assumption being the wind as a propulsive mechanism), utilising some version of a sail to harness energy, along the surface of the water, riding atop a single plank, recognised as a board of some form (see Figure 6.7). In the most basic of classifications, the mediational means mentioned adequately account for the multiple mediational means necessary for the undertaking of the action of kitesurfing. There is a social actor and their body (physiological mediational means), the wind and water (natural mediational means) along with a sail and board (cultural tools). Similarly, the very same mediational means, as over simplistic categorical generalisations, would account for the basic mediational means in the sport of windsurfing.



**Figure 6.7: Example of social actor kitesurfing and mediational means**

The perception of this discrete action is understood through one's existing knowledge of a system of mediated action wherein similar mediational means interrelate in the undertaking of action. Initially, the action is understood as, or interpreted as some derivative of a system of mediated action that the perceiver has some general knowledge about (in this case windsurfing). The action is not understood as part of a different system of mediated action and, only through the increasing acquisition of knowledge about this new system of mediated action, does the individual come to separate the systems as a result of various material, spatial and temporal particularities.

Initially, there is the perception of, or undertaking of some discrete action, or collection of actions mediated by specific and identifiable mediational means and/or cultural tools (wind, water, body, sail and board). The initial act can give impetus to the development or recognition of a system of mediated action but typically it is not interpreted or understood in relation to the system of mediated action, as the system, as socially co-produced, does not yet exist (theoretically or for the individual). What distinguishes this discrete act as not belonging to an existing system of mediated action

is the unique interrelationship between the mediational means and/or cultural tools through which the action is undertaken (sail is elevated a great deal rather than located on the board near the water). This new form of action is perceived through an existing system of mediated action as some particular derivative of that system (windsurfing). Thus, the action is interpreted as being loosely connected to an existing system of mediated action (similarity between kitesurfing and windsurfing); a system of mediated action which is characterisable through an individual's socially instantiated understanding about the material, spatial and temporal particularities for some collection of actions.

The perception or interpretation of kitesurfing as or like windsurfing, comes primarily as a result of the interpretation of classificatory similarity. In both scenarios, there is a social actor, riding atop of a board across the water, propelled by the wind and sail. Categorically, the discrete actions are similar and even in the analysis of the component mediational means it is still quite difficult to identify a distinctive difference. However, it is primarily the fact that we interpret this particular phenomenon through an understanding of an existing system of mediated action that the categorical similarity is constructed.

Development occurs to serve some sociocultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational or creative function. Often, development occurs to fulfil multiple functions simultaneously. Systems of mediated action develop from antecedent systems and development is often motivated by creativity, innovation and technological change.

Kitesurfing as a system of mediated action can be characterised as manifesting through a complex of functional imperatives. Historically, it has been suggested that kitesurfing as a sport developed to serve some pleasure principle; it was fun, enjoyable and challenging. Simultaneously, the earliest manifestation of the sport is generally

accepted as the first instantiation of gliding across the water powered by a kite in the form of the kite Ski (below) as undertaken by Cory Roeseler in Hood River, Oregon served a complex of other functional imperatives. It has been cited that this earliest manifestation of the system of mediated action resulted from Bill Roeseler's (Cory's father) desire to set the sailing speed world record. Bill Roeseler's theoretical computation suggested that a foiled kite of a particular surface area could propel a hydrofoil at much higher speeds than a static single sail. Cory, as he claims in "Upwind: The launch of a sport" was elected the 'guinea pig' for this endeavour and it is cited that his utilisation of a large kite and water skis during windsurfing races was the earliest manifestation of the sport as it has come to be known.

The antecedent systems of mediated action that gave impetus to kitesurfing as a specific system of mediated action are clearly identifiable in these earliest manifestations of new and categorically different mediated actions. While a complete articulation of the ways in which socio-cultural co-production, technological innovation and commercialisation permeate the system of mediated action as it has come to be is beyond the scope of this particular discussion, referencing of the various developmental imperatives will be introduced when pertinent in the articulation of the valuation of practices as socio-culturally and historically instantiated in connection with the mediational means and or/cultural tools through which actions are taken.

What I champion as ontologically salient about the theoretical concept of system of mediated action is that all systems of mediated action develop through and in connection with the mediational means and/or cultural tools through which action is undertaken. Actions and practices lead to development and reconstitution of the materiality of cultural tools themselves, which in turn function in shaping the mediated actions which manifest as specialised practices within the system. In kitesurfing, the use of a board with one single edge as more efficient for travelling upwind, inflatable kites

which allow the kiter to re-launch the kite after being crashed in the water and four line control systems which enable more steering and power precision are cited as technological innovations which were paramount in the sport's development. These technological developments occurred through functional imperatives (safety, ease of use, extended time on the water) and in turn have permeated the specialised practices which have manifested as the system of mediated action (i.e. water re-launch as a specialised practice). Thus, the tensions between social actor and mediational means through which action is undertaken is explicitly realisable in the manifestation of systems of mediated action and the ways in which mediated actions structure cultural tools and in turn, cultural tools structure practices.

This exemplifies how systems of mediated action develop in explicit connection with the mediational means and/or cultural tools through which action is taken. The systems develop through these mediational means and/or cultural tools and continuously change in connection with them.

### **6.2.3 System of mediated action: Developing embedded systems**

According to my findings, embedded systems within a system of mediated action follow the same developmental trajectories as the system itself. As such, they develop through regularised and typified real-time mediated actions, to serve some function (even if only to discern sets of practices apart from others within the system), and develop from antecedent systems.

These embedded systems (which also develop through regularity and typification in mediated action), are characterised by both the cultural tools employed and the haptic, somatic and kinaesthetic practices exemplifying their manifestation. Again, as visible in the case of kitesurfing, the irreducible interrelationship of the embedded system and cultural tools employed as mediational means is paramount. Wakeboard boots (as opposed to traditional straps), longer twin tip boards, C-style kites

and ‘riding unhooked’, have all become correlated with *wakestyle* kitesurfing (Raley, Figure 8). Simultaneously, various specialised practices also exemplify wakestyle as an embedded system (primarily realisable through being unhooked from the kite allowing for handle-pass aerial manoeuvres).



**Figure 6.8: Raley**

Embedded systems manifest as conceptual heuristics as a means to categorise a collection or constellation of practices as having specific and identifiable material, spatial and temporal characteristics which bind the practices within the system.

While a social actor performing wakestyle tricks is most definitely kitesurfing, the embedded system itself has come to fruition through socioculturally co-constructed valuation of certain practices as a particular type. As touched upon above, being *unhooked* is a key characteristic of wakestyle and this is a lexical denotation of the particular material, spatial and temporal components which exemplify this constellation of practices as distinct from others. Wakestyle manoeuvres are typically performed with more speed and at a lower height than traditional aerial manoeuvres.

### **6.2.3.1 System of mediated action: Specialised practices as embedded systems**

Systems of mediated action manifest embedded systems as collections of specialised practices that not only exemplify discrete members of the system as a whole, but also as members of an embedded class within the system.

In kitesurfing, as a system of mediated action, there are multiple embedded systems which have come to distinction through the precise materiality of specialised embedded higher-level actions as regularised practices. The embedded systems have manifested as a means to distinguish between various specialised embedded higher-level actions as belonging to a particular class. The embedded systems have become institutionalised through professional designations in the form of specific competitions. They have become lexicalised to denote particular specialised practices as belonging to a specific type; and have been concretised by the proliferation of special equipment within the system of mediated action. As such, while the embedded systems within this system of mediated action manifested through mediated action itself, the embedded systems become concretised by processes of institutionalisation. These are mirrored by explicit design and marketing of specialised cultural tools specifically for collections of specialised practices.

The generation of embedded systems within this system of mediated action has occurred not through explicit design, but through a retrospective classification of specialised practices as differentiated by material, spatial and temporal characteristics. As such, the embedded systems are socioculturally instantiated classificatory mechanisms whereby, practitioner's value embedded higher-level actions as belonging to a particular type as opposed to other types within the system. In kitesurfing, the lexicalisation of these embedded systems has occurred through the material, spatial and temporal similarities with other related systems of mediated action. Lexicalisation has

embedded classificatory similarities between the embedded systems and other systems of mediated action, while maintaining explicit relationship to the system of mediated action as a holistic entity. Thus, kitesurfers will talk about and classify embedded higher-level actions in terms of particular styles. A number of styles have developed as distinct embedded systems within the system of mediated action. As touched upon above, these styles have become concretised through both institutionalisation in terms of competition, and through commercial means of product development, style designation and marketing.

Within the system of mediated action of kitesurfing, there is an embedded system of freestyle as opposed to freeriding. The particular denotation of the two is explicitly related to the types of embedded higher-level actions that one engages in while kitesurfing. Freestyle is the lexical item attributed to regularity in embedded higher-level actions in the form of aerial manoeuvres as opposed to embedded higher-level actions that are performed while riding along the surface of the water. These embedded systems, with their identifiable material, spatial and temporal differences have been further concretised by the production of specific types of cultural tools as designated for particular styles. Kite manufacturers make, market and designate various kites and boards as belonging to the particular styles themselves, insofar as the materiality of the cultural tools has been designed with explicit orientation towards a collection of sub-specialised practices.

Freestyle kites and boards are designed in explicit connection with the embedded higher-level actions that exemplify the embedded system. As such, the kites are designed to make aerial manoeuvres easier to perform. Similarly, the boards are shaped and designed with an orientation towards the performance of aerial manoeuvres. The boards are often much stiffer which makes them more uncomfortable to ride on uneven water surfaces (in chop), but help maximise the production of pop (the way in



which the kitesurfer becomes airborne). Thus, the embedded systems within kitesurfing as a system of mediated action are not only retrospective classificatory heuristics through which to understand particular specialised practices, they also manifest specific cultural tools engineered, designed and marketed to fulfil specialised purposes (purposes which often conflict).

There is also an embedded system within freestyle most conventionally identified as wakestyle. Embedded higher-level actions as specialised practices within the system of mediated action of kitesurfing that would be classified as wakestyle, have classificatory membership to wakestyle (Figure 6.9, 6.10) as opposed to simply freestyle but also as freestyle in opposition to freeride. It is paramount to acknowledge that specialised embedded higher-level actions as practices within a system of mediated action and within a certain embedded system is a classificatory denotation that has manifested through regularity and typification of material, spatial and temporal characteristics of the practices as mediated actions with histories.



**Figure 6.9: Wakestyle**



**Figure 23: Wakestyle, another example**

The embedded systems develop socioculturally as a means to distinguish between specialised sub-categories of practices within the system. Simultaneously, the proliferation of classifications concretise the ontological valuation of particular practices as distinct in relation to other practices within the system, and as having a particular value in relation to other practices within the system. Thus, a hierarchy manifests within the system of mediated action through the classification of specialised practices as distinct in relation to other practices and as having particular values within the system of mediated action. In kitesurfing, values traditionally manifest in relation to skill, difficulty and physical prowess.

#### **6.2.4 System of mediated action: Same actions belonging to/creating different practices**

Systems of mediated action manifest materially through individual mediated actions. Individual practices within a system of mediated action exemplify material, spatial and temporal specificities which distinguish them from other individual practices within the system. These specificities are both recognised through their material, spatial

and temporal components and become lexicalised as a way of distinguishing between practices linguistically.

In kitesurfing, a power-stroke refers to both the haptic pulling in on one end of the control bar and simultaneously, to the spatial pattern of the kite's movement through the wind window. A kiteloop may involve an indistinguishable set of mediated actions to a power-stroke (pulling in on one side of the bar), however, the spatial pattern of the kite's movement is what realises the two as explicitly different. Another example would be body dragging as the practice of performing power-strokes while standing in the water to feel the power generated by the kite, as opposed to upwind body dragging (Figure 6.11), which is a controlled tack in an upwind direction usually to retrieve a lost board.



**Figure 6.11: Body dragging**

Thus, specialised practices within the system of mediated action are valued as being of a particular type, yet as having particular characteristics which distinguish them from other practices within the system. There are different 'types' of riding (toe-side / heel-side, Figures 6.12 & 6.13), different 'types' of jumping, different 'types' of front rolls and different types of back rolls. These practices are not only exemplified by

what they *are* (through their material, spatial and temporal composition) but in explicit contrast to what they *are not*. A sent jump is not a powered jump, both in terms of its material composition and the mediated actions through which it is realised. Without the sociocultural valuation and distinction, there is just a jump, not a particular type of jump.



**Figure 6.12: Toe-side riding**

The structural properties of a system become internalised as complex schematic aggregates whereby individual practices no longer need an explicit interpretation for the realisation of their meaning or pertinence. Rather, the social actor, through this cognitive schematic aggregate, perceives mediated actions *as* particular practices that have a structural position within the system of mediated action. Going further, systems of mediated actions come to manifest in the perception of other phenomena correlated with the system itself (be it mediational means, locational elements or environmental processes). As one kitesurfer articulated during a conversation:

Conversation 6.1: Perception through a system of mediated action

(119) S: 1:29 *I notice myself*

- (120) *doing that all the time*
- (121) *just when I*
- (122) *was driving up to the*
- (123) *Khyber Pass before*
- (124) *I was like*
- (125) *oh*
- (126) *those trees are blowing pretty hard*
- (127) *look at the phone*
- (128) *ahhh nope*
- (129) *four knots*

As exemplified in the transcript, there is an explicit correlation perceived between the movement of the trees and the possibility of conditions which might be deemed kiteable. Furthermore, there is an indication that this type of perceptual correlation, between trees blowing and kitesurfing occurs regularly. In this excerpt it becomes increasingly clear that some visible phenomenon (in this case trees moving), is perceived through a complex of relationships with the system of mediated action that is kitesurfing. Conceivably, trees blowing in the wind might have little value to most individuals; however, in this case, trees blowing in the wind precipitated a number of other mediated actions (checking weather report on phone) as the movement was explicitly perceived as related to the system of mediated action. In this way, systems of mediated action manifest as perceptual lenses through which other phenomena are perceived, interpreted and construed.

The collection and/or constellation of practices which make up, build, rebuild, constitute and reconstitute the system of mediated action itself are materially, spatially and temporally interconnected. Any distinction between practices is always and only

conceptual. However, classification mirrors the material, spatial and temporal elements of the practices as perceived.

The notion of system of mediated action helps to articulate the ways in which general practices like that of handing, writing and speaking are classified as specialised practices like paying for coffee, writing a grocery list and giving an oral presentation in a university class. While certain material regularities may extend beyond a particular system of mediated action, a large portion of the material regularities and typifications are situated specifically within the system of mediated action in connection with the cultural tools and/or mediational means through which action occurs.

Handing is describable as the exchange of some material artefacts between two social actors whereby an object is passed from one individual to the other with the hand. Paying is the exchange of a specific material artefact (money) between social actors for some particular commodity (object, service etc.). While paying is definitively handing, paying as a specialised practice can only be conceptualised in relation to a number of other specialised practices. To conceive of or identify paying as a practice (as a special kind of handing), we situate the practice in connection with particular mediational means, and, within other practices. While phenomenologically, *paying* and *donating* may be materially indecipherable, distinction occurs through the invocation of relationship to other practices. While general practices may be described phenomenologically, specialised practices must be described materially as situated socially, spatially and temporally, within a specific system of mediated action.



**Figure 6.13: Heel-side riding**

Consider jumping as a general practice, as a social actor leaving the surface of some material entity (the ground), momentarily suspended in the air without any portion of the body touching the material entity, and landing back on that material entity. Or, jumping as a specialised practice within a system of mediated action (jumping in kitesurfing, Figure 6.14). Pulling as a general practice, is a social actor exerting force on some object in the direction of their body typically using the hands and arms or steering as a specialised practice of pulling on one end of the control bar for the purpose of manipulating the flying trajectory of the kite. While general practices can be described through material composition, specialised practices are describable through material composition, in relation to specific mediational means, within a particular system of mediated action.





**Figure 6.14: Jumping**

While *mediated actions* are analysable and describable through their material, spatial and temporal composition, the analysis and description of *practices* unequivocally invokes a set of intangible ontological relationships within a specific, or multiple systems of mediated action. For instance, the interpretation or assertion of *paying* as a specialised form of *handing* unequivocally connects the practice with the reception of some commodity or service. Going further, material, spatial and temporal components of reception (in what manner does reception occur, where does it occur, before or after payment) are intimately connected to the system of mediated action which has manifested in and through mediated action and in connection with a plethora of cultural tools and/or mediational means. Payment for coffee may typically occur before the reception of the commodity, across the counter, to the attendant, whereas, payment for vehicle servicing will typically occur after the service has been provided, to an administrator, at a reception desk. It would be quite odd, and probably not possible to attempt to *pay* prior to vehicle servicing, on the shop floor, to the mechanic responsible for performing the service. Highly specialised practices often exemplify a phenomenological ambiguity whereby distinction as a practice, valuation in reference to



other practices and the articulation of functionality is highly situated within a specific system of mediated action.

The theoretical conceptualisation of systems of mediated action assumes a hierarchical relationship between ontological concepts insofar as human action is always mediated by multiple mediational means and is a one-time irreversible and unrepeatable phenomenon which unfolds in real-time. Next, all mediated actions carry with them complex and intersecting sociocultural and historical trajectories which manifest in the materiality of mediated actions as particular practices (actions with a history). Finally, the sociocultural and historical elements and trajectories which permeate mediated actions as practices instantiate properties of systematicity as material, spatial and temporal interrelationships between practices. As such, the mediated action is the materially unique and one-time human actor acting with or through mediational means or cultural tools. Histories and socio-cultural trajectories permeate the mediated actions as a type of practice and the practice is inextricably linked to other practices within a system of mediated action. Thus, the analysis of mediated action as materially, spatially and temporally unique, is inextricably bound to the mediated actions as a practice with intersecting sociocultural histories and trajectories and those trajectories are realised in the relationship of a particular practice to other practices within a system of mediated action.

### **6.3 Mediated Actions as Specialised Practices within a System of Mediated Action: An Example**

The analysis below illustrates one example of how I arrived at the theoretical characteristics discussed above. Through a close visual analysis of the one-time irreversible and unrepeatable mediated actions exemplified in the collection of still frames, which are socio-culturally and historically situated specialised practices. These have acquired valuation within a specific system of mediated action of kitesurfing.

First, the *mediated actions* are analysed and described in terms of material, spatial and temporal specificities realised by the social actor acting with and through multiple mediational means and/or cultural tools. Next, the analysis articulates the ways in which the mediated actions are classifiable as specialised *practices* through continuity exemplified in the material, spatial and temporal qualities of the mediated actions. As such, socio-cultural and historical trajectories permeate the materiality of the mediated actions in their realisation as specialised practices. Finally, the analysis articulates the ways in which specialised practices are valued in explicit relation to both material, spatial and temporal continuity as permeated by socio-cultural and historical instantiation, and, in explicit connection with other practices within the system of mediated action.

The frame sequence below is a static representation of an 00:11:20 (m/s/ms) second audio-visual clip selected from a 43 minute and 10 second audio-video segment which was collected on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2012. The 43 minute segment from which the clip has been selected was a result of automatic file consolidation which occurs as a means to store electronic files smaller than 4GB. The 43 minute segment is the first section of the 76:18:00 minutes of audio-visual data collected on that day of field work. The 00:11:20 is a representative selection of the complete audio-video data set as a whole (see appendix).

The 00:11:20 clip has been segmented into a frame sequence of still images differentiated by approximately 00:00:50 seconds (half a second). The selection of this temporal segmentation serves two primary functions; keeping the frame sequence to a reasonable length for inclusion in this thesis while also maintaining the phenomenological quality of the mediated actions themselves (for complete audio-visual clip see appendix). Thus, the frame sequence is structured to be readable within the confines of a textual medium while exemplifying enough specificity for the analysis

of mediated actions within this analytical section. Thus, segmentation of this temporal scale coincides with the analytical depth and specificity of the section. Where segmentation differs, a clear explanation regarding purpose is provided.

The 25 frame sequence below (Figure 6.15) represents a social actor undertaking multiple and multifarious mediated actions in a haptic dialogic process (to be described in more detail in chapter 8). The frame sequence has been segmented for the analysis of the mediated actions undertaken by the participant. The analysis below coincides with this segmentation as a means to articulate the mediated actions, practices and their valuation within the system of mediated action.





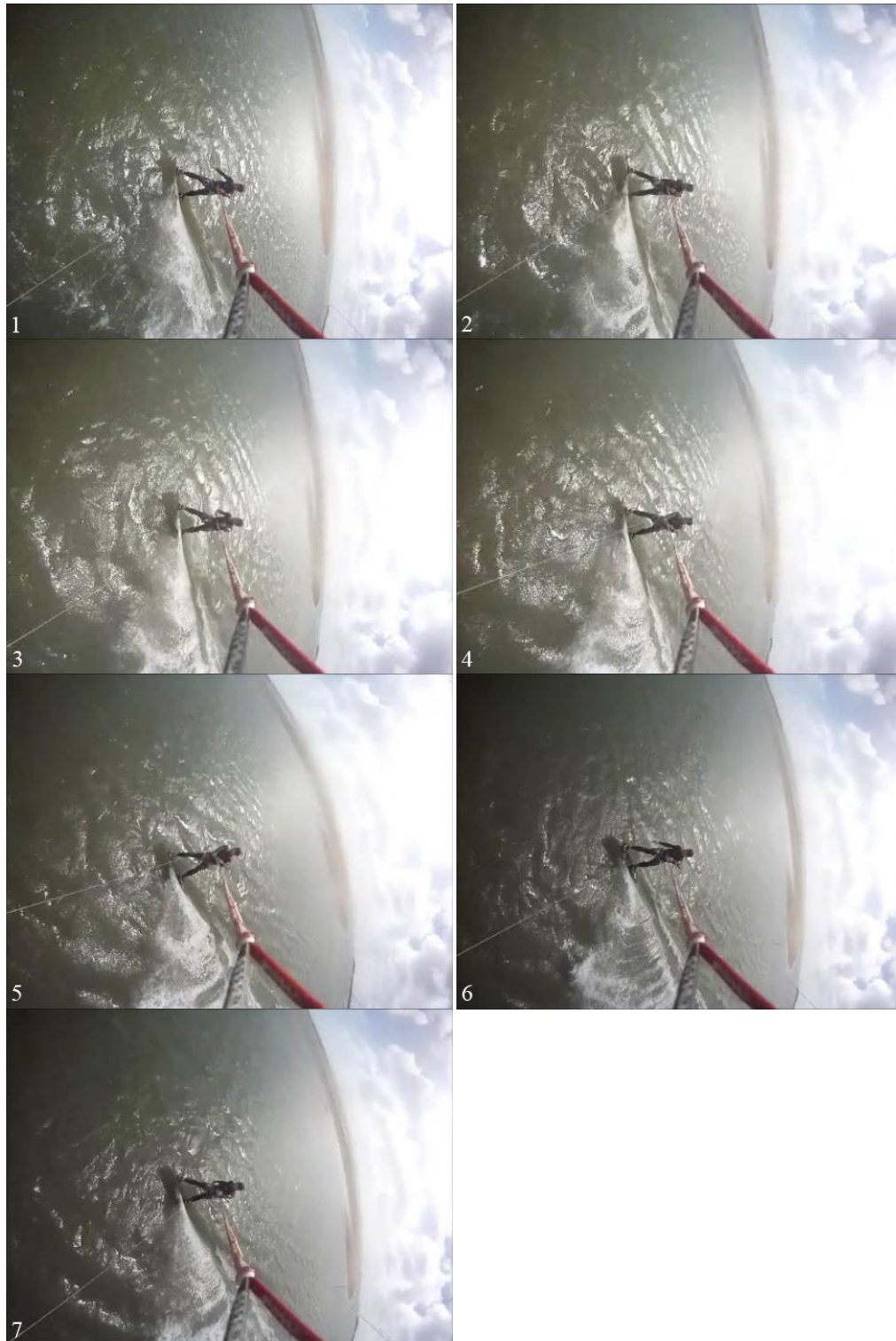




**Figure 6.15: Heel-side transition**

### **6.3.1 Frames 1-7: Riding on a starboard tack**

Frames 1-7 (Figure 6.16) exemplify the social actor engaged in multiple mediated actions. There is a material, spatial and temporal continuity between the actions themselves and the ways in which multiple mediational means and cultural tools function in the actionary equation. In frames 1-7 (Figure 6.16) the social actor is engaged in a haptic dialogic process of undertaking multiple simultaneous mediated actions, many of which are difficult to identify visually in the material body of the social actor themselves. However, there are multiple visually salient components relevant in the frames which inform the analysis of the mediated actions occurring.



**Figure 6.16: Riding on a starboard tack**

In frames 1-7 (Figure 6.16), the body positioning of the social actor and the materiality of one of the mediational means acted through in the multiple actions inform an articulation of body weight distribution as one of the many actions occurring in these frames. The right leg of the social actor is positioned near full extension, while the left

leg is slightly bent. The torso and upper body of the social actor appear to be in direct alignment with the left leg creating a linear continuity extending from the left foot to the left shoulder of the participant. In contrast, the extended right leg appears to create an obtuse angle in connection with the upper body with the axis point being approximately the hip of the social actor. Simultaneously, the material composition of the water which is functioning as a mediational means through which action is taken clearly shows discontinuity. There is a clear disruption of the surface continuity identifiable visually in the material composition of the white water spray located to the participants left, and a trailing linear wash exemplifying the trajectory of travel. Considering the material composition of these visually salient elements, the social actor is travelling in a linear trajectory, with their right foot forward (pointing in the direction of travel), with the majority of their weight centred on their bent left (back) leg.

Simultaneously, in frame 1 the social actor has only one hand located on the control bar with their head facing or positioned towards the trajectory of travel. In frames 2-5, the social actor has returned their right hand to the control bar, with their head continuing to face in the trajectory of travel. In frames 6-7 the social actor again removes their right hand from its location on the control bar while maintaining a head position facing the trajectory of travel. Visually, the movement of the participant's right hand suggests some haptic function or manipulation of the control bar as an identifiable mediated action. However, considering the material composition of the hand movement in connection with the visual frame realised by camera placement on the front lines of the participant's kite, it is explicitly clear that the hand movement was not for the purpose of steering the kite. Furthermore, the starting location of the participant's right hand, extended outwards from the body at the distance of approximately half a metre, and the same returning position coupled with the continuity of kite flying trajectory



leads to the suggestion that the arm movement was primarily a phenomenon which materialised in the service of balance and not kite steering.

In frames 1-7, the body positioning, differentiation in leg extension, materiality of the water, arm movement, continuity in head position and frame perspective exemplify the participant engaged in subtle mediated actions for the purpose of balance, with bodyweight primarily centred over the back leg, travelling in a linear trajectory to their right or an *a starboard tack*. This collection of simultaneous and subtle mediated actions can be categorised, as a result of the material continuity, as the practice of *riding on a starboard tack*. While there may be subtle differences in the precise bodyweight distribution of the social actor and there are very clear differentiations in hand movement and positioning, the temporal continuity in camera perspective, the materiality of the water and body positioning suggest the undertaking of multiple simultaneous and subtle mediated actions realising the practice of riding. Riding, as a specialised practice within the system of mediated action can manifest in materially, spatially and temporally differentiated manners. Furthermore, other embedded higher-level actions may occur while riding. Variations in the material composition of mediated actions which realise the practice of riding will be articulated in more depth below.

### **6.3.2 Frames 8-9: Heel-side transition**

Frames 8-9 show the social actor engaged in multiple simultaneous mediated actions undertaken through multiple mediational means and cultural tools which exemplify material, spatial and temporal specificities which realise other simultaneous specialised practices.



**Figure 6.17: Switch to toe-side**

Frames 8-9 (Figure 6.17) show a clear redistribution in body weight realised by the material composition of the social actor and multiple mediational means through which the mediated actions are being taken. First, frame 8 shows the social actor redistribute body weight, and while still predominantly favouring their left leg, as realised by the white water spray extending from the tail (back end) of the board, a shift in bodyweight initiates the turning of the board. The linear trajectory of the board has changed in relation to the previous frame. Now, instead of in a linear trajectory of travel (linearity realisable by the water trail left in the material composition of the water surface), the board is now pointing substantially further in an upwind direction. In frame 9, the social actor has completely shifted their body weight from being located predominantly on the left leg (exemplified by a linear continuity between the leg and body and by differentiation in leg extension), to their right leg. This is realised visually in the alteration of leg extension. In frame 9, the social actor's right leg is substantially more bent than the left, and they are now travelling with their left leg forward.

Simultaneously, while undertaking multiple mediated actions through body weight redistribution realised by turning of the board approximately 180 degrees, the social actor has also pulled on the left side of the control bar initiating a change of kite flying trajectory. This mediated action of pulling on the control bar is realised visually by a change in visual perspective provided by the line-mounted camera. Thus, while it

may be difficult to visually identify the precision and force with which the social actor pulled on the control bar, the mediated action materialises in the changing perspective of the line-mounted camera.

Therefore, in frames 8-9 the social actor is engaged in multiple simultaneous mediated actions which primarily materialise in the turning of the board, the materiality of the water surface, extending spray from the heel-side edge of the board and a change of visual perspective exemplifying kite movement. These multiple mediated actions, simultaneously exemplify the end of one embedded higher-level action as a specialised practice (riding on a starboard tack) and the initial stages of another specialised practice (heel-side transition), which is realised in its entirety in frames 10-21.

At this point, it is important to articulate the ways in which the identification of the embedded higher-level actions as specialised practices is describable only in elements of relationship between practices within the system of mediated action. While the material, composition of the mediated actions which realise the specialised practices of riding on a starboard tack, and *a heel-side transition*, may look very different in various situations and when undertaken by different social actors, there are salient visual properties which distinguish the multiple simultaneous mediated actions as specialised practices.

