The call of the sea: how sound co-composes the place of the surfed wave.

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Introduction.

You flick to the stated page number, scan the title, confirm your choice. You read this *now*. You sigh, you fidget, you focus. Your eyes on the text, mind on the meaning of the words, you block out that which distracts: the noise of the couple chattering on the next table, the general din of the café, the cappuccino machinations; foot-falls; snippets of chat; tones and shrills. Zoning in on the words, maybe you hear them as your eyes read and brain processes; you perform them internally, the rah-'sp' of the r's, the ki-ck-ing k's, the silent pauses of punc… tuations. But mostly you skip along; falling onto a form of words you are familiar with, and resonate with what you feel you may need to know. But now, pause for a moment, turn your head, listen: perhaps you can hear the sough [suff] of the sea.

"Hold this page close to your ear – you can almost hear the 'whomp' followed by a 'phhsssh' noise. Isn't it magical?" (Selway, 2009: 55)

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This chapter explores the sound of the sea, in particular the sound of surf. According to Nguyen (no date), the word 'surf' originates from a corruption of the work 'sough', meaning a rushing sound, and may also derive from the Indian word 'suffe', used with reference to the coast. Here we suggest that the rushing sound of surf is a crucial, but underexplored dimension of surfing, and drawing on the authors' extensive work on surf riding practices in Europe, Australia, and North America, and directly on surf literature (see, for example Anderson and Stoodley 2018; Anderson 2012, Olive 2016, Farmer 1992), it examines not only why this may be the case, but also why the vitality of these rushes, and the rhythms they create, become integral to the momentary experience that defines the place of the surfed wave.

Listening to hydro-logics.

This chapter, and this volume, is part of a paradigmatic shift within the social sciences to sense our world differently; to examine how our world may be different if we "think critically about the heard environment" (Smith, :92). Drawing on a range of scholars (including Anderson et al., 2005; Bull, 2000; Connell and Gibson, 2003; Gallagher, 2011; Hudson, 2006; Matless, 2005), social scientists, and human geographers in particular, have come to recognise that sound is one vital component that 'takes and makes' the places of our world. As Gallagher and Prior argue, "sound [is] involved in the construction and mediation of urban, rural, public and private environments, the production of identity and difference, and the exercise of power through space" (2014: 267).

If we listen to these scholars, sound is therefore vital to any approach to the world. It offers not simply an audible augmentation to the ocular, a further means through which to understand power, place, and politics which supplement the dominant 'lens' of sight, but it also encourages us to experiment with an alternative way of apprehending space and our relation to it. As Attali (1985: 3 cited in Smith, 1992) outlines, ``for twenty-five centuries Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible". Smith (page 92) concurs, she suggests that taking sound seriously requires us to "imagine space as a listening, to recognize that ways of hearing are ways of being and becoming". Thus in the process of pausing, and shifting our head position in relation to this page, in reorienting our ears to our object of interest rather than our eyes, we not only focus our attention to the world in a new way, but open up the possibility of entering into new relations with that world – a world that is heard, not held; a world that becomes (us), not one that is given and taken for granted.

In this chapter we explore how these ideas play out in relation to the water world, in particular, one specific component of this hydrosphere: surf space. Exploring sound in relation to the hydrosphere is itself part of a broader 'watery turn' in human geography and the social sciences. As there is growing acknowledgement that human life is shaped by sound, there is also a similar recognition of the extent to which human life is shaped by water (see Anderson and Peters, 2014, see also Brown and Humberstone, 2015; Steinberg, 2013; Steinberg and Peters 2015). In brief, a move towards 'hydro-logics' within the social sciences is concomitantly a move away from the defining 'geo-logics' of its many constituent disciplines (see Peters, Steinberg and Stratford 2017). Where geo-logics would focus its attention on the land, hydro-logics focuses on water. Where geo-logics would tend to frame the landed world as constituted by fixed, durable, locations, as points on a map that are

discrete and essential; hydro-logics tends to frame the water world as in flux, dominated by flows, trajectories, and coming togethers, where places are emergent in the moment (Latour 2004) through a constellation of forces and processes intersecting at a singular site (see Massey, 2005). Following poststructural and relational theories (see, for example Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Butler, 2004;), hydro-logics contend we live in a world of 'ongoing composition' (Anderson, 2015). From this perspective, the hydrosphere, or specific places within it – such as surf spaces – are "not [conceptualized] as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatia-temporal events" (Massey, 2005: 131). This 'wet' worldview (Peters and Steinberg, 2015) posits that sound is one component that assembles with others to 'take and make' the nature and quality of places. As Revill puts it, "where sound is concerned, space is made and shaped [in part] by the qualities of sound itself" (2016: 244, see also Carpenter and McLuhan, 1973; Pocock, 1989).

