

AFFECT AT ALTITUDE:

EMBODIED PRACTICES AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN BACKCOUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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Jonathan Curtis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lifestyle sport subculture of backcountry skiing and snowboarding, or backcountry touring. The sport sees participants use specialised equipment to venture into mountain areas that are unsupported by human infrastructure in pursuit of secluded or challenging slopes to climb and then ride down. Over the course of the last 10 to 15 years backcountry touring has experienced rapid growth in attention and participation. As a result a number of new influences have altered the way that participants engage with their practice and understand their experiences. The use of digital technologies have become significant elements of the embodied experiences of tourers in the backcountry. Similarly, the proliferation of digital media practices has offered new ways of representing and understanding the backcountry and its corporality. With these depictions of touring reaching wider audiences than ever before, commercial interest in the backcountry market has risen with ramifications for the tourers who participate in different aspects of the industry. These additions to the affective atmosphere of the field constitute a raft of challenges to sanctity of established backcountry principles that concern ‘authentic’ and safe practice. Tourers experience and respond to these struggles in nuanced ways: from expressing concerns about how depictions of the backcountry can influence the practice of others, to adopting and adapting technology that augments their observance of the conventional perspectives of touring. This thesis uses a synthesis of affect theory and the concepts of Bourdieu in order to explore and animate these intersections of human bodies, objects and the non-material. This theoretical position has informed the project design and data collection process that included fieldwork, digital ethnography and 22 semi-structured with a broad range of the relatively homogenous touring community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

On the 9th of March 2020, four professional skiers and a film production crew were working in the backcountry surrounding Whistler in British Columbia, Canada. As is routinely the case, the skiers had carried out a range of safety checks on conditions and equipment like avalanche beacons¹ to ensure that all the necessary precautions were in place. Subsequently the skiers had been successfully ascending and descending in high consequence terrain, capturing footage of their embodied prowess in the spectacular mountain environment for the cameras of Teton Gravity Research (TGR)². Towards the end of the day, one of the skiers, Nick McNutt, spotted another line³ that he wanted to ski and skinned⁴ back up to the peak. As he rode down the mountain the snow washed loose with his turns, or slough⁵, collected a large pillow⁶ of snow, knocking it down the mountain to collide with McNutt who was still descending below (see fig. 1.1). He was swept into a treed area in a shallow gully and as the relatively small, but serious avalanche came to rest, McNutt was buried beneath the surface. Having watched this unfold, McNutt's companions jumped into action, deploying their avalanche rescue equipment to find their friend. A critical component of this is the reliable operation of the avalanche beacon, whereby when a group enters the backcountry they all set their beacons to the 'send' setting that transmits a signal of its location to other beacons. In a situation such as this, the members of the party that are not incapacitated switch their beacons to a 'search' setting that scans for the signal in their vicinity that are still transmitting in 'send' mode. As Arvesen (2020) describes 'for a team this experienced, this [a beacon search] should

¹ An avalanche beacon is a small digital device worn on the bodies of tourers in the backcountry. They can send and receive a signal that allows tourers to be located and rescued by others in their party in the event that they are buried by an avalanche.

² Teton Gravity Research is a media production company that initially produced skiing and snowboarding content but has now expanded to include a broad range of lifestyle sports. The TGR websites also host popular forums for skiers and snowboarders to discuss touring and a broad range of elements that make up snowsports.

³ 'Line' is a term used to describe the route a skier or snowboarder takes down a mountain. It is also used to describe a planned route that is determined by the natural features of the terrain.

⁴ Skinning describes the action of moving uphill and across flat ground on skis. It requires the use of synthetic skins that attach to the base of skis and provide friction against backwards movement (see fig. 1.11)

⁵ Slough is a term used to describe loose snow that is knocked off by skiers and snowboarders as they make turns on their descent of a slope. In the backcountry, slough can trigger avalanches.

⁶ Pillow is a term to describe a mound of snow that collects on a prominent feature in the terrain like a boulder or large tree stump.

have identified his [McNutt's] proximate location relatively quickly. But something was wrong – they couldn't find a signal'. With serious concern about the ability to locate McNutt, the group drew on their skills and luck, managing to locate him with a successful probe⁷ strike allowing the group to extract McNutt who required hospitalisation, but had survived.

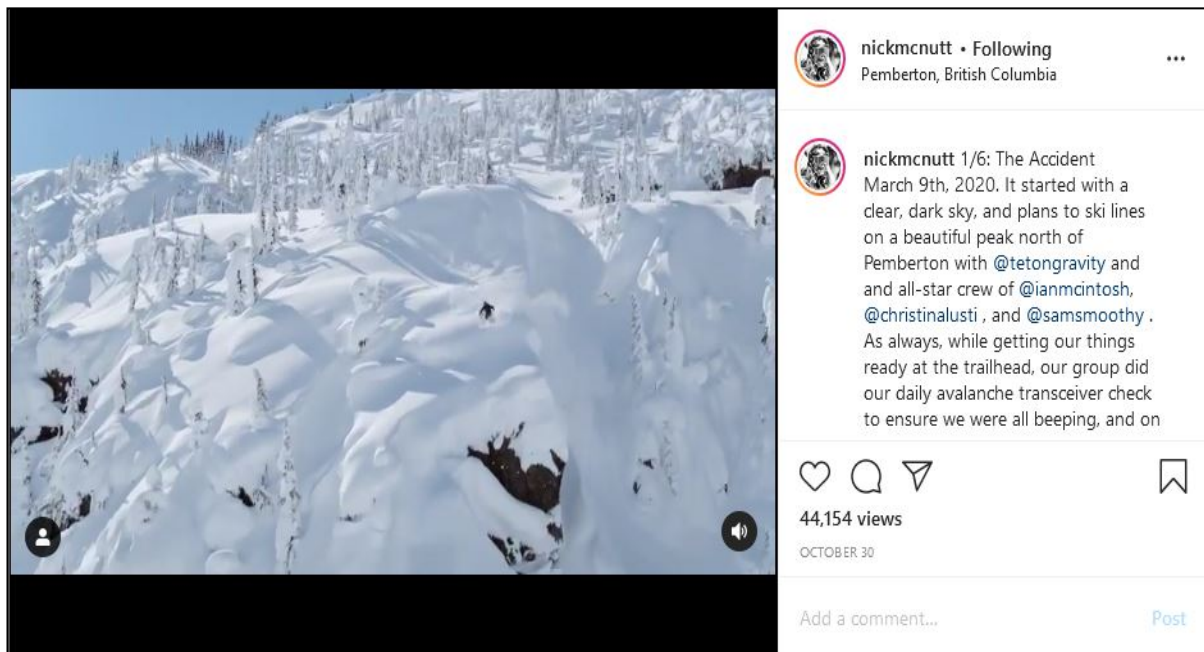


FIGURE 1.1: Instagram video posted by Nick McNutt of the skiing the line leading up to his accident. SOURCE: Instagram - @nickmcnutt

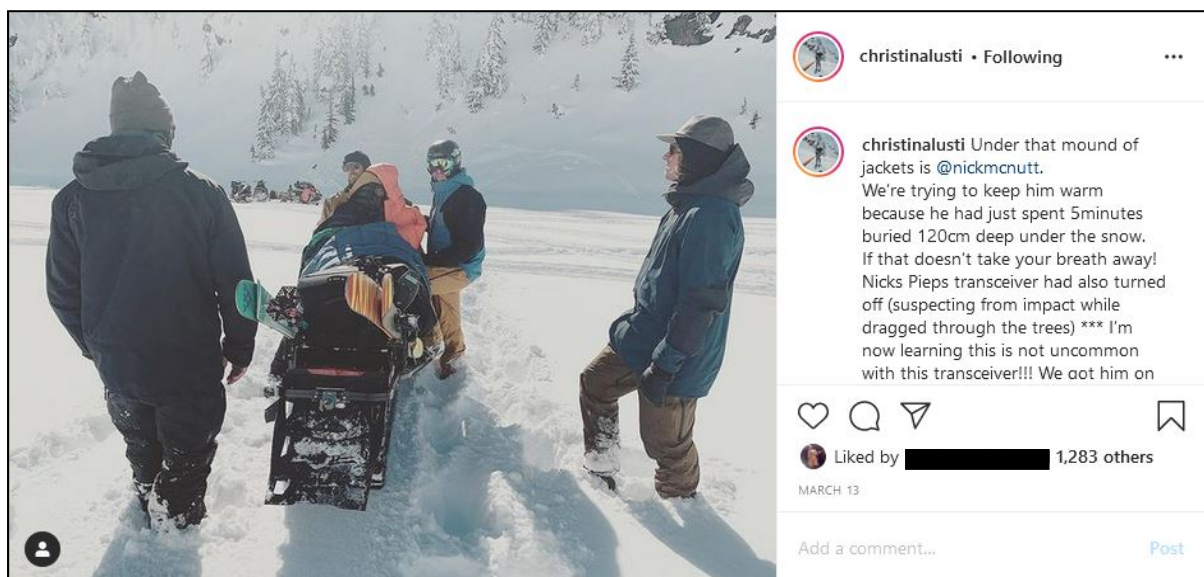


FIGURE 1.2: One of Christina Lustenberger's Instagram posts about the incident. SOURCE: Instagram - @christinalusti

⁷ A probe is another piece of avalanche rescue equipment carried by tourers. It is a thin, long (>240cm) and collapsible pole that is used in tandem with an avalanche beacon to pinpoint the location of a buried avalanche victim by being inserted into the snowpack to 'feel' for the victim.

Having not identified any problems with the beacons at the start of the day, the team concluded that something had malfunctioned with McNutt's device causing it to independently shift from the 'send' setting to 'search' in the course of the day. As established professionals, the skiers in the group had relationships with the industry and were able to work with the manufacturer and distributors of the beacon, Pieps and Black Diamond, to conduct a range of tests to examine the propensity for the beacons to malfunction in the way McNutt's had. During the course of the investigations, the skiers drew on their networks of friends and connections in the subculture to learn that there had been several instances of other tourers experiencing similar problems with the devices. Realising there was an issue with the beacons, the skiers privately called on the brands involved to issue a recall of the product and correct the problems.

However, this was not forthcoming. On 10th October 2020, one of the skiers, Christina Lustenberger published a collection of posts on her Instagram account (@christinalusti) detailing the experience that the group had earlier that year. Following this there was a flood of comments from recreational skiers and snowboarders who had experienced similar issues, including some who had lost friends and family that were using these specific devices (Arvesen 2020). Together with the tests conducted with the manufacturers, these anecdotes have produced the allegation that the mechanics of the switch that changes the beacon from 'send' to 'search' can be unlocked unintentionally due to its design. The publicisation of these issues that unfolded from Lustenberger and others' posts (see figs. 1.1; 1.2) ultimately led to Pieps and Black Diamond posting their own announcement on social media channels (see fig. 1.3) and the discontinuation of the sale of one model of the beacon and a program for upgrading to higher model (see fig. 1.4). Nonetheless, the brands maintain that the issue is not inherent to the design of the product and can be mitigated with routine maintenance and inspections (Arvesen 2020). In broad terms the handling of the situation has not been well received by the backcountry community. In online forums and social media posts, comments on the issue reveal an emerging distrust of these beacons, and suggestions from many individuals that they will cease to consider the brand as an option when making purchases.

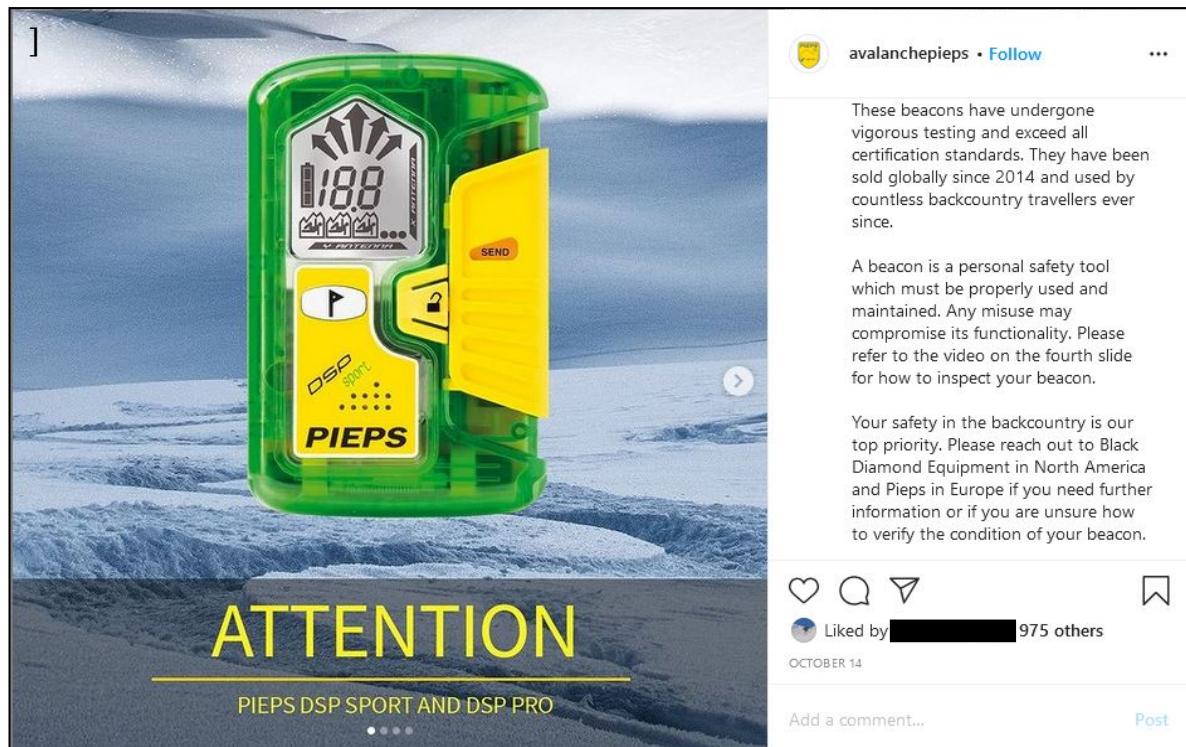


FIGURE 1.3: Pieps Instagram post concerning the function of their beacons.
SOURCE: Instagram - @avalanchepeips

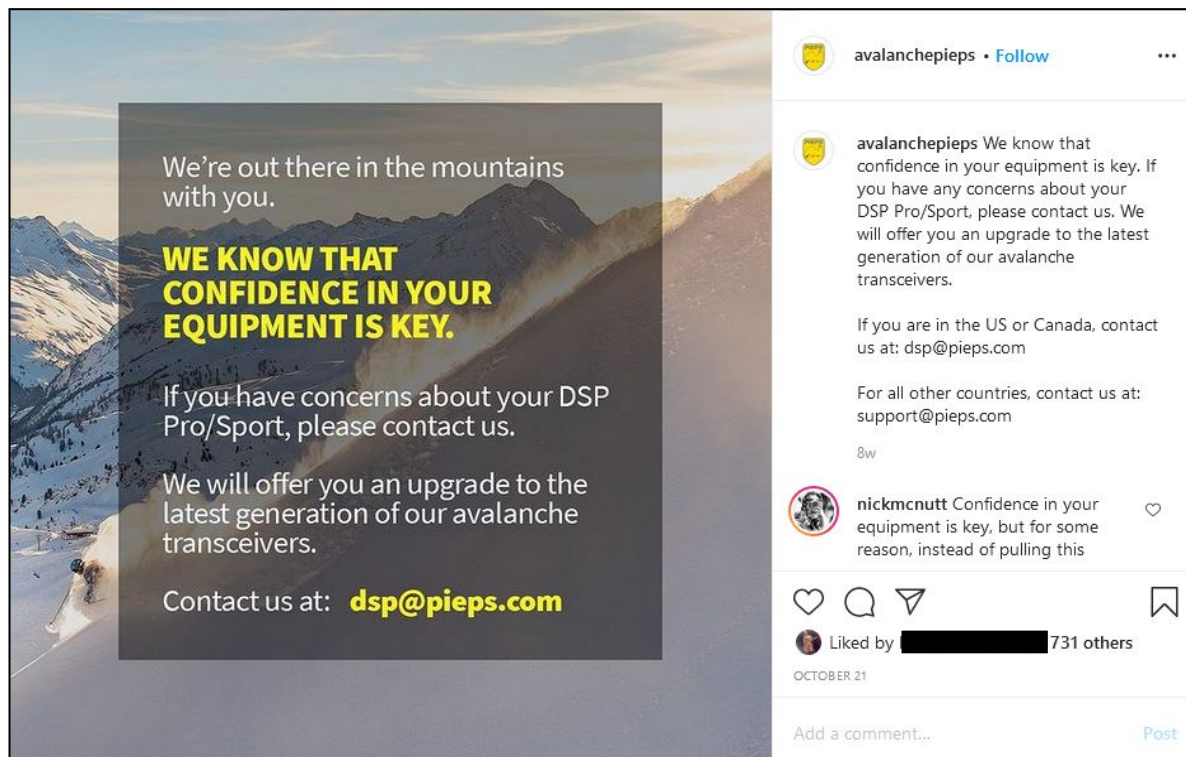


FIGURE 1.4: Pieps Instagram post concerning the beacon upgrade program.
SOURCE: Instagram - @avalanchepeips

Together this incident, the involvement and attitudes of the backcountry community, the digital means of that involvement; and the intersections between the commercial, professional athlete and recreational aspects of the subculture represent an acute depiction of the unfolding evolutions being experienced by lifestyle sports. As Stoddart (2012) has described these sports and their subcultures are shaped by these interactions between the human, non-human, immaterial and inorganic. Recreational activities such as surfing, skateboarding and BMX have long been influenced by the social forces emanating from the media, technology and commercialisation. This thesis brings into focus the lifestyle sport practiced by McNutt, Lustenberger and their friends of backcountry skiing and snowboarding, otherwise known as alpine ski touring⁸. The entanglements of these human and non-human, material and non-material elements are central to the way that tourers conduct their practice, shaping their physical and virtual experience. With exponential increases in touring participation these developments unfold in unique directions changing legitimised subcultural practice, knowledge, language, aesthetics and styles. Personally, I have been a skier for over 25 years and have been venturing into the backcountry for the last 10. Before I was born my father spent much of his youth traipsing around the mountains of Europe before returning to Australia to pass on the skiing bug. Spending childhood winter holidays at ‘the snow’ has not only my own disposition to feel at home in the mountains and the development of skiing into a passion, but has also prompted the thoughts that have inspired this project. In occupying this dual position as both a researcher and tourer, I have sought to explore these emerging dynamics that animate the corporality of the backcountry and tourers, and sociologically analyse the interactions and experiences produced within the field.