For riding, there are material continuities between trajectories of travel and holding of an edge which distinguishes the practice from others within the system of mediated action. As touched upon above, the disruption of continuity in trajectory of travel, wherein the participant shifts body weight while initiating a turning of the board and a change in kite flying trajectory signals both the end of one specialised practice, and the start of another. While phenomenologically, it would be accurate to suggest that the social actor is still riding, as they do continue to glide across the surface of the water while located on top of a board propelled by the power of a kite, within the systems of

mediated action the practice of *riding*, has acquired a specific valuation in relation to other specialised practices within the system. Thus, the shift in bodyweight and turning of the board are mediated actions which signal the initiation of *another practice*; one that is not riding, but rather *is* a heel-side transition. While it is conceivable that initially, a heel-side transition was simply something done while riding, the socio-cultural and historical co-production of this constellation of mediated actions as a specific practice functions to distinguish both the actions that produce the *practice as distinct*, and, as distinct *in relation* to other practices, like that of riding.

As a result, the valuation of specialised practices has occurred as an ontological structuration of the myriad of mediated actions which manifest in the undertaking of kitesurfing. As constellations of mediated actions acquire valuation by practitioners themselves, this valuation functions to instantiate particular material continuities which distinguish the practice as a practice, and, as distinct in relation to other practices in the system. The assertion that a collection of mediated actions *are* a specific specialised practice unequivocally values the practice in relation to other practices within the system. These intangible relationships of systematicity exemplify the ontological character of the system itself.

### **6.3.3 Frames 10-11: Power-stroke**

As touched upon above, frames 10-21 exemplify the participant engaged in multiple simultaneous mediated actions which realise the specialised practice of a heel-side transition.

In frame 10 (Figure 6.18), there is a continuation of the materialisation of the action of pulling on the left side of the control bar through the participant's left hand. This is visually manifested in the continuing change of flying trajectory realised by the changing camera perspective. Simultaneously, in frame 10 there is a material difference

in the trajectory of travel which manifests in a differentiation of the linear composition of the kiter's board direction. As opposed to frame 9, the board direction in frame 10 shows a linearity towards the bottom left hand side of the camera frame. This downwind trajectory is further complimented by an increasing opening of the kiter's upper body (increasing forward facing position). These material and visually salient elements represented in the frame manifest as a result of both shifting bodyweight towards the heel-side edge of the board which in turn initiates a change in board trajectory, and, continued pressure applied on the left hand side of the control bar as occurring through the left hand and arm of the social actor.



**Figure 6.18: Frame 10**

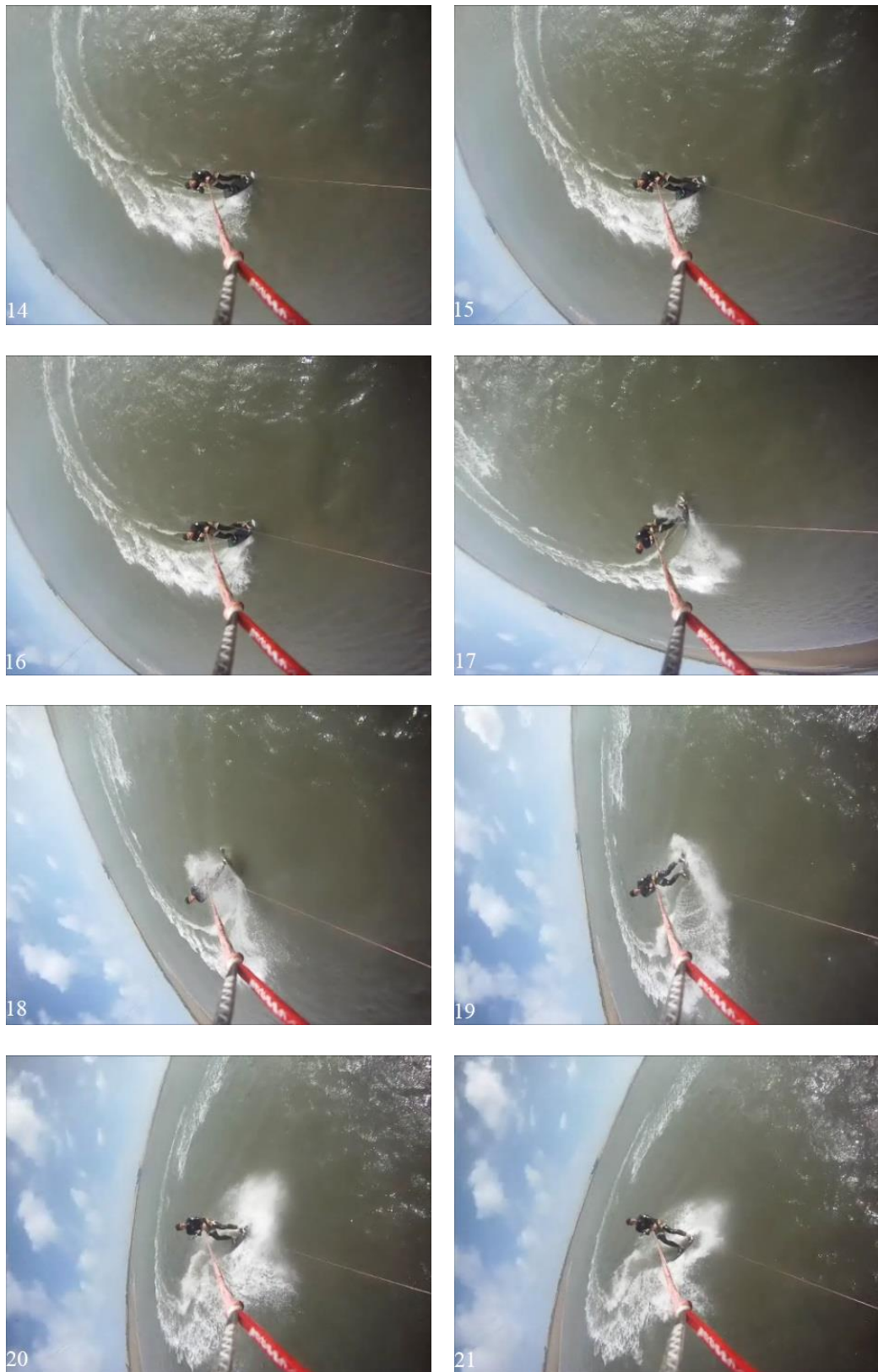
In frame 11, there is a more distinct visual realisation of the process of shifting bodyweight towards the heel-side edge which can be identified in both the angular position of the participant's body and is complemented by both a further downwind trajectory of the board as well as increasing white water spray materialising as a result of increased pressure applied to the heel-side edge through a shift in bodyweight. Frame 11 (Figure 6.19) also shows the continuing change in kite flying trajectory realised by the changing camera perspective. In this frame, the kite has reach the zenith (term used to denote a position directly above the kiter's head).



**Figure 6.19: Frame 11**

#### **6.3.4 Frames 12-21: Completion of the heel-side transition**

Frames 12-21 exemplify multiple other simultaneous mediated actions which culminate in the realisation of the completion of the embedded higher-level action and specialised practice of the heel-side transition. While there are multiple individual mediated actions undertaken in this continual haptic dialogue between the participant and the multiple mediational means through which the action is taken, there are certain constellations of mediated actions which exemplify specialised practices which manifest inside other practices. Most notably, frames 14-20 represent a drastic change in camera perspective as the materialisation of the mediated action of applying pressure on the left hand side of the control bar using the left hand and arm.



**Figure 6.20: Frames 12-21, Completion of the heel-side transition**

Frame 14 (Figure 6.20) represents the kiter in a horizontal position which suggests that the kite's leading edge, and thus the trajectory of travel is perpendicular to the surface of the water (at a 45 degree angle from the kiter). Through changes in camera perspective as the materialisation of a collection of mediated actions, most specifically, pressure applied to the left hand side of the control bar, it is clear that that kite's leading edge travels from perpendicular to the water's surface, to directly in opposition (upside down frame orientation) and back to a perpendicular position. This specific movement from one stable position, travelling in a downward trajectory and returning to the original position is the materialisation of multiple mediated actions (pulling on the left side of the bar to initiate change in trajectory, pulling on right side of bar to bring the kite back to original position, slight pull on left side of control bar to stabilise flying trajectory). This constellation of actions is a specialised practice called a power-stroke. It is one of the most common and regularised practices which manifests in kitesurfing as a system of mediated action as it is the primary means for generating more power (force through lift in a specific direction).

This leads to another important theoretical distinction regarding systems of mediated action and the practices which manifest through socio-cultural and historical co-production; practices can and often do occur simultaneously within a system of mediated action and this is primarily a result of distinction of practices as related to specific mediational means and/or cultural tools. Thus, a power-stroke can occur while riding, while jumping, during a transition etc. The particular ways in which practices manifest through co-constitution dictates possibility for simultaneity because some practices manifest as a complex of multiple practices. As such, one cannot perform a power-stroke at the same time as a kite-loop transition because the practice itself has been valuated as comprising both specific kinaesthetic mediated actions related to body positioning and changes of movement trajectory *with* a specific type of kite movement.



### 6.3.5 Frames 22-25: Riding on a port tack

In the final frames of this sequence (Figure 6.21), the social actor again engages in multiple mediated actions which manifest in the realisation of *riding on a port tack*. A complete articulation of the mediated actions which realise this practice is not analytically useful here, as they are very similar to the multiple subtle mediated actions which realise the practice of riding on a starboard tack. The difference is primarily a haptic and kinaesthetic inversion of weight distribution, head direction and subtle readjustments in power through pulling in on both ends of the bar so as to mitigate fluctuations in wind consistency.

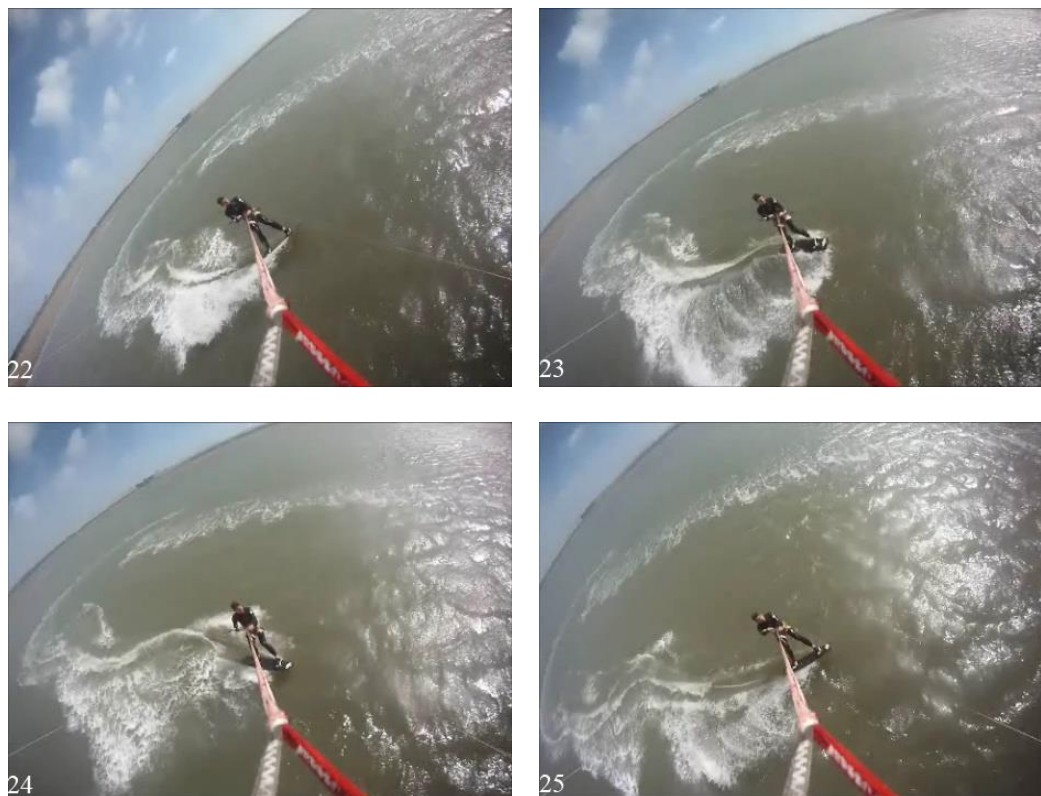


Figure 6.21: Riding on a port tack after transition

While there are material inconsistencies between frames 1-7 and frames 22-25 over and above the opposite direction of travel, weight distribution and head position, a continuation of the frame sequence would clearly show the very same practice (that of

riding) as manifested through multiple simultaneous mediated actions. The difference I am pointing to is the wash line created by the board in the water which, in frames 22-25 appears in an S shape rather than straight. The manifestation of this S shape wash line results from the participant releasing the heel-side edge (only slightly), which results in a change of trajectory (slightly downwind), as a means to increase speed. As touched upon above, the practice of riding (towards starboard or port) can materialise in differentiated manners and through differentiated mediated actions. The participant's momentary releasing of an edge in favour of more speed is simply something that happens while riding and is not classified as a particular practice. In the same manner, the moment to moment pulling in and pushing out on the control bar to mitigate wind inconsistencies is not construed as a particular practice. These actions or collection of actions have not been socio-culturally and historically co-constituted as a particular practice, but rather, just as something that must be done while riding in either direction.

### **6.3.6 Practices within the system of mediated action**

The above analysis exemplifies how multiple mediated actions constitute a specialised practice within the system of mediated action of kitesurfing. The frame sequence represents a social actor engaged in multiple and multifarious mediated actions, simultaneously, the sequence shows the social actor engaged in three identifiable practices that have come to be valued within the system of mediated action: riding on a starboard tack, heel-side transition, power-stroke and riding on a port tack.

## **6.4 Conclusion: Four Characteristics of the System of Mediated Action**

The realisation of the multiple and simultaneous mediated actions *as* particular practices within a system of mediated action is a result of sociocultural and historical co-

produced valuation of collections of mediated actions as regularised and typified and is mirrored by the development of lexical items through which to describe the constellation of mediated actions as a single practice.

The practices themselves, which have explicit interrelationships which bind them as being part of and exemplifying a particular system of mediated action connect and permeate each other in complex and dynamic ways. Practices come to be valued in particular ways through material interconnections and specificities in collections of mediated actions, and, as differentiated from other practices within the system itself. In this way, it is not only the material specificities which characterise particular practices, but also the material specificities of the constellations of other practices within the system of mediated action.

The breadth of this chapter has been allocated to articulating a system of mediated action as a systematic relationship between practices and while the cognitive facets of a system as a complex and dynamic schematic aggregate through which phenomena is interpreted has been implicitly alluded to, the next chapter more comprehensively exemplifies this notion through a description of the ways in which social actors perceive, conceive and interpret space and locational elements in and through kitesurfing as a system of mediated action.

# **7 Actionary Pertinence: Space to Location**

## **7.1 Introduction: Actionary Pertinence**

Contemporary endeavours investigating the nature of space and spatiality have varied drastically in thematic and paradigmatic orientation. Much scholarship has been allocated to understanding space and components of spatiality (Herbert 2000; Low 2003; Scollon & Scollon 2003; Dant 2004; Lemke 2005; della Dora 2009; Eriksson 2011). Yet, there has been a noticeable ambiguity in breadth and scope as a result of a growing fragmentation in relation to analytical specificity in human geography (Sklar 1977; Jones 2009; Thrift 2006, 2008; Merriman 2011). In this chapter, I seek to reconcile some of this ambiguity through the re-invocation of the mediated action as the primary organising analytical principle through which space and spatiality can be analysed. In doing so, I explicitly bypass much of the contemporary theorisation that has occurred in human geography as well as research that has been conducted in multimodality and communication related fields (McIlvenny, Broth & Haddington 2009; Haddington & Keisanen 2009; McIlvenny & Noy 2011; Jaworski & Thurlow 2011). While emerging interest in the ways in which space, spatiality, location and mobility function in discursive, semiotic and multimodal phenomena has provided strong arguments in favour of considering the centrality of spatiality in social science research, here, I strictly focus on how, why and in what ways, components of space are relevant for kitesurfers and thus, kitesurfing.

While mediated action is the primary organising analytical principle, the breadth of this chapter seeks to elucidate the way in which space (geographical area) becomes place (kitesurfing location) in and through mediated action and in explicit connection with a panoply of cultural tools which are employed as mediational means in mediated

action. Through the developmental process of space to place, I suggest that particular material components of the natural and man-made environment, acquire particular characterisation in direct relation and relative to various complexes of mediated action. As such, social actors conceive and interpret components of the environment as salient or relevant, through systems of mediated action.

Material components of the physical environment, I argue, become locational elements as a result of the ways in which social actors consider their relevancy and salience in relation of mediated action. I will show that locational elements and the materiality embedded in their characterisation manifest in and through mediated action. Further, I demonstrate that locational elements, as relevant material components of a kitesurfing location, are typically considered in relation to actionary pertinence.

Therefore, in my analysis of kitesurfing locations, I assert that through mediated action and practices, space becomes place and in this process material components of the physical environment acquire particular valuations in relation to mediated action. Then, I illustrate how consideration of location is permeated by the ways in which kitesurfers conceptualise locational elements through three organising principles: possibility, safety and favourability. In doing so, I hope to show how social actors conceive, perceive and interpret components of the physical environment in explicit connection with systems of mediated action. Therefore, in this chapter, I analyse space through an analytical orientation towards the way in which places are co-constructed through mediated actions and practices.

## **7.2 Space, Location, and Locational elements**

Space and/or material components of the physical environment are integral to engagement in kitesurfing. It is not possible to kite surf *anywhere* and attempts to do so may result in bodily harm and/or engagement in different actions altogether. While it is

now relatively common for individuals to utilise kites to propel three-wheeled buggies or large wheeled boards across grass or sand, this practice is typically referred to as kite-landboarding or kite-buggying.

Kitesurfing can only be performed on water. Moreover, the nature of the water must be adequately suited to the velocity, trajectory and distances travelled while kitesurfing. Thus, swimming pools and/or meandering streams are not employed as locations for kitesurfing. Essentially, kitesurfing must take place in a large body of water with few aerial structural hazards. The most prevalent and appropriate being the shores of oceans, the large estuaries/bays which bring tidal sea water further inland, or large lakes.

Typically, before going kitesurfing, a decision making process about possible locations involves a complex set of negotiations and considerations by which individuals read, assess, consider and re-read aspects of space in order to determine a plan of action for a particular session. Social actors typically engage in this process in an attempt to strategise where and when particular conditions will manifest. This decision making process and negotiation occurs through the analysis of publicised meteorological and marine data in coordination with the dispositions and desires of the kitesurfers themselves. While the determination of what conditions are favourable may vary slightly between individuals, favourability is typically assessed through an analysis of what I call *locational elements*.

A locational element is a relevant and/or salient material component of a kitesurfing location. Relevance and/or salience are primarily determined through the bearing that single element has on the mediated actions of kitesurfing and therefore, through the role it plays in the establishment of particular conditions. Thus, locational elements are central to the decision making process and as such, are read and considered in various ways. Locational elements range in nature of their materiality, but all

locational elements have some perceptual or cognitive materiality. The nature of this materiality becomes a composite facet of consideration when several kite surfers negotiate location.

Locational elements do not necessarily have to be inextricably linked to a particular location (though many are). Rather, locational elements acquire comprehensive materiality through consideration in relation to the action of kitesurfing. Therefore, locational elements will from here forward, be discussed only as they relate to concrete real-time kitesurfing. As touched upon above, this particular strategy is employed to concretise the relative nature of locational elements and avoid the ambiguity of consideration *a priori*.

All locational elements have some tangible, perceptual and/or cognitive materiality. While locational elements are never of a finite character and are always in flux, they acquire their particular spatial character in relativity to action and that character ranges on a continuum. Regarding kitesurfing locations, locational elements can be classified as being one of three types: a *stable locational element*, a *predictable locational element*, or a *contingent locational element*. Their nature regarding classification is always relative and relational and within their categorical nature, locational elements range on a continuum from high to low. Furthermore, spatial character results from instantiation through conceptualisation in reference to action. Thus, a specific spatial property may vary in categorical nature in relativity to various actions.

## 7.3 Considering Location

The data considered herein was largely co-created through negotiation regarding where and when to ‘head out for a session.’ The negotiation developed through discussion of particularities at specific locations regarding how atmospheric and

geographical features might affect kitesurfing on a particular day. The data referred to throughout the course of this analytical section come primarily in the form of observational notes, with supporting documentation in the form of still photography and video imagery. First, I define locational elements and outline pertinent locational elements and their categorical relation, their spatial stability and associated relativity factors. Then, I discuss locational elements based on their relative importance to the action of kitesurfing in reference to two specific locations: *Te Haruhi Bay (Shakespeare Regional Park)* and *Orewa Beach*.

Negotiation regarding the selection of a particular location for kitesurfing is heavily influenced by the reading, assessing and re-reading of stable and predictable locational elements. These elements have a definitive bearing on the selection of location and the ways in which the elements interrelate is a key component in assessing the suitability and desirability of a kitesurfing location. The materiality of contingent locational elements bears more heavily on an individual as they engage in the real-time action of kitesurfing. The material unpredictability of these elements requires continual negotiation in-the-moment. While admittedly, particular contingent locational elements could be considered to have some predictability; their real-time materiality is substantially less stable than predictable elements. Their material configuration can be loosely estimated but their actual material configuration is continuously changing.

### **7.3.1 Stable locational element**

*A stable locational element* is an element with relatively enduring and persistent materiality. For stable locational elements, relativity refers to contemporary understandings regarding geographic, industrial and social change. Meaning, a stable locational element has enduring materiality insofar as the geographic, industrial and social processes of change regarding that property are conceptualised as having a



temporal longevity via contemporary physical, natural and social science. This does not mean that stable locational elements are concrete and finite, only that they have material stability in relativity to the temporality of change and this relativity ranges on a continuum of high to low.

### **7.3.2 Predictable locational element**

*A predictable locational element* is an element with relatively foreseeable materiality. For predictable locational elements, relativity refers to contemporary models for the prediction of geographic, atmospheric and hydrological activity. Meaning, a predictable locational element has foreseeable materiality insofar as contemporary scientific modelling dictates probability. In terms of temporality, predictable locational elements are considerably more variable than stable locational elements and their particular materiality will fluctuate within a realm of probability on a much shorter temporal scale. Again, predictable locational elements range on a continuum from high to low.

### **7.3.3 Contingent locational element**

*A contingent locational element* is an element with relatively relational and/or unpredictable materiality. For contingent locational elements, relativity refers to the ebbs and flows of perceptual social existence and to the interaction of other locational elements. Contingent elements are embedded in a moment-to-moment temporality and while they may be loosely predictable, their materiality changes consistently. Contingency is typically in relation to other contingent elements and their materiality is largely influenced by stable and predictable locational elements.

## 7.4 Locational Elements: Categorical Relation, Spatial Stability and Relativity Factors

I discuss locational elements and their relation to the practice of kitesurfing based on their relative importance to the action of kitesurfing in reference to a specific location. For example, beach gradient, as a stable locational element, has considerably less bearing on the action of kitesurfing than the presence of a predictable locational element, the wind.

Individuals do not consider and assess locational elements in relation to stability; rather, they consider and assess locational elements in relation to actionary pertinence. In other words, if there is a hierarchical relationship that manifests, it is primarily determined through the relevancy and salience of locational elements in explicit connection to mediated action. Therefore, the structure of my discussion will mirror this actionary pertinence. Furthermore, pertinence is always relative. While, for instance, beach access, as a stable locational element, may be a primary concern when travelling to a new location, it loses actionary pertinence following a first traversal of the route. Similarly, swell may be highly pertinent when considering a location for wave riding, whereas, it would have low actionary pertinence when considering a location for flat-water riding. Below is a table outlining pertinent locational elements and their categorical relation, their spatial stability and relativity factors associated with the elements.

Category	Element	Element Type	Relativity Factors
<b>Atmospheric</b>			
	Wind	Predictable	Weather Modelling
	Daylight	Stable	Scientific Knowledge
<b>Geographic / Topographic</b>			
	Land Formations	Stable	Geological Modelling
	Beach Gradient	Stable	Geological Modelling
	Tide	Predictable	Scientific Knowledge
	Swell	Predictable	Hydrological Modelling
	Submerged Features / Sea Floor Structure	Stable	Geological Modelling
	Water Surface Texture	Contingent	Other atmospheric and geological elements
	Access	Stable	Geological Modelling
	Layout	Stable	Geological Modelling
<b>Industrial / Mechanistic</b>			
	Roadways	Stable	Industrial change
	Traffic	Contingent	
	Speed Limits	Stable	Socio-cultural Process
	Vehicle Type	Stable	Economic Processes
<b>Social / Recreational</b>			
	Other Beach Users	Contingent	
	Other water Users	Contingent	
	Beach Regulations	Stable	Socio-cultural Process
	Enforcement	Contingent	

**Table 2:** Pertinent locational elements and their categorical relation, their spatial stability and relativity factors

Regarding the actionary pertinence of all locational elements, there are three overarching components which contribute to the understanding about the ways in which certain elements contribute to mediated action: possibility, safety and favourability.

## 7.5 Location: Possibility, Safety and Favourability

As briefly touched upon above, possibility is paramount and numerous locational elements contribute to making kitesurfing possible at any given time. A unique feature of locational elements contributing to possibility is that their particular materiality is not explicitly considered or negotiated in most cases. For instance, the presence of water, while theoretically a locational element with high actionary pertinence, would rarely be considered explicitly insofar as it has a determinate character. Similarly, daylight and wind have a determinate character in relation to the action of kitesurfing. One must have adequate visibility via the presence of light and the wind must have a velocity great enough to generate sufficient propulsive force. However, while these components definitively mediate action, and contribute to the ways in which space becomes place, they are so intimately connected to possibility, that their particular character is rarely an explicit consideration. Thus, these elements and their material characteristics are, in most cases, taken for granted.

There are situations in which the materiality of locational elements relating to possibility is explicitly considered. For instance, 'night sessions' are possible; however, the presence of sufficient light enabling sight remains determinate. This may be artificially produced through vehicle headlights, or there may be ample amounts of moonlight to enable a session, however, this is a rare occurrence and should be considered an exceptional circumstance. Wind, as a component of possibility, receives more explicit consideration, but this is a result of stability.

As a relatively stable locational element, light is present or it is not. Fluctuations in the temporal aspects of sunrise and sunset are so highly predictable, that they are conceptualised as stable. One can predict, with absolute certainty, the exact time of sunrise and sunset and whilst these facets definitely bear on possibility, their material stability results in very little explicit consideration. This is similar to the ways in which

individuals conceptualise land formations. Admittedly, the materiality of land formations is continuously changing. Through erosion and other geological forces, the materiality of land is in continuous flux. However, we do not consider the presence of a mountain as temporally fleeting. The longevity of the temporal scale of change results in a materiality of stability.

Wind relates to possibility, safety and favourability simultaneously, and therefore, wind has a particularly unique characteristic in its relation to kitesurfing. As a determinate component, the wind must have an average velocity in excess of approximately 10 knots. This fluctuates slightly depending on the surface area of the kite, the size and floatation qualities of the board and the mass of the rider, however, a very small individual with a very large kite and board would need approximately 8-10 knots in order to stay upwind. Specific characteristics of the wind also fluctuate with approximate velocity and these will be further exemplified below. However, regarding components of possibility, let it suffice to suggest that the wind must have an average velocity in excess of 10 knots.

In relation to possibility, wind has a determinate character as either present or not and despite fluctuations in real-time materiality, there is either wind or there is not. Of particular interest is the manner in which wind, as a locational element in regard to possibility takes on unique characteristics in relation to a particular action. It is very common to hear phrases such as “no wind today”, “not calling for anything tomorrow” or “no wind all week” in reference to either the real-time materiality of air-flow or regarding weather forecasts. Logically, these statements are definitely fallacious as it would be a near environmental impossibility to have ‘no wind’. However, we see some very basic presuppositions embedded in statements like these regarding the conceptualisation and pertinence of wind as a locational element.

First, in terms of possibility, wind is conceptualised and treated as dichotomous insofar as there either is or is not. Interestingly, if there is no wind, consideration of quality ends at this point. Consistency, actual speed and direction are of little consequence. However, if there *is* wind, these material components become pertinent. It is insufficient to simply suggest that wind is an important component of kitesurfing. Rather, in relation to kitesurfing and in direct relation to action, the wind is imbued with actionary pertinence and acquires particular characteristics. This example illustrates how the nature of locational elements, their stability and actionary pertinence, must always be considered in relation to concrete human action. It is only through action and in relation to action that locational elements acquire particular qualities and thus, must be conceptualised in relation to action.

Light and the presence of water, as locational elements with a determinate quality relating to possibility will not be discussed at any length below. The remainder of this analytical section is dedicated to exemplifying the ways in which locational elements, their material stability and their interaction contribute to kitesurfing in regards to safety and favourability. Safety and favourability are the two primary factors which influence the ways in which a space (geographical area) becomes a place (specific kitesurfing location).

The process by which a space becomes a place is highly situated within a particular system of mediated action, and as such, the locational elements which contribute to the establishment of place become conceptualised through complex and dynamic aggregates of mediated action. It will become increasingly clear that all locational elements acquire a particular character through mediated action and therefore are *situated* within a system of mediated action. In this way, general spaces or geographic areas are turned into places through mediated action.