Hydro-logics, with its emphases on relational emerging and entities/processes becoming through the moment of performative practice, 'echoes' recent work in sound studies; this latter work seeks to move away from a logic that is premised on fixed 'things' which are discrete, essential, and durably formed. This work posits that, like a hydro-logical water world:

> "…the world of sound is [also] an event world, in contrast to that of [geo-logical] vision which is an object world (Ong, 1971): [sound] is a world of activities rather than artefacts, sensations rather than reflections (Schäfer, 1985). It is dynamic: something is happening for sound to exist" (Pocock, 1989: 193).

This approach discourages any framing of sound that positions it as part of an object world - a world of stabilised material 'things' acting in isolation, rather it encourages

registering sound as integral to an emergent world of assembled processes that produce momentary 'events'. This approach resonates with Massey's view that the world comes into being "in the simple sense of the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing" (2005: 141). In this approach, sound is therefore not an isolated 'artefact', but realised through the intersection of various components that are themselves constituted by other components temporarily coming together. In practice, these components include, firstly, a generator of wave distortion – an entity/process which disrupts the equilibrium of energy in a given context; secondly, it requires a medium of transmission, a means through which the initial distortion can travel; and thirdly, a means through which this distortion can be registered, i.e. an entity/process with the capacity to 'hear' it. In contradiction to approaches to sound that focus solely on the listener in isolation which Revill contends "may fail to give due weight to the materiality of sound itself" (2016; 243), sound 'as event' only comes into being when a process begins which distorts audio waves in a continuum, that distortion is transferred across space, and it is ultimately registered. As Revill summarises, sound becomes when,

> "the 'thinginess' of sound [i]s co- produced by the act or processes of making, the materials which carry and transmit, and the means of receiving, sensing and making sense. Sound is made within the contingent interplay of each of these realms simultaneously" (253).

In this framing, sound is not 'geologic' in nature – it is not the "passive connection of two or more discrete entities" (Revill, 2016: 246), but rather it is "a relational making simultaneously involving production, transmission, reception and interpretation through

and within entities and materials" (245). Indeed, this approach confirms that the sound world (and perhaps the world itself), is "not for beholding" (after Attali, 1985:3 above), it is an emergent, eventful, process – an experience that assembles temporally, then dissipates and disassembles again. This new epistemological approach to the sound world is thus a new 'way of seeing' it (after Rorty, 1979) – so much so, that the conventional vernacular which betrays the dominance of the ocular is initially betrayed, then outmoded.

There are resonances therefore between the epistemological innovations which broadly characterise both watery and sound turns within the social sciences. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that it is possible to identify geo-logics giving way to hydro-logics when considering sound and the sea. As Capp outlines in the following account, the soundworld of surfspace is no longer an 'image' that is 'legible', a stabilised 'thing' that can be held (after Attali, above), rather it is a coming together of conflicting elements which produce a momentary event. Sound is central to this relational emergence, an assemblage which cannot be captured or held, just experienced whilst the process temporarily becomes:

> "where sea and land collide, the ocean as an image of eternity takes on a mortal, human dimension. … [t]ime cannot be held[;] when the energy silently coursing through deep water finally explodes upon the shore in a burst of white noise, the eternal becomes the now. Every wave is a perfect expression of the present tense: it can't be grasped or prolonged, only ridden" (2004: 115).

Sounds of the surf.

Reorienting oneself to the sounds of surf spaces, to the magical 'whomps' and 'phhsshs' of the breaking waves, often inspires a return to the sea. One can experience a mediated

encounter with this sensory emporium through the following website www.spatialmanifesto.com [note to Ed: *I want to put all the links below listed on this site so they can be accessed via this, and explain here where they are all from*]. Here the authors have collected various sounds of the sea in order that the reader can register for themselves the different coming togethers that produce the soundscape of the shore. In many eventspaces, the silence of the seas can be their defining aspect (as registered during this moment at Caswell Bay, Wales (https://youtu.be/8KVImJnEZCU), whilst in others the sound of the wind is the dominant presence (as in this case of Freshwater West, Wales https://youtu.be/R13nnzYPfC4). From the shore, the contributions of water molecules on rock or sand offer a key sound to the scape (as in these cases of Hawaii (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f0y1Iaorug&t=52s , and Kirra, Australia https://youtu.be/jqzd24tOXk8 , https://youtu.be/ZRiDJ_DdJIs). There is, of course, nothing essential or guaranteed about these sounds, there are surf space music performed on the day they were recorded, and replayed at and for our leisure – if we were to return, these sounds would not be heard as their energised components have long disassembled.