SETTING THE SCENE PART I: THE HISTORY OF BACKCOUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING

Moving through mountains and alpine environments has been a necessary way of life for different groups of people for millennia. 22 000 years ago during the last ice age, the Ostyak tribe of Siberia told myths that referred to gods who hunted elk on skis (Huntford 2008: 3). From this time on in human history, there is evidence of people adapting to and thriving in mountainous environments. Similarly aged accounts of the use of technology

⁸ For the purposes of readability, backcountry skiing and snowboarding will be referred to as touring, and its practitioners as tourers throughout this thesis.

to assist travelling through snow and mountains exist from China, the Middle East, North America and Scandinavia. Over time techniques were refined and eventually technologies like skis emerged in prehistoric Norway together with Norse legends of Ullr and Skade, the god and goddess of skiing (Dawson 2020). The earliest written accounts of humans developing technology to adapt to these inhospitable places come from Greece in the fourth century BCE. Anabasis, on retreat from Persia with the Greek army, recorded how locals in the Armenian Mountains advised his army to wrap bags around the hooves of their horses to stop them sinking into the snow (Huntford 2008: 15). The practices of making and using the equipment were brought about by the necessities of human life at the time; hunting, foraging and waging war. As Fry (2006) and Huntford (2008) highlight, it was not until the late 18th to mid-19th century that these sorts of practices began to emerge as recreation activities. With the skills and knowledge of skiing central to the culture and the population embodying those capacities, ski races that took place on steep downhill slopes and often featured jumps appeared in Norway at this time. For the most part participation in these events was reserved for men, but accounts of some women who did compete highlight the skiing ability of women in the society. For example, in 1863, 16 year old Ingrid Olsdatter Vestbyen wrote to the Trysil Rifle and Skiing Club asking for permission to take part in the races organised by the club. The Norwegian newspaper, Morgenbladet, reported that Vestyben sought to compete:

not to win any of the prizes because these could only be won by men and boys... but in a village where skiing is just as vital for women as for men if they are to get out of the house, it might be of interest to see an example of women's accomplishment in the use of skis (Huntford 2008: 75).

Vestyben was allowed to compete and in doing so became the first recorded female ski racer. The Morgenbladet report on the event described how 'she flew at lightning speed over the jump and easily, with great assurance stood where many an agile boy had lost his footing before her' to stun the crowd (Huntford 2008: 75). The reporting of Vestyben's efforts circulated through the country prompting other women to follow the example she had set. However this did not lead to the widespread inclusion of women in these events and disrupt the dominance of men in skiing culture.

These events are heralded as the birth of modern skiing, but the equipment and techniques of its most common forms remained largely tethered to its historical origins

of traversing mountainous terrain, but without the purpose of skiing down steep slopes. Long wooden skis and leather boots worked well for covering relatively flat, snow covered ground, but they could not offer the precision and control that is needed to ride down steeper slopes. In spite of this, in the late 1800s new techniques, such as the telemark turn⁹, were created allowing skiers to turn and control their descents downhill. It was shortly after this time, that Fridtjof Nansen crossed Greenland on skis. Nansen could be described as an enigmatic figure. He had a successful career as a ski racer, while also holding a doctorate in marine biology that contributed to the formulation of modern neurology, yet having felt that he had fulfilled his potential in both, in 1888 Nansen sought challenges elsewhere (Huntford 2008: 134). To avoid the errors of previous attempts Nansen modified his and his companions' equipment to what they thought would best suit the terrain. The team designed innovative equipment such as skis with steel lined edges and a method of attaching seal skins to them that is reminiscent of some used today (Huntford 2008: 136). Nonetheless, as Huntford describes 'the great riddle was how snow and skis would function at those latitudes, at different heights, and these particular atmospheric conditions' (2008: 135). Despite several precarious moments, Nansen and his team crossed over 400km from the uninhabited eastern coast of Greenland to the west and in doing so 'proved that even at the highest point, some 2,800m above sea level... Skis still moved in a familiar way and therefore the mechanism of sliding, as yet not understood, still functioned at high altitude' (Huntford 2008: 139). Nansen's achievements brought widespread media attention that popularised the idea of venturing into similar terrain on skis and his expedition stands as the first example of what has evolved into modern backcountry ski and snowboard touring today (Fry 2006: 4; Huntford 2008: 155).

Nordmarka, the hinterland around the Norwegian city of Christiania (now Oslo) became a hub of these practices as their popularity grew through Norway. At this time the exploits of skiers like Roald Amundsen, Wilhelm Holst and Laurentius Urdahl (see fig. 1. 5) were shared through society and they become well known tourers. The attention that these tourers brought to the burgeoning sport meant that some felt a responsibility to address

⁹ Telemark skiing was the first example of technique that used turning to control the speed of descent. It was made possible by the invention of the first 'elastic free-heel binding in the 1860s by Sondre Norheim of Telemark, Norway' (Fry 2006: 93). By providing enough control to tilt the ski on its edge the combination of this technique and the equipment made it much easier to turn.

the dangers and realities that participants could expose themselves to in the backcountry. Notably, after returning from a month in the Nordmarka backcountry to great acclaim, Urdahl became concerned about the popularisation of such a risky practice.

He found Nansen's influence dichotomous. On the one hand, the crossing of Greenland enticed people into the snows without understanding the risks; on the other, it was a catalyst for technical development. Single-handedly, Urdahl set out to deal with both (Huntford 2008: 157-158).

As this thesis reports, modern day tourers share similar concerns about the role that the media plays introducing tourers to the backcountry, and Urdahl's response to the issues he saw would be considered an 'authentic' performance of touring self-identity today. Urdahl organised public meetings where he and his contemporaries would speak on topics including the suitability of the climate for touring at different stages of the year, the most necessary and appropriate equipment and clothing, and innovative techniques (Huntford 2008: 158).



FIGURE 1.5: Urdahl, Amundsen and Holst posing with their equipment in a studio before Amundsen's first tour (1893-4). SOURCE: Ski Museum, Holmenkollen, Oslo.

At the same time as this unfolding progression into the backcountry had been started by Nansen, Urdahl and their like, the popularity of these new iterations of the sport were spreading across the mountain regions of Europe. This created a new impetus for investment of the time and money required to refining the construction of skis and other equipment like bindings and boots. In 1893, the first ski factory in Switzerland was opened in the town of Glarus. The factory produced two types of skis – a telemark model and a ‘mountain’ model of the style used by Nansen – and branded them with the factory owner’s name, Jacober (Hitz n.d). Other commercial enterprises began around the activity in the region and in 1909 Abel Rossignol of France began to construct skis for the French army, establishing the oldest ski manufacturer still in existence today (Masia n.d). At the same time the concept of the ski resort emerged. Meanwhile, Swiss mountain towns, like Davos (Huntford 2008, 211-215) had come to be seen as ideal locations for doctors to send wealthy patients for convalescence in the clean mountain air, where in the winter skiing was thought to be a healthy treatment. The popularity of these towns, their hotels and alpine settings grew and non-patient visitors, most prominently from Britain, began to frequent the Alps in summer for hiking, rest and relaxation. Business in these resort towns sought to capitalise on the same market in the winter months and the potential for skiing tourism was recognised. This saw the construction of the first conveyance specifically for skiing constituted by a small cable car that rose to the Corviglia Terrace of the Swiss town of St Moritz (Huntford 2008: 348). In 1934 in Davos, the Swiss engineer Ernst Constam invented the first iterations of a j-bar drag lift¹⁰, modern iterations of which are still in use today (Hitz n.d). These commercial factors came together to accelerate the growth of skiing not only through Europe, but also in North America. Like Urdahl’s concerns, these types of commercial dynamics and their influence on the growth of skiing are reminiscent of some of the central themes that have emerged from the data to be further explored in this thesis.

This increase in participation saw continued refinement of the required equipment. In the 1950s ‘Howard Head, Bob Lange, and Ed Scott revolutionized skiing through the use of dramatically new combinations of materials to make skis, boots and poles’ (Fry 2006:

¹⁰ Drag lifts describe a category of lifts used in ski resorts whereby the skier or snowboard remains standing, with their feet on the ground to be pulled up a slope by a device on a moving cable. Variations of drag lifts are commonly referred to as; pomas, j-bars and t-bars.

75). The use of new materials like glues and plastics that had become available after WWII in the design and manufacturing process saw dramatic improvements in the performance of equipment and subsequent participation in the sport. In the US the 1950s and 1960s saw participation rise by 15 percent each year. By:

the winter of 1962 – 63 one of every five people on the slopes was skiing for the first time, and three out of five has skied for fewer than five years (Fry 2006: 33).

Despite these participation levels growing at similar rates on either side of the Atlantic, the cultures that arose around them featured several differences. In Europe, wealthy tourists populated the resort towns, and enjoyed the lavish hotels, restaurants and the *après ski* scene as much as the skiing itself (Huntford 2008). At the same time, there were local and dedicated skiers and alpinists who practiced their sport away from the glitz, and established a subculture that respected quiet accomplishment and celebrated unassuming, resilient characters.

Without the same types of established alpine communities and the infrastructure of mountain towns, in post-war America skiing was not initially augmented by the luxurious hotel and bar lifestyle of the Alps. Similarly, sophisticated ski lifts, like those invented in Davos in 1934 took time to catch on, and ski areas remained primitive, often consisting of only a simple rope tow¹¹. The US boom of participation in downhill skiing stemmed from the interest of young people, college students and the expertise of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division who were heavily involved in the established of North American ski areas (Coleman 2004). Legendary stories abound of iconic figures like the ski filmmaker, Warren Miller, spending winters of the 1960s camping and counterfeiting lift tickets in his Volkswagen at the base of Sun Valley ski resort (Fry 2006: 236). This sort of lifestyle, often describe as that of a 'ski bum' or 'dirtbag', remains an evocative image in the world of touring to this day. All the same, regardless of the nature of their engagement with ski culture at this time, all skiers of the era shared a willingness to deal with 'the hardships of flawed equipment and lifts, frostbite, rain, ice, and blustering winds' (Fry 2006: 26). These sorts of corporeal experiences produced *affects* for these skiers,

¹¹ A rope tow is a rudimentary drag lift that consists of a cable or rope that rotates over a distance on two large pulleys. Skiers and snowboards must use their hands to hold the rope (or occasionally a plastic handle) and be pulled uphill. They can be difficult to use and taxing on the body.

engendering a sense of camaraderie amongst them and a desire to produce and share them again. To this day these characteristics continue to inform the self-identity of many tourers.

The increased performance of equipment that helped to popularise skiing following WWII extended to tourers who had continued to access the backcountry throughout this period. Between 1969 and 1974 Sylvian Saudan of Switzerland developed what came to be known in French as *ski savage*, or ‘extreme skiing’. This moniker arose in light of the first descents Saudan made in the peaks around his home of Chamonix, France, including Mt Blanc and the Eiger (Fry 2006: 206-207). Del Mulkey – a photographer who accompanied Saudan and captured his exploits – describes that in the moments before a descent ‘you’d think he [Saudan] was in trance’ (quoted in Fry 2008: 207). These embodied elements of practice in the backcountry Mulkey intimates towards are another point of interest for this project, and represent a central element of the touring experience. Interest in these types of experiences, and the skills necessary to induce them continued to progress with the endless innovation of gear. More and more peaks throughout the backcountries of Europe, North America and beyond were ‘bagged¹²’ by skiers like Patrick Vallencant of France, and Louis Dawson, who skied down every peak over 14 000ft (4250m) in Colorado in 1991 (Fry 2006: 209). Through this time tourers adopted techniques from mountaineering to further extend their capabilities and push into more challenging terrain. The obvious goal of a ski descent of Mt Everest was accomplished in 2000 by Slovenian Davo Karnicar after others had made a series of failed attempts beginning in 1988 (Fry 2006: 208). During the same period that ski tourers were exploring this increasingly consequential terrain, snowboarding began to gain popularity. In 1977 at Stratton Mountain in Vermont Jake Burton began selling what he called a ‘backyard board’ for \$49 dollars. There had been several variations of a similar device that had proceeded Burton’s, but his success saw him accumulate the funds to convert an old farmhouse into a factory and his actions are seen as the definitive genesis of snowboarding (Fry 2006: 236-237). From that time the popularity of snowboarding has increased despite concerted efforts at different stages of its history to limit its growth. By borrowing some of the aesthetics and style of the skateboarders of southern California

¹² Bagging a peak is a term used to describe successfully summiting and/or descending a particular mountain.

that had gained notoriety earlier in 1970s, snowboarders, who were mostly youths, gained a reputation as transgressive, anti-social individuals (Fry 2006: 238-239). With some elements of the subculture growing to embody these labels, some ski areas banned the use of snowboards and attempted to marginalise the practice. Nonetheless snowboarding has grown over recent decades to rival skiing in its share of snowsports participants, and many snowboarders go on to develop an interest in the backcountry and touring.

Through this progression to the highest peaks on the planet and the disruption of snowboarding, technology that allowed these feats to be captured by photographers and videographers also emerged. Professional film companies were established and began to produce feature length movies capturing previously unimaginable stunts of the likes of Americans Scott Schmidt, Mike Hattrup and Glen Plake (see fig. 1.6). The iconic 1988 film, *Blizzard of Aahhhs* 'introduced mohawked bad-boy Glen Plake, a self-confessed drink-and-drug-fuelled punk rocker, and showcased the cliff-jumping prowess of Scot Schmidt' (Hodgetts 2018). The identity performance of these skiers was in stark contrast to the middle class sensibilities of the predominant skiing culture that had emerged out of post-war Europe. Their acceptance amongst a young audience represented the impact of snowboarding and its disruptive qualities and has contributed to the contemporary self-identity of tourers that will be examined in this thesis.



FIGURE 1.6: Mike Hattrup (left), Glen Plake (centre) and Scot Schmidt (right) arriving in Chamonix, as depicted in *The Blizzard of Aahhhs*, directed by Greg Stump.

SOURCE: Bruce Benedict

At this point it is important to reflect on some of the key characteristics of this history. Despite the diversity of skiing and snowboarding's prehistoric origins, and the more recent development of these 'punk-rock' snowsports identities, its evolution into a recreational activity has largely been dominated by affluent sections of western society from European backgrounds. Furthermore, the cultural values that have driven the popularity of snowsports have ultimately been underpinned by ideals stemming from colonialism and hegemonic masculinity. White, men with access to wealth and time have been celebrated in modern history for their stoicism and physical strength in conquests of 'unscaleable' peaks in exotic corners of the globe. Meanwhile the social gate keepers of gender, race and class have maintained the exclusivity of specific snowsports subcultural knowledge and skills. There is nothing unique about the social barriers that snowsports like touring present, but they form an acute node for the manifestation of broader social inequalities that continue to minimise the opportunities for the diversification of the people who constitute these subcultures. As a result the backcountry field retains a relatively homogenous composition, with white males holding a position of cultural dominance. The capacities of male bodies and masculinity hold significant power that can impact the ways that others experience, sense and understand their time in the backcountry. For example performances of 'authentic' touring identity requires the embodiment of traditionally instrumental qualities like resilience, assuredness, material resourcefulness and physical strength. At the same time, these forms of masculinity are unfolding, moveable and not adequately captured by categorisations of patterned gender relations. Instead they emerge through bodies as they move through backcountry terrain and are mediated through modern technologies. In other words the tourer *feels* their masculinity as they manage their vulnerabilities while confidently making critical decisions in their practice.

Despite these social forces, the last 10 – 15 years has seen touring continue to gain popularity amongst those who do have access to the necessary resources to pursue it. The capacity of digital technologies – point-of-view (POV) cameras and drones - have allowed for more vivid representations of the backcountry to reach ever wider audiences. This media content, some reminiscent of the aesthetics established by the *Blizzard of*

Aahhhs, acts as a gateway to the backcountry much like the reports of Nansen's expedition 130 years ago. At the same time, touring participation remains relatively small compared to mainstream skiing and snowboarding. For example the Snowsports Industries of America recorded 1.39 million tourers in the US during the 2017 – 18 winter, as compared to 30 million participants in downhill skiing and snowboarding (Smith 2019). As such tourers remain a minority in the world of snowsports, but participation is rapidly expanding. As Kim Miller, the CEO of Scarpa¹³ North America suggests, the demand for gear that performs to a high level reliably is 'growing and it's growing quickly' (Smith 2019). As the prices to ski or snowboard in a ski area become more prohibitive (a lift pass can be upwards of \$150 per day) and awareness of touring expands, the backcountry has become an enticing option for individuals with dispositions that prime their interest in it. However it is simplistic to suggest that these financial factors are what is driving skiers and snowboarders to the backcountry. According to Oliver Steffen the CEO of G3¹⁴, people who are engaging with touring are 'looking to expand their experiences... They want to go a little farther. They want to go to that ridge that they've seen from the lift for a couple of seasons'. With a greater awareness of the potentials of touring thanks to digital media and increased access to higher performing equipment the door to experiencing the backcountry has been pushed ajar. As this thesis highlights, the nexus of these factors have prompted concerns that stand as modern iterations of Urdahl's – the popularity of the backcountry is causing people to explore it without understanding the risks. However data from organisations such as the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, highlight that despite increased numbers of people touring in avalanche terrain, after peaking around 2010 the rate of fatalities has decreased (see fig. 1.7), more tourers are completing formal training programs, and the fatalities that do occur tend to involve experienced and educated tourers as opposed to those who are less initiated (Green & Logan 2020). As such, part of this study is comprised of an explorations of these sentiments of tourers, and the ways their adoption of technologies and established subcultural ideals mitigates the manifestation of those concerns.

¹³ Scarpa is an Italian footwear brand that specialising in touring and hiking boots.

¹⁴ G3 is a Canadian manufacturer of a range of touring specific equipment such as skis, touring bindings and skins.