The ways in which locational elements contribute to the establishment of place occurs through a conceptualisation regarding how their interdependencies afford (Gibson, 1979) certain practices. At this point it is important to re-clarify that my use of the term affordance is explicitly in line with Ingold's (2000: 166), in that affordances manifest in explicit relation to the "action in which the perceiver is currently engaged". In this way, locational elements, their material stability and their interaction becomes concretised in relation to various sets of practices. This further substantiates the distinction made in chapter 5, insofar as locational elements are perceived, interpreted and construed through a system of mediated action as a dynamic cognitive lens.

The articulation of this perspective on space, as intimately intertwined with particular actions and practices, is organised around two primary principles which have manifested through real-time mediated action and the development of the system of mediated action of kitesurfing; safety and favourability. These principles have manifested as organising. They permeate the ways in which spaces become places and account for why many spaces do not become places. Thus, for a space to become a place (kitesurfing location), both safety and favourability function as organising principles. The particular ways in which locational elements, their interdependencies and their mediating characters contribute to both safety and favourability will comprise the remainder of this chapter. Here, I analyse two popular kitesurfing locations to a) illustrate representative data samples which led me to develop the concepts for this chapter; and b) explicitly show how locational elements are integral mediating factors in the undertaking of action.

## 7.6 Kitesurfing Location: Te Haruhi Bay (Shakespear Regional Park)

Te Haruhi bay as a *space* is located near the end of the Whagaparoa peninsula, approximately 45minutes north of the Auckland City Centre. Te Haruhi bay is a crescent shaped bay with a SSW orientation. The heads of the bay are lined with rock faces and the inner bay surface is predominantly large grained sand with a few sheet rock formations. As a kitesurfing location (place), Te Haruhi Bay is popular for two very practical reasons: first, it is the only suitable location north east of Auckland for a SW wind, which is a reasonably predominant wind direction, second, the layout of the regional park affords ample space for parking, setup and launching. The bay can be kited at any tide and a wind direction ranging between SSE to WSW. The bay does not receive any sizable swell as a result of its SSW orientation on the peninsula facing the City Centre separated by the Hauraki gulf. The bay has a number of pertinent locational elements which culminate to produce (at particular times) relatively flat water even in high wind situations resulting in a favourable kiting location. The interconnected materiality resulting in safe and favourable conditions is outlined below.

### 7.6.1 Te Haruhi Bay: Safety

Safety is an ever present factor in all facets of kitesurfing. Safety manifests as impetus for equipment maintenance, it has been acknowledged as contributing to a culture of camaraderie in the early stages of the sports generation, it is a salient element regarding whether one will go out in certain conditions or not, and manifests as a core component regarding how a space (general geographic area) becomes a place (kitesurfing location).

Regarding Te Haruhi bay, and in common with all kitesurfing locations, the interrelationship between *wind direction* as a characteristic property of wind as a



predictable locational element, and land formation as a stable locational element, is the supreme organising component in the determination of safety regarding any kitesurfing location. As such, this interrelationship has the highest actionary pertinence and is paramount in the realisation of space to place. As the supreme organising component, the interrelationship between wind direction and land formation accounts for why on some very windy days, certain locations are busy (large number of kitesurfers) while others are completely void.

Moving a step further, it would suffice to suggest that wind direction (given the satisfaction of components related to possibility) holds the highest actionary pertinence regarding the selection of a kitesurfing location. While the interrelationship between direction and land formation is certainly a salient aspect, it is primarily through conceptualisation of land formations as a *stable locational element* which negates explicit consideration in most cases. As a result, wind direction primarily determines the location options on any given day. In this way, wind direction as a characteristic of a predictable locational element functions as an organising principle through which all other considerations are made.

The wind direction manifests as having the highest actionary pertinence and as the supreme organising component through an easily conceivable set of circumstances which might materialise as relative to the interrelationship between wind direction and land formations. It may not be that social actors have experienced personally, or have witnessed some dangerous event transpire in specific conditions at a particular location, but rather, that dangerous events are “within the limits of an easily imaginable series of ordinary, plausible actions” (Bazin 2003: 424) within the system of mediated action.

The conditions that have come to be considered safe is when the trajectory of wind (direction it is moving) creates an angle somewhere within the continuum of a straight angle (0 – 180 degrees) with the linearity of the land formation. This range of

interrelationship between wind direction and land formation has been lexicalised (not only in kitesurfing) as on-shore wind. On-shore winds are considered safe to kite in and the majority of kitesurfing locations are only frequented when on-shore conditions manifest. On-shore conditions typically create a water surface texture that is considered unfavourable for flat-water riding, however, despite unfavourable water surface texture, on-shore conditions remain the determining factor of whether a specific location is frequented on any given day. As such, safety is prioritised above favourability.

On-shore wind conditions have manifested as considered safe in and through the valuation of specialised practices within the system of mediated action. Travel in a downwind trajectory is valued as given, easy or the norm, while travel in an upwind trajectory is something that must be *accomplished* or *worked for*. Riding upwind typically exemplifies a kitesurfer who is competent, and the steepness of the angle on which one can ride upwind is often associated with skill or prowess. Upwind travel is typically remembered as the day when one actually is able to kitesurf. As one participant claimed:

**Conversation 7.1:** Getting upwind

- (347) K: 5:36 getting upwind is key  
 (348) like,  
 (349) prior to learning that  
 (350) it's just shit  
 (351) because you're either  
 (352) stuck on the beach line  
 (353) and really struggling all the time  
 (354) to really do anything  
 (355) or

(356) walking up the beach  
 (357) back from somewhere  
 (358) I think that is really  
 (359) like  
 (360) changing point  
 (361) and I mean  
 (362) you talk to most people who have learned  
 (363) and like ya  
 (364) well  
 (365) once you've learned to go upwind you can start actually  
 kiteboarding properly

Any undesirable event which is conceived as possible while kitesurfing is intimately related to the materiality of the mediational means through which action is undertaken. As such, equipment failure, subsiding of wind strength or physical injury, will substantially alter the mediated actions which are possible. Most comprehensively, an alteration in the material character of any of the multiple mediational means may result in compounding the difficulty associated with the practice of 'upwind riding'. *If* the materiality of various mediational means is altered, making 'upwind riding' more difficult, or not possible at all, on-shore conditions *should* propel the kitesurfer towards land. In contrast, off-shore conditions *would* propel the kitesurfer out to sea.

As articulated by one kiter:

#### **Conversation 7.2: Keeping safe**

(671) K: 10:24 you talk to  
 (672) even like

(673) really  
(674) even really skilled and  
(675) and good dudes  
(676) and they still don't really ride in off-shore winds  
(677) Because in the end of the day like  
(678) you can't control  
(679) well to a  
(680) to a  
(681) most of the time you can't control  
(682) like a failure in your lines system or something like that  
(683) and then if your kite is rendered useless  
(684) and the wind's blowing off-shore  
(685) like  
(686) your best option  
(687) is to ditch your kite as quickly as possible and start swimming  
(688) without your board  
(689) and so that's everything gone

Thus, the classification and conceptualisation of locational elements and the ways in which they contribute to the manifestation of particular conditions on any given day is intimately and inextricably linked to the materiality of other cultural tools employed in the aggregates of mediated actions which occur. If, travelling upwind was easy and one's equipment afforded momentary alterations of sail size (or some other means through which fluctuations in wind strength could be mitigated), wind direction might not have such comprehensive actionary pertinence. However, since this is not the case, wind direction explicitly dictates one's options on any given day.

As a result of a conceivable set of circumstances which may manifest while kitesurfing, on-shore conditions, as the interrelationship between wind direction and land formation, have come to be conceptualised as safe. This conceptualisation has occurred through the perception of what actions might be afforded in relation to the material character of multiple mediational means. Furthermore, this conceptualisation has led to a concretisation of the character of locational elements. Land formation, as touched upon above is considered a stable locational element with a relatively enduring materiality and temporal longevity. Wind has come to be considered a predictable locational element with relatively foreseeable materiality. The interrelationship of these locational elements contributes to the characterisation of certain locations as safe or not. As a result, different locations are said to “work” with particular wind directions, and “not work” in others; whether a particular location works or not, is in direct correlation to wind direction.

It is important to recognise that the characterisation of locational elements occurs in relation to and through a particular system of mediated action. As such, the perception of affordance is contingent on the “action in which the perceiver is currently engaged” (Ingold, 2000: 166). I would extend Ingold’s articulation with a slight terminology shift to include *practices of which the social actor can conceive*. Thus, the perception of affordance is contingent on the action in which the perceiver is currently engaged and a panoply of practices of which the social actor has acquired a disposition to conceive. It is in this way that kitesurfer’s characterise and concretise the affordances of various locational elements in explicit relationship to the practices of kitesurfing.

While safety is most explicitly conceived of in relation to wind direction and land formation, this does not adequately account for the collective congregation of kitesurfers at particular locations or why certain spaces become kiteable places. If safety

was the only organising principle related to kitesurfing, it is conceivable that a vast array of locations would harbour kitesurfers (when on-shore conditions manifested). However, this is not the case. Kitesurfers congregate in specific places en masse, while other spaces remain desolate.

### **7.6.2 Te Haruhi Bay: Favourability**

Favourability allows us to account for why it is that given the vast array of options (safe kiting locations), congregation occurs in specific places. Favourability also accounts for why, despite usable space being a priority, and large numbers of kitesurfers in one location creating multiple hazards which might not exist with fewer people, large congregations of people continue to manifest in specific locations.

The locational elements which contribute to the component of favourability vary substantially from one location to the next but in explicit alignment with the embedded systems described in chapter 5. Therefore, what is considered favourable is intricately related to the types of specialised practices which have manifested as exemplifying embedded systems within the system of mediated action.

Te Haruhi Bay is considered a favourable *flat-water* location at *low to mid tide* for a *SW-SSE prevailing wind direction* (wind is coming from). Low to mid tide and SW-SSE, refers to particular characteristics of certain locational elements which have a comprehensive effect on the materialisation of particular conditions. Specification of wind direction, as described above, identifies the range on which this location can be considered a safe kitesurfing location, and thereby favourable. Indication of tidal level explicitly relates to the ways in which the tide as a predictable locational element, in connection with other predictable and stable locational elements, co-create a set of conditions which are considered favourable. As such, the conditions which materialise are considered to afford certain specialised practices.

There are multiple locational elements which interrelate and contribute to the establishment of Te Haruhi Bay as a favourable kitesurfing location. As a set of interrelated properties which contribute to the materialisation of particular conditions, distinction between the properties is for analytical acuity.

First, Te Haruhi Bay is considered favourable as a flat-water location, and thus relates most explicitly to the contingent locational element of water surface texture. Water surface texture as a contingent locational element has actionary pertinence in relation to the types of practices flat-water affords. As touched upon above, on-shore winds have a definitive effect on the surface texture of the water in the generation of swell or chop. As such, flat-water locations (as they have come to be known) typically feature other locational elements which mitigate this undesirable effect. Te Haruhi Bay has a sea floor structure which functions to mitigate the generation of swell or chop (within a specific area), thus creating large portions of reasonably flat water in on-shore winds.

As visible in Figure 7.1, there is a distinct portion of white water located between the shore and the open water of the Hauraki Gulf. The white water is created by waves which are breaking against a large sand bar which mirrors the contour of the bay and acts as a break point for incoming waves.



**Figure 7.1: Panorama of Te Haruhi Bay at mid to low tide**



In the first 2 images (Figure 7.1), the white line created by breaking waves is less distinct than in the last 2 images (Figure 7.1). This is primarily a result of a differentiation in the structure of the sand bar. In the region located on the left (from this perspective), the sand bar is more porous and therefore, travelling water penetrates the bar maintaining some momentum. Whereas, in the region of the bay to the right, the sand bar is much more distinct, resulting in the dissipation of the energy of incoming waves.

Figures 7.2 and 7.3 provide more detail regarding the actual surface texture of the water in the left region of the bay.



**Figure 7.2: Te Haruhi Bay at mid tide**



**Figure 7.3: Te Haruhi Bay at mid to high tide**

The images are still frames taken from video captured using a tripod supported video camera. The images are approximately 50:00:00 (m/s/ms) minutes apart, around mid tide, during an incoming tide. The difference in water surface texture is clearly visible in the frames. As the tide rises, the water surface texture becomes increasingly uneven or ‘choppy’. This is an unfavourable characteristic for flat-water riding and thus, Te Haruhi bay is best kited at low to mid tide.

Under-water features or sea-floor structures which affect the water surface texture assist in the creation of flat-water areas in on-shore winds and at certain times. This exemplifies a situation which would predominantly contribute to the manifestation of a kitesurfing location. In this case, locational elements (salient and relevant material components of a physical space) come together in complex ways and affect the kinds of conditions which might manifest on particular days and at particular times. It is primarily through the contribution of a particular locational element to the manifestation of particular conditions which characterises the element’s actionary pertinence. Thus, for Te Haruhi Bay, as a result of flat-water conditions manifesting through the interrelationship of sea-floor structure and tide, favourability is contingent on tide

height. Resultantly, tide height figures quite prominently in the determination of favourability, functioning as a key organising principle regarding the decision making process.

As touched upon above, wind direction also plays an integral role in the characterisation of a particular place as favourable. This is a result of the ways in which the materiality of wind consistency is affected by other locational elements in any geographical location. The crescent shaped land formation of Te Haruhi Bay would theoretically suggest that a wide range of wind directions would contribute to the materialisation of on-shore conditions. However, the materiality of the protruding headlands disrupt the consistency and continuity of wind velocity which has a comprehensive bearing on the mediated actions afforded through the interrelationship of locational elements.

When the prevailing wind direction is “too west”, or there is “too much westerly in it”, the large headlands which protrude on the westerly side of the bay create gusty and inconsistent wind velocities. As a primary mediational means through which mediated actions and practices occur, the material character of the wind figures as a prominent component in the characterisation of favourability. As a result, gusty conditions are considered unfavourable, and therein, wind directions which manifest in gusty conditions, equally unfavourable.

As further substantiated during discussion regarding wind consistency:

**Conversation 7.3: Wind consistency**

- |        |    |       |  |
|--------|----|-------|--|
| (1021) | K: | 17:22 | it (consistency) makes such a difference |
| (1022) |    |       | if you                                   |
| (1023) |    |       | you know                                 |
| (1024) |    |       | if you have a wind                       |

(1025) which is gusting from  
(1026) you know 25  
(1027) to to 15 or something like that  
(1028) it's a pain in the ass riding it  
(1029) because  
(1030) you're going along all sweet at 18 knots or  
whatever  
(1031) and then boom  
(1032) it's up to 25 or 30  
(1033) you know  
(1034) and you have to sort of  
(1035) readjust everything you know  
(1036) or  
(1037) you know  
(1038) or on the other side  
(1039) you're going along  
(1040) and everything's good and it's dying out  
(1041) and that's just the worst  
(1042) when you're trying to go somewhere  
(1043) and you haven't got enough power for it  
(1044) it's just like the fluctuation  
(1045) which is not good  
(1046) it's when it's got that large  
(1047) that large difference

Again, it is important to highlight the relativity and relational character of the ways in which locational elements are conceptualised through mediated action and thus, in explicit connection *with* and *as* mediational means. In so doing, while the headlands of Te Haruhi Bay may be considered a stable locational element, it is the interrelationship between this element and the wind that contributes to the characterisation of favourability or not in this location as in direct relation to the materiality of the wind as a mediational means. As one kiter explains:

**Conversation 7.4: Wind gusts**

(721)	K:	11:52	it makes your kite fly awkwardly sometimes
(722)			because you'll be
(723)			it'll just have a big gust you know
(724)			and it could quite easily overpower you
(725)			and you find yourself like
(726)			tailing downwind going fuck
(727)			trying to get a
(728)			trying to get an edge in
(729)			so ya
(730)			wind consistency is always good
(731)			and that always changes with where you are
(732)			and what kind of whether system it is

Consideration of locational elements is often explicitly lexicalised in terms of mediated action. As introduced above, it is common to hear that the wind has 'too much' of a specific direction 'in it'. Even the attribution of a location 'working' at certain times, or 'working best' in a certain set of conditions exemplifies the ways in

which the materiality of locational elements and their interrelationship becomes represented as a single entity; as working or not. In this way, a whole host of locational elements become concretised as interrelated through mediated actions.

Most importantly, space becomes place, and materially absolute geographical areas, as a complex of relative locational elements, become concretised in relation to and through mediated actions. As such, the material elements which make up one's immediate environment are attributed with value based on the conditions they contribute to creating. In this process, locational elements acquire valuation in relation to the material character of the mediational means they give rise to. This in turn structures and affects one's perception of locational elements as relating to particular practices within a system of mediated action. In this way, it becomes increasingly clear, that environmental, natural and geological objects and processes are valued through systems of mediated action and thus, in direct correlation to other mediational means and/or cultural tools through which actions are undertaken. Consideration of another kitesurfing location in close proximity will further articulate this point.

## **7.7 Kitesurfing Location: Orewa Beach**

Orewa Beach is a small beach located just north of the Whagaparoa Peninsula, approximately a 30 minute drive from the Auckland CBD. Orewa Beach could easily be considered the most popular location in the Auckland area (on certain days) and is one of the few public beaches which have public signage explicitly targeted towards kitesurfers. Orewa has come to be known as a kitesurfing location as a result of the vast number of kites who frequent the location. On windy summer days, there have been as many as 100 kites populating the inner breaks of this public beach.

As seen in figure (7.4), Orewa Beach is linear in character and extends in a NNW direction for approximately 2 km. Orewa does receive reasonable swell in certain

conditions and as such, has come to be conceptualised as affording multiple and differentiated disciplines of kitesurfing. Orewa can be kited in many wind directions and at any tide, but as articulated below, certain conditions are perceived to afford particular practices more comprehensively than others. As such, locational elements and their contribution to a set of conditions as a complex interrelated materiality through which actions are taken, are valued in different ways at different times and in explicit relationship to embedded systems within kitesurfing.



**Figure 7.4: Orewa Beach**

### **7.7.1 Orewa Beach: Safety**

In explicit correlation with the discussion above, safety as an organising principle is most comprehensively related to the interrelationship between wind direction and land formation. As a result, Orewa ‘works’ with a wind direction ranging between N and SE, though SE winds are incredibly uncommon and thus, Orewa is typically frequented during easterly and north easterly winds. Given the extension of the Whangaparoa peninsula, theoretically, and similar to the operant variability of Te Haruhi Bay, Orewa could be kited in a North Westerly wind, as the peninsula provides downwind safety. However, the inconsistency of the wind velocity created by other land

formations which would affect conditions in this direction has led to a conceptualisation of this as unfavourable. As such, while it may be safe, it is not preferable.

### **7.7.2 Orewa Beach: Favourability**

Orewa is considered favourable for different reasons and at different times. These reasons are primarily determined through a perception of affordances created by the materiality of interconnected locational elements which lend themselves to particular practices which have come to represent particular embedded systems of mediated action. In this way, Orewa is a kitesurfing location which has come to be known as ‘catering’ to both wave riding and flat-water riding. Furthermore, the locational elements which culminate to produce certain types of conditions are valued in relation to both wave riding and flat-water riding.

Conceiving of water surface texture as a contingent locational element, valuation of this element and its actionary pertinence occurs through embedded systems within the system of mediated action. Most explicitly, and obviously, the pitching and momentum of waves as a materiality manifest through the interconnection of swell and beach gradient is desired for wave-riding. As such, the precise material nature of the waves themselves as a mediational means through which riding occurs would be explicitly desired. Whereas, it is primarily the space between crashing waves which would be coveted as a mediational means for flat-water riding. In this location, the locational elements of swell and beach gradient manifest in a water surface texture which, while in differentiated manners, affords both flat-water and wave riding.

Waves, as a material component of the contingent locational element water surface texture acquire valuation in and through systems of mediated action, and in relation to individual social actors and other mediational means and/or cultural tools. A wave is a mediational means, providing momentum through gravitational forces in



coordination with the buoyancy of a board, a ramp through which aerial manoeuvres are accomplished and an irritation compounding downwind forces making upwind riding more challenging. As such, water surface texture as a contingent locational element is contingent on both swell and beach gradient and the materiality produced therein functions as a mediational means in differentiated ways. Again, environmental, natural and geological objects and processes acquire valuation in and through real-time mediated actions and systems of mediated action. The same locational element can acquire differentiated valuations in explicit relation to the ways in which it mediates action.

While locational elements may contribute to the materialisation of a particular set of conditions considered favourable for both flat-water and wave riding, there are differences in the ways in which tidal movement affects water surface texture, and thus favourability for either embedded system. Mid to high tide typically results in the generation of larger surf out back (the point at which the largest waves break) and therefore, is considered more favourable for wave riding. However, while this also materialises in large portions of flat water between breaking surf, the flat water sections tend to be located much closer to the shoreline ridge where there are other locational elements like beach users, trees and other hazards which might affect safety. Higher tides also limit the area available for set up and launching.



**Figure 7.5: Orewa Beach south end**

For flat-water riding, it is commonly championed that Orewa ‘works best’ on a low tide, or on an outgoing tide. Despite the large available area, kilters tend to congregate in the southerly most section of the beach (Figure 7.5). The regularity of north-easterly winds coupled with the flat water availability at the southern end of the beach could be seen as accounting for the congregation. The area of beach where a small estuary connects with the open water has been dredged and the contour of the beach gradient has been altered in a way that results in larger sections between breaking waves. The estuary mouth also provides a means for increased power whereby the outgoing tide (opposing the direction of the wind), compounds movement in an upwind direction, making it substantially easier to stay upwind and travel on a steep upwind trajectory. The quick moving water can also seem to materialise as an increase in wind speed. As such, through mediated actions, social actors can feel the changing materialities as manifest by the interconnectedness of locational elements.

The identification of locational elements and their valuation must be situated within a particular system of mediated action in explicit relation to the ways in which the element contributes to the manifestation of particular conditions. As such, through maintaining a focus on mediated action it is possible to articulate the bearings of various

locational elements on mediated action itself. In this way, locational elements materialise as pertinent through mediated action and thus as relative to other locational elements and in relation to other mediational means and/or cultural tools. Space becomes place through mediated action and the physical properties of space become instantiated as locational elements in a place. In this way, *physical objects* or the *physical properties* of a *geographical space*, become *locational elements* in a *specific place*, which manifest in particular conditions through interconnection and *as mediational means* through which mediated action occurs.

Kitesurfing occurs in specific places at specific times in fulfilment of two primary organising principles: safety and favourability. As articulated above, the locational elements and characteristics thereof which contribute to the realisation of a safe kitesurfing location is reasonably similar in most cases. Safety is predominantly manifest through on-shore conditions which describe a set of interrelationships between the wind and land formations as locational elements. While safety as the materialisation of on-shore conditions would suggest the existence of a vast array of possible kitesurfing locations, kitesurfers tend to congregate in very specific locations for particular reasons.

Favourability is an organising principle which is responsible for why, given the plethora of possible safe kitesurfing locations, kitesurfers tend to congregate in similar areas in large groups. A particular location is realised as favourable in relation to the conditions which manifest through the interconnection of various locational elements and how that materiality becomes a mediational means through which action occurs.

The analysis and description of locational elements must be situated within the analysis of mediated actions and practices that realise various systems of mediated action. In doing so, physical properties of the environment become locational elements through the ways in which they contribute to the materiality of the various natural

mediational means through which action occurs. In other words, locational elements acquire their particular character in and through mediated action. In recognising the centrality of real-time mediated action as the constitution of place as opposed to located in a general space, locational elements become relevant through actionary pertinence (how they figure in mediated action). Conceptualising spatiality in this manner simultaneously draws upon the three dominant theoretical traditions in human geography (absolute, relative, relational), while situating analysis through the maintenance of the ecological unit of analysis; the mediated action (Sklar 1977; Jones 2005, 2009; Thrift 2006, 2008; Merriman 2011; Wertsch 1991, 1995a, 1998; Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b)

## **7.8 Conclusion: Actionary Pertinence**

The discussion above highlights the situatedness regarding how, why and to what extent, social actors conceive, perceive and interpret material components of physical spaces in explicit correlation to complexes of mediated actions. First, in an attempt to bypass the ambiguity associated with considering space a priori, I have explicated the ways in which material components and/or environmental processes acquire valuations as locational elements in direct correlation to mediated action. While it may seem plausible to simply conceptualise locational elements in terms of mediational means and/or cultural tools, there is an ontological fallibility in that classification. Kitesurfers do not employ the tide as a mediational means, but rather consider the tide as a salient and relevant locational element which comprehensively contributes (in connection with others) to a set of conditions which are conceived of as favourable or not. While the tide affects and contributes to the material composition of the water, it is not the material composition of the water itself. As such, it is much more useful to consider the ways in which material components and environmental processes

acquire situated valuations through mediated action. The tide (as an environmental process) can and does mean different things to different people. To many, it might be inconsequential and a process of the environment that receives little consideration in day-to-day activities. However, for kitesurfers, and through complexes of mediated action, the tide has acquired a valuation as a salient and relevant locational element which comprehensively contributes to the materialisation of particular kitesurfing conditions. In this way, the tide has become a *predictable locational element* for particular social actors.

As similarly contingent on complexes of mediated actions, many physical spaces and/or geographical areas have become particular places for certain social actors. The ways in which a space becomes a place is permeated by various and intersecting sociocultural, historical and institutional processes, but predominantly relates to how *spaces are used* by social actors. Moving a step further, physical spaces can become places through the *perception of use*. It would be quite commonplace for a non-kitesurfer to ask, ‘do you go to pt. chev?’. This primarily results from perceiving participation in a particular location, and an assumption that the location offers or affords something to the practice of kitesurfing. Similarly, in this instance, paramount in the conceptualisation of place is the ways in which places manifest *through use*, and thus, through mediated action.

In the next chapter, I explicitly depart from the ways in which social actors, consider, conceive and perceive of locational elements through mediated action, and allocate analytical attention to the ways in which social actors employ components of the environment as mediational means.

# **8 Theoretical Conceptualization of the Mediation Interrelationship Exemplified in Kitesurfing**

## **8.1 Introduction: Some Theoretical Background of Mediation**

The core theoretical tenant of Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) is the utilisation of the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis. The mediated action has been championed as the most useful unit of analysis in sociocultural research due to the irreducible tension exemplified between the social actor and the mediational means through which action occurs (Wertsch 1991, 1994, 1995a, 1998; Scollon 1998, 2001a; Norris 2004, 2011; Norris & Jones 2005). Originally, the concept of mediation was introduced by Vygotsky (1978) who recognised that “higher mental functioning and human action in general are mediated by tools (or “technical tools”) and signs (or “psychological tools) (Wertsch 1991: 28). More recently, the concept of mediation has been taken up by Wertsch (1991, 1998), Scollon (1998, 2001a) and Norris (2004, 2011) and employed in the investigation of psychological functioning, discursive action and multimodal inter(action) respectively.

The mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis has been identified as “a way out of the quandaries associated with disciplinary fragmentation” (Wertsch 1991: 121), because the mediated action “preserves in a microcosm (Vygotsky 1987) as many dimensions of the general phenomenon under consideration as possible”. Thus, the mediated action allows “one to move from one dimension to another without losing sight of how they fit together into a more complex whole” (Wertsch 1991: 121). Employing the mediated action as the unit of analysis seeks to ‘live in the middle’ through an attempt to maintain the complex individual, cultural, institutional and

historical elements which permeate all facets of social life without fragmentary practices which allocate undue analytical attention to a single component.

Paramount in utilising the mediated action as the unit of analysis is the irreducible tensions exemplified between the social actor and the mediational means through which action occurs. Wertsch (1998: 26) in following Vygotsky (1987) suggests that “one of the results of focusing on the irreducible tension between agent and mediational means is that the boundaries between these two pentadic elements begin to erode”. This erosion gives impetus to a re-conceptualisation of both agent and mediational means. No longer can analytical priority be allocated to an agent in isolation, and a more appropriate designation might be the *individual-operating-with-mediational-means* (Wertsche, Tulviste, & Hagstrom 1993).

While the new designation seeks to maintain the tensions exemplified in mediated action, Wertsch (1998: 27) acknowledges the difficulties with treating “the mediated action as an undifferentiated whole” for the purpose of analytical explication. In an attempt to reconcile this issue, he claims that it is paramount to “conceptualize it as a system characterized by dynamic tension among various elements”. Wertsch (1998: 27) claims that this is central because “many of the analytical strategies for examining mediated action are made possible by the fact that one can isolate its elements”. Accepting that conceptual distinction between elements is necessary for analytical endeavours, he claims that “the isolation of elements in mediated action must be carried out with an eye to how the pieces fit together in the end, but it cannot really get off the ground if mediated action is treated as an undifferentiated whole” (Wertsch 1998: 27). The articulation of isolating elements for the purpose of analysis is exemplified in his description of the ways in which a pole mediates action in the contemporary sport of pole vaulting. In so doing, there is a simultaneous focus on both the agent or actor, and

the mediational means through which action occurs, even if isolated for ease of description.

Wertsch's occupation with the mediated action and thereby the irreducible tensions between social actor and mediational means, takes up the Vygotskian focus on two differentiated types of mediational means: technical tools and psychological tools. Through employing the anecdotal example of the contemporary sport of pole vaulting, Wertsch outlines ten characteristics which are said to be indicative of mediational means in an attempt to concretise the conceptual category and elucidate the complex and dynamic interplay between social actors and mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action. While he explicitly warns of the futility of comprehensively categorising mediational means or providing rigid definitions, since "any attempt to do so would be either so abstract or so expansive as to have little meaning" (Wertsch 1998: 25), Scollon (2001a: 120) notes that there is a problematic "ambiguity of scope and an ambiguity of concreteness or specificity – some mediational means are physical objects, such as the pole, and other mediational means are highly semiotized, psychological objects, such as the official history of the Soviet Union".