> "Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 15)

In many cases, the dominant characteristics of the sound scapes of surf spaces are the rhythms generated between wind, water, and land. The 'expenditure of energy' between these different elements creates a sound attributed to these event spaces that is perhaps unique to this particular category of location. The ear and the body registers vibrations produced through the 'rasp' and 'roar' (see Casey, and London, below) of energies moving through air molecules (wind), this aerial energy in turn encounters and transfers to the surface of the sea,

and drives forward (and often conflicts) with deeper currents, swells, and tides, then meets the terrestrial impediments of continental shelf, reef, rocks, and beach. Following Elden (2004), there is an organic and apparent unpredictability to these multiple rhythms, yet despite this, a semblance of continuity appears which renders the sound of a piece, as Simpson, citing Elden, notes:

> "There is, thus, '[n]o rhythm [here] without repetition in time and space, without reprises, without returns, in short without measure'; but equally 'there is no absolute identical repetition, indefinitely . . . there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference" (2012: 426).

The sound of the sea, the sound of waves breaking through the wind and onto the shore, creates a polyrhythmic soundscape. There are the constant, rhythmic 'movements', as in a musical composition, which each constitutive 'instrument' contributing a percussive layer to the overall piece. Although the overall composition can be sensed in the round, as with all musical performances, it is also possible for different aspects to capture the attention of the listener at different times, producing different relational sensibilities (or affects registered in the human through their coming together within an assemblage, see Anderson, 2010), in the aspiring surf rider.

In an example similar to Rhossili, Wales (https://youtu.be/6qhyIHsv6jg), the calm serenity of this particular eventspace's rhythms renders it possible for the aspiring surf rider to gain a relational sense of calmness and tranquillity through their engagement with the sea. This relational sensibility is well articulated by Allen:

> "Shifting, yet motionless, I dance across the reef, ever so gently. The tide now is extremely low. Islands appear where I once rode days earlier when the tide was in. My senses awaken in the cool water and again I ride… The coolness is invigorating to my soul, my senses are heightened, the sounds and smells add to the experience. I paddle in slow motion as if a strobe light were upon me. Each drop of water that l lift up with my hand as I raise it back out of the water, drops back from which it came, each in succession. The first appearance of randomness is soon overshadowed by the existence of natural rhythm within spontaneous movement.Within spontaneity, arises rhythm, beautiful sound emitted from each reaction to my own gestures. The kelp beds themselves, move in rhythm to the incoming swells. Flowing, with each successive movement from the winds, tide and rolling waves" (ref, 77-78).

When we begin to realign ourselves to the sound of the sea we become part of a hydro-logical world. Indeed, it is possible that listening to surfspace encourages us to get 'wet' both philosophically and actually, as it pulls us centrally into the water world. As Smith outlines (following Handel, 1989), "'Listening' is centripetal; it pulls you into the world. Looking is centrifugal; it separates you from the world" (1999; 10). If this is the case, then valorising the auditory enables us to be more mindful of the assembled relations of which we are a part, and shakes off the urge to position ourselves outside of an emergent network, viewing them as if we were 'solitary knower' (Haraway, 1988) spun out from the context which co-defines us. We can recognise this centripetal experience in relation to the sound world of surf when aspiring riders first encounter a new wave break. This is well summarised by the following two excerpts, the first by Susan Casey, documenting her visit to meet big wave surfer Laird

Hamilton in Hawaii, and her first encounter with the 'Jaws' wavebreak, and from Jack London's seminal account of wave-riding, A Royal Pursuit:

> "… I had come to Maui [in Hawaii, for the first time]. This was where tow surfing had been brought to the world's attention, and Jaws was still the gold standard for giant waves. It was also the reason why Hamilton lived on this island, at the top of these pineapple fields: Jaws was literally in his backyard. During a big swell he can feel the wave before he sees it. The ground shakes for miles…. 'That's Jaws beach,' Hamilton said[.] I could [just] make out a small, crescent-shaped indentation about eight hundred yards away, filled with rocks. [But] more than that, I could hear it. As the waves swept in and out, the rocks rolled forward and backward, making a sound like an avalanche of bocce balls. It was a rasping, raking noise that was frankly terrifying" (2010;32/41).