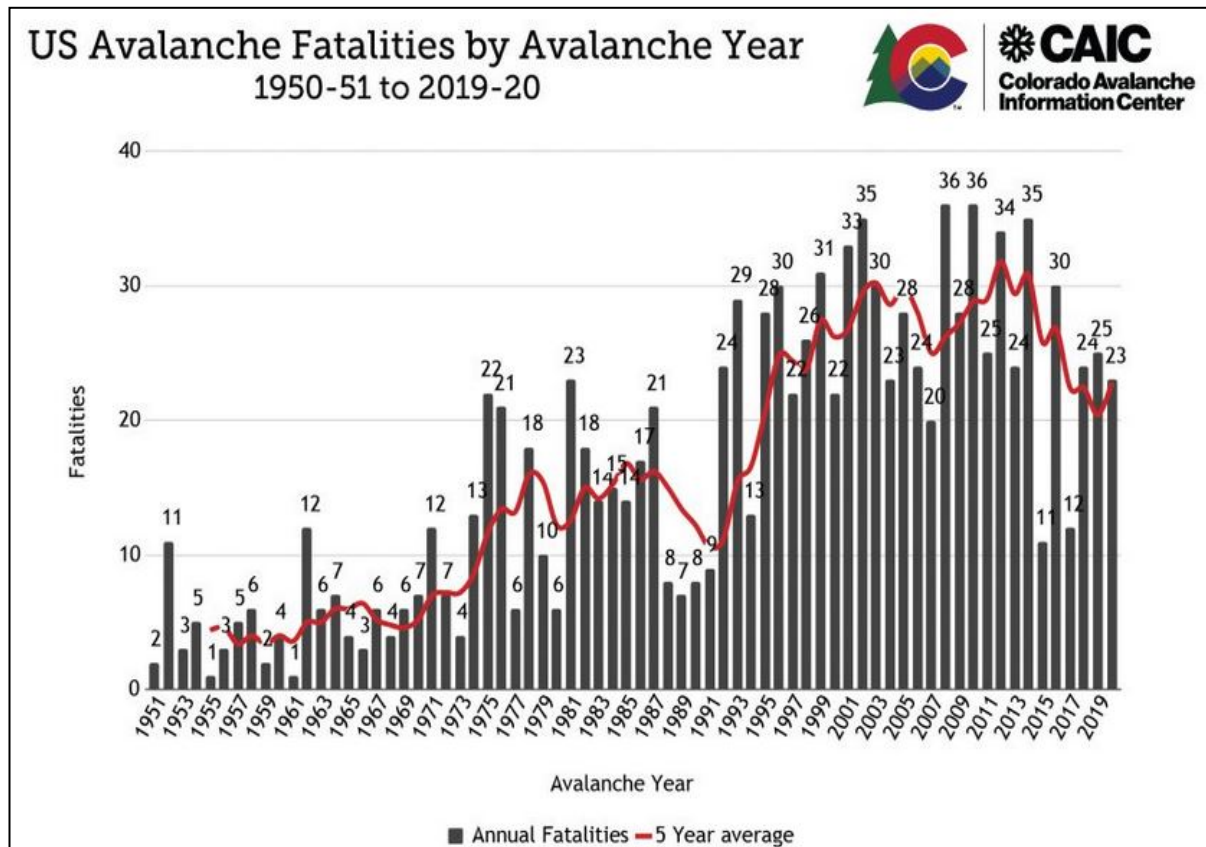


FIGURE 1.7: Graph of US avalanche fatalities by winter seasons 1950-51 to 2019-20.
SOURCE: Colorado Avalanche Information Center

SETTING THE SCENE PART II: A DEFINITION OF TOURING AND THE BACKCOUNTRY

Backcountry tourers today take advantage of all the developments that have historically unfolded to continue the tradition of venturing into the mountains to test their capacities. Nonetheless it is difficult to provide an unambiguous definition of touring. Touring practices are constituted by a broad spectrum of performance that gives rise to unique experiences, dependent on the myriad ways tourers configure their engagement with the field. For the purposes of this thesis, touring is broadly understood as travelling through mountainous, snow covered terrain, unsupported by mechanical technology or infrastructure, and with the desire to ascend slopes in order to ski or snowboard down them. To clarify, the backcountry is described as ‘uncontrolled’, as opposed to the controlled nature of mainstream snowsports that take place in a ski area. A ski area, also referred to as a ski resort, is a location where lift-accessed skiing and snowboarding takes

place. Ski areas have clearly defined areas where skiing, snowboarding and other winter activities are permitted. These areas are controlled by professional and volunteer staff who put out signage, close off dangerous sections and tend to injuries and other emergencies. Together with these spaces ski areas are also generally comprised by a base area with parking, public transport, ski and snowboard school offices, accommodation, restaurants, and retail outlets. In contrast the backcountry has none of these amenities and as such its description as uncontrolled signifies the lack of avalanche control¹⁵ and other risk mitigation such as the signposting and access to emergency services. The remoteness of these places can be seen in figures 1.8 and 1.9, and the experience of being in these environments is an integral part of touring for many. Modern equipment (that is discussed further below) has allowed a larger number of tourers to venture further into the backcountry, often over multiple days, to ride more technical and consequential terrain than has previously been the case.

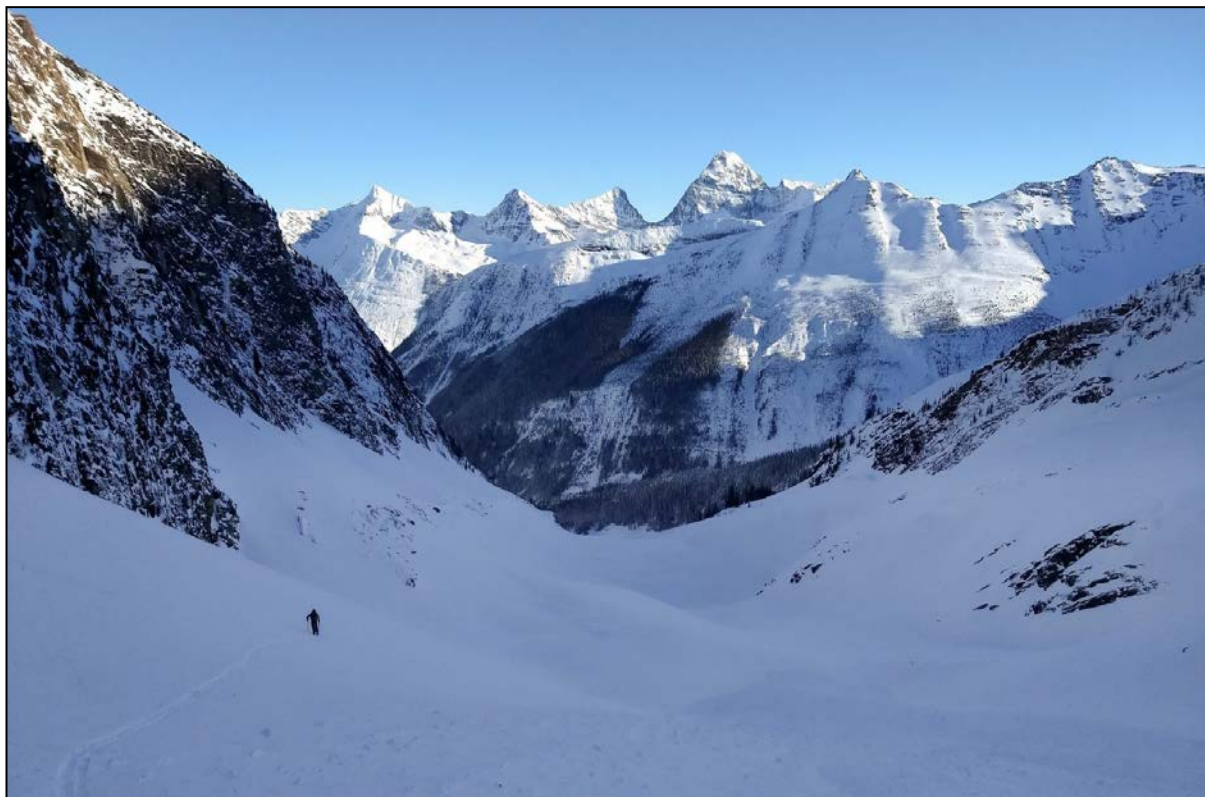


FIGURE 1.8: A tourer in the Rogers Pass backcountry near Revelstoke, BC, Canada.
SOURCE: Olivier Denis-Larocque/snowbrains.com

¹⁵ In avalanche prone areas within ski areas or close to roads and other infrastructure, organisations are tasked with the targeted detonation of explosives in order to deliberately trigger avalanches and minimise their impact and danger.



FIGURE 1.9: Snow campsite in the backcountry of the Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, Australia. SOURCE: Personal photograph

Some tourers will enter the backcountry by mechanical means, but complete a portion of their practice under their own power. For example many ski areas offer what is described as 'lift-accessed' touring whereby after riding on a ski lift, tourers can access the backcountry through a gate marked along the ski area boundary. Similarly, tourers might also chose to use a snowmobile to get deeper access into the backcountry, before turning to their own efforts to reach summit of a peak or slope they would like to descend. Commercial helicopter and snowcat¹⁶ operations are also available in many regions for tourers to use in a similar manner to snowmobiles. However these have added expense and beyond professional athletes, photographers, and backcountry guides, are not often, if ever used by most tourers. As a result of the different ways tourers access the backcountry, they are ultimately dependent on a range of highly specified equipment that provides them the functionality to safely access an array of terrain. Tourers who prefer to snowboard have a collection of different styles of equipment at their disposal. Some chose to use a traditional snowboard in conjunction with snowshoes that allow them to move uphill and across flat ground, but can be stored in a backpack for the descent. Meanwhile splitboards, which have grown in popularity and can be seen in figures 1.10

¹⁶ A snowcat is a large vehicle that moves on tracks that provide traction in the snow. They are often used in snow-maintenance (snow removal, preparation of ski areas etc.) but can also be configured like a bus for the transport of people.

and 1.11, are used by some tourers to provide greater ease of movement in alpine terrain. A splitboard is essentially a traditional snowboard that has been sliced vertically through its centre. With the addition of several pieces of hardware, it can be clamped together, and its bindings orientated appropriately to ride downhill or split apart and reconfigured and worn like a pair of skis to allow for the action of ‘skinning’ (see fig. 1.12).



FIGURE 1.10: A splitboard in its alternate configurations.

SOURCE: Bryce Kloster/Karakoram



FIGURE 1.11: A splitboard configured for uphill travel with climbing skins attached.

SOURCE: < splitboarding.eu >



FIGURE 1.12: A group of tourers taking strides uphill with touring bindings and climbing skins. SOURCE: < commons.wikimedia.org >

‘Skinning’ requires the use of particular types of bindings that attach the tourer to their equipment and can be configured to pivot vertically at the toe and release the tourers heel to take a stride, before being switched to lock it in place for the descent. For tourers who ski, this sees them make a choice from several styles of binding highlighted in figure 1.13 and particular types of boots that allow for the skinning motion. Skinning also necessitates the attachment of climbing ‘skins’ to the base of the ski or snowboard with a specialised adhesive and clips (see fig. 1.11). This terminology is derived from the historical use of animal skins in their construction, but modern climbing skins are produced using synthetic and natural fibres like nylon and mohair¹⁷. These pieces of equipment form the core components that allow tourers to move through challenging terrain and conditions with ease. In certain situations however tourers also draw upon a range of auxiliary equipment such as technical clothing¹⁸, crampons¹⁹, ski crampons²⁰,

¹⁷ Mohair is a fabric produced from the hair of Angora goats.

¹⁸ Technical clothing is a term that describes the array of waterproof, insulating and functional clothing that tourers wear to protect themselves from harsh conditions.

¹⁹ Crampons are metal spikes that can be attached to the soles of touring boots to provide greater traction.

²⁰ Ski crampons are similar metal spikes that attach to touring bindings and provide greater traction while skinning.

ice axes²¹, and ropes, harnesses and climbing hardware,²² (see fig. 1.14) to facilitate their practice as is highlighted in figure 1.15. This gear is employed in a range of different techniques, but all are used in conjunction with the embodied skills tourers possess.



FIGURE 1.13: Some different styles of touring ski bindings. A 'tech' style binding that prioritises low weight over downhill capability and a 'frame' binding that is more focused on downhill performance SOURCES: <mpora.com/skiing>

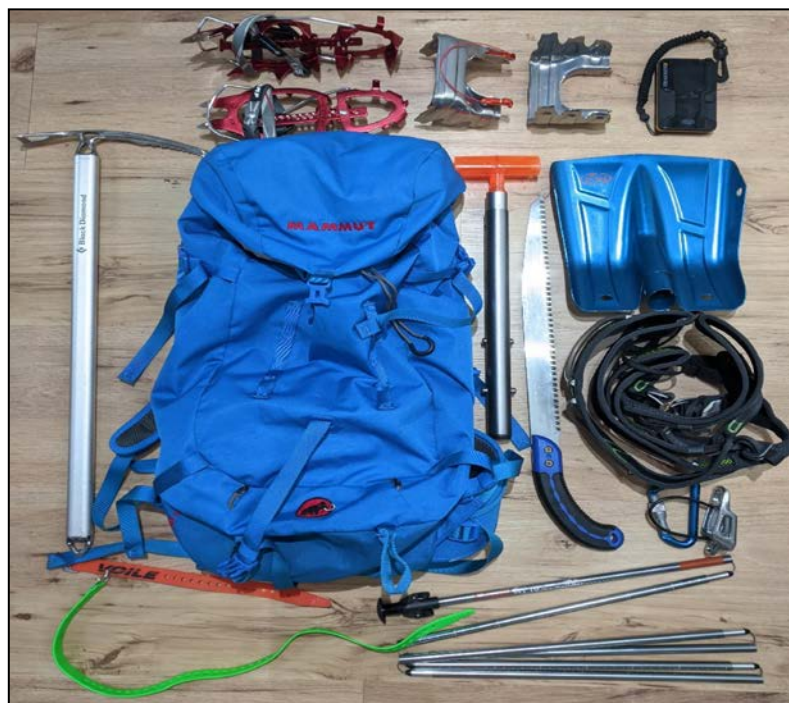


FIGURE 1.14: A collection of some of the gear that a tourer might carry on a routine day in the backcountry including: crampons, ski crampons, avalanche beacon, shovel, snow saw, harness, probe, ice axe and other miscellaneous items. SOURCE: Personal Photograph

²¹ Lightweight, axes with a long shaft and narrow, pointed headed designed to punch and hold through harder surfaces like ice.

²² Carabineers, belay devices, anchors, pulleys etc.



FIGURE 1.15: Tourers using climbing techniques and equipment to ascend in the Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, Australia. SOURCE: Personal photograph

Over the course of the last 10 to 15 years however, touring practice and experience has evolved under the influence of broader social forces. As this study reports, the evolution and influence of digital technologies, media and concomitant increase in commercial activity have seen the arrival of diverse collection of newly legitimised practice and modes of engaging with the backcountry subculture. These new entanglements with the field that have become integral components in the experience of being a tourer. These include, but are not limited to; digital practices in the consumption and production of media; the incorporation of digital technology in embodied practice; and subsequent new methods of achieving status and legitimacy both within and beyond the touring community. As these alterations emerged they have produced debate over the authenticity of new practice and the legitimacy of defining them as part of the touring experience.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, and as is highlighted through the story of Nick McNutt and his Pieps avalanche beacon, the definition of touring arrives at a point from which the field is viewed as a diverse and emergent crossroads formed by a multiplicity of component parts. In this fluid space we see affective encounters between tourers' bodies; their socio-historical contexts; the mountains; climate; equipment; class; gender; race; media; commercial interests; and more. In order to traverse this expansive assemblage this thesis adopts a theoretical perspective that draws on the work of Threadgold (2020) and Wetherell (2012; 2013) to employ the conceptual toolkit of Bourdieu and imbue it with notions of affect theory. Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit and its developments that imbue it with notions of affect theory (Wetherell 2012, 2013; Threadgold 2020). As a result the project has assumed a 'more-than-representational' (Lorimer 2005) perspective that has allowed the exploration of the affective intensities and atmospheres that tourers first feel, then make sense of, through their bodies in practice.

To further establish the need for this more-than-representational orientation, this thesis proceeds with a review of a broad set of literature that encompasses the thematic nodes explored by this project. Edgework theory is highlighted to offer a framework with which to understand the risky practices of touring in the backcountry. A collection of work that explores the experience of other lifestyle sports subcultures as they have undergone similar evolutions to those of touring is examined. In a similar regard, broader literature has been discussed to offer insight into various ramifications that have come from the proliferation of digital, and particularly social, media. In turn studies that explore the changing nature of economies and labour in these contexts are also appraised. Together this collection of literature stands to support the theoretical perspective of the project with a conceptual framework that can keep pace with the focus of study as it unfolds.

Following this literature review, the thesis offers a thorough explanation of its synthesis of Bourdieu and affect to highlight the latent affective tinges written into Bourdieusian ideas. This chapter also establishes the suitability of this nuanced reading of affect and Bourdieu in unison with advancing the case of more-than-representational research. Subsequently, Chapter 4 provides an explanation of the methodological framing and discussion of the research process. Here justification is offered for the use of a range of

methods that include participant observation, fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, digital ethnographies, and my position as an ‘insighter’ researcher (Hodkinson 2005; Sharp 2020). Together these methods have enabled the project to maintain its more-than-representational perspective and produce data that both animates the embodied intensities of touring and captures the discursive outcomes of them.