Scollon (2001a) attempts to more concretely articulate the dimensions of mediational means by focusing on objects handed between a child and her mother. In doing so, his proposal to clarify the conceptualisation of mediational means by focusing on five characteristic properties is exemplified through an analytical focus on cultural tools and/or mediational means (like Wertsch, he uses the terms interchangeably) that mediate various actions and practices. Most notably, Scollon orients the discussion regarding mediational means and/or cultural tools around kitchen utensils and crayons in an attempt to elucidate the five characteristics claimed to be indicative of mediational means.



Wertsch's pole as mediating the action of pole vaulting and Scollon's discussion of kitchen utensils and crayons as mediating multiple differentiated actions and practices of different social actors comprise the two most comprehensive contemporary discussions regarding the mediational means as a conceptual category. These examples will be called upon below and employed alongside data excerpts from my own video-ethnography in an attempt to further tease apart the complexities of the concept of mediational means. In doing so, I hope to illuminate some fundamental issues with previous discussions through an articulation of a concept which has been continuously alluded to, but has escaped comprehensive detailing: the mediational interrelationship.

Wertsch (1998) and Scollon's (2001a) detailing of the characteristics of mediational means and/or cultural tools highlights a key categorical element which is indispensable in conceiving of mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis; *mediational means and/or cultural tools are always multiple in any mediated action*. Despite the lexical indication of plurality with mention of means and tools, and despite Scollon's (2001a: 4) unequivocal assertion that a "mediated action is carried out through material objects in the world (including the materiality of the social actors – their bodies, dress, movements) . . . [and] *we take these mediational means to always be multiple in any single action*" (emphasis added), their analytical focus exemplifies widespread disregard for multiplicity which results in considerable ambiguity in both accounts of mediation and mediational means.

I draw attention to this fundamental component of mediation and thereby mediated action in response to an implicit contradiction exemplified by undue analytical attention allocated to a single mediational means in any mediated action. If mediational means are always multiple, and the mediated action as a unit of analysis is championed based on an anti-reductionist sentiment, it seems counter intuitive to allocate analytical attention to a single mediational means through which mediated action is accomplished.

This is not just an “analytical exercise involving the isolation of elements in mediated action . . . with an eye to how the pieces fit together in the end” (Wertsch 1998: 27). I see it as much more akin to reducing the account of mediation to individual elements and thereby running the risk of destroying the complexity and dynamism of the phenomenon itself.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the concept of mediational interrelationship is one spawned simply through the analysis of the data which follows. The concept accounts for many of the characteristics outlined by both Wertsch (1998) and Scollon (2001a) and its analytical utility has been continuously alluded to in all discussions of mediation. My efforts at elucidating the complexity of mediational interrelationship will hopefully assist in teasing apart many of the ambiguities currently exemplified in the concept of mediation, mediational means, and consequently, mediated action. My hope is that a more comprehensive theoretical account of mediation and the interrelationship of mediational means will further concretise previously championed categorical elements articulated by Wertsch and Scollon while simultaneously advancing the anti-reductionist perspective on which the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis sits.

## **8.2 Mediational Means: Always and Only In-Use**

The first conceptual component which necessitates attention is the use of the term mediational means to refer to the gross plethora of objects, artefacts, elements and psychological constructs through which mediated action occurs. Wertsch employs the terminology in following Vygotsky as describing a broad range of material components of differentiated materiality. Mediational means can refer to anything and everything that mediates action. This is an adequately ambiguous description of the material nature of mediational means, since anything that mediates action is by nature a mediational

means. However, Scollon's (2001a) introduction of *practice*, as essentially a mediated action with a history injects considerable ambiguity into the classification of mediational means.

Scollon suggests that the interpretation and meaning of mediated actions are only realisable in reference to a panopoly of social practices of which the mediated action is a one-time irreversible exemplification. In essence, mediated action refers to the real-time irreversible and unrepeatable action taken through mediational means. Practice refers to a level of abstraction above the materially unrepeatable mediated action which unequivocally connects the mediated action as a practice with multiple other intersecting social practices.

I am predisposed at this point to introduce a change in the terminology of mediational means and cultural tools, which have been used interchangeably by both Wertsch and Scollon. The predisposition is led by the level of abstraction introduced by Scollon in attempts to concretise the conceptual entities under discussion.

Mediated action refers to the one-time unrepeatable and irreversible action taken through mediational means while practice refers to the ways in which the mediated action is permeated by individual, historical, institutional and cultural trajectories. Scollon (2001a: 116) asserts that mediational means can be appropriated by social actors through practices. He suggests that "'use' calls upon the unique, irreversible and concrete object as used in real time" whereas "'appropriation' is most fruitfully used to speak of the development of a mediational means over time within the habitus as an aspect of practice". As such, *use* essentially relates to mediated action and *appropriation* primarily to practices. However, this embeds considerable ambiguity regarding the distinction between the primary elements in this equation: the social actor and the mediational means. While use and appropriation relate to mediated action and

practice, the distinction says little about the composite nature of the mediational means themselves.

However, it may be useful to incorporate a distinction between mediational means which is in line with both practice and appropriation. In so doing, it seems logical to simply employ terms like object, material, or concept to any mediational means that has been appropriated through practices by a social actor. Since appropriation and practice are unequivocally connected to sociocultural, historical and institutional trajectories, these objects, materials or concepts would be cultural tools in Wertsch's (1991, 1998) and Scollon's (2001a) views. Yet, for clarity it seems to be most appropriate to describe the appropriation of an object, material, or concept rather than terming it some ephemeral *cultural tool*.

A mediational means is by definition a mediator of action and as such only exists in and through mediated action. Thus, there is a fallacy in discussing mediational means outside of, or as separated from, action. One can discuss objects, materials, equipment, environmental processes, concepts etc, but mediational means exists by definition only in and through action. Therefore, the concept of mediational means is correlated with that of mediated action. As the precise manner in which a mediational means materialises and thus, the way it mediates, is a one-time, irreversible and unrepeatable phenomenon.

To discuss an entity as existing outside of action as having some material continuity and temporal longevity is not a discussion about mediational means, but rather, a discussion about objects, artefacts, or concepts. However, objects, etc. acquire socioculturally and historically embedded trajectories through use as mediational means. It is in this way that the crayon as an object with sociocultural, historical and institutionally embedded typicalities as a writing utensil, becomes appropriated as a tool for infant pedagogy. As a mediational means, the crayon mediates the action of holding

up for the teacher, and mediates the action of observing for the learner. But reference to social practices like that of pedagogy, unequivocally invokes sociocultural and historical permeations of the tool itself, and simultaneously, the spin off use of this object in a social practice not typically associated with its use.

Therefore, *mediational means* refers to the plethora of objects, materials, forces, signs and psychological structures/tools/concepts/processes through which mediated action is undertaken. As such, mediational means materialise in real-time in and through mediated action. Their materiality as mediators of action is a one-time-only irreversible and unrepeatable phenomenon in space and time. The manner in which mediational means mediate real-time mediated action is primarily a character of interrelationship insofar as mediational means as they materialise in mediated action are always multiple and *interconnected*. As such, an analysis of mediation as it occurs through multiple and interconnected mediational means is unequivocally an analysis of the *mediational interrelationship*.

*Objects, materials, concepts, sign systems, etc.* have acquired sociocultural and historical trajectories which permeate their character as objects-for-specific-uses through an aggregate of employment as mediational means. To draw on Scollon's lexicon, in this way, cultural tools "predate the user" because the tools themselves have developed (explicitly or implicitly) for employment in certain practices in *coordination and complementarity with other cultural tools*.

*Appropriation* can be used to refer to the process whereby a social actor employs objects, materials, concepts, or signs, which carry with them socioculturally and historically embedded dispositions for use as mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action. Paramount in the process of appropriation is the establishment or materialisation of a differentiated mediational interrelationship. This materialisation of

mediational interrelationship is different to the aggregate of use embedded in the object itself.

Objects, materials, concepts, or signs acquire new dispositions-for-use through the process of appropriation. This process can be limited to a select group of social actors through which the process of appropriation occurs and/or through a more broadly conceived of sociocultural process of appropriation that extends beyond and through multiple groups, classes, societies and cultures. This helps to elucidate why it is that some objects, materials, concepts, or signs might carry with them certain dispositions-for-use to particular social actors while the same objects, materials, concepts, or signs may carry with them different or ancillary dispositions-for-use for other social actors. These dispositions-for-use are intimately intertwined with the systems of mediated action various social actors have come to know.

The analysis below functions to substantiate the above categorical distinctions. First, the analysis of an aggregate of mediated actions undertaken through multiple interconnected mediational means exemplifies the conceptualisation of mediation as primarily a property of interrelationship. Second, I elucidate the ways in which material object, entities and forces become parts of practices through mediated action, and thus, through the mediational interrelationship. Third, I show how objects, acquires new dispositions-for-use within a particular system of mediated action through the process of appropriation exemplified by employing an object as a mediational means in a new mediational interrelationship.

### **8.3 Mediational Interrelationship: An Example**

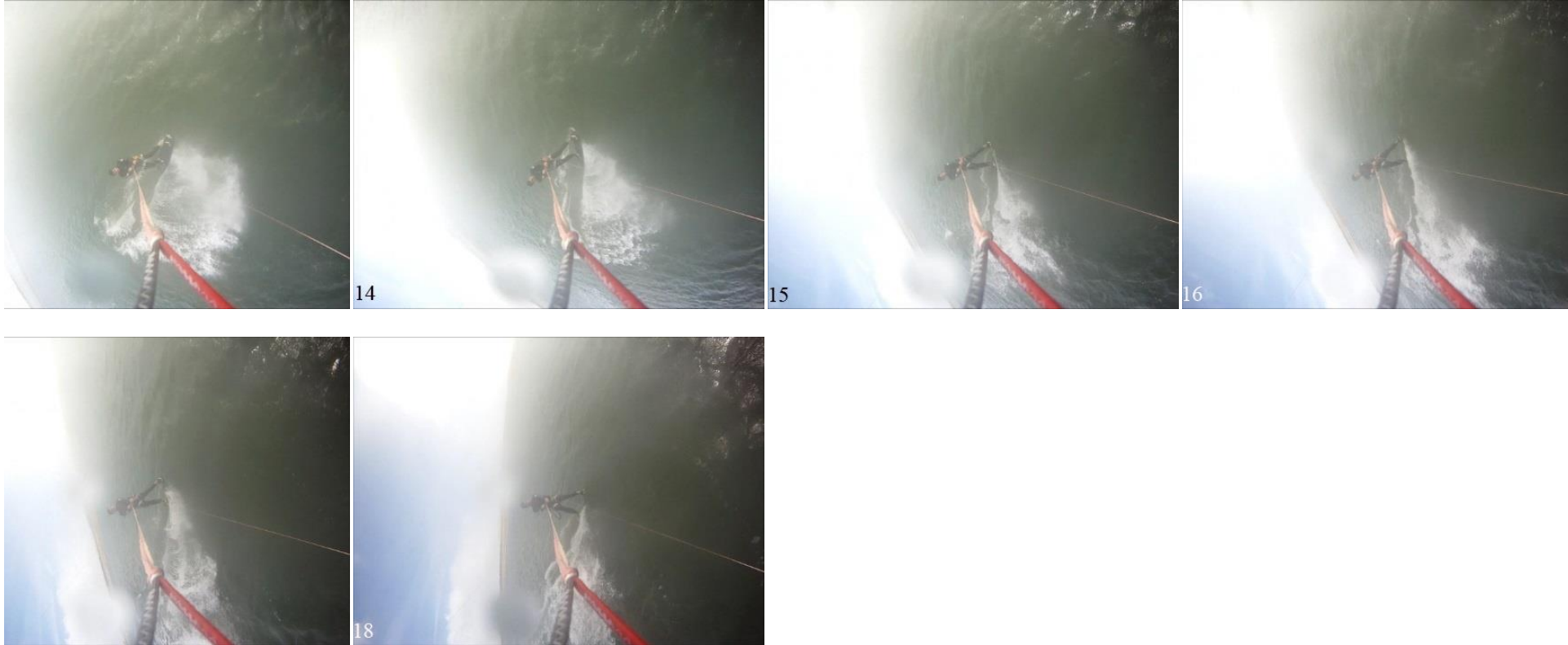
The 18 frame sequence below (Figure 8.1) is a static representation of a 00:09:00 (m/s/ms) video clip isolated from a 43:02:05 video segment which was collected utilising a line-mounted GoPro high definition video camera. The 00:09:00

second clip has been segmented into still frame images separated temporally by approximately 00:00:50. The segmentation at this temporal duration has been completed in an effort to maintain the character of the mediated actions and practices exemplified in the data excerpt within the constraints of still frame segmentation.

The embedded higher-level action (Norris 2004, 2011) exemplified in the sequence below is comprised of multiple simultaneous mediated actions taken through multiple interconnected mediational means. The embedded higher-level action of analytical priority is realised through a clearly identifiable beginning and ending (Norris 2004, 2011). The beginning and ending of the embedded higher-level action is represented by continuity and/or similarity in the frame perspective and body positioning of the social actor. The continuity and/or similarity results from the fact that this higher-level action as a practice is bordered by another practice.

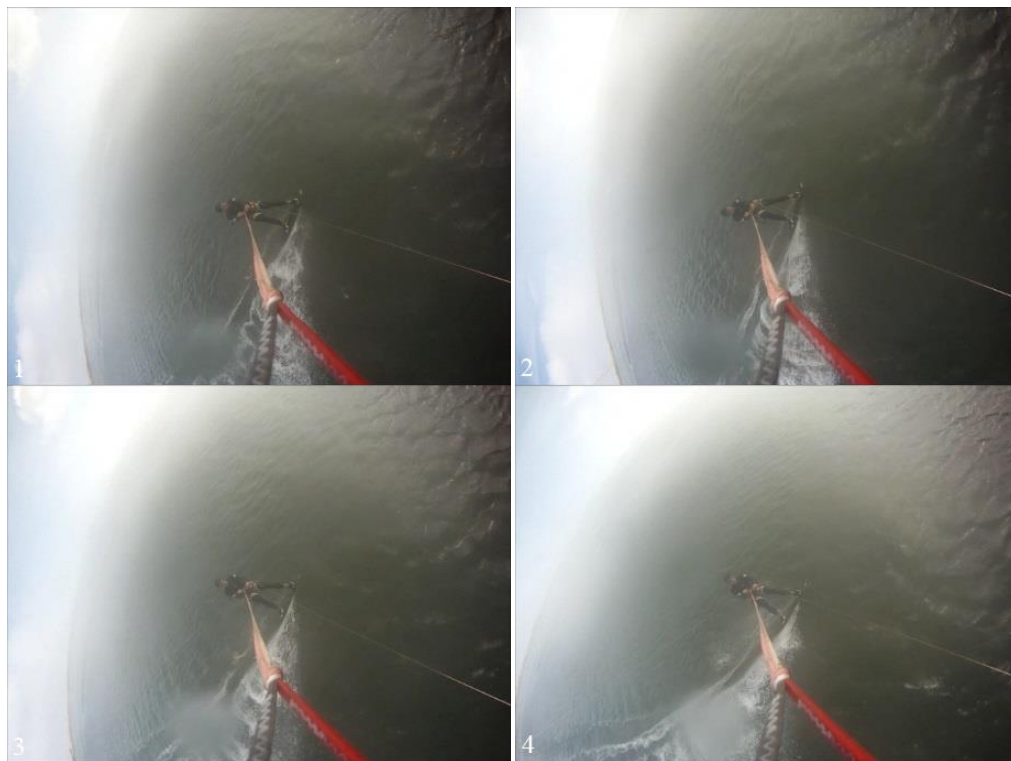






**Figure 8.1: Jumping and the mediational interrelationship**

The embedded higher-level action which is exemplified by multiple simultaneous mediated actions can be identified as a specialised practice within the system of mediated action. This specialised practice is called ‘jumping’. The practice which borders ‘jumping’ is that of ‘riding’. Riding is typically realised through a continuity of the trajectory of travel which parallels the trajectory of travel of the social actor’s kite. In this sequence, ‘riding’ as a practice is exemplified in frames 1-4 (Figure 8.2), and again in frames 15-18 (Figure 8.3). There is a slight difference in the frame composition which is created by a difference in the kite position and this results from the connection point between practices; riding-to-jumping and then jumping-to-riding. Again, the ways in which practices permeate other practices is clearly realisable in the frame sequence through the differentiation in frame composition.



**Figure 8.2: Riding**

The ways in which the practice of jumping is accomplished occurs through a complex and dynamic dialogical chain of differentiated and simultaneous mediated actions. While it is possible to isolate each individual mediated action when articulating the complex simultaneity of those mediated actions, the analytical orientation of this particular section is towards articulating the character of mediational means through which these actions are accomplished. As such, individual mediated actions that culminate to produce this higher-level action will be introduced through an analysis of the ways in which mediational means are acted through.



**Figure 8.3: Riding (frame differentiation)**

In all frames, there are multiple clearly visible mediational means through which the actions are undertaken. There are different coloured lines which extend from the middle of the frame, and these lines are attached to a bar which is in the hands of the social actor. There are four lines in total, two of which connect in some manner in the

middle of the frame (red and black) and extend towards the body of the social actor.

These two lines extend through the middle of the bar which is in the hand of the social actor and connect to a harness which is wrapped around the social actor's waist. There are two other lines, located on either side of the red and black lines, which also extend towards the social actor and these lines are attached to the bar itself. Although not present in the frame, the lines extend beyond the placement of the camera and attach to a collection of other lines (bridal), which are in turn connected to an inflatable kite. Thus, the mediational means mentioned thus far comprise a kite, lines, bar and harness, all of which are attached in some particular configuration.

Simultaneously, the social actor's body is supported by a board. The board is rectangular in shape, black in colour, and on the top of the board, there is a configuration of straps and pads which hold the social actors feet in place on top of the board. More easily visible in certain frames than others (2,16,18, reproduced in Figure 8.4) there is a black chord (a leash) which is attached to the social actor through the harness wrapped around their waist, and to the centre lines which extend through the middle of the bar located in the social actor's hands.



**Figure 8.4: Leash**

There are two other identifiable mediational means which are integral to all the actions undertaken in this sequence: water and wind. The water is clearly visible in all frames and it is of a differentiated composition at different times, and this is primarily the material result of the board in connection with the social actor's body which is exerting force onto the board through the legs. This can be seen quite clearly in the material composition of the white water spray which extends from the connection point of the board and water, towards the social actor's right side. While the wind is not explicitly visible in the frames, it is clearly audible in the audio-video segment. The wind has an approximate velocity between 17-27 knots and fluctuates in material consistency.

There are still other mediational means which function in this equation, though their materiality is difficult to comprehensively identify in the audio-video footage. The social actor has and is acting through some knowledge about the system of mediated action of kitesurfing. This system of mediated action comprises an understanding of the

individual mediational means and the ways in which they function as mediating the actions of kitesurfing. The precise nature of the knowledge, the acquisition of the knowledge and the ways in which these cognitive mediational means figure in the undertaking of action is difficult to articulate with any degree of certainty. However, we can deduce that there is some collection of psychological mediational means through which the actions are mediated.

The mediated actions (plural to denote multiple and simultaneous mediated actions) exemplified in the still frames have much in common with Wertsch's (1998) articulation of the mediated actions exemplified in the sport of pole vaulting. Wertsch clearly articulates the irreducible tension between social actor and mediational means by suggesting that "it is futile, if not ridiculous, to try to understand the action of pole vaulting in terms of the mediational means – the pole – or the agent in isolation" (Wertsch 1998: 27). The vaulter without a pole cannot participate in the event, and the pole by itself cannot function as a mediational means unless it is used by the vaulter.

A similar deductive logic could be used to identify the futility and ridiculousness of attempting to understand the actions of 'jumping' in terms of the mediational means – the kite – or the social actor (kiter) in isolation. The kite does not magically propel the kiter into the air (though observers often assume this is the case), and a kiter without a kite or with an inappropriate kite is incapable of jumping. As a result, we are better served to consider the ways in which the kite, as a mediational means, is acted through by the kiter in the accomplishment of jumping.

However, acknowledging the kite as a mediational means only brings us one step closer to understanding the ways in which 'jumping' is accomplished. Much in the same way, the agent-and-pole only provides a small portion of the "dynamic tension[s] among various elements" (Wertsch 1998: 27).

A consideration of the psychological mediational means through which jumping and pole vaulting as mediated actions are accomplished recognises a dynamic interrelationship between mediational means. However, momentarily ignoring the psychological mediational means that are clearly acted through in mediated action still results in the necessity to articulate a plethora of other interrelationships through which the mediated actions occur.

For ease of description, from here forward I treat the kite, lines and bar as a single mediational means: the kite. A kite without lines is not really a kite and cannot mediate much of anything other than cover from the elements, much like a tarpolin, and a kite with four lines and no bar would create a plethora of other issues.

The multiple and simultaneous mediated actions which realise the higher-level action of jumping occur through multiple, interconnected and interrelated mediational means. First, the kite does not mediate the action as an isolated element, nor does it simply mediate the action in connection with the social actor. In the sequence above, the social actor acts through the *kite-and-wind* in the undertaking of mediated action. Without an adequate velocity of wind (adequate primarily a determination made in explicit reference to the shape, size and material composition of the kite being used as a mediational means), there is no kitesurfing, and therefore no jumping.

Moving a step further, suggesting that it is the social actor – acting – through – kite – and – wind, still does not adequately describe the ways in which the kite and the wind mediate the actions of jumping. The series of multiple and simultaneous mediated actions exemplified in the sequence above (most importantly the social actor becoming airborne) occurs through an *interrelationship* of social actor, kite and wind. It is primarily the interrelationship between the kite and wind as mediational means that the social actor is able to become airborne.

The social actor pulls in on the bar, which alters the angle of attack, and in doing so, angles the kite at an increased horizontal slope creating a sudden increase of lift produced by the interrelationship of kite and wind resulting in the social actor becoming airborne. However, this alone still does not fully articulate the ways in which multiple mediational means through an interrelationship, mediate the action of becoming airborne.

Between frames 1 and 7 (Figure 8.1), there is a dramatically different perspective provided by the line-mounted camera. Furthermore, through frames 1-7, there is a noticeable and consistent changing perspective which materialises through a change in kite trajectory which is initiated by pulling in on the right hand side of the control bar. Simultaneously, in frames 5-7 (reproduced in Figure 8.5), the social actor clearly alters their distribution of bodyweight resulting in a changed trajectory of travel in frame 5 and then again in frame 7. The change in bodyweight distribution is clearly identifiable in the materiality of the water. In frame 7, the trail created by the social actor's board and distribution of bodyweight on the board forms a loose S shape. The materiality of the water exemplifies the ways in which bodyweight distribution has changed; first the social actor leans forward slightly and then backwards in an aggressive fashion. This can be seen both in the materiality of the water surface and in the body positioning of the social actor. In frame 6, the social actor's legs appear to be extended much further in front of his body, which is a materialisation resulting from leaning back aggressively.





**Figure 8.5: Load and pop**

The changing distribution of bodyweight coupled with the simultaneous changing trajectory of the kite is also an integral component in understanding how mediation is occurring in the accomplishment of jumping. If the social actor does not lean against the force of the kite during the mediated action of pulling in on the control bar, jumping would not be accomplished, rather an increase of speed in a downwind trajectory would be the result. Thus, it is not simply the interrelationship of the social actor, kite and wind; the board and water are also integral mediational means in the accomplishment of jumping.

Moving a step further, there is a temporal specificity which is traditionally lexicalised as ‘timing’ which contributes to the interconnected ways in which mediation occurs through an interrelationship of mediational means. In the sequence above, there are many distinct processes which must be timed in correlation with each other in order to accomplish becoming airborne. First, the changing trajectory of the kite as initiated by pulling on the left side of the control bar, coupled with sheeting in (pulling on both

ends of the bar) once the kite has reached a position directly above the kiter's head, applying force in an opposite direction through leaning back, and, releasing of the force (releasing the edge), must all occur in an appropriate temporal manner for jumping to be accomplished. Applying force in the opposite direction by leaning back, releasing one's edge too early and/or sheeting in before the kite is located directly overhead may all disrupt the temporal specificity through which complex aggregates of mediated actions, and, multiple interconnected mediational means contribute to the action of becoming airborne.

Therefore, it would be incorrect to suggest that the kite, wind, board or water have any mediating effect in isolation. The lift generated by changing kite trajectory only mediates becoming airborne in connection with the pressure exerted in the opposite direction mediated by the board and water. As such, attempting to describe the ways in which a single mediational means functions as mediating a particular action, unequivocally involves the invocation of the other mediational means through which the action is taken. Furthermore, it is not simply that mediation occurs through multiple mediational means, but that mediation occurs through the *interrelationship* of mediational means. In this case, mediated action does not occur by the social actor acting through the kite and wind and board and water, but rather, the social actor acting through *kite – wind – board – water as interconnected* mediational means.

In a similar manner, the mediated actions of pole vaulting occur through a complex interrelationship of mediational means. Without the precise materiality of the other mediational means in the equation (125 foot runway, vaulting box, crash mats), there is no pole vaulting. The 125 foot runway enables the vaulter to generate sufficient speed, vaulting box provides a place to plant the pole and crash mats provide a safe landing place. An alteration in the material composition of any of these mediational

means will dramatically alter the mediational interrelationship which would materialise through action.

The interrelationship between mediational means is not only paramount in sporting or athletic practices. If we return to the employment of the crayon discussed by Scollon (2001a) in infant pedagogy, we begin to see how integral interrelationship is in classification of actions and the resulting practices.

In Scollon's (2001a) example and as briefly touched upon above, the crayon as a mediational means, mediates the action of holding up or showing. This action is realised by movement of the hand and arm, coupled with some general grip on the object through the fingers and results in the object being held in some clearly visible position. In this manner, the crayon clearly mediates the action of holding up.

Simultaneously, there are other actions being undertaken through other interrelated mediational means. 'M' is said to speak a particular utterance simultaneously, and this mediated action is mediated by physiological components which mediate the production of audible sound in connection with psychological mediational means which mediate the production of a clearly articulated collection of phonemes.

On the level of practice, it is said that 'M' employs or appropriates the crayon in the practice of infant pedagogy. However, the crayon (employed in a 'spin off' function) is only appropriated as a pedagogical cultural tool in explicit connection with language. The crayon and language are so intimately interconnected that to take one away completely dissolves the practice itself.

Thus, the crayon, appropriated for use as a pedagogical tool only functions as such in explicit relation and interconnection with a plethora of sign systems, concepts, etc. (most specifically language, but also other psychological tools for pedagogical practice).

Similar to the temporal composition of the multiple actions which comprise the initial components of the higher-level action and resulting practice of jumping, there are temporal specificities which permeate the ways in which multiple simultaneous and interconnected mediational means are employed in infant pedagogy. Though it may seem obvious, it is relevant to point out that temporal continuity between holding up of the crayon and the utterance verbalised simultaneously comprehensively contribute to the realisation of attempted pedagogical action and the resulting practice. To displace or separate the multiple actions through multiple mediational means would again disrupt the complex interrelationship which manifests through multiple interconnected and interrelated mediational means.

## **8.4 Conclusion: Mediational Interrelationship**

As exemplified above, mediation is always a property of interconnected and interrelated mediational means. If one's analytical orientation is towards elucidating the complexities of mediated action and the ways in which the social actor and mediational means come together through mediation, one must unequivocally focus on the complex dynamism exemplified in and through multiple interrelated mediational means. To focus on a single mediational means is to fracture the dynamic tensions which manifest through mediated action, and thus inappropriately reduces the phenomenon to sets of isolated material or cognitive components. While as Wertsch (1998) points out, it is through our ability to isolate elements which makes analysis possible, one must only isolate elements with an explicit eye towards how those elements relate and interrelate.

# **9 Learning to Kitesurf: Creating Mediational Means**

## **9.1 Introduction: Creating Mediational Means**

In this chapter, I explicitly allocate my attention to elucidating developmental trajectories as they manifest in the acquisition of skill and/or proficiency; in other words, what is it that is learned when social actors learn to kitesurf. In this vein, the analysis is explicitly oriented towards mediated action and practices and the cultural tools employed as mediational means in the process of the acquisition of skill and/or proficiency. That being said, social actors draw upon multiple differentiated but interrelated sources which inform and permeate skill development; beginners get lessons from qualified instructors, seek assistance by less qualified mates, watch instructional videos, read magazines and watch other social actors both on and off the water. It is far beyond the scope of this section to articulate the complex interplay of these differentiated trajectories. Rather, my particular discussion will centre on the learning of one particular practice and the developmental trajectories which intersect in the learning of this practice.

First, I argue that the complex and dynamic aggregates of mediated actions exemplified in various kitesurfing practices are best characterised as a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel (Norris 2012). Second, as a result of the inconsistent material character of a key mediational means through which the mediational interrelationship materialises, kitesurfers acquire and employ a practice of prediction regarding the ways in which a particular touch or an aggregate of touches will result in a response-feel of a particular character. As a result of the fluctuating consistency of the wind, a touch of the same strength, speed and specificity can and often does result in a response-feel of variable material characters. Therefore, through the haptic dialogic

process and through the experience of the variability of response-feel materialisation, kitesurfers learn to strategically touch so as to bring about a response-feel of a particular character. The development of skill and/or proficiency occurs through an increasingly accurate *practice of prediction* which is informed by an understanding of the mediational interrelationship: the real-time experience of the mediational relationship which is interpreted and perceived through kinaesthetic properties and the continuous haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel.