> "The grass grows right down to the water at Waikiki Beach… One after another they come, a mile long, with smoking crests, the white battalions of the infinite army of the sea. And one sits and listens to the perpetual roar…" (A Royal Sport, excerpt from The Cruise of the Snark, 1911).

In these cases, the sound of surf is definitive to the becoming of the space itself. In the initial encounter from the shore, the polyrhythms of molecules pulsing through and into the elements of air, water, and land, come together to create an orchestral cacophony of noise that is bracing in its scale and novelty.

> "Surfers… improvis[e] against the orchestra of the grinding sea, concentrating on intense, short solos and raucous codas" (Bleakley, 2016: 97).

From and on the sea itself, different sounds are generated. Here the aspiring surf rider is closer to the water, and they themselves contribute to its auditory and physical 'movement'. This may be through board, boat, or body, depending on the technological means of floatation and ride, and also through the chosen means of propulsion – arms, legs, or paddle. As in the following examples (Caswell, Wales https://youtu.be/IAv8MnhT2ng, and Rhossili, Wales https://youtu.be/jEjWldibUzs) one can detect the rhythmic sound of paddle entering and exiting the aqua-assemblage, whilst also the mild bounce of boat on water. On the sea, therefore, new sounds contribute to the "complex polyrhythmy" of this water world (after Edensor, 2010: 69), its emergent nature emphasises how these hydro-places are "always becoming, and a human, whether stationary or travelling, is one rhythmic constituent in a seething space pulsing with intersecting trajectories and temporalities" (ibid: 71). Aspiring surf riders need to register and be attentive to these complex rhythms in order to successfully negotiate, and eventually ride, breaking waves (see for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJUYzA5d0cQ). Being out of sync with these material and melodic rhythms marks the human out as a poor reader – but perhaps more accurately put – poor register, of the sounds and vibrations of the surfing event space. Such (lack of) awareness makes any attempt to catch a wave almost impossible, and the effort to simply be on the sea drainingly difficult (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3hZwZ9ksu0).

However, if one can register the rhythm of a surf space, one can catch a wave. When this occurs, one senses the 'shhhhh' of incoming rustly waves, a marked crescendo, often a quiet moment of rise, and sometimes slap! (as in this case at Port Eynon, Wales

https://youtu.be/eKJuZCldSNM and Porthcawl, Wales https://youtu.be/ce2IMGviNEQ). From these examples, we can identify a centripetal intensity to encounters with surf space, both from the shore, and on the sea itself. These encounters with the event world are akin to an assault on the auditory senses, engagements so powerful that – as Smith suggests – "We are sucked into this soundworld network … [as a result, listening] evokes and organises collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity" (Stokes 1994, in Smith 2000; 622). However, it is important to note that during some attempts to ride the surf, other senses compete to drown out the intensity of the sound world. Consider, for example, the following articulation of a tube ride by acclaimed surf writer Tom Anderson:

> "After about five attempts to get in and around the tube[s breaking at this spot], one virtually landed on my lap. …I paddled, coolly focusing my breathing and senses to channel the excitement in my muscles into the economy of motion needed to negotiate the drop. Building up paddle momentum I got over the ledge well in time to avoid any kind of freefall, but still deep enough along the reef to find a long wall of mercury-like water rising up in front of me. Way beyond, out in the flats and a world I had left behind, I could see [my co-surfer] Rhino sitting up and raising his hands into the sky. …Time began slowing and my awareness of all around me heightened to a haywire crescendo. I could hear my breathing as my thought processes clarified... *This wave is going to do it... It's going to do it... It's going to... [become a tube].*
>
> The lip hooked itself outwards, piercing the flat water to my left, swallowing me in the back of its saltwater pocket. With so much room, my board was able to stick to a clean wave face and continue unhindered in its trajectory forward, towards the

> window of light that had now shrunk my view of the channel to merely a snapshot - with Rhino cheering ecstatically in the middle of it. This time the absolute change of sound, gravity and atmosphere indicated how far behind the portal I was. There was time to think, to stare, to marvel - then as quickly and predictably as it had thrown over, the exit suddenly flew towards me and I was catapulted out and back into reality, careering onto the shoulder with runaway speed and a grin that could be seen from the town centre. Taking a breather to register what had happened, I let the euphoria flood through me and waited for my psyche to adjust. I had to try and do it again" (Anderson, 2010:78).