With the theoretical and thematic underpinnings of the project established Chapters 5, 6 and 7 offer analysis of the data collected. These findings have been organised along thematic lines. Chapter 5 offers discussion of the embodied practices, both physical and digital that tourers engage with when they are in the backcountry with snow beneath their feet. Chapter 6 then provides exposition on the digital engagements of tourers and how the introduction of new forms of practice represent a struggle over what tourers feel is ‘authentic’. Chapter 7 looks to the impact of commercial interest and activity in the backcountry field. A description of the commercial landscape is established, before an analysis of the ways in which professional touring athletes, other industry workers (photographers, avalanche forecasters etc.), and recreational tourers experience commercialisation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The term 'lifestyle sports' has been used to encapsulate a variety of activities that have been popularised in recent decades including: surfing, skateboarding, mountain biking, rock climbing and BASE jumping. For the purposes of this project, 'lifestyle sports' has been chosen over other terms, such as 'alternative' and 'extreme' sports, as it encapsulates the broad nature of participation in the backcountry field, as well as doing away with some of the connotations that arise with the use of other descriptors. As Wheaton (2010: 1059) argues, 'alternative' describes a much wider array of activities than those that make up a sports subculture. Similarly, 'extreme' is often misused and media-driven term that distorts the realities of lifestyle sports for participants. These types of depictions have seen persistent characterisations of lifestyle sports practitioners as transgressive and anti-social despite their popularity and subsequent legitimacy that has developed in recent years (see King & Church 2020). This dynamic is also contributed to as lifestyle sports are delineated by their subjugation of traditional sport culture, to be less bounded by rules and intuitions, along with their occurrence in un-controlled spaces (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 170). These lifestyle sports have seen increasing participation and interest in the 21st century leading to their legitimisation broader sections of society. Despite the growth in engagement with these subcultures, they have for the most part remained culturally dominated by ideals of masculinity and are characterised by the presence and celebration of the embodied skills of male bodies. Although expressions of masculinity in lifestyle sports are nuanced (Beal 1996; Evers 2004; 2006; 2009; 2016; 2019.b; Thorpe 2010) they can be spaces and communities that, in part, remain inhospitable to woman and other minorities.

The itinerant and decentralised natures make these changes difficult to accurately quantify (Wheaton 2010: 1058), but equipment sales, media commentaries and market research provides some insight into the patterns of growth that are occurring in lifestyle sports. This evolution and development of lifestyle sports has spurred renewed sociological interest in the practices, people and experiences that make up these subcultures as they offer insights into broader issues faced by late-modern society. As Wheaton suggests:

in these activities we can see some of the central issues and paradoxes of advanced capitalist or late-modern societies, such as the expression of self-identity as increasingly fragmented... the decline of collective and community values, and a concurrent focus on the (self-fulfilled, hedonistic) self (2010: 1060).

For touring, this increase in participation has coincided with the digitalisation of subcultural media, the birth of new media platforms and their influence on subcultural experience. These online spaces have provided new avenues for the backcountry subculture to develop, and for representations of it to reach wider audiences. As media increasingly spreads and morphs into digital spaces, proliferating around new technologies, many lifestyle sports communities have been forerunners in the adoption and adaption of this evolution (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 170). Practices involving the use of digital media and its related technologies have become increasingly common in touring. As Thorpe (2016) highlights, the subcultural pressures brought to bear by the evolution of lifestyle sports media are increasingly inextricable from those of commercialisation. As such research of lifestyle sports can provide a strong basis from which to follow these emergent trends and garner understandings about their impact in such subcultures, and general role of digital media and commercialisation in society. This review will discuss a range of literature that engages with these notions and how they occur in lifestyle sports subcultures, as well as examine perspectives on volitional risk taking that characterises a significant portion of touring practice.

CONVERGENT MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN LIFESTYLE SPORTS

The notion of 'authenticity' in processes of identity construction are intrinsic to achieve status elements of lifestyle sports subcultures. Lifestyle sports subcultures can be understood as Bourdieusian social fields in which different types of 'capital are central to identity construction, and struggles over legitimate use and meaning of the body and subcultural space' (Wheaton 2017: 106). As such particular sets of values, aesthetics, language and practices, or 'distinctions' as termed by Thornton (1995), become codified by the subculture. Indeed lifestyle sports practitioners seek out these 'distinctions' in order to generate a unique social identity that is representative of their subcultural status and authenticity (Wheaton 2004: 4). Overt symbolic markers such as a specifically branded t-shirt, and more subtle symbolic markers such as wearing that t-shirt in a size

that makes it baggy, signify and solidify legitimacy amongst those who show their ability to 'do it' (Wheaton 2004: 9). The ability to 'do it' that Wheaton refers to goes beyond an individual's embodied ability to perform the central practices of the sport. It also encompasses the 'embodied, sensual and spatial expression' of doing it that Evers (2009: 899), drawing on the work of Borden (2001), describes as 'style'. As practitioners increase expertise their corporality is affected by a reservoir of previous embodied experience to endow their interactions with their equipment and practice with grace, fluidity and distinction. 'Style' also produces affects, for instances informing hierarchies in the 'pecking-orders' (Evers 2009) of lifestyle sports communities. Style is also more than the capacity to catch and ride a wave or manoeuvre a BMX bike through the air. It also encapsulates the ease and familiarity with which the surfer carries her board under her arm across the sand. These types of embodied identity performance distinguish those who produce them as 'authentic', but it is important to note that the subcultural legitimacy afforded by these symbolic and corporeal markers is not reserved for those with the most expertise. Rather 'authenticity' is relative, and embodied and symbolic identify performance that is self-aware of its place in the 'pecking-order' can mean that the practice of those with less skill is nonetheless seen as legitimate.

Together with the embodiment of these qualities and 'style' specialist lifestyle sports media have played significant roles in curating and preserving subcultural knowledge and aesthetics. In lifestyle sports such as skateboarding (Wheaton & Beal 2003) and windsurfing (Wheaton 2000) specialist magazines and videos/DVDs acted to authenticate and maintain the distinctions of lifestyle sports subcultures in the past. Today digital media provides the basis for these modes of subcultural expression. As Lewis (2015: 878) contends, lifestyle sports media can illuminate the worlds of meaning that are written into the visual culture of lifestyle sports. Similarly, Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014) have shown the role of specialist 'zines' in the world of roller derby and how the values of the subculture are solidified and built upon through them. For Thornton (1995: 30) specialist media is 'a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge' and understanding subcultural 'distinctions' is contingent upon thorough investigation of media consumption. However with the advent of digital media and associated technologies such as point-of-view (POV) cameras and smart phones, the position and influence of specialist subcultural media is evolving too. As Wilson remarks:

The emergence of the Internet has influenced understandings of these various forms and levels of communication, and for this reason needs to be accounted for in responsible and rigorous research on subcultural life (2008: 148).

In this regard it has become necessary to reassess the perspective with which researchers approach investigations of media. Moreover, such research must now extend beyond exploring just the media consumption that Thornton illuminates, but as Dumont (2017) suggests, include the myriad practices emerging around the production of digital media in its varied forms and the subsequent impacts for subcultures.

In this context, some social theorists argue that separating the 'real' from the virtual has become an increasingly fruitless endeavour. There has been a convergence of mass and interpersonal media brought about by the changes in the ways individuals receive and process information (Walther et al. 2011). For example where discussions on current affairs and their coverage on television between peers was predicated by a necessary spatial and temporal disconnect, the news programme and discussion of it can now occur simultaneously. Friends might discuss election coverage over Facebook instant messaging as they watch it, or interactively participate in a reality show by voting through the use of digital technologies. These dynamics are facilitated through new communication platforms that rely upon and provide access to peer-generated information in unprecedented ways (Walther et al. 2011: 20). Essentially this has led to what can be termed mediated inter-personal communication that dissolves the constraints of time and space that have traditionally been imposed on communication and media. Brabazon (2017: 600) describes these kinds of changes as 'deterritorialisation' in which 'we are no longer bodies in space and time, but living life on and through a screen that connects us to a network'. Digital media deemphasises the boundaries of the physical world and in doing so creates new ways of thinking about bodies, movement, iterations of time and space. From a similar perspective, Knorr Cetina (2005) suggests that the infrastructure of digital media constitutes a scopic system. The scopic systems theory describes a reflexive and multi-faceted structure through which content is produced, contextualised and responded to, in relation to the subcultural constraints in which it is operating. Scopic media also allow the emergence of structures that are spatially unrestricted, and develop in various configurations across digital

‘microstructures’ like subcultural social media (Knorr Cetina 2005: 216). Less bounded by temporal and spatial concerns, individuals can reflexively respond with ‘synchronicity and immediacy’ (Knorr Cetina 2005: 216). In other words, scopic media can transpose experiences to alternative environments and modify the boundaries of response, or ‘deterritorialise’ both content and audience. These concepts are reminiscent of Ponting’s (2009) exploration of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ of surfing media and highlight the potential for these technologies to affect their audience. It is essential to consider them from a perspective that incorporates those aspects of the phenomena.

In order to conceptualise such audiences that feel this affect, the somewhat contested notion of ‘publics’ is utilised by boyd (2011) to develop the concept of ‘networked publics’. A public can be understood as a collective, but potentially decentralised, group of people who share common perspectives of the world, identities, interests and more material items such as texts. As such the audience of specialised media can be viewed as a public. However the growth of digital media and technology has reconfigured the architecture of publics by incorporating the characteristics discussed by Brabazon (2017), Knorr Cetina (2005) and Walther et al. (2011). Subsequently boyd (2011: 39) defines networked publics as both the space that is constituted by digital media and technology, as well as ‘the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice’. Networked publics can be delineated by their architectures of ‘bits’ (as opposed to atoms) that alter how people engage with them and the ways that information flows through them. Networked publics still allow individuals to coalesce for social and cultural purpose but also allow connections that go beyond the immediacy of close friends and family. However boyd (2011: 45-46) argues that the structural affordances of networked publics can ‘destabilize core assumptions people make when engaging in social life’. Ultimately from structures of friends lists, likes and profiles, four key affordances emerge which boyd (2011: 46) posits to induce these changes. Firstly the persistence of online expressions that are systematically archived. Secondly, the ease with which content can be reproduced. Thirdly, the capacity for the visibility of content to be scaled up, and finally the searchability of content in networked publics. The impact of these affordances opens new questions about the practices people engage with to connect, communicate and construct identity, not only digitally, but in society more broadly and how these changes might be manifested in lifestyle sports.

Papacharissi (2015.a; 2015.b) has expanded on the work of boyd (2011) to suggest that networked publics are affective publics influenced by sentiment and structures of storytelling. Drawing on case studies that investigated the use of twitter during the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and the Occupy movement, the structural affordances of social media act to form an architecture of storytelling that ‘help us tell stories about who we are, who we imagine we might be and how we might get there’ (Papacharissi 2015.b: 5). These structures simultaneously construct and constitute framing devices that allow networked publics to converge or dissolve around shared sentiment and develop narratives that are mediated by interactions based in that sentiment. This ‘mediality’ ‘shapes the textures of these publics and affect becomes the drive that keeps them going’ (Papacharissi 2015.b: 2). Borrowing from the same Deleuzian perspective and vocabulary, Renold and Ringrose (2016) posit that affective publics are not simply populated by humans and their interactions, but rather assemblages of human and non-human bodies that are mediated by the encounters and architectures of digital media and technology which dissolve conventional binaries such as the virtual and the real. Key to this perspective is understanding these dynamics in terms of assemblages. In doing so the bodies (both human and non-human), practices and technology that constitute assemblages of affective networks in this way ‘decenters the subject, to show how it is made up of and criss-crossed by multiple external forces, of the non-human, inorganic and technological kind’ (Renold & Ringrose 2016: 2). This perspective provides the space to consider the multi-faceted makeup of lifestyle sport subcultures and the complex encounters that occur within them.

One such assemblage that has been explored in existing literature is that of digital data assemblages featuring digital technologies that track and quantify all manner of embodied practice. As Lupton (2017: 201) explains, work on notions of cyber technology and its infusion with human bodies can be traced back to the 1990s and early 2000s when arguments were made to recognise the unique and complex connections between human and non-human subjects/objects. These perspectives have grown from a theoretical basis in ‘sociomaterialism’ (Lupton 2016: 39). Sociomaterialism offers the scope to move beyond the privileging of language and discourse to incorporate a focus on the significance of material objects to social worlds. A sociomaterial perspective builds on the

concepts of actor-network theory to understand that material objects act as agents and exercise influence over other human and non-human constituents of such networked assemblages. In doing so this perspective also acknowledges and emphasises the constant fluid and multiplicity of these subject-object relations. The proliferation of accessible and advanced technology such as smart phones, GPS devices, fitness trackers and POV cameras has seen the increasing digitalisation of bodies that emit huge amounts of data. Lupton suggests that this data can be understood as ‘lively capital’ generated by ‘new forms of bodies being configured via contemporary digital technologies’ (2017: 205). This data is fluid and flows through digital data economies which have the potential to commercialise it. Indeed, self-tracking data which is commonly produced in lifestyle sports ‘is also gathered and analysed by the corporations that own the software and platforms in order to extract surplus value, primarily by selling it for marketing and other purposes’ (McEwan 2018: 241). The data and its technologies are analytic, aggregative and predictive providing the potential for them to effect things like individuals’ behaviour. These impacts can include ‘tangible material effects on people’s actions, including the ways in which their bodies are conceptualised, managed and disciplined’ (Lupton 2017: 202). For example, the panopticon of CCTV in public spaces highlights the ways technologies can shape human behaviour and the movement of bodies in space, as the surveillance, and subsequent data generated, influence the actions of those being recorded (Lupton 2016: 58). This kind of dynamic has the potential to instigate a feedback loop whereby data is generated by digital technologies to then be used by an individual to assess their practice and performance, adjust their behaviour and establish new configurations of data (Lupton 2017: 206). With this in mind, researchers need to ask how digital technologies can push individuals towards engaging with certain practices and go beyond merely investigating the types of data they produce. As such it is critical that understandings about the ways human and non-human bodies encounter each other to form the ‘new hybrid beings’ who create that data are established. In light of these concepts Thorpe (2016: 21) signposts important questions about lifestyle sport research and future-facing ontological and epistemological positions. Specifically addressing the impact of POV cameras in lifestyle sports, Thorpe challenges researchers to consider how digital technologies are:

affecting the embodied action sporting experience, influencing action sport media production and consumption, and contributing to new forms of

individual and collective meaning-making within local and global action sport communities (Thorpe 2016: 13).

These ideas prompt researchers to explore these digital assemblages to animate the affective intersections of the digital, organic and immaterial in lifestyle sports, and how they are felt and understood by those who pass through them. With this in mind, I now look to understandings of commercialisation that can provide insights into those elements of these encounters in touring.

LIFESTYLE SPORTS: COMMERCIALISATION AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Commercialisation forms an intrinsic relationship with lifestyle sports. Products that are made, marketed and sold reflect a multitude of interests. Equipment is required for participation, while auxiliary products like hats, t-shirts and so on, help to instil and preserve legitimised values, aesthetics and subcultural knowledge. Drawing on a 20 year longitudinal study, Edwards and Corte (2010) have developed a theoretical framework which can be used as a basis from which to analyse the ways that commercialisation evolves in lifestyle sports. The authors observed the emergence of Greenville, North Carolina, as a hub of the BMX subculture. The town's scene became a barometer of the knowledge and practices of the lifestyle more broadly, because professional riders, amateurs and the industry came to see the town as a Mecca of BMX (2010: 1138-1141). The nature of commercialisation in BMX evolved markedly over the 20 years of the ethnography. Over time, control and influence of the industry moved from riders to commercial interests, and ultimately outside the sport altogether.

The tripartite frame offered by Edwards and Corte (2010) describes movement, paraphernalia and mass-market forms of commercialisation. First, movement commercialisation represents the grass roots of lifestyle sports industries. Entities making up movement commercialisation are generally owned or influenced by the users of the products themselves. As well as the equipment necessary for participation, movement commercialisation includes merchandise such as clothing and accessories that embody and preserve 'authentic' principles of the subculture (Edwards & Corte 2010: 1144-1145). Secondly, paraphernalia commercialisation considers the production and marketing of equipment necessary to practice the sport but not specifically concerned with the broader preservation of the subculture. This type of commercialisation is

characterised by exchange relations between user-consumers and the producers who do not necessarily share the same ‘authentic’ outlook (Edwards & Corte 2010: 1143-1146). Often, but not exclusively, the major focus for these large commercial entities is profit. As such the maintenance and appreciation of subcultural values can wane and be distorted by the shift to paraphernalia commercialisation from outside the subculture. While at the same time, new opportunities and avenues for evolution can be presented. Finally ‘mass-market commercialisation’ (Edwards & Corte 2010: 1146-1147) sees the symbolism, style and status of the lifestyle sports co-opted by external commercial interests to be used in, what Lewis (2015: 877) describes as the ‘pervasive’ marketing of unrelated products like soft drink and cereal. Essentially this takes the ‘authentic’ image of the sport and transposes it to use in exchange relations that rarely, if at all, involve the groups who cultivate the image. Ultimately Edwards and Corte (2010: 1147) suggest that this multi-staged process can have significant influence on the landscape of lifestyle sports. The level of that impact however, is determined by the specific configurations of influence and the conditions in which they evolve.

A prominent, but by no means singular, example of this co-optation can be seen in the case of Red Bull which has become synonymous with lifestyle sport. For Kunz, Elsässer and Santomier ‘Red Bull can be considered as a “best practice” for sport-related branded entertainment’ (2016: 534). As McCarthy attests ‘no other company has been sponsoring as many of these activities for as long’ (2017: 544). Branded entertainment is defined as the often subtle combination of advertising and entertainment content whereby an advert is not placed within content, but rather the content is created by the brand (Kunz, Elsässer & Santomier 2016: 521). This a large part of Red Bull’s success in positioning itself as an intrinsic part of lifestyle sports with ‘its policy of ownership of all media assets resulting from action sport events and athletic achievements in which it has been involved’ (Thorpe 2016: 5). This has obvious impacts on the labour performed by lifestyle sports athletes sponsored by Red Bull. There is the potential for athletes to become alienated from their work as they engage in labour relationships with Red Bull to utilise their bodies and perform risky practices to produce content which is then used by Red Bull for profit (Thorpe 2016: 5-6). As is explored later in this chapter, lifestyle sports practice often includes management of considerable risk. Thorpe (2016: 6) notes the example of skier, BASE jumper and Red Bull athlete Shane McConkey, a pioneer of ski-

BASE jumping, whereby participants use backcountry touring techniques to firstly ascend into alpine terrain, to then ski down a mountain face that ends in a cliff, before finally jumping from said cliff and releasing a parachute. McConkey's achievements in this extremely risky pursuit led to him completing a highly technical ski BASE jump in March 2009 that cost him his life when his parachute failed to open properly. As Thorpe contends, through careful management of the content, owned by Red Bull, the incident was represented and broadly understood as the culmination of McConkey's agency and individual choice to pursue risk that he was lauded for. At the same time questions remain over the impact that these types of labour relationships have on the exposure of athletes to risk and even death. Ultimately these labour dynamics that are so prevalent in the commercialisation of lifestyle sports provide the basis for brands like Red Bull to employ 'the latest digital technologies and media platforms to produce their own events, media, and sporting celebrities' (Thorpe 2016: 6). The success of this branding model as noted by Kunz, Elsässer and Santomier (2016) means that the impact of this commercialisation goes beyond just the economics of the lifestyle sports industry, but also impacts subcultural aesthetics, style and knowledge.