Moving a step further, I claim that alongside, and the primary impetus for developing acuity and accuracy in the practice of prediction, is the ways in which kitesurfers actively *co-create* through the employment of cultural tools as mediational means, and through the mediational interrelationship, complex mediational means which are then employed in the undertaking of other mediated actions and practices. In other words, through employing multiple simultaneous mediational means like the kite, wind, board, water etc., social actors co-create or co-construct complex mediational means which are employed in subsequent mediated actions and practices. In Kitesurfing, complex mediational means manifest or materialise as a response-feel which is created through touch or multiple touches. Thus, through the development of a practice of prediction, kitesurfers learn to co-create, complex mediational means which manifest in and through the mediational interrelationship. In kitesurfing, the complex mediational means which is co-created is most commonly referred to as power (force as generated through the interrelationship of kite and wind). Kitesurfers then employ this power in the undertaking of other mediated actions (resulting in practices like riding, jumping, transitions etc.).

## 9.2 Learning to Kitesurf: Touch/Response-Feel

The first step in elucidating the ways in which social actors learn the practice of predicting the ways in which the mediational interrelationship will materialise involves explicating the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel.

Norris (2012) introduces the notion of touch/response-feel through the analysis of a horse-riding/training session whereby an instructor draws upon multiple modes of communication in an attempt to teach touch/response-feel to a student. While my particular employment of the concept differs somewhat from Norris' concentration, the utility of the notion will become increasingly clear as a means to describe the haptic dialogic process exemplified in the various actions undertaken while kitesurfing.

Norris (2012: 8) describes touch/response-feel as “differentiated from other haptic experience such as sitting in a chair or walking across a hard surface. This touch/response-feel comes about when a social actor (inter)acts with another social actor or a mediational means where a touch of the (touching) social actor results in a response by the other social actor or the mediational means”. Paramount in this dialogic process is the integration of perception exemplified in the notion of touch, whereby touch “includes the notion of counter-perception” (Norris 2012: 8). Thus, touch refers not only to the social actor touching some material entity, but also includes the counter-perceptive feel of the material behaviour through touch. In this way, sitting in a chair or walking across a hard surface constitutes only one component of the touch/response-feel phenomenon. Norris' particular concern is with the ways in which certain touches (including counter-perception) manifest in a differentiated response-feel by another social actor or a mediational means itself. As such, touch/response-feel refers to the (inter)active phenomenon whereby a touch results in a particular response-feel which is ontologically differentiated from the simple counter-perception embedded in the touch itself.

The articulation of the conceptual notion occurs through the analysis of the ways in which a horse-riding instructor attempts to teach the phenomenon to a student. The particular touch/response-feel that is being taught in her analysis is that of kicking the horse with one's heel (touch) and the resulting movement of the horse in some particular manner (response-feel). While Norris' particular attention is allocated to the ways in which touch/response-feel is taught through modal aggregates in a horse-riding/training session, my employment of the notion of touch/response-feel is oriented towards the ways in which the phenomenon itself and the experience of the phenomenon teaches the social actor something about the mediational means through which touching and the corresponding response-feel occurs.

Many of the actions undertaken in kitesurfing can be characterised as a dialogic process of touch/response-feel whereby the social actor touches (many times), and feels the response of the touch(es) through a kinaesthetic experience of forces and/or pressures exerted on the body as manifested through the mediational interrelationship. In this way, it is most appropriate to conceptualise the social actor as (inter)acting with multiple mediational means through touch/response-feel. Most importantly, the development of proficiency in kitesurfing is inextricably linked to the ways in which social actors learn the (inter)active relationship between particular touches, how those touches manifest in particular response-feels, and how to harness the response-feel and employ it as a mediational means for the next aggregate of touch/response-feel.

On the surface, the acquisition of proficiency and/or the learning of particular practices in kitesurfing may seem simple enough. However, the materiality of the response-feel(s) cannot be directly attributed to the materiality of the touch(es). In other words, the very same touch(es) can and often does result in vastly differentiated response-feels; and this is the primary impetus necessitating dialogicality in the process.



Therefore, in kitesurfing, social actors are in a continuous dialogue with the mediational means through which the actions are undertaken: touching, feeling and re-touching.

In the beginning stages (someone learning to kitesurf) the differentiated nature of the response-feel which manifests as a result of a particular touch seems unpredictable and erratic. It is typical to hear lamentation in varying forms related to this apparent unpredictability. Beginners might claim “it’s (the kite) not doing what I want it to do” or in frustration might claim to the teacher “that is what I’m doing and it (the kite) is not listening”. This can typically result from the experience that the same touch (i.e. pull on the bar in one direction) with the same pressure and force, may result in drastically different response-feel(s). In this manner, the kite may seem to have a mind of its own, reacting in apparently unpredictable ways despite the consistency of the social actor’s touch.

The phenomenon of differentiated response-feels as manifested through similar touches is directly attributable to the fluctuating and unpredictable materiality of a key mediational means through which the actions are occurring: the wind. More accurately, the materiality of the response-feel is a result of the mediational interrelationship which materialises through the interconnectedness of the multiple mediational means which function as mediating the particular actions.

The velocity or strength of the wind can dramatically differ from moment to moment. Since the response-feel is directly attributable to the mediational interrelationship which materialises through mediated action, the changing material character of the wind results in a continuously fluctuating mediational interrelationship. This fluctuating mediational interrelationship becomes something that must be managed or mitigated to some extent by the social actor while engaged in a particular action. For example, when riding, the kiter is continuously in dialogue with the mediational means through which the actions are being mediated in an effort to ensure the production of an

appropriate amount of power which assists in propelling the social actor across the surface of the water. While it is very difficult to identify the haptic dialogic process visually, the kiter must continuously pull in and out on the control bar (changing the angle of the kite as relative to the wind), while shifting bodyweight distribution so as to maintain a consistent tack in one direction.

Through the experience of touch/response-feel, kitesurfers learn that particular touches result in response-feels with a materiality that ranges on a continuum primarily determined by the real-time materiality of wind velocity or speed. In other words, a single touch (i.e. pull on one side of the bar), will result in the movement of the kite in that direction, however, the speed at which the kite moves and the resulting force (response-feel) created by the interaction of the kite and wind is not directly attributable to the touch itself, but rather, the touch in connection with the kite and wind. As a result, kitesurfers acquire and learn other strategies to mitigate the fluctuating nature of the response-feel as created by the inconsistency of wind speed.

This is not to suggest that kitesurfers through some intuitive acumen acquire comprehensive foresight about the ways in which wind speed fluctuates moment to moment. Rather, kitesurfers are in continuous conversation with the wind through the mediational means employed in the undertaking of mediated action. In this way, the materiality of the mediational interrelationship which manifests through mediated action affects and permeates the actions which immediately follow. In this way, the dialogic process of touch/response-feel is a continuous negotiation occurring through multiple and interconnected mediational means.

The saliency of this haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel necessitated by the material fluctuation of a core mediational means through which mediated action occurs is mirrored in and manifests through the mediational means themselves. Simultaneously, the materiality of the objects themselves affect and permeate the ways

in which the haptic dialogic process occurs. Contemporary kites employ four line control systems (as opposed to original two line systems). The four line control systems are exemplified by the two leading edge lines extending through the centre of the bar attached to the harness via a chicken loop, while the two back lines (steering lines), connect to the end of the bar. This configuration makes it possible to mitigate and manage wind speed fluctuations through the practice of sheeting (continuous pulling in and out on the bar). It could be suggested that the creation of this control system was designed and developed explicitly to afford more manageable negotiation of fluctuating wind speed. Simultaneously, the control system has affected the materiality of the actions (and the resulting practices) of riding exemplified in kitesurfing.

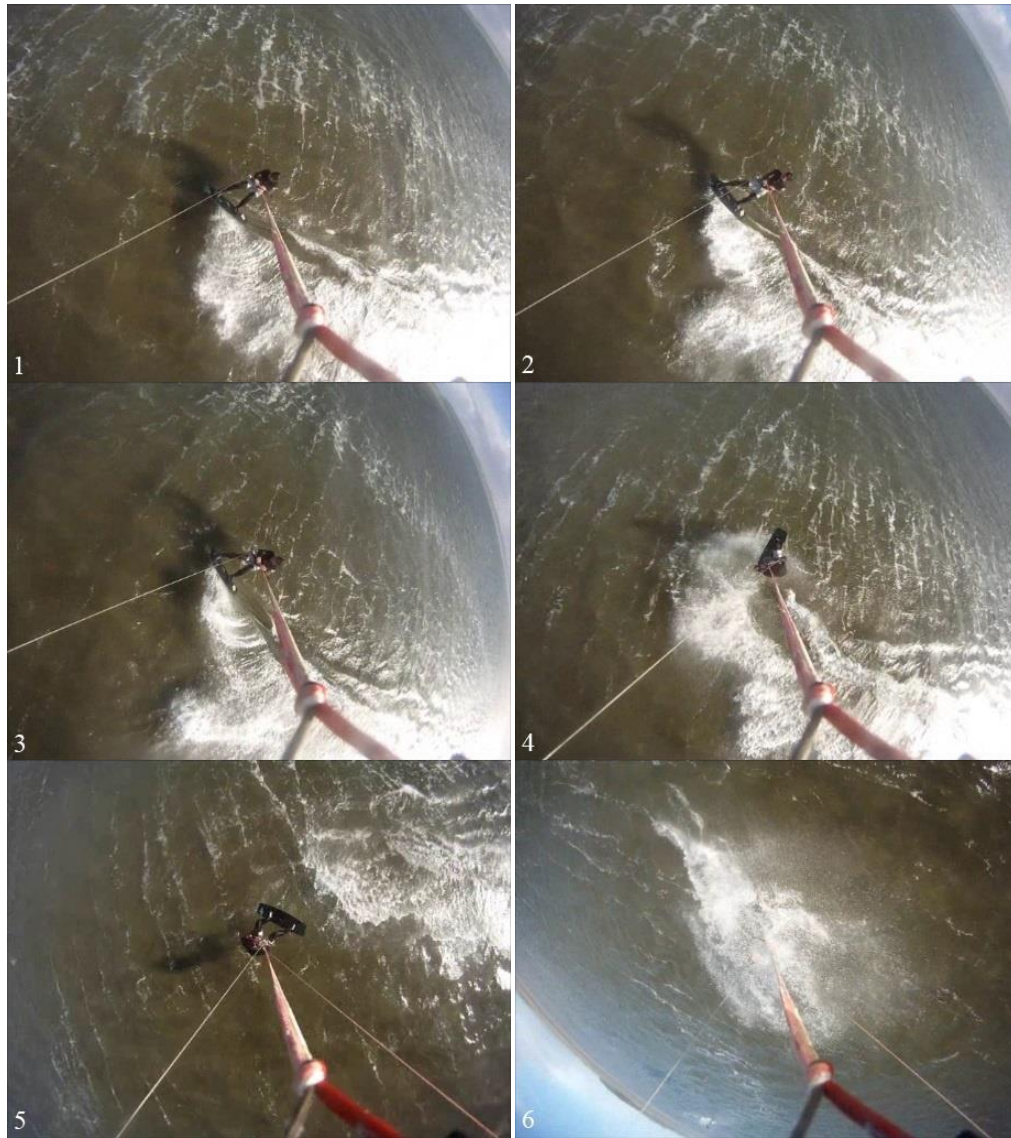
Before four line systems, fluctuations in wind speed would unequivocally result in an increase or decrease of power which would have to be mitigated by an alteration in bodyweight distribution. However, the ability to sheet in and out as a practice to mitigate the fluctuation of wind speed has altered or changed the materiality of the practice itself. Now, fluctuations can be managed through sheeting. In this way, mediated action and the mediational interrelationship affect and influence the construction and production of objects, which in turn affect the practices themselves. This supports Werstch's (1998: 45) claim that "mediated action can undergo a fundamental transformation with the introduction of new mediational means". This further substantiates the sociocultural, historical and institutional permeation of mediated action through the irreducible tensions between social actor and mediational means.

Through mediated action and mediation, the mediational interrelationship of mediational means is both experienced and learned by the social actor. Paramount in the dynamic interrelationship of mediational means as it materialises through action is the way in which objects change through mediated action, mediation, and therefore, the

mediational interrelationship. Thus, the materiality of objects, their affordances and constraints along with their dispositions-for-use, are unequivocally embedded within particular systems of mediated action and simultaneously, through the dynamism of interrelationship materialise through mediated action.

### **9.3 Creating Mediational Means: Learning a Backroll**

The three figures below (Figures 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3) exemplify one kitesurfer who is attempting to learn how to perform a backroll. The first two sequences show the social actor making one particular mistake (while admittedly there may be others). The saliency of this particular mistake manifests in the third frame sequence where the social actor over-corrects the mistake (again leading to another complex of issues). However, from the point of correction onward, in all the data collected, the social actor does not make the same mistake again.



**Figure 9.1: Backroll - attempt 1**

In the above sequence, the social actor is attempting to perform a backroll. In doing so, there is a clearly distinguishable changing orientation of perspective which manifests through the changing trajectory of the kite. As touched upon earlier, as a result of camera placement at the connection point of the two front lines of the social actor's kite, the camera perspective provides an accurate account of the position of the kite in the sky. The front lines (attached to the leading edge), always and invariably extend to the kite, and thus, the camera perspective is explicitly indicative of the kites position.

In the six frame sequence (Figure 9.1), the camera perspective, thus kite position, continuously changes. In frames 1 through 4, the kite slowly and consistently

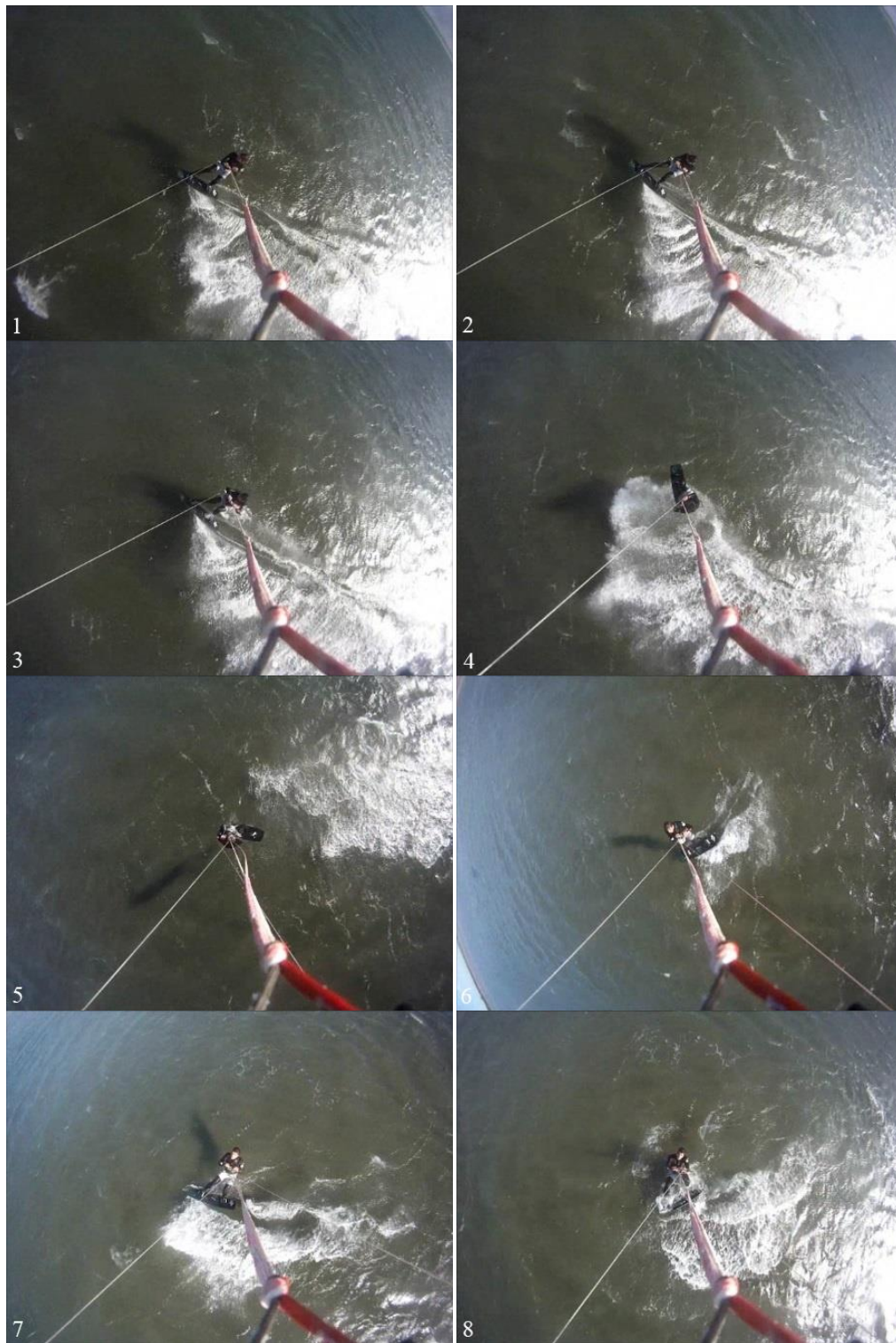
moves from a position with the leading edge facing the kiter's right (direction of travel), towards the zenith (directly over the kiter's head). In frames 5 and 6, it is clear that the kite has progressed past the zenith, and now the leading edge is more or less facing towards the left of the kiter.

The kite's movement is explicitly attributable to input provided by the social actor through touching (pulling) on the left side of the control bar. This pull results in a change of kite flying trajectory, and coupled with pulling in on the bar and leaning against the pull of the kite, the social actor is propelled upwards and off the surface of the water. As the kiter rotates their body in an opposite direction to that of original travel, the kite continues to travel in a different trajectory, past the zenith and all the way to the kiter's left. Simultaneously, the kiter has been unable to complete the full rotation, and crashes violently in the water.

The salient aspect in this frame sequence, and a fundamental mistake made, is that the kiter pulled too aggressively on the left hand side of the control bar, directing the kite towards the zenith and then past, opposed to the original direction of travel.

Admittedly, they also failed to complete the full bodily rotation; however, it is unclear as to whether this occurred from a lack of momentum or (more probable) too aggressive of a touch resulting in the kite travelling too far in the opposite direction.

The next frame sequence (Figure 9.2) exemplifies the same mistake; too aggressive of a touch (pull on the left side of the bar). Again, this results in the kite moving from a position located to the kiter's right, towards the zenith, and past, towards the kiter's left.



**Figure 9.2: Backroll - attempt 2**

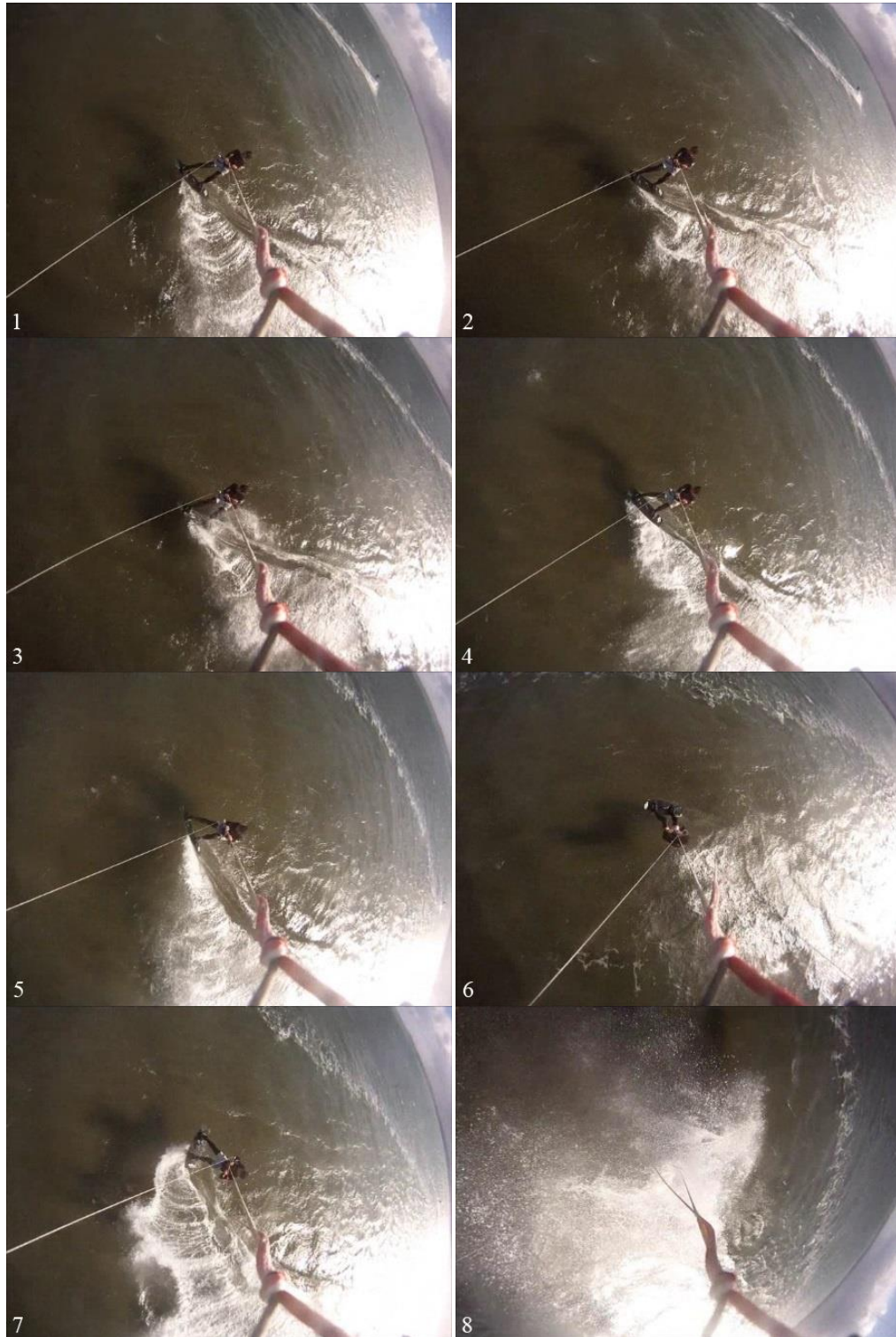
In frames 1 through 4 (Figure 9.2), the kite moves from the kiter's right, to the zenith. In frames 5 through 7, the kite is towards the kiter's left, and then in frame 8, the kite is once again located at the zenith. In this sequence, the kiter has once again touched (pulled) too aggressively on the left side of the control bar. As a result, the kite moves



directly over the kiter's head (desired circumstance) but continues towards the kiter's left. In this instance, the individual has completed the full rotation and landed back upon the board on top of the water. However, as a result of a touch which was too aggressive which resulted in the kite travelling past the zenith, all power has been lost and the kiter sinks into the water, rather than continuing to glide across the surface.

In the next sequence (Figure 9.3), the kiter appears to fix the issue (the kite does not travel all the way past the zenith and to their left), but instead, the individual overcompensates, so as to avoid the past situations, and in doing so, the kite does not travel far enough over their head.





**Figure 9.3: Backroll - attempt 3**

Again, we see the starting kite position as facing towards the kiter's right or the direction of travel. While in frames 1 through 4 (Figure 9.3), there is a distinguishable, though slight, change in the orientation of perspective, and thus kite positioning, in

frames 5 through 8, the kite continues in the trajectory of travel, and in frame 8, it is clear that the kite is actually flying towards the water (in the continuation of the audio-video footage, the kite does crash into the water).

Clearly evident in these three frame sequences is that the social actor realised that they were pulling too aggressively on the left side of the control bar. While they were becoming airborne through the interrelationship of kite, wind, board and water, the initial touch resulted in a response-feel of an undesirable nature. In the first sequence, half way through the rotation, and in the second sequence, after completing the rotation, the kite travelled too far in opposition to the trajectory of travel and the result was a loss of power. In the final sequence, the social actor attempts to correct the issue, but in doing so, touches too lightly resulting in an equally undesirable response-feel. In this final sequence, the kite does not travel far enough overhead, and as a result, an inappropriate amount of lift is generated resulting in a short period of being airborne, followed by a hard crash into the water. Interestingly, in the remainder of the data, the kiter never again touches too aggressively so as to initiate an undesirable response-feel (losing power). While in some cases they do not create enough upward lift, and in others too much, still in others they rotate too fast, in others not fast enough; over-sending the kite (pulling too hard) does not occur again.

The three frame sequences above exemplify a number of integral components about what is being learned in and through the aggregate of mediated actions and the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel.

First, it is evident that the social actor pulled too aggressively. It can be assumed that their intention was to complete a full bodily rotation while airborne, land back on the surface of the water and continue riding in the same trajectory. However, there was an inappropriate prediction about the ways in which a touch of a particular material specificity, would manifest in and through the mediational interrelationship, a response-

feel of a particular character. The touch can be considered as appropriate insofar as the kiter became airborne, and, in the second sequence, fully completed the backroll rotation; but as a result of too aggressively pulling in on the left side, the kite over-flew to a point past recovery (pulling back in the opposite direction to readjust flying trajectory).

In the final sequence, the inappropriate prediction results in too aggressive a touch and a response-feel of an undesirable (or semi-desirable) material character, the kiter attempts to correct the issue, but in doing so, again inappropriately predicts how the touch will materialise in a particular response-feel, though this time the touch was too light.

Paramount in the analysis is the fact that one cannot articulate with any degree of certainty, the exact material character of the wind during the undertaking of the real-time, irreversible and unrepeatable mediated actions through which the practice of a backroll is attempted. However, one can say, with reasonable certainty that the wind probably had an approximate velocity of between 18 – 25 knots. This assumption can only be made through the acquisition of an intimate understanding about the ways in which the mediational interrelationship materialises as interdependent on the materiality of the multiple mediational means through which action occurs. The ability to become airborne, ride powered-up and stay upwind while flying a 10m kite, suggests that the wind has a material character within a range of probability. In this way, through the system of mediated action and through the development of an understanding about the mediational interrelationship, it becomes possible to see, read or interpret the materiality of the wind through phenomena.

While approximations may be possible, again, the precise materiality of the wind, in the moment is impossible to accurately articulate. As a result, the characterisation of the particular touches exemplified in figures 9.1 and 9.2 as

appropriate or not, is explicitly situated in real-time and through the changing materiality of the wind itself. The inconsistency of the wind makes it difficult to articulate the materiality of the touch, furthermore, the social actor themselves would struggle to articulate exactly how aggressively, how quickly and with what specificity the touch occurred. As a result, it is unreasonable to suggest that the social actor is learning how a particular touch results in a particular response-feel. Rather the social actor is learning to predict the ways in which a particular touch will result in a particular response-feel. In so doing, the practice of prediction materialises in the multiplicity of touches undertaken by the social actor, and the accuracy of predication materialises in real-time through the undertaking of mediated actions and practices.

The accuracy and acuity of the practice of prediction is a fundamental developmental characteristic that is acquired through mediated action and in turn, employed as a psychological mediational means in the undertaking of action. As such, the practice of prediction can be conceptualised as intimately connected with the system of mediated action. It is important to highlight the ways in which the practice of prediction as a psychological system manifests through employment of other cultural tools as mediational means. As such, the objects permeate the structures of the practice of prediction. With advancing technology, changes in control systems and kite design, these will invariably be changed, reshaped and reconstituted in and through mediated action and the mediational interrelationship. Thus, actions, practices, mediational means, psychological systems and objects are co-constitutive. It is squarely within the tension between social actor and mediational means that we can comprehensively see the ways in which individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional trajectories permeate the mediated action itself.

## 9.4 Creating Complex Mediation Means

To this point, I have highlighted the importance of the notion of *interrelationship* regarding the *multiplicity* and *interconnectedness* of mediational means as they manifest in and through mediated action. Furthermore, in kitesurfing, I have attempted to characterise the ways in which various mediational interrelationships materialise as varied along a continuum as a direct result of the inconsistency and/or fluctuation in the real-time materiality of the wind as a core mediational means through which action occurs. As a result, kitesurfers traditionally engage in what has been described as a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel (Norris 2012) whereby the response-feel which manifests through the interrelationship of mediational means becomes employed as a mediational means through a simultaneous aggregate of re-touches and haptic or kinaesthetic orientations.

Thus, some of the most typical and regularised practices which have manifested within the system of mediated action can be characterised as a social actor engaged in a continuous conversation and or negotiation with and through cultural tools employed as mediational means. Admittedly, the process as described herein seems as though it would require great energy, skill, concentration and training. While kitesurfing can be quite difficult to learn in early stages, many of the complex haptic dialogic processes which occur during the practices exemplified in kitesurfing become semi-automatic for seasoned practitioners. Through the development of proficiency and/or skill in regards to many basic practices, kitesurfers can allocate their attention to other components of the situation (i.e. learning new practices).

However, the predictable inconsistency and fluctuating materiality of the wind as a mediational means necessitates engagement in a continuous negotiation with and through multiple simultaneous mediational means. Furthermore, the material inconsistency of the wind can also be attributed as responsible for the ways in which the

exact same touch, of the same strength can, and often does, result in differentiated response-feels. The question which logically results from this particular line of reasoning is: how is it that kitesurfers, considering the complex and dynamic nature of the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel and re-touch, are able to perform various practices like those of riding, transitions, jumps and backrolls with relative ease and simplicity?

Over-time and through action, mediation, and therefore the mediational interrelationship, kitesurfers learn a practice of prediction which manifests as part of the system of mediated action, which is employed as a mediational means in the undertaking of action. In early stages, the practice does not exist at all, but over-time and primarily through experiencing the ways in which the mediational interrelationship fluctuates as contingent on the materiality of the wind, the practice materialises through an increasing accuracy and appropriateness of touch, therein the creation of a response-feel of a particular material character which is then employed as a mediational means for other actions and practices.