In this evocative account, Tom Anderson refers to the soundspace of this tube ride on two occasions. Firstly, he contemplates the sound of his own breath – here, the contributions of his inner body to the movement of the ongoing composition dominates his attention, and secondly, to the absence of the 'normal' cacophony of water sounds as he successfully rides the breaking tube of white water. The reference to his own breath suggests that in the centripetal tendency to position the surfer as part of a broader contextualised assemblage, it is also possible for the individualised entity that is the human to be identified and the body as instrument recognised in the broader movement of which it is a part. The second reference to sound, occurring at the moment when Anderson is in the pocket of the tube, is significant as it identifies the 'absolute change' to the sounds he has become used to through hours of surfing at this spot. It is a break in the normal soundspace – what Bleakley (drawing on Redgrove, 1999), refers to as a 'holiday' from the accepted and normalised soundscape (Bleakley, 2016). Playfully toying with this term, Redgrove suggests this break is a 'hole in the day'; this 'rest' in the orchestral rhythm provides the surf rider with a moment many refer to as an experience of the transcendent (so perhaps, to continue the wordplay, it may be

usefully referred to as a ‘whole in the day’), a rest which draws surfers back to the swell again and again.

Yet it is equally important to note that Tom Anderson *only* refers to sound twice in his account. It is possible to suggest three processes at play which may help to explain the relative underscoring of the musical movement in this passage. Firstly, and as noted above, humans have the ability to block out that which distracts from their sensory registers. In the risk-ridden world of the breaking wave, other senses become more vital than sound to the survival of the surfer. One must look, touch (through the paddle, board, and body), and sense in aggregation in order to appropriately time and position oneself in the oncoming rhythmic swell. In order to execute the take-off perfectly, and potentially experience a ‘holiday’ on the waves, sound needs to be blocked out, or rather merged into a more co-constituted set of senses, out in order to function successfully. This is summed up neatly by Parsons, in reference to surfing Cortes Bank; he states when you are on this wave, “Your senses tell you where [it’s going to break]. I guess noise [does] play a role, but it’s more a feeling. You know the second it’s gonna hit. It’s all timing” (in Casey, 2010: 255). Secondly, buffering or integrating ‘noise’ into one’s direct experience becomes possible due to the surf sounds noted above becoming increasingly expected and ‘normal’ to the surf rider. The novelty of the aurally registered distortions have now become the norm, perhaps even the natural, sounds expected to be heard at this particular break (see Bourdieu, 1985, and Anderson, 2015). As such, the constancy in polyrhythms render it possible for the experienced rider to block them from dominating their senses in order to safely navigate the assemblage of surf space. Thirdly, and relatedly, it may also be the case that due to the surf rider buffering out the natural sounds of the site, as well as being able to focus on their centrifugal self when lost in a centripetal movement, that they are less able to remember, and also re-present, the sounds

they register and produce. The surfer may not simply have the recall, or the lexicon to faithfully record and communicate whatever fragments of the sound world that resonate both with themselves as the rider, but also the reader. It is here that the movement of which they were a part is simply what it is – it does not refer outside itself for external meaning or understanding, and cannot be translated, interpreted or represented through another medium. It simply has to be experienced.

Conclusion.

In this chapter we have begun to explore the soundworlds of surfspaces. Following what we have termed the hydro-logic turn in the social sciences, we have presented a processual and performative account of surf sounds, which resonates with new approaches to sound across may disciplines. We have seen that sound contributes at a vital level to the event-space that is the surfed wave, suggesting that the motion of the sea could be understood as the movement of a soundscape, with polyrhythmic contributions performed by the coming together of sea, land, air, and often, surfers. This surf music is often difficult to ignore, but sometimes easy to forget; its momentary nature can define the relational sensing of the sea, but can also be impossible to re-present beyond that pulse of experience. As a consequence, the sound of surf is often marginalised from its spectacle – the ease with which the image of the breaking sea can be 'held' (and commodified) encourages surf to be framed as an object world to be fossilised and fixed. What we suggest in this chapter is that another world is possible; by tuning in to the sounds of the sea, our water world becomes one (and many) which has no meaning beyond the immediate, where mobility gives way to simple movement, and sound is vital to the co-definition of the place of the surfed wave.

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