With such a significant position in the commercial ecosystem of lifestyle sports the content produced and disseminated by brands like Red Bull can come to define understandings of these pursuits for some sections of society. In this context, McCarthy (2017) highlights important points concerning the creation of what she terms 'the Red Bull sublime'. McCarthy explores the philosophical dualities of ascent and descent and the natural versus the built environment to offer a considered definition of what can be described as the mainstream aesthetic of lifestyle sports. McCarthy points to Felix Baumgartner's 2012 sky dive from the edge of space as the paradigmatic model of the Red Bull sublime. Baumgartner jumped from:

a space capsule – essentially a high-tech helium balloon – hovering 128 000 feet over the surface of the earth... Part science experiment, part marketing stunt, Baumgartner's space jump was meticulously recorded by an infrared camera on the ground, fifteen cameras on the space capsule, and five more attached to his pressure suit (McCarthy 2017: 543).

In events such as these, technology is used to produce awe inspiring cinematography that is edited with musical and visual cues to remove any doubt about the drama, risk, courage

and skill on display. This coming together of the human, material and immaterial is prevalent in ‘the myriad of extreme sports and adventuring activities – particularly those involving some form of flying in visually overwhelming landscapes’ (McCarthy 2017: 544) that Red Bull is involved in. Furthermore, the Red Bull sublime also incorporates the maintenance of subcultural styles, attitudes and authentic self-identity. In this sense McCarthy sketches out in detail, the ‘hero’ of the Red Bull sublime.

He – and it is almost always, though not exclusively, a young man – is an athlete and daredevil rather than a poet, philosopher or explorer. Examinations of interiority – the motivations that drive a person to climb a mountain... do not make a good video. Despite high-risk taking behaviours... [he] is usually likeable, friendly, even humble about his accomplishments and what he has seen. He is frequently “stoked” about his accomplishments and also “stoked” about the next race, the next jump, the next surfing contest. He may trade in clichés about “going beyond limits” or “seeing if it can be done” (2017: 548).

This image of the affable, healthy young man who accomplishes extraordinary feats and responds with nonchalant ‘stoke’ has come to form the mainstream understanding of lifestyle sports identity performance. The connections that this depiction has to Red Bull result from the brand’s efficacy in understanding and reproducing the fundamental elements of ‘authentic’ lifestyle sports identities. In other words, the performance of ‘the Red Bull sublime’ by the surfer, skateboarder or skier that McCarthy describes, is hyperbolic, but accurate representation of the ‘authentic’ qualities that many lifestyle sports practitioners aim to embody.

McCarthy is also clear to note that this very much includes focusing on the technological apparatuses and innovations that make such feats, and the recording of them, possible. The success and failure of these practices like Baumgartner’s sky dive and McConkey’s ski BASE jump, rest on the performance of sophisticated equipment as much as the athletes embodied skill and often ‘the Red Bull sublime’ highlights this intersection of organic and inorganic bodies. Ultimately, with a can of Red Bull never far from an athlete’s hand when they are outside moments of practice – in interviews or lifestyle content that reveals nature of the Red Bull ‘hero’ – the Red Bull energy drink is positioned amongst this atmosphere as driving force behind the successful completion of stunts like

Baumgartner's, as after all, 'Red Bull, as the slogan goes, gives you wings' (McCarthy 2017: 544). The ability of Red Bull to utilise technologies to broadcast content of this nature 'blurs the line between participants and spectators' (McCarthy 2017: 544), whereby the audience has the potential to be affected by the content they consume. For example, the utilisation of POV cameras and live streaming places the audience in the centre of the 'action' dissolving the line between participant and spectator and making the audience feel it is appropriate to purchase and consume both the content and cans of Red Bull.

Studies have shown how the changing nature of commercialisation in particular lifestyle sports can have unique and unpredictable outcomes. Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) have argued that the incorporation of lifestyle sports, such as BMX, into the Olympics has not constituted a binary struggle of 'for and against' such co-optation. Whilst it is not uncommon for lifestyle sports practitioners to reject commercialisation in varying degrees much like the DIY punks that O'Connor (2016) describes, the experience and reaction to commercial forces in lifestyle sports is multi-faceted. A collection of struggles emerge as commercial actors seek to benefit from the popularity of lifestyle sports. The situation is fluid and fractured, with a variety of conflicts developing as the fundamental values and authenticity of lifestyle sports are threatened in much the same way as what Edwards and Corte (2010) term 'mass-market commercialisation'. Whilst this process can be detrimental to the cohesion and continuity of a subculture, negative outcomes are not prescribed. The commercialisation process can also be distributive within lifestyle sports. New avenues can be built for the dispersion of subcultural meaning and knowledge in the different contexts of consumption that materialise (Beal & Wilson 2004). As Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) suggest, rather than simply being a polarised relationship between sub-culture and industry, commercialisation is dynamic and emerges in unique forms within lifestyle sports. For example, Stranger (2010) has highlighted the 'authentic' status of large multinationals such as Billabong within the surfing subculture. Similarly Coates, Clayton and Humberstone (2010) have explored the complex ways in which snowboarders distinguish themselves from other lifestyle sports in the face of increased commercial co-optation. The emergence of these varied responses to commercialisation requires empirical investigation to be fully understood (Beal and Wilson 2004: 33).

These studies (Beal & Wilson 2004; Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Kunz, Elsässer & Santomier 2016; McCarthy 2017; Stranger 2010; Thorpe 2016; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011) imply the broader potential applicability of Edwards and Corte's (2010) concepts through the congruence of their arguments and findings. The framework offered is not a ready-made fit for all applications, but it offers a useful heuristic with which to begin scrutinising commercialisation in lifestyle sports. Nonetheless, as is made clear in the cases put forward by Thorpe (2016), there is a need to reconcile these commercial dynamics as they intertwine with the online spaces of lifestyle sports. For example Brabazon (2017: 601) highlights the 'disintermediation' of supply chains as content producers and equipment manufacturers communicate with consumers without the mediation of wholesalers and retailers. The evolution of such dynamics in tandem with the changing state of media and technology can have significant outcomes. The growth of digital media has seen representations of lifestyle sports transcend traditional, specialist media to reach much wider audiences than was previously possible. Often the nature of these representations captures the superficial imagery of lifestyle sports, but are underpinned by portrayals of risk and masculinity that have come to define the popular culture iconography of lifestyle sports (Lewis 2015: 877). As the value of such representations increases with the popularity and visibility of lifestyle sports, their impact on the composition of such subcultures is important.

Sport, and indeed sporting bodies, have been drawn from their foundations based in pleasure and amateurism into commodified and mediated forms as their economic potential has been understood. Traditionally this process has been limited by the spatial and temporal confines of sport, however as communication and media technologies have evolved, so too has the process of commodification and mediation (Rowe 2017: 238). The mediation of sporting bodies describes how such bodies convey diverse and meaningful symbolic representations through their depiction in media. In such a context the conditions are also set for the sporting body to be commodified, whereby the body is 'deployed not only in remunerated athletic labour, but can be bought and sold... while its image is used to sell goods and services' (Rowe 2017: 237). Often this commodification results in the mediatization (in addition to *mediation*) of sporting bodies that are transformed and represented in various forms of media (Rowe 2017: 237). This is highlighted by the example of trials mountain bike cyclist Danny MacAskill presented by

Lewis (2016). In the majority of his well-known videos, that could be largely categorised as 'specialist' media (Thornton 1995), MacAskill tends to avoid the tropes of masculinity and risk, and instead conveys themes of precariousness, play and the 'fragility in fulfilment' through his self-expression (Lewis 2016: 878). Nonetheless in a particular advert for one of his sponsors (Red Bull) intended to reach a wider audience, Lewis describes the way MacAskill's body, along with the other bodies featured, are co-opted and commodified. Performing tricks on his bike around the pools of the Playboy mansion for fawning 'bunnies', his 'stunts read as swagger, opposed to self-expression' (Lewis 2016: 888). While MacAskill's corporeal skill and ability are central to the video, they are objectified in a similar manner to the sexualised bodies of the 'bunnies', and co-opted in order to sell soft drink. This kind of conceptual, and at times literal, separation from the embodied practices of sport has helped to sustain the commodified sporting body outside the spatial bounds of sport (Rowe 2017: 239). Commodified sporting bodies therefore must be symbolic and economic as well as physical, as athletes become spokespeople and 'faces' of brands and organisations.

In this increasingly commercialised context of lifestyle sports industries, combined with expanding digitalisation and subsequent reach of specialised media, the use of athlete's bodies as commodities can have significantly gendered manifestations. For Thorpe and Dumont (2019: 1649) 'the business context of sponsorship may mean that impression management strategies in online spaces become an imperative for athletes – with different strategies available to men and women'. With the new commercial dynamic created by digital technology, sponsors require athletes to curate an online profile that can engage their intended audience and this requires a considered approach from athletes to achieve the most success. The context of the cultural dominance of white, heterosexual masculinity in lifestyle sports since their emergence to prominence in the 1990s strongly influences some of the gendered expectations and pressures placed on athletes to maintain lasting connections with their followers and fans. In the fallout of what he describes as a crisis of masculinity emerging in the United States after the 1960s, Kusz suggests that:

extreme sports are constituted in these cover stories as a masculinising practice where white male participants can experience a set of affective

and bodily pleasures which allow them to reclaim a masculinity which they feel has been lost (2004: 205).

As such subcultural values prevalent in some lifestyle sports can be reflective of broader hegemonic characteristics like stoicism, strength and determination. Yet, in some instances, responses to masculinities can see complex gender identities develop within lifestyle sports where, although not necessarily any less patriarchal, the presence of woman is more common than traditional sporting spaces. Beal (1996) explores hegemonic and alternative masculinities in skateboarding to show the gender relationships and experience they create for female skaters. Young woman who skate are required to negotiate contradicting gender performances and maintain changeable gender identities depending on the situation. More recently, Thorpe (2010) discusses the need to build upon a simplistic reliance on concepts like Connell's hegemonic masculinity to understand the nuance and complexity of masculinities in lifestyle sports. In order to achieve this Thorpe (2010) proposes a feminist interpretation of Bourdieu to understand the way that masculinities within lifestyle sports respond to social pressures over time preventing a one-size-fits-all analysis.

Such conceptual advancements are particularly needed given lifestyle sports subcultures remain inherently male dominated spaces, and especially with the expanding commercialisation of these fields, the experiences of female lifestyle sports athletes can share commonalities aligned with dominant gendered expectations with woman in other industries, including meeting idealised body norms of femininity (see Coffey et al. 2018). With the expectation that athletes 'work on their self-presentation through social media to build personal brands and audiences' (Evers 2019.b: 1695) the affective manipulation of hegemonic female sexuality is a normative expectation of the role. As such the commercial value of female lifestyle sports bodies can become detached from their practice and instead be based in societally entrenched gendered norms and the performance of feminine characteristics like 'hetero-sexiness' and the empowerment of self-sexualisation (Toffoletti & Thorpe 2018.a; 2018.b; Wheaton & Thorpe 2018). Ultimately the most visible sporting bodies become the most valuable, and there can be serious rewards for those with sporting bodies and the required skills for their commodification. As Olive (2015) describes in her exploration of women who surf, these dynamics both disrupt and reinforce those hegemonic ideals, yet are able to establish

themselves within subcultural hierarchies. Nonetheless, as Rowe (2017) highlights through the examples of Oscar Pistorius and Lance Armstrong, there can be significant penalties and prices for the type of success that the mediated and commodified sporting body can bring. In the context of lifestyle sports particularly, this dynamic has again been altered by the proliferation of digital media that presents the opportunity to fashion oneself, through a commodified sporting body, into a 'micro-celebrity'.

Digital media and technology have revolutionised the practices and frequency with which individuals become well known amongst a niche group. Senft (2008: 25) defines micro-celebrity as a type of online performance that utilises digital media to maximise the micro-celebrity's popularity amongst those they are connected to online. Unpacking this concept, Marwick (2013: 116-117) posits that these types of strategic performance fall on a continuum from ascribed to achieved micro-celebrity. Ascribed micro-celebrity is bestowed upon individuals who become well known in a particular subculture, frequently through media about them – for example people who feature in viral memes. They are granted high status, and maintain the conceptual distance between fans similar to that of mainstream celebrities. In contrast, achieved micro-celebrity is a 'self-presentation strategy that includes creating a persona, sharing personal information... acknowledging an audience... and strategically revealing information to increase or maintain this audience' (Marwick 2013: 117). This construction and preservation of a public persona is required for all micro-celebrity, with digital media and technology providing the toolkit to do so. Part of this toolkit are technologies such as instant messaging and other communication platforms that mean micro-celebrities remain accessible to their fans. While for some this might mean constant updates, for others personal communication with their fans becomes a large part of the maintenance of their fame (Marwick 2013: 118). Indeed, this type of 'authentic' performance is crucial as fans demand insights into the everyday lives of micro-celebrities that constantly reflect their subcultural legitimacy. The performance of an authentic identity is critical to the commercial success of influencers Wellman et al. (2020) and is used to generate intimacy audiences 'through unaltered 'behind the scenes' material, commonality with readers by displaying shared mundane practices (despite a luxurious lifestyle)' (Abidin and Ots 2016: 154). Ultimately becoming a micro-celebrity is an exercise in self-commodification, with the most successful turning their identities into lucrative commodities, who's value

rests in the continued interest of fans. In lifestyle sport subcultures there are unique inputs that have the potential to produce interesting manifestations of micro-celebrity. As Thorpe (2016: 6-12) describes, the context in which lifestyle sport micro-celebrities must remain relevant is characterised by the popular culture iconography of lifestyle sport discussed by Lewis (2015). Indeed the highest returns from self-commodification come from extending that project into the mainstream, often with access to the infrastructure that comes with sponsorship from companies such as Red Bull (Thorpe 2016: 5). However with questionable acceptance of corporate social responsibilities (Levermore 2017) by such companies and the dynamics of co-optation in play, acting with ‘authenticity’ can be a perilous balancing act for the most successful lifestyle sport micro-celebrities who must navigate ongoing commercial development of their sport. Nonetheless the affordances of digital media and technology means that anyone with the relevant subcultural capital and embodied skill can become a lifestyle sport micro-celebrity.

The emergence of the micro-celebrity represents the need for new understandings of the economy that they operate in. Here I turn to the work of Franck (1999; 2002; 2019) on attention economies and the ideas that have been contributed to this area by Citton (2017) through his work on ecologies of attention. Central to these concepts is the understanding that where economies of the past have been centred on the limits of production of goods, ‘the attention economy is based on the scarcity of the capacity for the reception of cultural goods’ (Citton 2017: 2). Here Citton is describing the ways in which our focus, not what captures it, has been transformed into capital. For Franck (2019) this is a new form of capital that formalises the social ‘income’ of Bourdieusian social capital whereby attention ‘becomes like money, abstract, comparable, a system of equivalence, quantifiable and measurable’ (van Krieken 2019: 5). Through the ubiquitous access to endless swathes of information offered in advanced capitalist societies, attention has become a scarce resource. Interactions in the social become a struggle for attention and celebrity becomes the commercial outcome of those struggles. As van Krieken (2019: 6) suggests attention economies exist in a context whereby ‘everything and everyone becomes a brand’ and the attention that brand accumulates has the ability to ‘self-reproduce’ and accrue interest. In other words attention generates more attention. Critically, Citton (2017) has highlighted the way that the language of attention

economies have a somewhat restrictive impact on the ability of these ideas to fully explain these conditions. Citton contends that '*I am only attentive to what we pay attention to collectively*' (2017: 17. Emphasis in original) to show how his proposal of 'ecologies of attention' is a more apt descriptor. Our attention does not exist outside socio-cultural contexts and the, crucially, affective interactions we have within them. These ecologies have the ability to orientate our attention in ways that correspond to other attentions within our surrounds, feeding the conditions that Franck has described as existing in attention economies. Consider a video clip of a big-wave surfer careening down the face of 20m wave that goes viral, reaching a mainstream audience. The groundswell of attention that builds that virility initially comes from the clip being shared amongst surfers, before it might reach a 12 year old boy watching it under the supervision of his mother, who then shares it to her Facebook feed. The way that our attention is connected to that of those around us in these ways and has become a critical form of capital is of significant use in considering the commercial evolutions of lifestyle sport. They assist to position the experiences of lifestyle sports practitioners by illuminating the economic situation in which value is realised and capital is dispersed.

These concepts of commodified sporting bodies and the manipulation of mediated representations of them within ecologies of attention synergise with the notions of immaterial and affective labour, and the theoretical orientation of this project. Lazzarato (1996: 132) defines immaterial labour as that which 'produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity'. Or in other words, labour that creates immaterial commodities such as knowledge and communication (Hardt 1999: 94). For Lazzarato (1996) and Hardt (1999) these immaterial products are created in networks and information flows through activities that fall outside what has been traditionally thought of as work. As such they rely on an assortment of skills and practices whereby worker's own personalities and subjectivities become an active element in production and are used to manipulate creative symbolic and cultural information. In this regard Lazzarato (1996: 137) posits that immaterial labour is manifested through consumer relationships to transcend acts of consumption and establish ideological and cultural environments for consumers. Hardt (1999) argues that one (and perhaps the most) important facet of immaterial labour is affective labour. Affective labour is rooted in (virtual and actual) human interaction and although it produces embodied products – for example feelings of

ease, satisfaction and connectedness – it nonetheless remains immaterial as these affective products are intangible. Crucially these subjectivities and the sociality they induce are ‘directly exploitable by capital’ (Hardt, 1999: 97). By modulating affect through ‘influencers’ or ‘micro-celebrities’, as well as more traditional means, commercial entities in lifestyle sports are able to create communicative consumer relations that surpass the limits of the act of consumption to create the kind of cultural and ideological products that Lazzarato (1996) describes as intrinsic to immaterial labour.