A core component of this situation is the importance of creating a response-feel of a particular character which can be employed as a mediational means for some other action. The more accurately the social actor can create a response-feel of a particular material character, the more efficiently the social actor can employ the response-feel as a mediational means for the undertaking of some other collection of actions and practices.

However, as a result of the fluctuating materiality of the wind which manifests in a continuously fluctuating mediational interrelationships and thus, differentiated response-feels resulting from the touches of the same material specificity, social actors cannot and do not simply learn the ways in which a particular touch results in a particular response-feel. Rather, social actors develop and acquire a practice of

predicting the ways in which a touch of a particular material character will result in a response-feel of a particular character. The more accurately the social actor can predict the ways in which the mediational interrelationship will manifest a particular response-feel, the more easily the response-feel can be employed as a mediational means for other actions and practices. In other words, the social actor strategically touches so as to create, through interrelated and interconnected mediational means, a desired response-feel.

The creation, through touch, of a response-feel of a particular character allows the social actor to anticipate the response-feel, thereby distribute bodyweight, and utilise other haptic and kinaesthetic practices in the employment of the response-feel as a mediational means. In this way, social actors learn to construct complex mediational means (power, lift) through the employment of multiple mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action. The ways in which these complex mediational means materialise (power, lift) is primarily a result of the mediational interrelationship that manifest through the employment of interconnected mediational means. In this way, the mediational means themselves affect, shape and co-create the construction of the complex mediational means created through action. This supports the assertion that the objects employed as mediational means become co-constitutive insofar as they permeate the material nature of the complex mediational means crafted through their employment.

The development of proficiency and the acquisition of skill in relation to the various practices exemplified in kitesurfing can primarily be characterised along three developmental trajectories:

1. Social actors acquire an understanding about the ways in which the mediational interrelationship manifest through action. This varies on a

continuum as dependent upon the changeable fluctuating material character of the wind.

2. Social actors develop, acquire and refine practices of prediction regarding the ways in which the mediational interrelationship will manifest in a particular response-feel; and
3. Social actors learn how to exploit the affordances of multiple interconnected cultural tools as mediational means in the real-time co-construction of complex mediational means (response-feel), simultaneously and in coordination with anticipatory practices for utilising the response-feel as a mediational means for employment in other mediated actions and practices.

This developmental process regarding the ways in which social actors employ mediational means, the ways in which social actors learn the mediational interrelationship, and the ways in which they co-construct and create complex mediational means through the exploitation of affordances which materialise through the mediational interrelationship highlights a number of core theoretical tenants related to the notion of mediated action.

First, social actors initially learn about objects as mediational means: what they are, their typical uses, their interdependencies which manifest through use. Second, social actors learn to employ objects as mediational means through the mediated action of kitesurfing. While the employment of objects as mediational means may be influenced and affected by multiple intersecting pedagogical trajectories or conceptual understandings, learning how to use mediational means is learning how to employ these in coordination with other mediational means in mediated action. Therefore, through mediated action, social actors acquire an understanding about the contingency of affordances as situated within the mediational interrelationship.



With an increasing proficiency for employing mediational means, certain practices become habituated and commonplace.

Regarding kitesurfing, first, social actors learn what a kite is, that it is inflatable, that it flies and that there are material components built in to the object which afford manipulation of the kite's flying trajectory (that the kite can be steered). Next, social actors learn to control (or not steer) the kite (most typically a trainer kite), so that it stays in the air in a stable and controllable manner. At this point, certain characteristics about the mediational means are being learned; that the kite will fly above one's head with very little effort, it pulls on one's body and responds to input on the control bar.

Following the basic acquisition of understanding about the mediational means itself, social actors learn (through mediated action), that the cultural tool can be employed as a mediational means in the co-constitution and co-creation of complex mediational means manifest through an interrelationship which materialises through mediated action. In so doing, social actors learn how to employ mediational means in the creation of new, complex, temporally fleeting and contingent mediational means (creation of a particular response-feel). In kitesurfing, social actors learn that certain inputs (touches) result in a reaction by the kite (change in flying trajectory). Next, the social actor learns that the touch and resulting change of flying trajectory also manifest in a response-feel (pressure on the body / pull on the harness) of a particular material character. Simultaneously, the social actor is acquiring an understanding about the mediational interrelationship and the affect that the fluctuation of wind speed has on the particular materiality of the response-feel.

Thus, the prospective kiter learns that different kinds of touches materialise in different response-feels and these different response-feels are primarily attributable to the interrelationships which materialise between mediational means through mediated action. Soon, and sometime painfully, the social actor learns that an increasing wind

speed results in the kite turning faster with the same specificity of touch, and, that decreasing wind speed results in the kite turning slower. Simultaneously, the social actor learns that the speed of turning and flying directly correlates with the intensity of the response-feel. Thus, a faster moving/flying kite produces a more intense and powerful response-feel; while a slower moving/flying kite produces a response-feel of less power and intensity.

At this stage of skill acquisition or proficiency development, learners are often encouraged to engage in body dragging which is a pedagogical practice whereby the learner generates power (complex mediational means), through an aggregate of touches, without standing upon a board. The traditional result of generating power while standing in the water, results in a response-feel of a particular character and a complex mediational means which functions in the social actor's dragging through the water (body dragging).

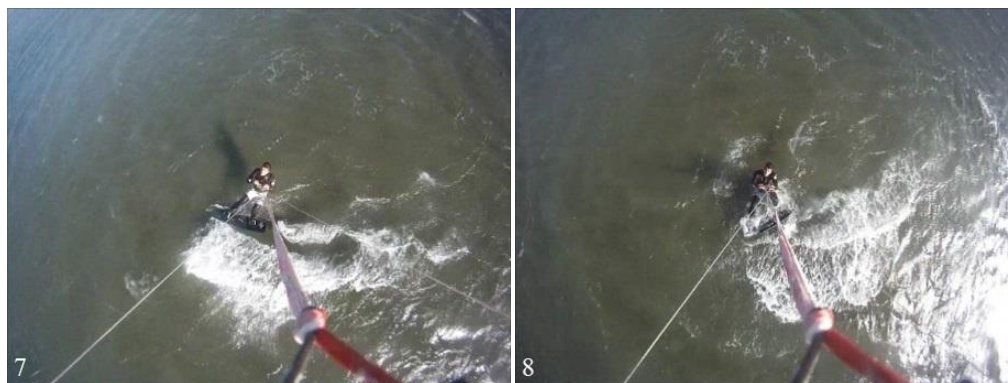
Most notably, in this pedagogical practice, prospective or beginner kites are learning that it is possible to co-create through employing mediational means (including the wind), a complex mediational means that has a temporally fleeting material character which is interdependent on the social actor, the mediational means and the mediational interrelationship. Without the material configuration of the kite as a mediational means, power could not be created. Without the wind, the kite would fall out of the sky and power could not be created. Without a social actor employing multiple simultaneous mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action, power could not be created.

It could be argued that at this developmental stage, prospective kites learn how kitesurfing is possible; through the active co-construction of complex mediational means which are employed in propulsion as the social actor glides across the surface of the water. The acquisition of skill and/or proficiency is intimately connected and

intertwined with one's ability to co-create a mediational means of a particular character and, how to employ that mediational means in coordination with others (board, water) in the undertaking of mediated actions (and their resulting specialised practices).

If we return to the sequences above (Figure 9.2, as continued in Figure 9.4 below), it becomes increasingly clear that what has occurred through the inappropriate touch (too aggressively pulling on one side of the bar), is the co-creation of a complex mediational means of a particular character; in this case a semi-intended character.





**Figure 9.4: Backroll - attempt 2 con't**

The complex mediational means co-created through a multiplicity of touches and through multiple interconnected mediational means can best be described as *lift*. Through pulling on the left side of the bar, simultaneously with leaning against the pull of the kite, and through pulling in on both ends of the bar once the kite is travelling towards the zenith, the kiter co-creates *lift*, in an upward direction, which functions as a mediational means through which becoming airborne occurs. In the sequence above, *lift*, as a complex mediational means has been created in a particular manner and with a specific material character through which the kiter is able to be suspended in the air, for a long enough period of time so that they can complete a full bodily rotation. However, in the co-construction of lift, the kiter has touched too aggressively so while upward lift is generated enabling the individual to become airborne, another complex mediational means (power) is not created through the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel, and as a result, the kiter sinks into the water.

## **9.5 Conclusion: Creating Mediational Means**

Thus, through the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel which is permeated and affected by the practice of prediction which manifests through learning the mediational interrelationship, the social actor agentively and continuously co-creates complex mediational means (lift, power, etc.) which are employed in the undertaking of

subsequent mediated actions. Similar to the ways in which negotiation occurs through touch/response-feel as necessitated by the fluctuating material character of the wind, the social actor must continuously co-create complex mediational means which have a temporally fleeting materiality. Thus, many of the actions exemplified in kitesurfing can be characterised as the social actor engaging in a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel in an attempt to continuously co-create or co-construct multiple temporally fleeting and materially variable complex mediational means which can then be employed in the undertaking of subsequence actions.

# 10 Discussion: Participation as Methodological Tool

## 10.1 Introduction: Participation as Methodological Tool

I am using this discussion chapter to comprehensively argue why I used participation as one of my methodological tools, how participation helped in the analysis along with how the theoretical notions developed through the participatory co-creation of data and the analysis of the complex mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing can provide new insights into the nature of mediated action, (inter)action, mediation, interpretation and valuation.

## 10.2 Lifestyle Sports: Methodological Background

Over the past 15 years, there has been a notable surge of academic interest in the broad and highly variable domain of *lifestyle sport* (Donnelly & Young 1988; Rinehart 1998, 2000; Anderson 1999; Heino 2000; Wheaton & Beal 2003; Wheaton 2003, 2004a, 2013; Booth 1994, 2001, 2003, 2004; Rinehart & Grenfell 2002; Beal & Weidman 2003; Humphreys 2003; Beal & Wilson 2004; Young & Dallaire 2008; Chiu 2009; Vivoni 2009; Partington, Partington & Olivier 2009; Knijnik et al. 2010; Stranger 2010; Edwards & Corte 2010; Nelson 2010). Despite contestation regarding the most appropriate moniker with which to refer to this broad cross section of physical activities, Wheaton (2004b) has championed the employment of *lifestyle sport* over more commercially prevalent terms such as ‘extreme sports’, ‘action sports’, or ‘adventure sports’. While initially, choice of terminology may seem inconsequential, after all, the particular sports that are said to belong to this grouping vary quite drastically, I am of the opinion that the employment of lifestyle, as opposed to extreme,

action or adventure, usefully mirrors the theoretical orientation of the majority of work dedicated to understanding this increasingly prevalent component of contemporary society.

The vast majority of empirical endeavours allocated to the investigation of lifestyle sport can be loosely classified as belonging to one of two particular types: sociocultural or psychological. More specifically and explicitly exemplified by the theoretical orientations of the work itself, interests have traditionally come from perspectives in sport sociology and sport psychology. Sport sociologists and socioculturally oriented analysts have approached the phenomena through the employment of methodologies and theoretical perspectives indicative of the disciplines themselves (Rinehart 2003; Downs 2003; Humphreys 2003; Palmer 2004; Robinson 2004; Kusz 2004; Vivoni 2009; Chiu 2009; Nelson 2010; West & Allin 2010). Resultantly, research has tended to employ the concept of subculture as a means to articulate the ways in which identity, argot, language, participation and ideology manifests in explicit relation to the sports themselves. While there have been valuable insights provided regarding subculturally oriented elements of the phenomena under investigation, a theoretical orientation towards broadly defined groups and classes of individuals has resulted in a lack of consideration about the actions and practices exemplified in the sports themselves.

While there may be a disciplinary orientation towards articulating commonalities in argot, ideology, attitude and ethos through the invocation of the concept of subculture, I would argue that the single component most indicative of membership to a particular subcultural group, and the primordial organising components in the outlining of similarities of varying type is the fact that the individuals in question all participate and/or engage in the same sport/activity. Furthermore, I would argue that analytical endeavours which employ overarching and broad

classificatory mechanism as a starting point are ontologically flawed and function to distort rather than articulate the local, personal and interpersonal realities of the individuals themselves.

Approaching the phenomenon of lifestyle sport from a subcultural perspective has comprehensive but implicit ramifications which are typically overlooked in much contemporary work on the subject. The implications manifest through the theoretical baggage the term carries with it, and the ways in which this theoretical baggage orients one's analytical perspective towards finding congruities between local and material realities and broadly defined group and class continuity.

A useful metaphor might be to consider empirical investigation as the piecing together of a puzzle. If we begin our construction by identifying all the pieces with linear edges and strategically placing them so as to construct the borders of our picture, we have irreducibly limited the boundaries of our project, resultantly, there is an implicit assumption that the remaining pieces have a place somewhere within the confines of our border. The picture may vary dramatically in terms of colour and composition, but in our definition of boundaries, we have determined the spatial scope of our construction project.

Following the establishment of the border, we might begin with a single piece of a particular shape, size and colour, in doing so, we have established a strategy for finding our next piece; our search is directed by an assumption that there exists a piece in our pile that fits both materially (the pieces will fit together) and in terms of composition (there will be some unifying component). The piece will probably be of the same or similar colour and may have indicative elements like linear continuity. Upon the location of multiple pieces which appear to interrelate in some manner, we have managed to construct a small portion of our puzzle, and we are working under the



assumption that this portion we have constructed has a logical place within the confines of the border first established.

As we continue to construct our puzzle (one for which the final product is a mystery), our puzzle piecing strategy is twofold; construct small sections through interconnecting individual pieces, while simultaneously working towards a determination of where our smaller sections fit into our established borders. As our work continues, a picture begins to emerge, and the emergence of this picture is simultaneously related to the individual sections we have managed to put together, and the ways in which these sections fit within the borders of our puzzle.

However, as we continue to construct the smaller sections, and place these sections within the confines of our border, we come to the realisation that we have too many pieces. Worse yet, the individual sections we have so dutifully and strategically constructed, do not seem to fit comfortably within the confines established at the start of our endeavour. The logical answer is that, through no fault of our own, we have been provided excess pieces and must dispose of the excess in favour of completing our project; or, we do not have enough pieces, and we must be missing some border pieces because there is not enough space.

The answers, justifications, deductions and strategies which have manifested during the project have all been coloured and permeated by a number of seemingly mundane and inconsequential assumptions; that the pieces provided construct a whole picture, that this picture has borders exemplified by material linearity and that the pieces will construct some unified whole without missing sections or ambiguities. The assumptions have been implicit and are guided by our comprehensive knowledge of the material composition of the other puzzles we have worked on. The strategies employed have proved useful in the past and logically, we assumed they would prove useful in the present.

However, our strategies have unequivocally defined the very nature of our project and, in doing so, have implicitly negated various other possibilities: that we have been provided only the pieces for a small section of another big puzzle, that our puzzle is not characterised by porous and permeable borders which are not linear or definable; or that there are complex holes which have been engineered into the body of our puzzle. While these are very real possibilities, our endeavour began with the establishment of borders and the assumption that each piece has a place within those borders. This starting point, which may have completely logical justifications, and, which has worked quite well on other puzzles, has coloured our perception of the pieces and our strategic construction of the puzzle itself. In this way, our prioritisation of the whole has coloured our perception of the component parts and imbued them with a valuation of belonging somewhere in service of the whole.

The ways in which analytical orientation (perception of the pieces) is coloured and permeated by conceptions of the whole is in no way a novel insight and is the grounds for analytical methods like grounded theory (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001) which champions situated analysis in the service of constructing theory rather than allowing theoretical perspectives to inadvertently situate analytical attention. While I would not advocate analytical methods which are theoretically void, I would champion the employment of theoretical perspectives which prioritise local and material realities in advance of over-arching categorical theorisation.

One instance where the theoretical baggage of subcultural classification disrupts the perception of local and material realities is when Vivoni (2009) claims:

A sign of solidarity is achieved when pieces of candle wax are purposely left behind to promote the upkeep and use of a skatespot to unknown skateboarders. By sharing wax with strangers, an ethic of care for the built environment unfolds. Urban land takes on new experiential meaning through the collective creation of skatespots.

(Vivoni 2009: 141)

This particular commentary exemplifies an interpretation of material phenomenon with an analytical orientation towards bridging local materiality with subcultural identity and continuity. In this instance, the local realities and material specificities of the existential phenomenon have been imbued with meaning through an attempt to correlate individual actions with theoretical concentrations which champion subcultural solidarity.

Resultantly, the analyst has interpreted the piece of the puzzle through a theoretical lens which implicitly values the piece as having a relevant and salient position within the borders of the puzzle.

Conceivably, two situations have transpired; first, wax has been left (intentionally or not), by an individual or group of skateboarders, at a particular location which features some physical structure which requires waxing (ledge or rail). Sometime after their leaving both the wax and the skatespot, another group of skateboarders has arrived at the location. Perceiving both a physical entity in need of wax application and the presence of wax in the immediate vicinity, this second group of skateboarders have picked up the wax and used it to prepare a surface for sliding.

In this case we have two temporally differentiated events which have transpired. In both cases, wax has been employed for the preparation of a surface for performing some variety of skateboard manoeuvres. Two different groups of skateboarders have used the same wax; wax which was left behind by the first group. There are admittedly a number of material continuities; both groups used the same wax, and, the wax was used for the same purpose (to prepare a surface for sliding). When approaching these two events from a theoretical perspective which prioritises a conceptualisation of subcultural solidarity and/or group identity, it would seem a plausible explanation that the first group of individuals left the wax *purposefully*, so as to be used by other *subcultural members* in the *collaborative* upkeep of a particular *skatespot*. Even if one overlooks the fact that I am acutely aware of the existence of the downtrodden

skateboarders who arrived at a new skatespot, only to realize that the candle wax they had industriously remembered to steal from their house, has been left behind; there are still a host of other realities which question the interpretation.

First, if the *skatespot* in question is located in an urban area, it is highly unlikely that the *symbolic wax* would exist for a duration of time that would see it employed in the upkeep of the spot itself. Municipal and/or local sanitation staff would surely perceive the misshapen and dirty hunk of wax as litter or garbage and quickly remove it as a task of employment. Second, most skatespots do not have pieces of wax lying around which can be employed by each individual group that frequents the location. Wax, if remembered when heading out for a session, is held onto and employed in application at various locations on any given day. If anything, the wax stays with the group of skateboarders and not the skatespot itself.

An orientation towards describing group solidarity, conformity and subcultural membership has coloured the interpretation of some material phenomenon. As a result, the phenomenon has been interpreted so as to affirm, solidify and/or support a conceptualisation of subcultural solidarity. A much more mundane event of a group of skateboarders forgetting their wax, and another group of skateboarders finding some wax has been imbued with symbolic value as a sign of solidarity when really, it is much more a sign of forgetfulness.

An approach to the investigation of kitesurfing from the same subcultural perspective would result in equally fallacious sociocultural abstractions which would not necessarily correlate with the local and material realities of the phenomenon itself. Take for instance the cooperation exemplified in assisted kite launch. An analyst may be disposed to interpret the phenomenon of assisted launch as exemplifying some general unity in group identity. It occurs almost without fail that individuals (who may not know each other), often help one another to launch their kites. Many times, they

explicitly go out of their way to assist in the launching and landing of kites. Moreover, the gesture (thumbs up) employed as a signal of preparedness (Figure 10.1), may be interpreted as carrying symbolic meaning along with its pragmatism. However, a prioritisation of the local and material realities would reveal that it is generally considered safer to have someone assist with launching a kite, and, resultantly, most people help each other launch and land kites. It is much less a phenomenon of group identity, collaboration or solidarity, and much more a matter of utility. Similarly, the specific hand gesture employed does not exemplify symbolic notions of thanks, solidarity or group togetherness but simply exemplifies that the individual is ready to take full control of their kite; it is primarily employed because it is a clear signal (that most people would recognise as distinct), which can be seen from a distance and cannot be interrupted by auditory noise created by fast moving wind.



Figure 10.1: Let go of my kite

### 10.3 Lifestyle Sports: Towards Localisation and Mediated Action

To be clear, this is not to suggest that one should not move (when possible) from micro oriented analyses of local and material realities to higher levels of abstraction; I am simply pointing out the necessity of beginning at a micro level and only after having mastered and/or thoroughly understood the complex and intersecting individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional trajectories which permeate even the most mundane of social actions should one attempt to move to a level of abstraction beyond the phenomenon itself. As Scollon (2008: 7) comprehensively articulates, “far too much of our social and cultural theorizing leaps to grand heights of abstraction long before we’ve actually mastered our analysis of local and material realities”. This is problematic, and Scollon (2008: 7) claims that “if our view of the ground gets fuzzy from our theoretical heights, we don’t mind because social and cultural theory is looking for just the broadest outlines of social groups, cultures, classes, or nations”. However, he explicitly notes that the majority of his own work “concerns the weakness of vision which comes from those dizzying heights” (Scollon 2008: 7)

This prioritisation of the local and material realities gave impetus to the approach taken in the investigation of the actions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing. While admittedly, my analysis of the video-ethnographic data collected and the claims articulated in the analysis and conclusion sections of this thesis may be chastised as being too local or too material, I would argue that this micro analysis of the actions and practices of the individuals who engage in the sport of kitesurfing must be the starting point of any endeavour to understand the phenomenon itself.

Too often, empirical efforts become clouded by grand abstractions about contestation and conformity (Chiu 2009; Heino 2000), processes of commoditisation and commercialisation (Wheaton 2004b; Howe 1998), sporting patriarchies (Booth, 2004) or the appropriation of space as “both practicing and contesting urban governance” (Vivoni 2009: 130). In doing so, lines between phenomenological

authenticity and paradigmatic orientation collide, intersect and intermingle, obscuring perspectives. Ideologies become a provision of analysts rather than an ethos of practitioners and personal statements championing a particular site of practice based on the fact that it is *free* (does not cost money) is imbued with symbolic connotations. They claim that it was clear that this response had more than one connotation: riding at the Flats was free in the sense that there was no monetary fee to ride, but it was also free from adult supervision, organization, and intrusion (Rinehart & Grenfell 2002: 306). This is not to suggest that the invocation of ideological, sociocultural, institutional and bureaucratic abstractions are analytically inappropriate, only that the invocation has occurred in advance of an understanding for the local and material realities exemplified in the actions and practices of practitioners themselves. As I have attempted to articulate above, the complex and dynamic actions and practices which exemplify these lifestyle sports are definitively worthy of academic investigation and more importantly, often function as the primary organising principles for situated elements of perception, interpretation and meaning-making.

## **10.4 Lifestyle Sports: Participation as Methodological Tool**

The methods employed in this video-ethnographic endeavour were both micro analytically oriented and simultaneously situated within my own participatory ontogenesis as a kitesurfer. While a micro and/or local analytical orientation stemmed from a thematic recognition of the higher level abstractions exemplified by much of the current literature regarding lifestyle sport, participatory methods of data co-creation comprehensively contributed to maintaining a local and material perspective throughout the process. In this way, data collection, co-creation and analysis were permeated by and indicative of my own subjective participatory experiences. Later, I will touch upon some of the limitations which manifested out of this participation based video-

ethnographic endeavour. However, now I would like to explicitly focus on the ways in which participation as a form of data collection and, as an ontological lens through which data analysis occurs can contribute to maintaining a localised perspective in theorisation while simultaneously situating analytical endeavours through maintaining a level of authenticity towards the data.

A primary method employed in the collection, co-creation and co-construction of data is one which has received strikingly minimal amounts of methodological consideration throughout the increasing proliferation of ethnography as a qualitative methodology; striking insofar as participation comprises one-half of the investigative method most explicitly correlated with ethnographic endeavours.

*Participant-observation* is arguably the empirical method most explicitly correlated with ethnography and despite alarming amounts of employment (even those not engaged in ethnography espouse participant-observation as a method), the participation half of the equation continues to be treated like an unwanted relative; it cannot be disposed of but efforts to marginalise its existence are ever present. While the notion itself stems from early anthropological endeavours wherein researchers found themselves forced to participate with sociocultural others in order to gain access to the ways in which they perceive, conceive, interpret and construct their unique realities, it seems like its continued employment has been simply to appease the unequivocal assertion that "all social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it" (Hammersly & Atkinson 1994: 249).

While there is an ontological acuity to Hammersly and Atkinson's assertion, one that would surely be supported by most who champion the employment of qualitative methodologies, a substantial discussion regarding the methodological utility of participation has somehow escaped the majority of ethnographic literature. As far as my



knowledge is concerned, ethnographers have traditionally championed participant-observation as an empirical method, not *participant-observation*, *(participant)-observation* or *participant (insofar as one is present)-observation*. Resultantly, I think it is time to treat participation with the same methodological reflexivity and contemplation that observation has historically received.

To highlight a lack of substantial attention does not equate with no attention at all. Powell (2006) and Pink (2011) have both highlighted various components of participation as exemplifying methodological rigour and as providing a perspective towards phenomena which cannot be gained in any other way. Powell (2006) explains how participation led to a kind of ‘performative understanding’ during her experiences with Taiko drumming. Pink (2011) has similarly championed specific methods of data collection which bring the researcher much closer to the embodied experience of the participants themselves, suggesting that one can draw on these experiences as a means to understanding. While discussions about the utility of participatory methods have been introduced, the majority of treatment has been as a means to gain insider-status or gain the trust of participants so as to gain access to their worlds. In the same vein, there have been comprehensive warnings about *going-native* and the negative ramifications that *too much* participation or *too authentic* participation might have on one’s ability to remain, dare I say it, objective.

Participation and/or *doing what your participants do* is here championed as an empirical methodological tool based on the localisation of ontological perspective provided by the practice; first, I would like to dispel some of the apparent incongruities exemplified in conceiving of participation as dangerous or threatening to one’s empirical position.

Arguments in favour of avoiding complete participation or *going-native* hinge on the incongruous assertion that authentically engaging with participants as people or

becoming too involved in the worlds of one's participants may question the validity of findings by nature of the fact that one's perspective on the phenomenon has been distorted too much to be analytical. On these grounds, one should maintain a comfortable level of distance or separation thereby contributing to the analytical rigour of the endeavour itself. However, warnings of this manner implicitly commit two indisputable fallacies: first, there is an implied correlation between analytical rigour and an objective (or partially objective) empirical perspective, second, there is an assumption that while the participants which comprise the focus of the investigation may have highly situated sociocultural life-worlds, the researcher comes to the site of investigation as a *tabula rasa*.

Regarding analytical rigour and the championing of an objective empirical perspective; if one's methodological disposition is to employ ethnographic methods in an objective manner, it seems as though the ontological and epistemological grounds of ethnomethodology have been explicitly called into question. One's impetus for the employment of qualitative methodologies should be founded on the correlation between one's onto-epistemology, and that which the methodologies implicitly espouse. The mere championing of ethnography as a method of investigation rests squarely on the grounds that reality is conceived of as socioculturally co-constructed. Resultantly, knowledge about people, processes, societies and cultures, is equally socioculturally co-constructed. The moment one espouses an ontological orientation towards recognising reality as an object that is accessed through perceptual faculties, and/or, something that exists existentially; and, knowledge as a cartographic endeavour of charting its character, one is in the wrong science, or at very least, the wrong methodology. There is a comparable incongruity in the other implicit fallacy.

The primary impetus for the employment of ethnographic methods is the explicit analytical orientation towards investigating the ways in which a particular group

of people act, interact, communicate, live, experience, interpret, perceive and construe their socioculturally situated realities. As such, there is an implication that this group of people do and think things that are worth knowing about, and the means to accessing knowledge about these things is to participate (minimally), observe, ask questions and take notes. If these methods are employed with some rigour, there is an assumption that one will gain access to their socioculturally situated life-worlds where prioritisation, interpretation and the valuation of existential phenomena may exemplify some pertinent components about their actions, practices and society as a whole. The danger of going-native is intimately related to the authentic taking on of their life-world perspective, which would hinder one's analytical capabilities. However, claiming that acculturation to their (participants') way of being would obscure analytical judgement is one of two things; a marginalisation of their way of being (and if this is the case, why is the study occurring in the first place), or, a refutation that the researcher comes to the field with an equally pervasive, socioculturally situated life-world of their own.

First, claims regarding the fallibility of taking on the life-world perspective of one's participants as obscuring analytical ability are unsustainable arguments with implications that the human being and their ideological, social and cultural attributes are unequivocally dichotomous. It is an assertion that a single social actor must unquestionably occupy one position or another and a refutation of the possibilities of the multiplicity of identity and/or ideology. A large body of empirical work has clearly explicated the fact that social actors can and often do produce multiple differentiated identity elements simultaneously (Norris 2011) and that aspects of identity are not dichotomous and concrete but rather are flexible, changeable and permeable. While certain identity elements can be produced which are more or less stable, it is incorrect to assume that identity and the ideologies associated with identity are concrete or unchangeable.

Thus, one does not have to completely occupy the life-world of participants at the expense of, or in sacrifice of an empirical or analytical orientation. If this were the case, there would be an implicit problem with efforts to empirically approach social phenomena in which the researcher has a personal and/or sociocultural background. As this would seriously question the epistemological value of most social science research, it must simply be that this is not the case.