For instance, in exploring the popular music industry, Carah (2014) highlights the process through which commercial actors manipulate immaterial labour and its affective by-products to produce economic capital. Firstly brands position themselves as being already involved in cultural spaces and practice. Then these brands seek out practitioners who maintain reputations of authenticity within the cultural space, but who are also savvy enough to navigate the commercial world and engage with the affective self-promotion that is expected. Finally, brands are positioned as ‘facilitators of cultural spaces, where the brand becomes synonymous with the already existing tastes and interests’ (Carah 2014: 352). Ultimately Carah (2014) is describing how affect, as unbridled as it is, can be manipulated by engaging with and evoking particular culturally defined ‘authentic’ experiences, aesthetics and values. This mode of branding that attempts to capture the affective essence of culture ‘creates value by modulating a general circulation of meaning within a communicative enclosure’ (Carah 2014: 364 – 365). Brands attempt to capture the affect that emanates in a situation like a music festival to reproduce it in ways that attune the audience’s interaction with the brand’s commercial interests. This is a dynamic that is regularly repeated in lifestyle sports. Thorpe and Dumont argue that:

action sports at large are intimately intertwined in media production and circulation, the latter contributing to creating, shaping and disseminating particular version of the ‘action sports lifestyle’, fuelling the aspirations of participants as well as companies’ marketing and branding strategies (2019: 1648).

As such, contemporary lifestyle sports athletes are required by sponsors to conduct emotional and affective labour through the presentation and management of ‘authentic’

identities, which sees them carry out gendered emotional labour. Evers (2019.b) draws on Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labour and specifically Ashforth and Humphrey's (1993) concept of 'genuine' emotional labour to understand the affective labour that men perform in the surfing industry. Reminiscent of McCarthy's (2017) 'the Red Bull sublime', Evers explores what he terms 'the stoke imperative' whereby 'workers are expected by industry representatives and other enthusiasts to only express a positive attitude... Nor should they challenge the status quo of surfing culture(s)' (2019: 1692). This status quo is represented by the hegemonic ideals of strength, rationality and competence, and the like. With the privileging of surfers who take the most risk by riding the biggest waves, to 'put their body on the line', a hierarchy that reinforces those modes of masculinity defines the identity of the male surfing athlete (Evers 2019.b: 1695). However in-line with the findings and suggestions of other lifestyle sports researchers (Beal 1996; Thorpe 2010), Evers (2019.b: 1700) notes that 'there are multiple tensions and contradictions with the hegemonic expectations of surfers' gendered emotional labour and the practices of performing that labour with 'authenticity'.

Surfers discuss concerns of being feminised through the need to expose their vulnerabilities through their emotional labour, while at the same time needing to maintain an air of masculine bravado and confidence. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) have shown similarly competing expectations placed on the online performance of femininity by female athletes. Women are required to 'invoke postfeminist sentiments of self-making, personal capacity and empowerment and willingly promote a sporty and hetero-sexy, 'current' femininity' in the context of gendered regimes of visibility (Toffoletti & Thorpe 2018: 306). In other words, female athletes are expected to be simultaneously sexy and pure, strong and empowered, but passive in not challenging the status quo in the emotional and affective labour they perform. The gendered forms of labour that Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018: 306) and Evers (2019.b) have highlighted are aligned with forms of immaterial labour as defined by Lazzarato (1996). There is no display of the training or the preparation for and production of flowing streams of content that are required to produce the necessary representation of a contextually 'authentic' self online that becomes a cultural commodity.

EMERGENT PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACTS IN LIFESTYLE SPORTS

These developments in the media and commercialisation of lifestyle sports pose new questions about their impact on the legitimised mosaic of practices that help to make up such subcultures. Indeed, these developments mean that research needs to go beyond simple descriptions to consider how media and technologies are used in innovative ways and the how they impact on lifestyle sports experiences (Thorpe 2016: 2). Speaking more broadly, Bennett and Robards (2014: 2) theorise that style is no longer the defining element of youth cultures, but rather digital media and technologies have increased the importance of myriad practices that have previously been considered mundane. That is to say, digital media and technology have necessitated the exploration of the practices proliferating from them to arrive at thorough understandings of the social forces that drive subcultures such as lifestyle sports.

Handyside and Ringrose (2017) have followed this line of thought to examine how specific configurations of particular digital media platforms and technologies can affectively mediate the practices and engagement of their users. Snapchat is similar to other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in some aspects, but it also incorporates other functionality, such as the irretrievability of content. This ephemerality has been the major focus of research on Snapchat that has concluded that this fleeting nature of content and privacy are the ‘drivers for flirtatious or sexual communications’ (Handyside and Ringrose 2017: 3). At the same time however, Snapchat offers some of the affordances boyd (2011) describes as intrinsic to networked publics. The ease with which Snaps²³ can be captured, stored, reproduced and made visible means that they have become a form of ‘relationship currency’ (Handyside & Ringrose 2017: 12). As is seen in the example of Clare, who discovered her boyfriend’s cheating via a captured Snap sent to another girl (Handyside & Ringrose 2017: 10), this currency, serves to blur the duality between the real and virtual. Indeed rather than simply being an outlet to document them, the digital affordances of Snapchat have become an active part in the formation and maintenance of youth sexual relationships, changing the practices, and their subsequent meaning, for the individual engaged in them.

²³ Noun for Snapchat message.

Continuing this focus on the impacts of the specific functionality and affordance of different social media platforms Leaver, Highfield and Abidin (2020) examine the particular case of Instagram. The authors offer a thorough exposition of how the infrastructure of Instagram shapes the practice and experience of its users. At a fundamental level the developments of digital technology that have made the popularity of Instagram possible have ‘integrated photography into everyday settings’ (Leaver, Highfield and Abidin 2020). Moreover the infrastructure such as tagging, likes, hashtags and filters have further consequences for the way that users engage with the platform and the subsequent relationships and social interactions that proliferate around them. With the presence of these platforms and their related technologies exponentially increasing in lifestyle sports, the examples offered by Leaver, Highfield and Abidin (2020) serve to orientate the direction of investigation that this thesis pursues in this regard.

The now ubiquitous use of digital media and technology in lifestyle sports is evident from Evers’ (2016) unobtrusive use of a POV camera for data collection during his research on masculinities in surfing. As such several social theorists have begun to explore the questions surrounding this evolution. Woermann (2012) has probed the saturation of social media practices in lifestyle sports by observing the permeation of social media and associated technologies (POV cameras etc.) in the freeskiing²⁴ subcultures of the German, Swiss and Austrian Alps. The influence of the media practices that employ these technologies is so great that the fundamental performances of freeskiing now include social media use in all its forms. Woermann conceptualises these practices using a three-pronged typology (2012: 627-632). Firstly hedonic media practices – where it is simply fun for freeskiers to produce and consume media – form one version of media practice. Part of this enjoyment comes from using social media to extend and elongate the affective embodied experience of freeskiing in the much the same way as the BASE-jumpers investigated by Ferrell, Milovanovic and Lyng (2001). Secondly, freeskiier’s social media practices act to produce and maintain subcultural knowledge. In the decentralised networks of freeskiing and lifestyle sports, social media offers the space to coalesce and legitimise shared knowledge, values and style. Moreover, as part of the practice of freeskiing itself, social media use is now actively involved in the construction of

²⁴ Freekiing is a term used to describe a, largely youth, skiing subculture that encompasses a broad range of skiing styles that are practiced outside competitions.

subcultural knowledge (Woermann 2012: 624). This typology highlights how the affordances of digital media and technology can alter how individuals engage and practice lifestyle sports and offer a basis with which to begin such an investigation. Strengthening these concepts, Dumont (2019) has described a 'multi-media ecology' of lifestyle sports in which these convergent practices take place. Dumont (2019) comprehensively outlines the features of the lifestyle sports digital assemblage, explaining the way that information flows from the POV cameras of practitioners to YouTube, to then be discussed in forums and constitute an abundance of specialist content and media consumption and production practice.

In the context of the conditions that constitute Dumont's (2019) lifestyle sports media ecology, the immaterial labour conducted by recreational lifestyle sports enthusiasts must be considered. This labour not only provides a receptive audience that creates value for that of professional athletes, but also plays an integral part in the creation and maintenance of cultural values that shape the creation of the 'cultural content' Lazzarato (1996) describes and that are prevalent in lifestyle sports. Lazzarato defines this 'cultural content' as one of two aspects of immaterial labour. In one instance immaterial labour refers to 'informational content', which can be understood to encompass the suite of disruptive changes to workers requiring them to include new skills in their work processes – digital literacy, for example. Meanwhile the 'cultural content' of immaterial labour describes the range of practices that have now come to produce cultural styles and aesthetics and have not conventionally been seen as work. 'In other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion' (Lazzarato 1996: 77). In this regard, Fresco examines the self-branding of NBA basketballer LeBron James to argue that:

audience members' immaterial labour is essential to athletes' self-branding practices... Moreover, by participating in the labour involved in building (and re-building) the value of the LeBron James and Nike brands, fans' actions were just as commodified as the athletes' actions (2020: 442).

Athletes work with their sponsors to present a brand that attempts to manipulate an affective response from its audience. Fresco (2020) describes the way Nike and LeBron have utilised digital media to carefully craft an image that displays, at multiple levels,

values that are appealing and aspirational for particular groups and individuals in society. These individuals respond to this branding and create value in it through their participation. For Arvidsson (2005) this value represents an 'ethical surplus' whereby things like James' connection to the racial equality movement is shared by his audience independently of their connection, through the branding and becomes the basis of the affective branding (Carah 2014) described above. Furthermore the range of practices described by Dumont (2019) and Woermann (2012) that have been embraced by lifestyle sports practitioners also constitutes forms of immaterial labour. By engaging online to produce and consume specialist media, practitioners' actions build and maintain reservoirs of subcultural knowledge, aesthetics and style. These subcultural elements shape cultural commodities that are reproduced and manipulated to produce affect for commercial interests.

For lifestyle sports such as roller derby and parkour that are perhaps more niche than sports like freeskiing and surfing, the impact of digital media and technology can be more meaningful for participants, if no less commercialised. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2014: 170) argue that roller derby has been reinvigorated by digital media and technology that has 'shaped its cultural forms of play, spectating and fandom'. With the removal of boundaries between the real and virtual participants have developed new opportunities for creative, online expressions of roller derby online that capture and surpass the intensities of the physical sport (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014: 177). By operating through unique catalogues of meaning, and without commercial support, the specialised media of roller derby produced by participants acts to coalesce the values, styles and knowledge of the subculture (Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014: 171). As Woermann's (2012) describes is the case in freeskiing, producing this media has become a meaningful and important subcultural practice in and of itself, as it constitutes a significant portion of the time participants spend engaged with the subculture.

Similarly, Gilchrist and Wheaton (2013) have shown the way parkour has gained exposure and increased participation through digital media and technology, while at the same time its practitioners, or *traceurs*, utilised the same digital affordances to exercise a degree of control over the evolution of their sport. Traditionally parkour has remained hidden underground with low participation rates and a small, core community of

practitioners, however more recent media exposure has led to a burgeoning wider interest. Both resultant from and augmenting this development, parkour has recently seen significant increases in commercial interest from entities such as Nike, Swatch and KSwiss (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 174-175). As such representations of parkour have been co-opted in 'mass-market commercialisation' to appear in media productions as removed from parkour itself as music videos by Madonna. This increased exposure is welcomed by traceurs to a degree, however some worry that the reproduction of parkour imagery in the mainstream creates potential for 'understandings of the sport to atrophy, thereby popularizing unsafe practices' (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 175). As a result the parkour community has been quick to utilise the digital media to counter these representations and create grassroots media concerned with sharing advice and guidance on the safe practice of parkour, as well as the legitimate values and styles of the subculture (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 176). The accessibility of technology such as POV cameras has also facilitated the production of media that acts to form a digital data assemblage of the kind described by Lupton (2016; 2017). Traceurs produce videos of themselves to be upload to sites such as YouTube and for other traceurs to comment on, offer advice for improvement and valorise 'authentic' performances. Traceurs may then adjust their technique, or attempt a new move based upon the feedback they receive from the interactive affordances of digital media and technology. Traceurs also utilise these technologies to directly attract and communicate with audiences and fans, establishing themselves as micro-celebrities of the type discussed by Marwick (2013), and subvert traditional commercial power relations of lifestyle sports (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2013: 179). The uptake, adoption and reconfiguration of digital media and technology highlighted in the cases of roller derby and parkour highlight how these dynamics are producing new and unique impacts of the myriad of practices and wider subcultural makeup of lifestyle sports. However, despite these 'it remains an open question as to how far the adoption of digital media technologies is truly transforming lifestyle sports subcultures' (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013: 182). As such exploring these dynamics of digital media, technology and commercialisation in lifestyle sports provides the potential for insights to answer these questions about how digital media technologies are altering lifestyle sports practice and experience.

VOLUNTARY RISK TAKING

The practice of placing oneself in situations of serious risk is an inherent element of the touring experience. Many lifestyle sports include an array of risky practices as a core part of their makeup, and sociology has sought to understand how and why individuals engage, and become enamoured with these pursuits. Goffman (1972) was one of the first to sociologically explore concepts surrounding voluntary risk taking in the development of his notion of 'action'. 'Action' describes 'activities that are consequential, problematic, and undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake' (Goffman 1972: 185). That is, activities that present a gamble of significant consequence to the ontological stability of participants without obvious reward. In this category, Goffman (1972: 172-174) places several pursuits including: criminal activity, gambling, professional motor racing and recreational non-spectator sports (or lifestyle sports) such as climbing and surfing.

In order to explain the appeal of these pursuits Goffman suggests that the 'action' inherent to them instils 'character' as well as providing the opportunity to display it to others. 'Character' describes a collection of personality traits that ultimately signify stoicism, composure and ability to perform under pressure with apparent ease (Goffman 1972: 217-228). For Goffman, the performance of 'character' decorates 'the moral life of the community' as is highlighted by his example of the radio technician hopelessly sending an S.O.S on a sinking ship, who 'combines in his deed almost all that society can ask of anyone' (1972: 229). In imbuing these qualities through 'action' Goffman sees the opportunity for individuals to develop strong reputations and representations of themselves. As identity and the self continues to transform and manifest online, there is renewed significance to consider Goffman's performative notions of 'action' in contemporary investigations of voluntary risk taking. This is particularly the case concerning identity construction in lifestyle sports and the dominance of masculine ideals in their performance in mind.

Edgework builds on the ideas of 'action' and attempts to provide understandings of how and why individuals experience the practice of taking risks (Lyng 2014: 448). First developed by Lyng (1990), edgework emerges in a variety of phenomena; ranging from binge drinking (Cho et al. 2010); to motorcycling (Murphy & Patterson 2011); to online pro-anorexia networks (Gailey 2009); to BASE jumping (Ferrell, Milovanovic & Lyng

2001). Individuals who engage with all these kinds of pursuits and experiences are exposed to varying degrees of risk, and can carry significant and potentially terminal consequences (Lyng 2014: 449). These pursuits dance along the 'edge', a conceptual, and yet very real, boundary between, chaos and order, success and failure, life and death, echoing many of the ideas contained within Foucault's notion of 'limit-experiences' (see Foucault 1991). For example, a small miscalculation or equipment malfunction can mean certain death for a skydiver as they practice their edgework 13 000 feet above the ground. While the binge drinkers of Cho et al.'s (2010) study put themselves at risk in very different ways and with alternate methods of mitigating that exposure. All the same, edgework is grounded in embodied experience at the intersection of risk, bodies and objects, where the edge remains fluid and relative, adjusting to the accumulation of experience and capital. In other words, what would be edgework for one person could be a quite relaxed experience for another, as it is determined by physical capability, previous experience and other factors unique to the individual involved (Lyng 2005). Despite this continuum of risk that edgework falls upon, spaces of edgework remain restricted and temporal sites of practice, not least of all as result of how physically inhospitable they are for humans. As Bunn suggests:

edgework activity is the ability to not only tread boundaries that are shared only by an elite, but ones that are almost exclusively occupied by singular, non-reducible logics... Once entered, they require movement, as the inside of edgework space is one that can only be entered temporarily. These become effective screens for the uninitiated in order to maintain the sense of privilege that mastery entails. They are powerful places for a sense of distinction to be developed (2017: 1320).

What this means is that through the mastery of their practice edgeworkers achieve as they accumulate cultural capital, they come to embody certain markers. The performance of these produces Bourdieusian distinction (see Bourdieu 1984; Chapter 3) between themselves and non-edgeworkers, and also distinguishes edgeworkers to each other.

For Lyng (2014), accounts of the risk society of reflexive late modernity, described most prominently by Beck (1992; 2006) and Giddens (1991), inform edgework theory. These theorists suggest that we now live in risk societies in which detraditionalisation, ontological insecurity and reflexivity have become the norm. It is important to note here

that while there have been some useful reconfigurations of reflexivity that aim to address issues the concept raises for sociological accounts of subjectivity (see Farrugia 2013; Farrugia & Woodman 2015) in the context of edgework this thesis maintains definition of reflexivity offered by Beck (1992). In this sense, Beck suggests that in risk societies with the erosion of well-trodden routes of collective meaning making structures like religion, marriage and extended family, individuals perceive a world of risk and uncertainty. As such individuals, and particularly young people, must negotiate their own trajectory to reflexively construct a sense of self, direction and ultimately ontological security.

For Lyng (2012: 409-411) these social forces create a platform for the extreme experiences of edgework to be appreciated and pursued. Edgework offers an affective escape from the shifting structures of society that define the ways we develop reflexive projects of the self. Edgeworkers engage with risks that bring them to spaces and times on 'the edge' where each moment is a struggle between a safe return and serious consequence. The pressures of these serious moments induce an atmosphere of 'experiential anarchy' where critical and unpredictable decisions need to be made to safely navigate the edge (Lyng 2014: 449). These seemingly uncontrollable circumstances give rise to 'authentic' and 'hyperreal' experiences that transcend the subjectivities of reflexive society (Lyng 2014: 449). Indeed, these moments of euphoric, ephemeral sensation and emotion escape discursive explanations. This is somewhat evident through Lyng's use of the term 'hyperreal' which is problematic, as the definition in edgework moves away from that which is offered originally by Baudrillard (1994) that focuses on the consequences of hyperreal media representation. As such, and in the context of the theoretical orientation of this thesis, I propose its substitution for 'affective experiential clarity'. That is, clarity of reality in critical moments for edgeworkers that induces self-monitoring and removes self-presentation from consciousness, as existential self-interpretation fills the mind (Lyng 2014: 454). Furthermore the integral role of edgework in the touring experience further highlights the necessity of the theoretical framework this project has adopted. By considering edgework through the context of concomitant reading of Bourdieu and affect (outlined in detail in the following chapter), these intangibilities are more readily interpretable and understood.