Second, the researcher does not and cannot ever approach a research site as a *tabula rasa*. It seems unnecessary to invoke the commonly accepted position that one's socialisation, acculturation, language, cognition and history affect the nature of perception, interpretation and analysis, however, the point is worth articulating. Kenneth Burke (1966: 5) in his discussion of 'terministic screens' artfully describes the ontological problem of claiming purity and clarity in perceptual, interpretive and existential reality, and thus, bears articulation in his terms;

...can we bring ourselves to realize just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past, combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present? . . . To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naive verbal realism that refuses to let him realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.

(Burke 1966:5)

While Burke's particular occupation is with language and symbols, the passage clearly points to the futility in conceptualising reality, and resultantly empirical endeavours as devoid of the permeation of language, symbols, history and culture. While acceptance of this assertion could plausibly come in what Wertsch (1998) might call a half-full or half-empty perspective, I am predisposed to simply highlight the bearings of this statement on qualitative methodologies and more specifically, ethnography.

One can never approach a research site as devoid of ideologies, assumptions or ontological and epistemological orientations. Efforts to do so bring the researcher closer and closer to a positivist paradigmatic approach. However, even the extremes of positivism are subject to critique through identifying the effects of instrumentation and design on the empirical endeavour. If we are to exercise a critical position in relation to this fact, we can only hope to articulate the complexities of ideologies, assumptions and onto-epistemological orientations in the service of approaching a level of empirical transparency.

The brief treatment of arguments against going-native should explicitly highlight the incongruity and fallibility of their nature. As a result, below I outline a number of theoretical notions in support of *participation* or *doing what your participant's do* as a particularly valuable form of data collection and one which should be employed (when possible) alongside other forms of data collection in an empirical attempt to more affectively, personally, and kinaesthetically understand the phenomena under investigation.

As far as the arguments suggesting that one can never be in a purely observational position on the grounds that “*all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it” (Hammersly & Atkinson 1994: 249), I would suggest that it is equally difficult to conceptualise participatory methods as purely or holistically *participation*. First, the grounds for one's presence in the research site unquestionably invoke empirical notions of observation and these manifest in complexes of data collection tools, and all the actions associated with recording, observing and asking questions which might not occur in a purely participatory endeavour. While it may be possible to suspend analytical orientation momentarily, say while engaged in the immediate real-time actions and practices of kitesurfing, the momentary affective, haptic, somatic and

kinaesthetic experience does not imply the inability to retrospectively and reflexively consider, analyse and articulate experience. Furthermore, problematising retrospective analyses and/or interpretation would have grave ramifications for all kinds of empirical endeavours as one could quite easily argue that all note taking, analysis and interpretation occur as temporally isolated from the phenomenon itself.

My embodied and experiential participation during substantial portions of this research endeavour coupled with the co-creation of audio-video data explicitly employed for a micro-level analysis of mediated action has enabled an analytical and interpretive orientation much more in-line with the haptic, somatic and kinaesthetic nature of the phenomena itself. First, experientially learning the ways in which particular mediated actions manifest in the differentiation in kite-flying trajectory and movement within the wind window has enabled the perception, analysis and interpretation of mediated actions which might not be visible to the naked eye. In other words, through engaging in the actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing, I have developed an acuity of perception whereby otherwise indecipherable mediated actions are explicitly realisable in the mediational means and cultural tools through which they take place. To employ one of the terms outlined in my analysis, I have developed a system of mediated action which has attuned perceptual faculties to components of visual phenomena which might go unnoticed, prioritised or valued otherwise. While outlining this analytical orientation could be chastised as obscuring the ability to remain at an objective distance from the data itself, I would argue that all perceptual phenomena is perceived, interpreted and construed through systems of mediated action, and the manifestation or cultivation of kitesurfing as a system of mediated action which occurred experientially, over-time and in explicit correlation with multiple interconnected mediational means, has provided a useful lens through which to analyse and interpret the data. If I had not developed and/or cultivated the manifestation of a

system of mediated action of this type, this does not mean that I would interpret, analyse and construe the data in a more objective manner, only that I would do so through other systems of mediated action which might be less congruous with the phenomena itself.

To exemplify this notion, I once again invoke the commentary of Jean Bazin (2003: 424) who acutely argues that “it is not true that I am observing, in this way, raw behaviours not yet interpreted, as if I were observing graphic signs laid out on this page only without reading them”. Rather, he explicitly acknowledges the fact that “I know that certain people are waiting for somebody, that others are going to catch their train, others the subway, on their way to work, the movies and so on” (Bazin 2003: 424).

It is important to recognise the gravity of this statement regarding the nature of perception and interpretation. As ethnography has become increasingly employed in venues which deviate quite drastically from the impetus for its development (primarily in the service of researching cultural others), there are a number of problematic components which manifest as a result; components which Bazin (2003) explicitly deals with in his article *Questions of Meaning*.

Bazin’s continual invocation of the notion of *code*, and the implications exemplified through his problematising of the distinctions between perception, interpretation and meaning raise a number of salient methodological components which must be treated as increasingly relevant with the employment of ethnographic methods in social science research.

In both the real-time experience of material phenomena and, in the analysis of data (field notes, video-recordings, interviews), it is simply not the case that one is observing raw phenomena, not yet interpreted. One draws upon, or perceives through multiple and multifarious systems of mediated action and in so doing, makes intelligible, complex material phenomena.

For example, consider the coding of discursive phenomena (some piece of discourse, be it a transcript of an interview or something written) in the employment of grounded theory as a method of analysis. It is not true that the analyst is observing graphic signs laid out on a page not yet interpreted, they undeniably approach the data from a position of knowledge; knowledge of the language itself, knowledge of discursive conventions, knowledge of the rhetorical situation, knowledge of the context in which the material phenomena manifest (be it an interview or some impetus for the piece of writing). This knowledge (systems of mediated action) permeates the actions of coding and lives in the articulation of the classificatory codes which become established through the endeavour. Does this mean that the analysis of data and the practice of coding are affected by these systems of mediated action? Yes. Does this make the endeavour itself problematic? Not necessarily.

Ethnographically based inquiry is explicitly championed on the grounds that the experiences of the researcher (subjective experiences with participants) will be of analytical value. If this was not the case, given the affordances of contemporary technology, it might be more methodologically sound to employ some collection of recording devices alone in efforts to maintain a comfortable distance from the phenomena itself. However, one's presence in the research site as a participant-observer provides valueable affective, immediate and sensory experiences which provide a type of subjective data which might not be accessible otherwise. To invoke Pink (2011) and Powell's (2006) commentary, being present and participating with participants can bring the researcher closer to their 'embodied experience' or cultivate a 'performative understanding' which cannot be gained any other way.

Engaging in similar mediated actions and practices, or *doing what your participants do* (Norris, Geenen & Pirini *forthcoming*), contributes to the manifestation of a system of mediated action which more accurately correlates with the phenomena



itself. In so doing, the analyst learns (through experience) about the kinds of valuations, interpretations and meaning-attributions of participants in a way that is more immediate, sensory, affective and embodied. Through this experience, particular facets of the phenomenon become disambiguated; the utility of actions, the meaning of actions, the value of practices, various mediational interrelationships, and the value of cultural tools, reveal themselves (if only in part). Resultantly, this experience can and should be drawn upon as an impetus for further and more structured inquiry (because in the immediacy of experience we do miss a wealth of pertinent material components). Mediated Action Theory, Mediated Discourse Analysis and Multimodal (inter)action analysis are implicitly built on this notion: that the strategic isolation of component parts of various phenomena can be useful in articulating the complexities in their character.

The reason that I am discussing the methodological position here, is that it was specifically *my participation* in the sport of kitesurfing, which allowed me to interpret the data and to develop the theoretical notions outlined in this thesis. Participation was in fact indispensable in providing an affective, embodied and immediate understanding about the complex actions and practices exemplifying the sport itself. Further, through the participation, I began to learn the system of mediated action of kitesurfing discussed in chapter 6.

Growing out of the manifestation of this system of mediated action, participation supported the analysis of the ways in which an individual conceives, perceives and interprets locational elements in terms of actionary pertinence. Through engaging in the actions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing, I learned the relevance and salience of how locational elements contribute to the manifestation of particular conditions considered safe and favourable.

The valuation of conditions is inextricably intertwined with the mediational means through which action occurs, and the interactive structures between a kitesurfer

and the wind/water through complex interrelated mediational means is primarily a somatic, haptic and kinaesthetic phenomena. Without the embodied experience (feeling the effect of wind inconsistency through the mediational means themselves), the understanding about the relevance of particular locational elements would lack the fundamental phenomenological component; their relevance to the real-time actions and practices of kitesurfing.

In a similar vein, learning the mediational interrelationship in real-time through doing what my participants do, enabled a more detailed and structured analysis of the data. It is only through learning the ways in which particular mediated action manifest in specific kite movement that I have been able to comprehensively analyse only partially visible mediated actions in the materiality of the mediational means themselves. This ability to read mediated actions through the mediational means themselves (most specifically through camera angle orientation) provided indispensable analytical utility.

Participating with participants on the water during sessions enabled a more comprehensive, in-the-moment, real-time, affective and embodied understanding of the phenomena themselves. These participatory methods are explicitly in line with Thrope and Rinehart's (2010) championing of the employment of non-representational theory (Thrift 2008), whereby the analyst allocates considerably more attention to the ways in which the experiences of practitioners are in-the-moment, immediate, material and experiential. Bypassed is the disposition to articulate actions, practices and behaviours as *representational* of other things through the development of an embodied understanding regarding the local and material realities that permeate the real-time mediated actions themselves. Of particular salience in recognising the utility and of mediated actions is the notion that all action is primarily (inter)active by nature.

A core conceptual notion in Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) is that all action is interactive. While this delineation seems counter-intuitive within the paradigmatic traditions exemplified by the majority of research in fields like applied language studies, applied linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis and literacy studies, contemporary efforts in multimodality implicitly highlight this notion which Norris (2011) articulates more explicitly.

While there has always been an explicit acknowledgement that social actors interact with texts which employ primarily linguistic mediational means, there has been a notable aversion to conceptualising inanimate objects of a less representative or symbolic nature as manifesting similar interactive structures. However, the extension of Halliday's tri-functionally based theorisation regarding social semiotics, and the Norris's (2011) articulation of the ways in which all actions are primarily (inter)actions with objects, the environment and/or other social actors, has illuminated the need to better understand the ways in which this interaction occurs.

In kitesurfing, while there are most certainly interactions which occur off the water between social actors primarily through linguistics and/or other embodied mediational means, and, there are less explicit interactions between social actors while engaged in kitesurfing on the water, a large proportion of the interaction which occurs, occurs with and through complex mediational means. Theoretically speaking, this is slightly different than interactions which occur between two social actors, insofar as one would struggle to imbue components of the environment, objects, forces and cultural tools with notions of agency, affect, intention or any other primarily human attribute. However, this does not presuppose that social actors actively, consciously, and explicitly experience, read, interpret and respond to perceptual stimuli manifest through objects, forces, materials and the environment. In this way, the interactive structure can be likened to a more traditional interaction between social actors, only that the

interpretation of meaning or the valuation of the material phenomenon is less describable through reference to the abstract structures of the mediational means through which the interaction occurs (unlike contemporary theorisation in applied linguistics and other linguistic sub-disciplines).

If we consider the communicative structure through theoretical notions championed in MAT, MDA and MMT, we take the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis.

#### **10.4.1 Lifestyle sports: Kitesurfing as system of mediated action**

An experienced kitesurfer who has come to internalise the system of mediated action with some level of acuity, *sees* when another kitesurfer is overpowered (in the mediated action), *sees* the performance of a back-mobe (as a particular complex of mediated actions), *feels* the unsuitability of fluctuating wind velocity (which is permeated and/or structured in explicit connection with certain cultural tools and the system of mediated action itself) and values the perceptible phenomena through a complex schematic agglomerate which has manifest over time as materially, spatially and temporally situated and in explicit connection with particular mediational means and cultural tools.

It is not only in the real-time mediated actions and their interpretation that systems of mediated action manifest and permeate perception and valuation; systems of mediated action extend beyond the materially, spatially and temporally situated specialised practices to other facets of perceptible phenomena. Dark storm clouds in the distance *mean* that an increase of wind is on the way. In conditions of questionable favourability, the storm clouds *mean* good things (winds) are approaching. In conditions of 30+ knots, these storm clouds might *mean* dangerous circumstances are going to arise. Most importantly, the valuation occurs through the system of mediated action as a

complex and dynamic schematic agglomerate and valuation occurs in explicit connection with the system itself.

Paramount in the permeation of systems of mediated action as lenses through which material phenomena are perceived, interpreted and construed is that the structures of the system itself manifest in real-time mediated actions. This notion is explicitly in line with Wertsch (1991, 1998) and Scollon's (1998, 2001a) affirmation that sociocultural and institutional structures as well as historical trajectories materialise in real-time through mediated action. Similarly, the notion explicitly correlates with Vygotsky's (1976, 1987) conception that cognition and/or mental functioning first appears on the intermental plane (sociocultural) and later concretises and internalises on the intramental plane.

The relevance and salience of cultural tools as permeating structures of cognition, mental functioning, mediated action and practices is a central premise to all theorisation in MAT, MDT and MMT. This manifests methodologically in the unit of analysis which is always and unequivocally the social actor acting through multiple interrelated mediational means and has been extended in my articulation of systems of mediated action introduced by Norris (2012). MMT provides the most comprehensive theoretical framework with which to investigate 'lifestyle sports' and the methodological tools articulated therein seem most appropriate to employ in elucidating the complexities of mediated actions and practices as they manifest in real-time. Furthermore, a central component of 'lifestyle sport' and one which is continually referenced in the majority of literature is that "the sports are based around the consumption of new objects (boards, bikes, disks), often involving new technologies . . . yet embracing change and innovation" (Wheaton 2004b: 11). Simultaneously, the technological advancements "have resulted in rapid developments in many lifestyle sports, such as the fragmentation and diversification of culture, and its forms of identity.

This fragmentation can produce new scenes, or even the creation of new activities” (Wheaton 2004b: 11). While traditionally, efforts investigating these notions of technological advancement and object-use have centred on structures of consumption and institutionalisation, it seems time to situate analytical efforts squarely within the moments in time where fragmentation, diversification and identity manifest; in real-time mediated action.

#### **10.4.2 Lifestyle Sports: Space to Place**

Similarly, contemporary lifestyle sports have been characterised as taking place in unbounded spaces (Wheaton 2004b; Vivoni 2009; Chiu 2009) in direct contestation to the types of playing fields, arenas or explicitly designated areas which exemplify more traditional western sports. There have been prioritisations of the intimate relationships developed with nature through participation in various sports, arguments towards the harmonic nature of the practitioner in a rhythmic dance (Brymer & Grey 2009) and claims towards the centrality of open-spaces which exemplify the freedom sports themselves. However, in much of the representation oriented discussions, little attention has been allocated (save for the appropriation of city space in skateboarding), to investigating the ways in which practitioners value and interpret aspects of the natural environment in explicit relation to the sports themselves and resultantly, to the constellations of mediational means through which they are performed.

Participatory methods employed in this video-ethnographic endeavour supported the analysis of the ways in which practitioners conceive, perceive and value aspects of the environment as being salient and/or relevant for participation in the sport. Elements of the natural environment play a central role in kitesurfing, and practitioners come, through the manifestation of a system of mediated action, to explicitly value components of space. The pertinence of the natural environments manifests in and

through the complex interrelationships between mediated action, mediational means and the centrality of natural materials, forces and processes in that equation.

#### **10.4.3 Lifestyle sport: Interrelationship of mediational means**

Not only do practitioners interpret, read and value aspects of the environment in specialised ways exemplifying the permeation of systems of mediated action as perceptual lenses, they also *employ* aspects of the environment *as* mediational means. As has been alluded to in discussions about the appropriation of space and the drawing on the affordances of the natural environment, lifestyle sport practitioners explicitly employ aspects of the natural environment *in connection with* equipment, objects and materials explicitly designed to assist employment. This process whereby social actors draw upon the affordances of the natural environment through employment as a mediational means is complex, dynamic, and intimately connected with and through the other mediational means through which mediated action occurs. Resultantly, it is analytically paramount to consider the complex interrelationships which manifest in and through mediated action, and the individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes and trajectories which manifest therein.

Through learning to employ natural elements as mediational means in the performance and undertaking of mediated action, social actors learn to read, interpret and (inter)act with aspects of the environment through complex and intersecting mediational means contributing to the realisation of salience and the valuation of particular components as relevant in the practice. The learning trajectories and development of proficiency are intimately intertwined with the materiality of the objects employed in kitesurfing and comprehensively affect structures of perception, interpretation and valuation through the manifestation of a system of mediated action.

#### **10.4.4 Lifestyle sport: Learning a new system of mediated action**

The centrality of mediational means, in this case both natural and man-made, cannot be overstated in the manifestation of the system of mediated action. Furthermore, as a primarily haptic, somatic and kinaesthetic phenomenon, a pivotal component to understanding the relevance and/or salience of elements of the natural environment, the role they play in mediation and their centrality in the mediational interrelationship is experiencing the materiality in real-time through the undertaking of mediated action. Participatory methods explicitly contributed to recognising the salience and relevance of various aspects of the environment through the undertaking of real-time mediated actions, contributing to the maintenance of a local analytical perspective and further supporting the analysis of the real-time in-the-moment mediated actions of practitioners.

### **10.5 Conclusion: Participation as Methodological Tool to Analyse Lifestyle Sports**

Participatory methods have been particularly useful in contributing to the maintenance of a local analytical perspective prioritising the salience and relevance of existential phenomena in a manner that is more in-line with practitioners themselves. Resultantly, there is a permeation of utility in and through the analysis of data and in the development of the theoretical notions outlined in this thesis. As previously argued as the impetus for the study, lifestyle sports exemplify a complex and fruitful site of investigation and with the continuous articulation regarding the centrality of equipment, Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) provides an explicitly useful perspective from which to approach phenomena of this nature.

Above, I have championed the employment of participatory methods as a particularly valuable methodological tool which can be employed alongside other empirical methods to provide a more embodied, experiential and local perspective



through the manifestation of a system of mediated action more explicitly congruent with the phenomenon itself. Resultantly, the analyst can bring this experiential understanding to the analysis of data. I have articulated the problem of conceptualising participation as dangerous and the fallacy of marginalising participatory methods as empirically valuable. Through the exercise of experiential self-reflexivity and when used in support of other empirical methods, participation can provide a valuable methodological tool in ethnographic endeavours.

# **11 Conclusion: Kitesurfing, Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

## **11.1 Introduction to Conclusion: Kitesurfing, Action, (Inter)action and Mediation**

In the previous chapters, I have introduced a number of conceptual notions which implicitly allude to the ontogenesis of the social actor as a kitesurfer. First, through mediated actions and the development of proficiency through multiple intersecting pedagogical trajectories, a particular system of mediated action manifests as a complex schematic aggregate through which social actors perceive, interpret and construe complex and interrelated phenomena. Second, that through the acquisition of a particular system of mediated action, social actors come to conceptualise aspects of space and the environment in explicit connection to the actions and practices which have come to exemplify the system of mediated action itself. In so doing, social actors conceive of locational elements in terms of their interrelationship and actionary pertinence. Third, I have articulated the concept of the mediational interrelationship as paramount in the investigation of mediation, thereby forcing a re-clarification of the ecological unit of analysis. Simultaneously, I have clarified some ambiguities relating to the classification of mediational means and have posited that the term cultural tool is best employed on the same level of abstraction as Scollon's (2001a) conception of practice. Thus, cultural tool unequivocally invokes the sociocultural, historical and institutional processes which have come to exemplify a particular object's disposition-for-use as a mediational means.

Regarding the acquisition of proficiency and/or the development of skill, I have suggested that social actors learn how to co-create, through multiple interconnected cultural tools, complex mediational means which are employed in the undertaking of

other mediated actions and practices. In kitesurfing, the complex mediational means which are co-created manifest in the form of a particular response-feel which is then employed in subsequent mediated actions and practices. This complex mediational means (force/lift) materialises through the intersection of social actor and the mediational interrelationship. The mediational means have a contingent and temporally fleeting materiality and therefore, must be continuously re-created and re-constructed through a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel.

In this chapter, I provide a summation of the theoretical principles introduced and explicated in the analysis sections while articulating how the component parts contribute to new insights regarding mediated action, mediation, spatiality and learning.

## **11.2 Kitesurfing as a System of Mediated Action: Generalizable Findings**

The concept of a system of mediated action as introduced by Norris (2012) has been more thoroughly articulated and theorised as a means to explicate the ways in which mediated actions and practices come to acquire socioculturally co-produced and historically instantiated patterns of systematicity through complex sets of interrelations in and between specialised practices. Thus, a *system of mediated action* is a theoretical construct or a heuristic which can be employed to articulate how individual practices (mediated actions with a history) are permeated by and have a contingent classificatory existence with a panopoly of other practices.

In my articulation of the characteristic properties of all systems of mediated action, first and foremost is the acknowledgment that a system of mediated action is a theoretical construct and as such, has ontological character only insofar as it is used to articulate the complex and dynamic relationships between particular classes of material phenomena. As such, a system of mediated action is a heuristic unit employed in describing phenomena in theoretical terms.

A system of mediated action refers to a socioculturally instantiated collection of interrelated specialised practices that are materially, spatially and temporally situated. Systems of mediated action manifest in real-time through social actors acting in the world and naturally develop patterns of regularity and typicality. The patterns of regularity and typicality are socially constituted and thereby flexible insofar as systematic relationships between practices are relatively stable but may change over time. All mediated actions and practices are perceived and interpreted through systems of mediated action. As such, a system of mediated action describes not only the ontological interrelationship of practices as materially, spatially and temporally situated, but also the experiential lens through which social actors perceive and interpret material phenomena. Thus, the system is both a heuristic to articulate interrelationships between practices and, a complex and dynamic schematic aggregate through which perception occurs.

Therefore, there are two irreducible components of the concept: a system of mediated action as a systematic relationship between practices and, a system of mediated action as a complex schematic aggregate functioning as a lens through which material phenomena is perceived, construed and interpreted.

Going further, I have found that there are four primary characteristics of systems of mediated action:

1. Systems of mediated action develop to serve socio-cultural, economic, industrial, commercial, educational, or creative functions;
2. Systems of mediated action change in direct connection with mediational means/cultural tools;
3. Systems of mediated action manifest embedded systems; and,
4. Systems of mediated action manifest some of the same actions as belonging to and/or creating different practices.

Thus, the concept of a system of mediated action is a higher-order heuristic unit which can be employed to articulate the socioculturally co-constituted and historically instantiated systematicity which has manifested in and through multiple intersecting and interrelated practices.

My articulation of kitesurfing as a system of mediated action allocated considerable attention to the ways in which practices within the system are definable and describable both in terms of material, spatial and temporal regularities exemplified in the practices themselves, and, the valuation of a practice as distinct in explicit connection to a panopoly of other practices. Thus, riding is not only realised through regularised and typified aggregates of mediated actions, but also, in contrast to other practices like jumping and transitioning. As such, the simple identification of a particular practice invokes not only aggregates of mediated actions with a history, but also, values the aggregates of mediated actions as distinct in contrast to other practices within the system of mediated action.

Simultaneously, the valuation of a practice as distinct in opposition to others within the system, also implicitly allocates continuity in and between the practices as being of a similar type. Classification of type explicitly invokes the concept of system of mediated action.

### **11.3 Kitesurfing Location and Actionary Pertinence: Generalizable Findings**

Regarding the analysis of space, first I have argued for a re-conceptualisation oriented towards approaching the analysis of space using mediated action as the organising analytical principle. In doing so, I transgressed the thematic and paradigmatic ambiguities exemplified in contemporary theorisation in human geography. Employment of mediated action as the analytical organising principle

orients attention towards the ways in which space and spatiality figure in mediated action.

Components of the physical environment are integral in both the decision making process regarding the selection of a location for a session, and to the aggregates of mediated actions and practices which exemplify kitesurfing as a system of mediated action. As such, my approach to the analysis of space has been explicitly situated within how, why and in what ways, components of space are relevant for kitesurfers and thus, kitesurfing.

I have argued that geographical spaces become kitesurfing locations through mediated action. Furthermore, in the process of space to place and the manifestation of a kitesurfing location, social actors imbue, embed and value material components of the existential world as locational elements through a characterisation of saliency in relation to mediated action. Thus, material components of the natural and man-made environment, acquire particular characterisation in direct relation and relative to various complexes of mediated action.

A locational element is a relevant or salient material component of a kitesurfing location. Relevance and salience are primarily determined through the bearing a single element has on the mediated actions of kitesurfing and therefore, through the role it plays in the establishment of particular conditions which manifest through complex interrelationships.

Locational elements play an integral role in the decision making process and are read, considered and re-read in complex and interrelated ways. While locational elements range dramatically in the nature of their materiality, all locational elements have some existential, perceptual or cognitive materiality. The nature of this materiality in relation to mediated action becomes a composite facet of consideration in the determination of when and where to go kitesurfing.

Locational elements are conceptualised and categorised in coordination with components of materiality, temporal longevity and predictability. As a result, social actors tend to conceptualise locational elements as one of three types; stable, predictable or contingent. A stable locational element is an element with enduring materiality relative to contemporary understandings about geographic, industrial and social processes of change. While stable locational elements are not concrete or finite, they are conceptualised as having temporal longevity. A predictable locational element is an element with reasonably foreseeable materiality relative to contemporary models for the prediction of geographic, atmospheric and hydrological activity. While considerably more variable than stable locational elements, their materiality is conceptualised as fluctuating within a realm of probability. A contingent locational element is an element with relational and/or unpredictable materiality relative to the ebbs and flows of contemporary social life. Contingency can be in relation to other contingent elements and is often affected and influenced by stable and predictable elements.

Regarding the selection of location, I have argued that locational elements and the nature of their materiality are considered in terms of their actionary pertinence. Resultantly, particular interrelationships between locational elements, their conditions and the affect that these have on the real-time mediated actions of kitesurfing are supreme organising components. Furthermore, I have shown how the interrelationship which establishes options for actionary pertinence does so in explicit connection with a panoply of other cultural tools and how the relationship effects mediated action.

Actionary pertinence is a particularly important concept that relates both to the relevance and/or salience of locational elements as they pertain to particular complexes of mediated action.

The precise manner in which a locational element acquires actionary pertinence occurs through the system of mediated action as a cognitive lens. Further, the system of

mediated action itself primarily manifests in correlation with and through complexes of specific cultural tools which have come to be employed as mediational means in mediated action.

Wertsch (1998) in following Vygotsky (1987) explicitly highlights the arguably single most relevant conceptualisation offered by a Vygotskian sociocultural psychology; that the cultural tools and/or mediational means through which action occurs simultaneously affect the cognitive structures of the human mind. The invocation of the concept of system of mediated action extends this conceptualisation insofar as cultural tools structure the nature of perception and our valuation of material phenomenon.

When considered in relation to actionary pertinence, it becomes increasingly clear that the relevance and/or salience of locational elements and their consideration occurs through systems of mediated action, subsidiary or embedded systems of mediated action, and resultantly, through the material composition of the cultural tools which have come to be irreducibly connected to the systems of mediated action. Take the wind for example, it is enough to conceptualise the wind as of high actionary pertinence based on the fact that kitesurfers need wind to kitesurf. And, it is enough to consider the fact that kites were explicitly manufactured to harness the energy of the wind; a reasonably logical assertion. However, where things become slightly more complex is in the ways in which the material composition of particular cultural tools (in this case a kite), has unequivocally affected and structured the perception of an environmental element. Wind being present is not an existential assertion about the existence of moving air, but rather, a claim about the particular character of the air and whether it is of an adequate speed to employ a kite as a propulsive mechanism. Similarly, good wind, or bad wind, is not a characterisation based on ethics or morality, but a valuation which occurs as an extension of the kite as a cultural tool. The wind is



only good or bad for kitesurfers who endeavour to employ the wind (with a constellation of other cultural tools) as mediational means in the undertaking of mediated action.

One might even suggest that this could be characterised as an unintended consequence; that the material configuration of kites which were conceivably first employed for hedonistic exhilaration and fun, have been internalised and permeate cognitive structure and perception itself. Simultaneously, the cultural tools permeate and affect the valuation of previously valueless elements of the physical world. Mountains are not playgrounds, they are mountains; however, a perception of the affordances that mountains might offer occurs through an internalised extension of multiple cultural tools and their particular relation to a system of mediated action. Resultantly, mountains are playgrounds, for snowboarders, skiers, climbers and snowmachiners. However, the material composition of the mountain itself will be valued quite differently by the various sport enthusiasts. A great snowboarding mountain may be an average climbing mountain; this is primarily because the valuation of this locational element occurs through cognitive structures which have manifest through the cultural tools themselves.

Geographic spaces become kitesurfing places through mediated action and through the valuation of locational elements and the conditions which manifest through their interrelationship. Certain spaces become kitesurfing places as a result of the ways in which locational elements (salient material components of the space) co-create and interrelate in the manifestation of conditions which are deemed favourable. This helps to account for why it is that certain spaces become kitesurfing places while others do not.

The introduction of the concept of locational element, the ways in which locational elements are considered in terms of actionary pertinence and the ways in

which locational elements contribute to the manifestation of material conditions considered favourable, supports an ontological orientation towards understanding the ways in which places are created through use. In this vein, mediated action seems a logical organising analytical principle through which to undertake the analysis of space. Simultaneously, an orientation to the ways in which spaces are used, unequivocally orients analytical attention to the ways in which locational elements are often also employed as mediational means.

Departing from the ways in which space becomes place and from the ways in which locational elements are conceived, next I have argued for a re-conceptualisation of the ecological unit of analysis through championing mediation as always and only a property of interrelationship.