Control and self-determination are also highlighted as prominent drivers behind edgeworkers seeking out risk, as ontological security becomes more difficult to achieve in reflexive late modernity (Kiewa 2001; Laurendeau 2006.a; 2006.b). In making decisions for themselves in order to safely navigate the edge, edgeworkers can develop a sense of control and mastery of body, skill and environment that they employ to safely mitigate the hazards. In other words, ‘one of the compelling aspects of risk taking is not simply found in the execution of a risky moment, but the accumulation of practices, to relearn held ideas about the possible application of ability to combine skill with real peril’ (Bunn 2017: 1319). At the same time, the risks on the edge can never be fully controlled and even the most experienced and capable edgeworker can go beyond their control. In lifestyles sports particularly, the affective perception of mastery that these experiences evoke create a sense of intimacy with the spaces edgeworkers inhabit in those moments. Imagine if you will, the sensation a rock climber feels as time slows down while she stretches overhead for her worn fingers to grasp a slither of rock to allow her to progress up a cliff face. These types of experiences make edgeworkers feel attuned to their surrounds where their bodies respond to the environment based on a well of affective embodied capital. The impact of these elements of the experience mean that establishing these types of connections can become critical aspects of the overall practice and experience of lifestyle sports.

The growth of lifestyle sports and these connections that practioners establish with the more unstructured environments in which they practice has led to innovative outcomes around issues like land management. Schild (2019), amongst others (see Booth 2018; Evers 2019.a; Humberstone 2011; Wheaton 2020), has shown that although the realities of these relationships can be complicated, building such connections can lead to sentiments of environmental stewardship and practical conservation efforts from lifestyle sports practitioners. These understanding (Goffman 1972; Kiewa 2001; Laurendeau 2006.a; 2006.b; Lyng 1990; 2005; 2012; 2014) of why lifestyle sports practitioners repeatedly expose themselves to danger move past naïve characterisations of these individuals as mere ‘adrenalin junkies’ to offer a consistent heuristic with which to interpret these practices. Furthermore they offer further insight into the phenomena described by Schild (2019) and together with the theoretical approach of this thesis serves to illuminate much of the data captured by the project.

Despite their suitability for this project, these perspectives on voluntary risk-taking are not without criticism. Newmahr (2011) and Bunn (2017) have both offered nuanced critiques of the latent hegemonic masculinity that characterises some of the major principles of edgework along with a lack of exploration of the classed context in which edgework exists. For Newmahr the gendered nature of edgework rests in the conceptualisation of two key components of the theory; order and chaos; and skill.

The first masculinist dimension of the application of the edgework model is that risk has been, on the whole, limited to bodily risk. That which puts the physical body in jeopardy is thus the most risky and the thrill resides in the triumph of man (the self) over the danger to the body (Newmahr 2011: 690).

Newmahr suggests that the risk characterising the way edgeworkers experience their practice is inherently tied to Connell's (1995) model of a gendered instrumental/expressive dichotomy that prioritises masculinised performance of physicality over emotional experience. Indeed, the basis of this hierarchy can be seen in Goffman's (1972) notions of action, whereby status is bestowed upon those who portray inherently instrumental qualities like stoicism, independence and control. These concepts are further represented in the notions of skill that have most commonly been evoked in explorations of edgework. 'The edgeworker successfully negotiates the edge (viewed as bodily posed by, in or through the "natural" world) through his skill and technological superiority' (Newmahr 2011: 691). This romanticisation of the physical conquests of the environment in this way is again evocative of those instrumental qualities that sustain hegemonic gendered dynamics. Some efforts have been made to address these problems by exploring the experiences of edgework through a perspective that acknowledges their gendered aspects (see Lois 2003; Laurendeau 2008). However these attempts to reconcile the issue have largely been undermined by the assumption that what has conventionally constituted physical manifestations of the edge – a rock climber scaling a cliff; a base jumper leaping from a bridge – are inherently appealing in their 'edginess'. Furthermore examples such as Gailey's (2009) exploration of anorexia as edgework reorientates skill and risk away from the environment to the body, offering some potential to address these criticisms. Nonetheless a feminist reconfiguration of edgework needs to 'recognize a wide range of skills, including social-psychological and

interpersonal skill sets such as trust, expressiveness, emotion management, perceptiveness, introspection and self-restraint' (Newmahr 2011: 691).

As has been discussed, studies of lifestyles sports have highlighted the domination of white, affluent men in these subcultural spaces. Bunn (2017) has explored the ways in which applications of edgework have broadly failed to address the intersections of edgework pursuits and class. While Lyng (2009) does acknowledge uneven participation in edgework across class structures, 'his focus still remains on why the upper class strata's would invest in dangerous acts, where they already experience a much greater sense of self-determination in their everyday lives' (Bunn 2017: 1312). The classed aspects of edgework that have been highlighted extensively through lifestyle sports research (Kusz 2007; Thorpe 2014; Thorpe and Wheaton 2019) and Bunn (2017) suggests that edgework, both in and beyond its application in lifestyle sports, has failed to adequately address the classed context in which it occurs. Central to Bunn's critique is an examination of the relationship between edgework and leisure. Here Bunn turns to Bourdieu and some of the ideas he explores in *Distinction* (1984). Bourdieu describes the emergence of sports like hang gliding and windsurfing noting that 'they all demand a high investment of cultural capital in the activity itself, preparing, maintaining and using the equipment, and especially, perhaps, in verbalising the experiences...' (1984: 220). That is to say that these forms of edgework require a significant allocation of not only the disposable income of participants but cultural capital in order to correctly use and maintain the equipment. Bunn further synthesises these ideas with edgework theory, by considering the ontological security of edgeworkers and how necessary it is for them to act to preserve it in their everyday lives, away from edgework. There is less necessity for the middle and upper class to act, and as such their 'perceived modes of action' provide the scope to appreciate edgework, along with the economic and time resources to conduct it (Bunn 2017). On this basis, Bunn proposes that 'a greater phenomenology of risk and risk taking is required; one that explores voluntary risk in its relationship with the safety, dangers and distinctions of day-to-day life' (2017: 1319).

In part, these problems with the gendered and classed nature of edgework raised by Newmahr (2011) and Bunn (2017) have been exacerbated by its conventional application in research that prioritises the discursive and has not provided the scope

necessary to reconcile the issues that researchers have described. As Newmahr suggests, there is a need to rebalance the focus between the physicality, or risk to it, of the experience and totality of its embodiment to be cognisant of the subtle, yet important elements of edgework that have often been missed. I make no claims to have resolved these issues with edgework in this thesis, however its application in the context of a theoretical perspective informed by affect theory provides a potential way forward for building a more inclusive and nuanced model of edgework.

CONVENTIONAL THEORY AND METHODOLOGIES OF LIFESTYLE SPORTS RESEARCH

Studies into sports like touring and the subcultures that surround their practice have been undertaken since the mid-1980s. In the time since researchers who have examined these phenomena have established a set of conventional theoretical positions and methodological orientations that have come to define the sub-discipline. As this chapter has highlighted studies of lifestyle sports have included: surfing (Stranger 2010); skateboarding (Beal 1996; Beal and Wilson 2004); skiing (Woermann 2012); snowboarding (Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Thorpe 2010); wind surfing (Wheaton 2000); parkour (Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013); roller derby (Pavlidis & Fullager 2014); rock climbing (Bunn 2015; Dumont 2017; Kiewa 2001); BASE jumping (Ferrell, Milovanovic & Lyng 2001); Mountain biking (Lewis 2016; Church & King 2020); Skydiving (Laurendeau 2006.a; 2006.b); and BMX (Edwards & Corte 2010; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011). This collection of literature has highlighted the prominence of lifestyle sports research which prioritises the 'images, narratives, representations and meanings associated with alternative sport' (Thorpe & Rinehart 2010: 1268). The studies included in this review span a wide variety of focuses engaging with concepts concerning gender, race, class, media production and consumption, branding, and of course, experience. As such the tradition of this research field has seen the dynamic description and analysis of the discursive aspects of these subcultures, strongly engaging with the constructed meanings and understandings of lifestyle sports practitioners around their experiences. As Thorpe and Rinehart note however:

alternative sports participants frequently reiterate that it is the embodied, sensual and immediate experiences of their activities that are central to

their specific, grounded cultural practices – and words can only begin to articulate their experiences (2010: 1268).

In other words, lifestyle sports have been researched predominantly using constructionist epistemologies. This means such studies have had limited scope to investigate perhaps the most central aspect of these pursuits, their embodiment. Examples from scholars of lifestyle sports such as Bunn (2015; 2016; 2017) and Evers (2004; 2006; 2009; 2016; 2019.b) show how it is possible for researchers to embrace and animate those ephemeral moments on the edge and answer questions like: what sensations pass through the body of a climber as they feel an ice axe lose its hold as they dangle on a frozen waterfall hundreds of meters from the ground? How does the surfer's body move and respond to a problem as they ride a wave as if operating with the guidance of an embodied auto-pilot? What is the outcome for practice and experience in light of the potential for the glittering images and pulsating sounds of 'the Red Bull sublime' to affect the bodies of its audience?

As noted by Vertinsky and Weedon (2017), recently scholars of lifestyle sports have shown the potential for new theoretical and methodological approaches to answer these questions. Researchers such as Thorpe (2016), Evers (2016; 2019.b), Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) and Thorpe and Dumont (2019) has highlighted the possibility offered by theories that move past, but do not lose sight of, representation to animate the embodied and sensory elements of lifestyle sports. In this thesis I aim to joining these efforts of evening the balance between the corporeal and discursive through a combined application of affect theory and Bourdieu to incorporate these embodied, sensual and affective elements of lifestyle sports and their manifestation in backcountry touring.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describes the range of literature required to form a thematic scaffold that offers the perspective to examine backcountry touring in the depth that this project aims to. The multifarious nature of touring practice and experience has required the wide-ranging appraisal offered in this chapter that has included an examination of literature that offers definitions of lifestyle sports and the reasons for the choice of the specific term (Wheaton 2010; Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013; King & Church 2020); explains the conventions and examples of their research (Beal & Wilson 2004; Thorpe & Rinehart

2010; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011; Evers 2016; 2019.b; Thorpe 2016); explores the nature of media consumption and production specific to these subcultures (Pavlidis & Fullager 2014; Thornton 1995; Wheaton & Beal 2003); examines the permeation of technology into the practice and experience of these sports (Dumont 2017; Walther et al. 2011; Wilson 2008); and offers theoretical engagement with development of digital media and its related technologies (Brabazon 2017; Knorr Cetina 2005; Lupton 2016; 2017; Papacharissi 2015.a; 2015.b). This exploration of lifestyle sports and other media has further prompted the inclusion of literature that provides the basis to understand how it intersects with the unfolding manifestations of commercialisation in these fields (Carah; 2014; Citton 2017; Franck 1999; 2002; 2019; Hardt 1999; Lazzarato 1996; Marwick 2013; Senft 2008; van Krieken 2019). The thematic framework offered has further been augmented by a review of work that discusses the nature of how these digital and commercial evolutions are experienced by practitioners of lifestyle sports (Edwards & Corte 2010; Kunz, Elsässer & Santomier 2016; Lewis 2015; McCarthy 2017; Stranger 2010); and others groups in society beyond these fields (boyd 2011; Handyside & Ringrose 2017; Renold & Ringrose 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe 2018.a; 2018.b). Finally this chapter has turned to the efforts of Lyng (1990; 2005; 2012; 2014) and others (Bunn 2015; 2017; Goffman 1972; Kiewa 2001; Laurendeau 2006.a; 2006.b; Newmahr 2011;) to form an understanding of edgework theory and voluntary risk taking that is central to many lifestyle sports; particularly to touring.

The literature reviewed here have been chosen to illuminate a landscape in which the virtual and physical practice of lifestyle sports arrives at a sharp intersection with digital technology, media and commercialisation. The spectrum of practice that tourers engage with as they move through the field is evolving to feature many of the commercial influences and concepts of the media described in this chapter. Tourers' practice in the backcountry increasingly incorporates technology that provides the potential to mediate their experiences to an attention economy that can transform their embodied and cultural capital into economic. At the same time these affective publics give rise to new opportunities for the solidification of notions of authenticity and the making of distinctions between those who observe those principles and those who transgress. Understanding these emerging challenges to the status quo through the concepts offered

by the literature examined in this chapter, makes it possible to parse these nebulous themes through an established prism that renders them manageable.

As has been raised, the nature of this description of the field – its breadth, the relativity of unique aspects, its embodiment and affect – have necessitated the formation of an innovative, yet pragmatic theoretical perspective that is outlined in detail in the following chapter. A concomitant reading of particular notions of affect theory and Bourdieu that accounts for the inevitable tensions that arise in such a synthesis has been adopted. This lens, as will be explained, has provided the required concepts with which to approach and animate the corporality of touring while also understanding the meaning and interpretation of it for those who tour.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the wide spectrum of practice and experience that constitutes the backcountry field. As such, it has been necessary for me to approach these phenomena from a theoretical perspective that can account for such a milieu. With an awareness of the impacts of social structures such as the media and consumer capitalism, I use the analytical toolkit offered by Bourdieu to understand the ways in which tourers trace a trajectory through the field, engaging with subcultural values, knowledge and aesthetics that inform their practice and experience. At the same time, I want to give focus to the embodied intensities of touring which occur beyond the discursive realm. Moments that tourers encounter, like standing alone atop a remote peak and the contraction of reality that fear brings or the pull towards modes of subcultural practice, remain too ephemeral and ineffable to be fully scrutinised using Bourdieusian concepts alone. Conventional understandings of Bourdieu's toolkit do not afford enough attention to the theoretical areas of concern this project holds – the body, experience, and affect. Subsequently this thesis turns to a particular reading of affect theory in synthesis with Bourdieusian concepts like habitus, capital, doxa, *illusio* and social gravity, enabling analysis to explore tourers' numerous encounters with affect without losing sight of the meaning that these bodily and emotional experience hold for those who practice in the field.

THE NEED TO UNFOLD BOURDIEU

Until the rise of COVID-19 it was commonplace for people skiing and snowboarding in a ski resort to jump on a chairlift or gondola²⁵ with another party to fill up the space and keep the queues moving. With a ride of about ten minutes or more, it is customary for skiers and snowboarders to remove some of the many articles of clothing they wear - helmets, goggles, beanies, gloves, maybe unzip a jacket – and strike up a conversation, either within their own group or with the other occupants of the lift. On one such occasion during my fieldwork I ducked into a gondola with a group of other skiers and upon performing the disrobing ritual I realised that one of the other skiers was a well-known

²⁵ A ski lift that functions in much the same manner as a chairlift but is enclosed to protect the occupants from the elements. Gondolas can range in size from approx. 4 – 8 people and most commonly used to cover long distance or vertical rise.

professional. At this point in the project, I had interviewed several other touring athletes of equal stature, but this encounter in the gondola – the intersection of bodies, the non-material and non-human – represented a much deeper entanglement with the object of study than my interviews with ‘pros’. In an interview I am imbued with the confidence of my institutional capital as a PhD candidate at the University of Newcastle, which affects me as a researcher to be more comfortable and self-assured. At the same time, that institutional legitimacy may put interviewees at ease and induce a less guarded encounter or be intimidating to engender a relation of symbolic violence. By contrast, in the confines of the Gondola affect is no less active, but it fills the space and our bodies in different ways.

My embodied cultural capital was enacted in recognising her, my body tensing slightly as I saw a target for an interview, but also as I felt an opportunity to validate my own touring self-identity through any legitimacy she might bestow on me in that next 10 minutes floating uphill in a bubble of metal and plastic. We all said hello and began to chat. After hearing that they were on a family trip together I felt conscious of the impropriety of pouncing on an unsuspecting research participant in the compromised position of the gondola trapped 30 meters above the ground. I found myself trying to hide any involuntary facial expression that might give away that I had recognised her. By this point we had all ‘gauged’ each other, as you do in such situations. It became clear that my ‘style’, embodied and objectified capital – my appearance, my language, my comfort in moving with the equipment, the equipment itself like the Dynafit²⁶ bindings on my skis, my Arc’teryx²⁷ jacket, and my Mammut²⁸ backpack, that together resemble aspects of ‘the Red Bull sublime’ – affected her assessment and distinguished me from ‘other’ skiers on the mountain that day. ‘Are you in town for the FWT²⁹?’ she asked with no doubts about my ability to interpret not only the acronym, but the context written between the lines – there was a FWT event taking place that week in the backcountry around another ski resort nearby. I have no doubt that at this point the nonchalance that I had tried to maintain drifted away as my body filled with a vain pride that my touring self-identity

²⁶ Dynafit is an Austrian manufacturer of touring specific equipment such as skis, bindings and boots.

²⁷ Arc’teryx is a Canadian brand that produces outdoor recreation clothing.

²⁸ Mammut is a Swiss brand that produces a range of mountaineering equipment and clothing.

²⁹ The Freeride World Tour (1995) is an international skiing and snowboarding competition with events held each winter in a variety of alpine regions around the world. It is the closest example of what could be described as competitive backcountry touring.

had been so well performed that it engendered the suggestion that I could have been a competitor in the event. Despite being ‘stoked’ at this validation, and again in line with ‘the Red Bull sublime’, I was quick to correct her misplaced assumption, but my mind was filled with the ways I could maintain that assessment of me as tourer through my practice and body, and the ‘style’ they produce. The best opportunity to do so in this encounter arose when our gondola reached its top station. Having said a brief farewell, I walked away from the lift making sure that it appeared effortless as I carried my skis and then tossed them to the ground with precision, before being careful to smoothly step into my bindings and ski away. Without touching on the potency of affect in other encounters and interactions within the backcountry field, this scenario highlights the ways in which the body, practice, subjectivity and experience are so intricately entangled and any attempt to separate them as distinct objects of study is unproductive. As Wacquant (2013: 275) describes, the focus of sociology is not only ‘individuals or groups, which crowd our mundane horizon, but webs of material and symbolic ties’. This chapter will argue how and why a theoretical perspective that brings together the embodied intensities of affect and Bourdieu’s conceptual tools provides a way to animate and examine the webs that Wacquant describes and the experiences of backcountry touring.