## **11.4 Mediational Interrelationship: Generalizable Findings**

The mediated action has been championed as the most useful unit of sociocultural analysis because it preserves in a microcosm, the complexity and dynamism of the individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes and trajectories which permeate the action itself. As such, the mediated action as the ecological unit of analysis promotes an anti-reductionist sentiment and forces the consideration of various intersecting trajectories without allocating undue attention to any element in isolation. Wertsch (1991, 1995a, 1998) acknowledges the analytical necessity of isolating components of the mediated action but stresses that this isolation must only occur with an explicit eye towards how the components fit together.

In my analysis of mediated action and resultantly, mediation, I have claimed that there is an ontological fallacy in conceptualising mediational means outside of the confines of mediated action itself. Similar to Scollon's (1998, 2001a) description, I claim that mediational means always and only manifest in and through mediated action.

To conceptualise mediational means outside of mediated action is primarily a conceptualisation of objects, artefacts, materials or entities since, by their very nature, mediational means only exist as such through mediated action.

While the classification may seem arbitrary at times, conceptualising mediational means as only *in* and *through* mediated action has some relevant and important consequences regarding both the acuity of terms, and in the supposed ambiguity exemplified in discussion of mediational means which vary dramatically in terms of their material character.

Mediational means as only existing in and through mediated action helps rectify some of the ambiguities traditionally associated with the concept itself. First, it negates a course of investigation which would seek to articulate categories of mediational means based on their materiality. Objects, artefacts, materials or entities may (or may not) have a material character exemplified by temporal longevity and stability, however, mediational means always and only have a real-time, one-time only mediational character (how it is used). In this way, a classification of mediational means would unequivocally be a classification of how an object is used, and, as has been continuously exemplified in multiple empirical investigations, objects can be and often are used in vastly differentiated manners.

Moving a step further, I have explicitly argued that an object's mediating character or how it functions in mediation is always in direct interconnection and interrelation with a panopoly of other mediational means which manifest in and through real-time mediated action. With mediation as always a character of interrelationship, mediational means only exist as such in direct connection with multiple other mediational means, further negating the necessity of classification.

Of importance is the conceptualisation of mediation as primarily a property of interrelationship. While I acknowledge that the interconnectedness or interrelatedness of

mediational means has been implicitly alluded to in previous discussions, championing this conceptualisation further supports the anti-reductionist perspective on which the mediated action as the unit of analysis sits. Thus, attempts to understand and articulate mediation itself must always be an attempt to understand and articulate the complex interrelatedness of multiple mediational means as they manifest in and through mediated action.

An analytical orientation towards articulating the complex interrelationship of multiple and multifarious mediational means unequivocally points to the saliency of objects, materials and forces that might traditionally escape consideration. While kitesurfing may indeed be an extreme example by its very nature, it becomes increasingly important to recognise the ways in which components of the natural world, environmental and physical processes function as mediational means through the interrelationship.

Explicitly borrowing Wertsch's (1998: 27) rhetoric, it is futile, if not ridiculous to attempt to articulate mediation in terms of any mediational means in isolation. If one truly exemplified an anti-reductionist perspective in analysis, distinguishing the ways in which any item, material or object functions as a mediational means in isolation is an ontological fallacy, even worse, explicitly misleading. To describe a kite as a central mediational means through which all actions are mediated in the sport of kitesurfing only captures a small component of the phenomena. The kite cannot do much (cannot function as a mediational means) without wind. Similarly, a board cannot do much without water. In a similar vein, a kitesurfer cannot do much without kite – board – wind – water (and other pieces of equipment as well). Most importantly, social actors often employ materials, processes and/or forces of the natural environment as mediational means in undertaking action and the ways in which these mediational

means contribute. This needs to be a comprehensive focus of the analysis of mediated action.

Recognising the role of natural entities/processes/forces in mediation is not only for ontological acuity. In many cases, our understandings about the natural environment permeate the construction, production, use and refinement of the various objects, artefacts and materials which are employed as mediational means (see below). Resultantly, actions and practices are permeated and transformed by these natural entities.

Following the claim that the interrelationship of multiple mediational means is central in understanding mediated action, I have outlined how the fluctuating materiality of one mediational means, and the fluctuating materiality of the interrelationship created through multiple mediational means comprehensively affects and permeates the learning process in kitesurfing, and also, becomes an integral component one must learn about.

## **11.5 Learning to Create Mediational Means: Generalizable Findings**

I have described many of the actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing as characterisable as a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel (Norris 2012). From this perspective, through a complex of interrelated mediational means, the kiter is in a process of continual negotiation, touching, feeling and re-touching. The necessity of dialogicality in the process is given impetus by two components of the phenomenon. First, that a touch of the exact same material specificity can and often does result in a response-feel of a variable character which is predominantly the result of the fluctuating consistency of the wind as a mediational means. Second, the response-feel becomes employed as a mediational means in and of itself for the undertaking of subsequent mediated actions.

As a result of the material variability of the response-feel, kilters develop a practice of prediction about the ways in which the response-feel will materialise. Alongside this practice of prediction, are anticipatory mechanisms through which kilters can mitigate the variable nature of the response-feel. As the practice of prediction is refined, so too are anticipatory mechanisms which mitigate what could be considered unintentional or undesirable response-feels.

The acquisition of skill and/or development of proficiency are inextricably linked to the ways in which one can co-create or co-construct a response feel of a particular material character. In other words, the more refined one's practice of prediction becomes, the more precise one can create a response-feel of a particular character, and resultantly, the more easily one can employ the response-feel as a mediational means in the undertaking of subsequent actions and practices.

An integral component of acquiring a practice of prediction is the understanding about the ways in which the mediational interrelationship materialises through intersecting and interconnected mediational means. Through the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel, kilters learn how the various component parts contribute to the manifestation of the mediational interrelationship. This knowledge permeates the practice of prediction and manifests materially through the acquisition of competency.

Most importantly, through the development of a practice of prediction and knowledge of the mediational interrelationship, social actors learn how to co-create and/or co-construct complex mediational means which materialise through the intersection of social actor and the mediational interrelationship. The mediational means which are co-created are traditionally referred to as power and materially manifest as pressures or forces exerted on the body. These pressures or forces materialise in and through mediated action itself, and are subsequently employed in the undertaking of other mediated actions and practices. The specificity with which one can co-create these

complex and temporally fleeting mediational means becomes something that is sought after or strived for.

The lift which functions to propel the kiter skywards and the power which functions to propel the kites along the surface of the water are both mediational means (of a similar character) which are co-created and permeated by sociocultural, historical, institutional and developmental trajectories. One must learn both to co-create these temporally fleeting and materially variable forces through the employment of multiple cultural tools as mediational means, and, must learn how to employ that which they have created for complexes of other mediated actions and practices.

The materiality of these complex, temporally fleeting and co-created mediational means owe much of their ontological nature to, and resultantly are permeated by, sociocultural, historical, institutional and individual trajectories. Accordingly, the actions they irrefutably mediate (to suggest that jumping is accomplished without the co-creation of lift is fallacious), are equally permeated by these trajectories.

The co-construction of the complex and temporally fleeting mediational means which are employed in subsequent mediated action could be described as a central component of the majority of kitesurfing practices. The mediational means created through the intersection of the social actor and the mediational interrelationship permeates nearly all facets of kitesurfing. The momentary material longevity of these mediational means require constant and consistent re-creation which necessitates the haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel. Further, the material variability of the wind which results in a response-feel of varying materiality, and thus, a complex mediational means of varying materiality requires the development of a practice of prediction. Through the practice of prediction, kites learn how to strategically touch which is informed both by an aggregate of experiences and, the haptic dialogic process itself. Therefore, the kiter is in continual negotiation through multiple interconnected

mediational means in the attempt to continually and consistently co-create a response-feel of a particular character. The more precise one can create a response-feel of a particular character, the more easily the response-feel can be employed as a mediational means for undertaking subsequent mediated actions.

## **11.6 Kitesurfing: Action (Inter)action and Mediation, Answering the Research Questions, Limitations, Strength, Future Directions**

### **11.6.1 Aim of study and research questions**

This research study was undertaken with an explicit interest in elucidating the complexities exemplified in the mediated actions, (inter)actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing. There were five research questions guiding this study which centred on notions of mediated action, (inter)action, mediation and space. Over the course of the participatory based video ethnographic endeavour and through the employment of theoretical and methodological notions from Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, I have provided explicit answers to these questions as well as developed theoretical notions for employment in thematically similar research endeavours.

I initially set out to answer five questions:

1. How do technological, bio-mechanical and geological affordances or constraints figure in the practice of kitesurfing?
2. In what way does a kite mediate action, interaction, expression and creativity?
3. Is the practice of kitesurfing typified in any way?
4. How do the geosemiotic affordances figure in the participation and filming of kitesurfing? How do practitioners read and utilise the natural environment?



5. How does the interactive semiotic phenomenon of touch/response-feel (Norris, 2012) function in the practice of kitesurfing?

Questions 1 and 2 have been answered throughout this thesis, and most predominantly in chapter 8. The mediated actions exemplified in kitesurfing comprise a complex intersection of social actor and mediational means. The mediational means in this equation are both man made and technological as well as components of the natural environment. The technological mediational means always and only function through an interrelationship with a constellation of others and the material nature of the mediational means employed affect the nature of practices, and are inextricably linked to the system of mediated action.

In chapter 6, I answered the third research question describing kitesurfing as a system of mediated action which manifests for social actors over time and in direct connection with the mediational means through which action is taken. The system of mediated actions comprises both the intangible relationships between dynamic constellations of practices which are materially, spatially and temporally situated and as a complex schematic aggregate through which material phenomena is perceived and interpreted.

In chapter 7, I have articulated the centrality of the natural environment as it pertains to kitesurfing and have pointed to the complex ways in which the mediational means employed in mediated action affect conceptions and interpretations of space, spatiality and location. I have introduced the concept of actionary pertinence as a way to structure the analytical approach to space through reference to how it is used. This helps elucidate prioritisations and valuations of social actors acting in and of the world which provides an answer to the fourth research question.

Many of the mediated actions in kitesurfing can be described as a haptic dialogic process of touch/response-feel (Norris 2012), and this process plays a central role in

learning the mediational interrelationship, developing a practice of prediction and the co-creation of complex temporally fleeting mediational means which can be employed in subsequent mediated actions. This finding is outlined in chapter 9 and answers the fifth research question.

### **11.6.2 Limitations of the study**

The findings presented above are highly and solely related to the ‘lifestyle’ sport of kitesurfing and the actions, practices and learning trajectories exemplified therein. With a provision of more time and resources, the study could have been strengthened by conducting empirical work across a wide range of lifestyle sports like snowboarding, skateboarding, wakeboarding and surfing. An inter-sport investigation of this type may have assisted in elucidating what characteristics comprise lifestyle sports in general.

Simultaneously, looking between sports may have provided some insights into the manifestation of a particular system of mediated action, the ways in which antecedent systems permeate the manifestation of new systems and the precise manner in which they interrelate. Also, an investigation of multiple ‘board sports’ may have provided more comprehensive insights into elements of space and spatiality regarding the ways in which each individual sport and the cultural tools employed as mediational means therein, structure or affect the perception of space.

It could have been beneficial to follow a single individual during their ontogenesis as a kitesurfer, preferably coming from a similar sport like windsurfing or wakeboarding. This may have provided a way to explicitly trace learning trajectories, the sociocultural, institutional and historical elements which permeate these trajectories and how an individual comes to be a kitesurfer. There are also many identity oriented direction that this study could have followed in favour of tackling notions of identity

production, and while this was not my explicit focus, it may be a component that I will take up in further study.

### **11.6.3 Strengths of the study**

This study was conducted with an explicit focus on the real-time in-the-moment mediated actions exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing through the employment of a participation based video ethnographic endeavour which supported the co-creation of audio-video data for further analysis. This empirical method is explicitly aligned with Thrope & Rinehart's (2010) championing for a non-representational approach to lifestyle sport phenomena which is more embodied, affective, localised and material. Furthermore, the locality and materiality exemplified in an analytical focus on social actors and mediational means departs from traditional sociocultural perspectives which prioritise components of subculture, identity, argot and commoditisation over and above the moments in time where these things manifest materially, in mediated action.

Participatory methods in an endeavour characterisable as occupied with data co-creation played an integral role in maintaining a local and material perspective throughout the course of the investigation. This provided an experiential and analytical orientation towards facets of the phenomenon which manifest as salient and/or relevant for practitioners themselves. Furthermore, kitesurfing occurs in-the-moment, in real-time, through mediated actions and resultantly, facets of the phenomenon which manifest as salient and/or relevant also often manifest in real-time and in-the-moment. Participatory methods were central in understanding the complex and dynamic actions and practices exemplified in kitesurfing and maintaining analytical focus on locality and materiality in advance of representational abstractions.

This study further advances the propositions of Burke (1966, 1969, 1987), Wertsch (1991, 1995a, 1998) Scollon (1998, 2001a, 2005, 2008) and Norris (2003,

2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008. 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b) in articulating the centrality of *action* in the social world. Human beings act in the world and prioritising *mediated action* serves as both pragmatic, and anti-reductionist. Transgressed are traditional dichotomies between individual and society and the analyst is forced to consider the complex and dynamic relationships between them.

This fundamental theoretical notion has given impetus to the approach taken in this study and explicitly manifests in elucidating the complexities of systems of mediated action, actionary pertinence, the mediational interrelationship and how mediational means can be used to create more complex, dynamic and temporally fleeting mediational means. The mediated action *is* the most useful unit of analysis in sociocultural research as it exemplifies in a microcosm, the complex individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes which permeate all forms of social action.

#### **11.6.4 Future directions**

Moving forward, the theoretical notions outlined in this thesis have wide reaching implications in multiple social science domains. Their utility in new, localised and more materially concrete approaches to the investigation of lifestyle sport should be recognised as most comprehensive.

The broad domain of lifestyle sport is an increasingly prevalent component of contemporary society. As previous work in the discipline has highlighted, lifestyle sport practitioners are innovative, creative and committed. The sports themselves have been said to manifest complex social structures (sporting fratriarchies), are intimately intertwined with notions of self-identification, identity and subcultural cohesion, and increasingly encroach on the sociocultural, commercial and institutional landscapes in contemporary society. Resultantly, it is time to allocate analytical attention to the ways

in which lifestyle sports permeate other aspects of sociocultural life, cognition, perception, meaning-making, interpretation and valuation.

In doing so, employment of the mediated action as the most useful unit of analysis may help in elucidating the ways in which more abstract notions of subculture, commoditisation, commercialisation, institutionalisation, identity and spatial appropriation manifest in real-time through social actors acting in the world. As touched upon above, if one strips away all the sociological, cultural and political theory from the sports themselves, one is left with real-time mediated actions and practices which are complex, dynamic and worthy of academic investigation. Beginning from the moments in time where the intersecting and complex sociocultural, historical and institutional trajectories manifest can help concretise high-order theorisation and situate theoretical notions squarely where they manifest, in real-time mediated action. Furthermore, as lifestyle sport is constantly changing and evolving through technological innovation and the employment of new and unique cultural tools in new and differentiated spatial domains, Multimodal Mediated Theory (Norris 2013b) can provide a useful theoretical framework through which to approach the phenomenon. While technological innovation is obviously not unique to lifestyle sport, the blurred spatial boundaries exemplified in fields of participation, the continual and comprehensive employment of natural entities, materials, forces and processes as mediational means and resultantly, cultural tools, offers a unique site for inquiry and a fruitful avenue for understanding the ways in which social actors act with and through the natural environment.

#### **11.6.5 Concluding remarks: Kitesurfing, action (inter)action and mediation**

Investigating the actions and practices exemplified in the sport of kitesurfing through a participatory video ethnographic endeavour has further contributed to my affirmation that lifestyle sport provides an incredibly fruitful site of investigation.

Lifestyle sports often exemplify a complex intersection of social actors, technological tools, sociocultural and environmental processes and are an increasingly prevalent component of social life. This empirical endeavour has comprehensively contributed to the development of theoretical notions which can assist in elucidating the complexities of sociocultural phenomena. Furthermore, it has supported an increasing professional and personal interest in the complex dynamism exemplified in the moments in time where individual, sociocultural, historical and institutional processes and trajectories manifest materially, in real-time mediated action.

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# 1 Appendices

## 1.1 Appendix: Ethics Documentation

### 1.1.1 Ethics Approval Letter



## MEMORANDUM

### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

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To: Sigrid Norris  
From: **Dr Rosemary Godbold and Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC  
Date: 3 June 2011  
Subject: Ethics Application Number 11/53 **When you're in the moment: the experience of 'flow' in kitesurfing.**

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Dear Sigrid

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. We are pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 28 March 2011 and that on 30 May 2011, we approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 27 June 2011.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 30 May 2014.

We advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 30 May 2014;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 30 May 2014 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz) or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of AUTECH and ourselves, we wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold and Madeline Banda  
**Executive Secretary**  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Jarret George Geenen [jarret.geenen@aut.ac.nz](mailto:jarret.geenen@aut.ac.nz)



## 1.1.2 Participant Information Sheet

# Participant Information Sheet



### **Date Information Sheet Produced:**

24 February, 2011

### **Project Title**

Kitesurfing: Action, interaction and Mediation

### **An Invitation**

This is an invitation to participate in a research project which is being conducted by myself, Jarret Geenen. The research project is being completed to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Auckland University of Technology.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you reserve the full right to withdraw from the study at any time, prior to the completion of data collection and without any adverse consequences.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research, as stated above, is to fulfil the requirements of a degree. That being said, the research will also be used in subsequent publications in academic journals and will be presented at academic conferences.

I will be investigating, through ethnographically based audio-video recording, the manifestation of the psychological state of flow in Kitesurfing. The research also seeks to explain how the experience of flow is related to technology and practice in the filming of Kitesurfing.

### **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You have been identified through informal snowballing throughout the researcher's social networks. Your contact details have been obtained through mutual exchange with the researcher and you have been chosen to participate in this research as you actively participate in the sport of kitesurfing on a very regular basis.

### **What will happen in this research?**

The project involves ethnographically based observation and data collection wherein, participants will be the subject of observation during their daily activities, in and around the practice of kitesurfing.

Participants will not be asked to perform any specific tasks during observation; they will simply be expected to go on with their normal activities while enjoying their participation in the sport.

That being said, participation will include informal and semi-structured interviews throughout the course of the research, regarding particular aspects of kitesurfing, filming and practice.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

There are no foreseen discomforts or risks to participating in this research, other than the discomforts and risks associated with the practice of kitesurfing.

**What are the benefits?**

You will benefit from the research by having access to all raw data, in the form of video and audio footage, to do with what you so please.

**What compensation is available for injury or negligence?**

In the unlikely event of a physical injury as a result of your participation in this study, rehabilitation and compensation for injury by accident may be available from the Accident Compensation Corporation, providing the incident details satisfy the requirements of the law and the Corporation's regulations.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The data collected will be transcribed by the primary researcher alone, and no other individuals will have access to the information provided by you. Furthermore, an alias will be used in place of your name and identifying features such as your face, will be blurred in publications, if you so please.

Finally, all information provided will be kept completely confidential and data will be stored in locked cabinets at an undisclosed location.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The only cost will be your time. If kitesurfing is an activity which you engage in on a regular basis and enjoy, participation could be viewed as motivation rather than a cost.

However, the research will continue intermittently over the course of approximately 1 year.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Please let me know within the next two weeks if you would like to participate in this research project.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree, you will be asked to complete a participant consent form which further details the extent of participation and your rights as a participant.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes, if you so wish to receive feedback on the result.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Sigrid Norris, [Sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz), (+64) (0)9 921 9999 Ext 6262.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz) , 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Jarret Geenen, [jarret.geenen@aut.ac.nz](mailto:jarret.geenen@aut.ac.nz)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Sigrid Norris, [sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz](mailto:sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz), (+64) (0)9 921 9999 Ext 6262

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *May 30, 2011*, AUTECH Reference number *11/53*.

### 1.1.3 Participant Consent Form

## Consent Form



Project title: Kitesurfing: Action, Interaction and Mediation

Project Supervisor: Dr. Sigrid Norris

Researcher: Jarret Geenen

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 24 02 2011.
- ☐ I am above 18 years of age and I am capable of making an educated decision regarding my participation in this research.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio/video-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that the video footage/photographs will be used for academic purposes only and the data collected during this research project will be kept and securely stored for 10 years for use in subsequent publications and for reference purposes.
- ☐ I permit the researcher to use the photographs that are part of this project and/or any drawings from them and any other reproductions or adaptations from them, either complete or in part, alone or in conjunction with any wording and/or drawings solely and exclusively for (a) the researcher's PhD thesis; and (b) the researcher's further study in regard to examining the data thematically; and/or for methodology and/or theory building.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself, my image, or any other information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that any copyright material created by the photographic sessions is deemed to be owned by the researcher and that I do not own copyright of any of the photographs.
- ☐ I understand that the data collected during this research project will be kept and securely stored for 10 years for use in future research and for theory building.
- ☐ I understand that the video footage, photographs and interviews may be used for conference presentations and publication in academic journals and books, which may be published in print form as well as electronic form on the internet. Videos and photos may also be published on academic and professional websites.

- ☐ If one of my children or one of my relatives happens to be recorded, I would like the researcher to:
- ☐ delete the footage (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
  - ☐ blur their faces (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
  - ☐ leave them in the footage as they are (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

- I would like my face to be blurred in publications (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐

- ☐ I understand that I may be identified due to the possible identification of others in the study:

Yes ☐ No ☐

- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:  
.....  
.....

Participant's name:  
.....  
.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 30, 2011 AUTEK Reference number 11/53.***

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form*

## 1.2 Appendix: Supplemental stills from video data

### 1.2.1 Turning on cameras



Figure i: Turning on GoPro camera



Figure ii: Turning on GoPro camera 2

### 1.2.2 Preparation for launching



Figure iii: Getting ready to launch



Figure iv: Getting ready to launch 2



### 1.2.3 Thumbs up (let go of my kite)



Figure v: Thumbs up for launch



Figure vi: Thumbs up for launch 2



#### **1.2.4 The Waionui Inlet (South Head)**



**Figure vii: On the way to Waionui Inlet**



**Figure viii: Tide coming in at Waionui Inlet**

### 1.2.5 Other events

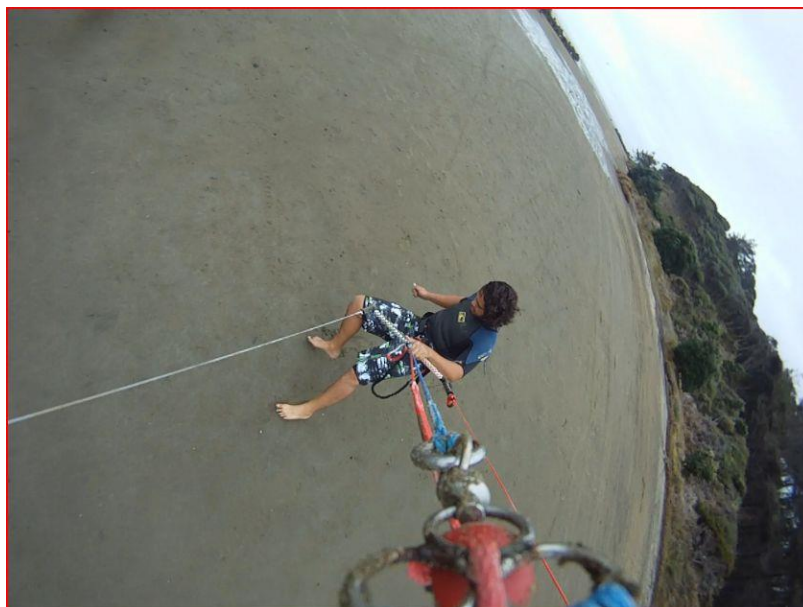


Figure ix: Overpowered and getting dragged on the sand

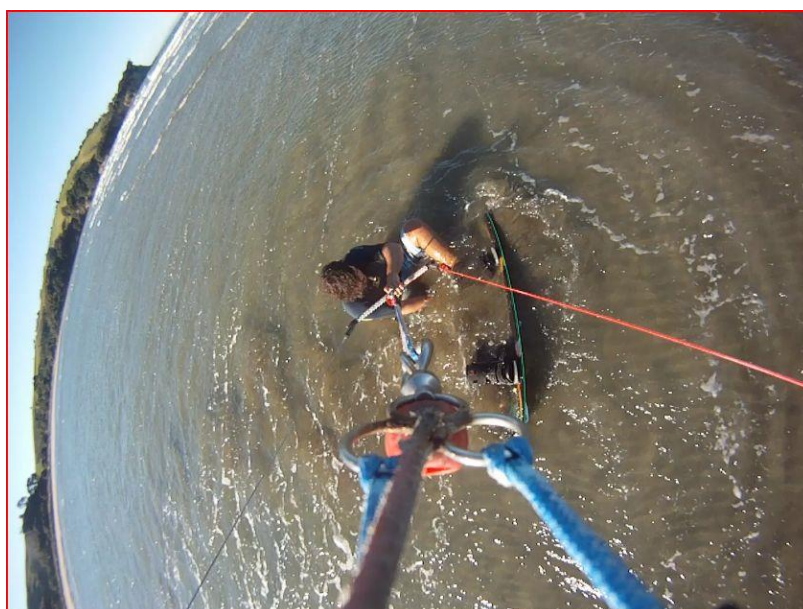


Figure x: Putting on boots

### 1.2.6 Participation as methodological tool: an example



Figure xi: Me riding



Figure xii: Me jumping



### 1.2.7 Locations



Figure xiii: Taporā (Kaipara Harbour)



Figure xiv: Headlands at Te Haruhi Bay (affectionately known as shakers)



**Figure xv: Headlands at Te Haruhi Bay**



**Figure xvi: Sand bars at Te Haruhi Bay**



**Figure xvii: Visualisation of wind shadow with westerly wind at Te Haruhi Bay**



**Figure xviii: Shoal Bay**





**Figure xix: Shoal bay looking towards Auckland CBD**



**Figure xx: Orewa Beach set up area**





**Figure xxi: Orewa Beach set up area, different view**

## 1.4 Appendix: Sample interview excerpts

### 1.4.1 Interview Excerpt: Early stages of kitesurfing

(123) R: 2:32 Then  
(124) then, people had twin tips  
(125) and  
(126) first time we went to a beach  
(127) where other people were kiting  
(128) and we went  
(129) ‘hey what’s this thing?’  
(130) why,  
(131) you guys aren’t using a surfboard?  
(132) And they go  
(133) nah nah  
(134) why would you use a surfboard  
(135) oh well  
(136) we didn’t have one of those

### 1.4.2 Interview Excerpt: Describing locations

(341) R: 6:21 Well  
(342) Orewa’s good  
(343) for easterlies  
(344) north easterlies

(345) shakespeare's good for  
(346) southerly quadrants  
(347) west coast  
(348) the lagoons there  
(349) Muriwai works for those westerly days  
(350) the  
(351) although  
(352) sometimes manly over there will work  
(353) but its ALWAYS gusty  
(354) and there's uh  
(355) not much beach uh  
(356) for landing there so  
(357) if we don't have enough time to go  
(358) to drive to the west coast  
(359) we've done a few of those sessions there  
(360) and always regretted it  
(361) J Why's that?  
(362) just cuz of the gusts  
(363) and the  
(364) the fact that  
(365) the power poles  
(366) and the uh  
(367) road is so close  
(368) to uh  
(369) if it isn't really low tide  
(370) its uh

(371) uh  
(371) can be life threatening

### **1.4.3 Interview Excerpt: Antecedent Systems of Mediated Action**

(565) R: 12:23 But learning  
(566) that would be tough sledding  
(567) I don't think that  
(568) unless I was already a surfer  
(569) or wakeboarder  
(570) or snowboarder  
(571) or had the board skills  
(572) how you would put both together  
(573) at the same time  
(574) seems like  
(575) really a big ask

### **1.4.4 Interview Excerpt: Deciding when to go kitesurfing**

(765) 16:45 Weather report first  
(766) look out the window  
(767) look at the  
(768) look at the  
(769) screen on my boat anemometer  
(770) you know for starters  
(771) but uh

(772) and if there's already 5-10 guys out  
(773) then it's a no brainer  
(774) in fact  
(775) it makes it a lot easier  
(776) J In what way?  
(777) because you can look and see  
(778) hey  
(779) they're all on 10's or 8's  
(880) so your kite choice becomes easy  
(881) Uh  
(882) but basically  
(883) it's go to the right place  
(884) based on the weather report  
(885) uh for the right time  
(886) like right now  
(887) it looks like our wind is  
(888) starting to  
(889) well there's now little ripples  
(890) so  
(891) so we have hope

#### **1.4.5 Interview Excerpt: The importance of equipment**

(1312) R: 21:34 It's kinda like  
(1313) checking your scuba regulator  
(1314) or your uh

(1315) parachute  
(1316) well the uh  
(1317) the bars  
(1318) the lines  
(1319) the safetys  
(1320) and even the bridals  
(1321) and the condition of the kite  
(1322) it's literally something that can pick you up  
(1323) and put you into the car park  
(1324) so checking to make sure things aren't worn to the point  
(1325) any kind of equipment failure  
(1326) and there's kinda  
(1327) you start at the beginning  
(1328) you triple check everything  
(1329) then you start to feel like you're getting good at it  
(1330) and you get a little bit cocky  
(1331) and then you miss-connect a line  
(1332) or don't tighten up the knot  
(1333) on one of the lines  
(1334) the line comes off  
(1335) the kite spirals  
(1336) only did that once  
(1337) right here  
(1338) kite parked right up against the uh