THEORIES OF AFFECT

In recent decades sociologists (amongst a raft of other disciplines) have turned to affect theories to re-distribute, and in some instances dismantle, the constructionist foundations of qualitative research and the privileging of discursive, textual ways of knowing and representing the world. As Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) explain, much of the inspiration for this work on affect has been derived from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator, Felix Guattari. The work of these French philosophers is characterised by the amalgamation of wide ranging fields and disciplines to produce ‘an open system, rather than a totalizing structure which must be taken as a unified system of belief’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007:2). Bodies are an element of this open system and Deleuze and Guattari present an understanding of the body that connects:

The human body to other bodies, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate; they link organs to biological processes to material objects and social practices while refusing to subordinate the body to unity and

homogeneity provided either by the body's subordination to consciousness or to organic organization (Grosz 1994: 194).

Such an understanding of bodies give rise to the potential to examine bodies with regards to what they can do, the movements they can perform and the transformations they go through as they connect with the non-human, immaterial and organic. These corporeal and felt encounters can be understood with reference to the concepts of affect.

Affects are becomings: sometimes they weaken us to the extent they diminish our strength of action and decompose our relations (sadness), sometimes they make us stronger through augmenting our force, and making us enter into a vaster and higher individual (joy) (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 74).

This ambiguous definition is intentional. Affect is not possible to pin down. It moves through bodies, encounters and the atmospheres of social worlds. It is in this sense that affects are describes as 'becomings'. They are potentialities, produced by and acting on bodies that interact with the limitless multiplicities of things that Deleuze and Guttari describe.

As such it is perhaps not surprising that affect is explained in a multitude of ways, by a range of theorists who have converged on the concept from an array of disciplines. Many of these discrepancies in thinking on affect are born from competing understandings of the physiology of affect, its impact on the body and emotion, and subsequently how they relate to discourse. Nonetheless there remains a diverse cohort of scholars of affect who largely agree that too much status is given to research that derives its understandings of the social through 'seeing and listening, as embodied experience is turned into narrative' (Wetherell 2013: 352). In other words, affect theorists argue that too much epistemological ground is ceded by focusing solely on the discursive, and such research fails to adequately deal with that which escapes the descriptions offered by research subjects. Instead, affect theory seeks to unravel the 'somatically sensed body' and examine the emotions, perceptions, corporeal movement, and 'proprioceptive responses to vibrations and rhythms' as they occur in social worlds (Wetherell 2013: 352). Theories of affect therefore offer the potential to examine social worlds with greater texture and nuance about the embodied, sensate, more-than-textual, felt dimensions of society.

For some affect theorists (Clough 2009; Massumi 2002; Thrift 2000, 2008) affect is understood to be informed by a temporal sequence of affect impinging on the body and then mind, thus rendering affect itself as pre-cognitive and pre-individual. Massumi (2002: 28-30) cites evidence from ECG brain scans to suggest that there is a missing 'half second' after the registering of affect by the body and before the mind is able to make-meaning of the corporeal changes being experienced. Similarly, Thrift conceptualises this moment as 'that small but vitally significant period of time in which the body makes the world intelligible by setting up a background of expectation'. As Wetherell notes (2012: 35; 2013: 354), William James and Antonio Damasio's accounts of the psychobiology of emotion play a significant role in these understandings of affect. Sullivan (2015:34) efficiently describes these interpretations by explaining 'we are sad because we cry; we are not crying because we are sad'. In other words, affects impact a body, which then produces physiological changes that, after a delay, are registered by the mind and made sense of as emotion. In tandem with this body-mind chronology of affect, Massumi (2002: 27-28) also argues that affect and emotion, in principle, operate on two, diffuse *intensity* and *quality* tracts. Affect is intensity; chaotic and unbridled. While emotion is the qualification, or categorisation, of intensity. For Massumi and others who subscribe to the same point of view, emotion *is not* affect. Instead emotion rationalises affect, making it manageable, individual and most importantly, representational. It is from this position – the severance of affect and emotion – that some theorists suggest that affect is pre-individual or pre human. For Clough (2009: 48), non-linear molecular forces impinge upon the 'molar' and pre-individual body. As such affect operates at a pre-human level, and initiates a 'becoming-human' in the language of Deleuze (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007:6). However, whilst still following the accounts of Massumi and Thrift, Anderson (2014) takes a position that 'tries to stitch back together what Massumi divides' (Wetherell, 2012:66). For Anderson (2014: 83) affect and emotion should not be viewed as operating at different levels, but rather in multi-faceted back-and-forth relationship of feedback and influence. Anderson (2014: 85) differs from Massumi in suggesting that 'capacities to affect and be affected are not, then, pre-discursive... They are mediated through process of agencement that involve but exceed the discursive'. At these junctures, with affect described as pre-conscious and pre-human, and pre- or in excess of discourse, many theorists of affect divorce affect research from studies of discourse, to

instead focus on liminal moments of affect impinging on the capacities of a body to be affected.

This split from discourse research, made allowable by the physiological understandings of affect and emotion outlined above, is not unintentional. Wetherell (2013: 352-353) paraphrases a number of scholars of affect to describe the reasons for this scepticism of discourse research. Wetherell highlights that discourse research can be seen to have 'anti-biologism' and 'anti-essentialism' sentiments that are likely to render the body as docile and inert, or a by-product of 'talk and texts'. Similarly views on the value of qualitative research that interprets the interpretations of research subjects and fails to adequately deal with embodied phenomena are brought to the fore. Massumi (2002: 11-12) argues that in looking for patterns and positions, conventional cultural theories fail to capture the Deleuzian becomingness and 'constant qualitative growth' of the social. For Wetherell (2013:353) these criticisms of discourse research are not baseless, however she also suggests that 'the call for new emphases and for new ways of working does not in itself, of course, rule out a productive dialogue with research in discourse studies'. Moreover, Wetherell (2012; 2013) posits that the physiological basis for the autonomy and non-representativeness of affect is flawed and that the 'turn to affect' raises interesting questions that intimately concern the connection between affect and discourse.

For some theorists of affect current neuroscience and psychology follow accounts of affect and emotion that are contrary to the model highlighted above. Wetherell (2012: 45-47) rejects Damasio's neo-Jamesian formulation of emotion (although not altogether), suggesting that brain and bodily responses to affect are intricately interwoven. This means that affect mixes cognitive and non-cognitive features to produce affective responses that are informed by memories and perceptions that relate to the subjectivity of individuals. Wetherell is careful to note that there may be some select instances of automatic, pre-cognitive responses, such as jumping from a snake-looking shape, but these are limited cases. Indeed, some of the most automatic responses for Wetherell 'involve representations of incoming information and are responses to its meaning and significance for the organism' (2012: 62). Here Wetherell (2012: 46) returns to explore some of Damasio's work, nominally his 'running polyphony', with greater optimism. This

concept suggests that ordinary emotional experience is made up of a continuum that constitutes the ‘fabric of mind/body’ through swirling inputs of somatic senses, cognition, and memories that can induce new ones (Wetherell, 2013: 355). In the context of Wetherell’s position on the physiology of affect, this essentially posits that affect is encountered in ongoing processes of ‘meaning-making or semiosis’ whereby affect is simultaneously sensed, recognised, categorised and communicated (2013: 355). For supporters of these arguments put forward by Wetherell, the positions on affect created by the be-heading of discourse from affect are untenable. Indeed as Wetherell states:

we cannot stop the clock, start it just from some constructed moment of initial impingement and ignore the meaning making contexts and histories that so decisively shape the encounters between bodies and events (2013: 355).

What this suggests is that affect is responded to in a constantly evolving socio-historical context that informs responses to it. With this concept in mind it becomes important to consider the how this interaction unfolds.

Wetherell (2012) employs habitus and capital to help illuminate her understanding of affect. Even with a cursory deliberation there is a significant synergy between Bourdieusian principles and some, particularly Wetherell’s, iterations of affect. For example, rather than prescribe outcomes, the habitus produces sets of potentialities that speak to the concepts of becomings and possibilities that characterise Deleuzian concepts such as affect. For Wetherell (2012: 104) habitus and capital can be used to explain how affective situations and encounters are ordered or informed by social structuring. Explaining the connections between habitus and affect, Wetherell (2012:106) notes that Bourdieu explains that the habitus is ‘written into the body’ and becomes ‘a set of integrated coordinations and patterns’. Essentially Wetherell contends that the habitus can influence responses to affect as the body and mind react to familiar patterns in affective situations, drawing on internalised dispositions and catalogued embodied experience. As with habitus, Wetherell (2012) views capital as having a solidifying impact on affect and vice versa, with affect having the potential to reinforce distinctions in class, gender etc. Wetherell (2012: 109-110) succinctly highlights two excellent examples of these concepts. Firstly the case of an upper-middle-class shopper visiting a presumably working-class hardware store to buy a garden hose is raised. The shopper describes

getting the ‘heebie-jeebies’ from being in the store. This affective encounter is understood by Wetherell to be indicative of the affective grip of habitus and capital. The upper-middle-class shopper has had a sensory experience that is inherently related to their social position. Wetherell draws similar conclusions about the role of habitus and social position in affect in her example of Germaine Greer’s provocative comments on ‘chavs’ and ‘Essex girls’. This observation of the entwinement of affect and social factors is not as far removed from the accounts of exponents of non-representational affect as might be expected. Indeed, care is taken to emphasise that while non-representational affect is pre-cognitive and pre-individual, affect is not pre-social (Clough, 2009:48). Anderson (2014: 84-88) argues that while there are socio-historical inputs into the assemblages of affect, these inputs happen at the pre-cognitive level, interacting with the physiology and not the conscious classification of affect as emotion. So even though non-representational formulations of affect recognise social factors, the pragmatism of the approach is balanced in a different way to that of Wetherell (2012; 2013).

With a variety of contested accounts, questions from a number of sources have arisen over the methodological implications of researching affect. The first hurdle to overcome for some researchers of affect is to represent the un-representable. Wetherell (2013: 356-358) turns to the example of McCormack’s study on Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) to highlight such difficulties. McCormack’s goal was to investigate the phenomena involved in DMT that is beyond conscious meaning-making. As Wetherell argues this study presented huge methodological problems. Firstly, separating affect from the discourse surrounding it so it can be examined without interruption from the voices and narratives of the research subjects is a sizeable task. Furthermore, actually investigating and then representing the phenomena to others proves a tricky situation. Wetherell (2013: 357) details the ways in which McCormack attempted to overcome these problems by learning a process of engaging with the practice of DMT in order to try and describe the beyond-discourse observations he made. However therein lies the problem. For Wetherell, McCormack’s methodology is an ‘honourable exemption’ to the trend of research on affect remaining theoretical, but nonetheless is unsuccessful as it relies on interpretation and sense-making to represent the supposedly un-representable. Clough (2009: 49) offers some suggestions, but veers towards positing what not to do, rather than concrete answers to the questions of a method that accounts for affect. Nonetheless, Clough’s point

that sociological methods cannot help but be wrapped up in affect is worth consideration. Any method that makes its focus examining affect will inherently become part of the assemblage that makes up the affect of a particular situation. In spite of these unanswered methodological questions, some theorists of affect do present coherent analytical frameworks or perspectives from which research of affect can potentially be taken forward.

In this light, Anderson offers an ‘analytics of affect’ (2014: 164) that seeks to offer perspective on the ordering, relationship with power, and occurrence of affect in social worlds. For Anderson, understanding how power functions through affect in modern society is of particular interest. Critical to Anderson’s perspective on power is an engagement with the Foucauldian principle of apparatuses. An apparatus describes an ongoing and dynamic interaction and integration of heterogeneous elements that act to create the ‘surface of contact for specific modes of power’ (2014: 25). Anderson identifies three manifestations of affect: affect as object-targets of apparatus, affect as bodily capacities and collective affects that emerge through ‘structures of feeling’. Drawing on the examples of torture used in the War on Terror to induce a state of ‘debility, dependency, dread’, Anderson (2014) argues that affect becomes the object-targets of structures of power. In the torture example, this can be understood by parsing the situation as an attempt to create the affective possibilities that are born from the horrors of the torture. Similarly in another example Anderson focuses on *Scent Air UK* – a marketing company that advertises the ‘promise of atmospheric manipulation: the capacity to explicate the affective backgrounds of sites and turn atmospheres into resources harnessed for economic value-creation’ through ‘scent systems and scent marketing solutions’ (Anderson 2014: 25 - 26). Anderson highlights how affect can become the object-target to be converted into a resource. Anderson (2014) is also interested in affect as collective affects, or affective atmospheres, that are constituted by ‘structures of feeling’. The ambiguity of Raymond Williams’ term is recognised by Anderson who attempts to reconcile these issues by focusing on the interesting questions that the principle poses (2014: 117). Anderson suggests a focus on how affect is transmitted and how affective atmospheres develop. Affect as bodily capacities is also an important consideration for Anderson’s ‘analysis of affect’. For Anderson the primary

concern of this facet is to understand the neurological and physiological questions of how bodies react in response to affect.

With this in mind, I now turn to Wetherell's (2012; 2013) argument for engaging with 'affective/discursive practices'. Wetherell (2012: 19) defines an affective practice as 'a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations'. That is to say, the social practices in which the body and the mind interact to produce affective responses that are socio-historically contextualised. For Wetherell (2012: 52) the focus is not so much on the relationship between discourse and affect, but instead the patterned assemblages and their consequences that are the result of everyday affective/discursive practices. With this research orientation – that is a focus on 'the whole pattern unfolding or coming into being' (Wetherell 2013) – there is the potential to pragmatically engage with both the affective and discursive, and produce textured research that moves beyond the limitations of discourse but is not removed from it.

In an article discussing the significance of non-representational theory for alternative sport, Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) argue that the concepts put forward by theorists of affect discussed here present exciting new avenues for research into the experimental, unrestricted and unique elements of lifestyle sports. However, the article is careful to conclude by suggesting that rather than a departure from conventional studies of the discourse of lifestyle sports phenomena, a balanced approach that incorporates new ways of dealing with embodiment and discourse is required for research that attempts to capture the uniqueness and nuance of lifestyle sports. As such this thesis has adopted a theoretical perspective that follows the work of theorists such as Wetherell (2012; 2013) and Anderson (2014) to understand affect as 'embodied meaning making' (Threadgold 2020: 16; Wetherell 2012: 4) that occurs in unique socio-historical contexts. By providing the conceptual space to address how practice, knowledge, emotion occur in and through bodies it is possible to return them to the analysis of tourers' practice and experience I offer here (Evers 2006: 231). To advance this position I turn to the theoretical toolkit offered by Bourdieu enlivened by this understanding of affect as 'embodied meaning making'. This has provided the opportunity to move beyond the discursive limitations

and include an exploration of the affective aspects of the various encounters tourers can have with the backcountry field.

EXCAVATING THE AFFECT IN BOURDIEU

When I arrived in Revelstoke to carry out my fieldwork, I *felt* it. Looking out the window of the bus into the fading grey light of a winter's afternoon in the mountains, my body was tense with anticipation. The familiar feeling of damp roadside snow meeting my feet as I stepped off the bus prompted my body to start to settle into the surrounds like the mountains sitting comfortably around the town. The crisp alpine air, with a faint trace of diesel fumes from snowploughs filled my nose and a smile drew across my face in anticipation of what these vivid sensory inputs suggested. These unfolding intensities of bodily sensation are an immanent feeling 'that was habitually developed but that has been lying dormant is summoned, activated into actuality in the affective atmosphere' (Threadgold 2020: 50). My father spent his early adulthood as what can only effectively be described as a 'ski bum' and fortuitously for me, this translated into decades worth of family holidays to 'the snow' where I developed the habitus, capital and *illusio* to be *affected* by the above encounter as described.

Some could argue that the flat ontology of affect, wherein *everything* is just a *thing* amongst assemblages of other *things*, is incongruent with that of Bourdieu which prioritises the meaning constructed from practice and experience within social structures and their cultural-historical contexts. These discrepancies, though genuine, are not absolute. Indeed, a necessarily calibrated reading of Bourdieu that moves away from any of the tendencies that prompt accusations of deterministic analyses reliant on a black box of habitus, allows one to see the notions and language of affect written into tools like capital, social gravity and *illusio*. In order to fully excavate these somewhat latent affective qualities of Bourdieu I turn to the re-exploration of the Bourdieusian theoretical apparatuses offered by Threadgold (2020).

In order to do this, I will first examine conventional understandings of each of Bourdieu's apparatuses, some of which can be interpreted through the analogy of a game, before embracing their full affective potential. Fundamental to this collection of concepts is the notion of fields. A field is 'a space of conflict and competition' that structures a spectrum

of possible outcomes, but does not prescribe them in individuals' struggles for success (Wacquant, 1992: 17). It is within the field that the game is 'played'. There are defined boundaries and rules that dictate how the game is played and experienced, with players possessing and obtaining the skills and resources needed to improve their standing in the game. Bourdieusian fields are understood as defined areas of action that an individual passes through, impacted upon by magnet-like influences (Bunn 2015: 4). As Threadgold (2020: 67) notes 'fields are structures, histories, norms, traditions and so on, but those aspects mean that a field is also a collection of affects' (2020: 67). As such entry to a field represents the commencement of an unfolding trajectory of affective encounters for individuals.

The habitus is a set of dispositions that are the 'internalization of external structures' (Wacquant 1992:18). The habitus works to instil 'a generative and unifying power, a constructive and classifying potency' that both *constructs* and is *constructed by* an individual's reality (Bourdieu 2000: 136-137). The habitus calibrates how individuals respond to certain situations through a prism of their previous experience and subsequent responses. In other words, the habitus can be understood as a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1993.b: 5). As such the habitus is not fixed but instead evolves when individuals encounter new situations, experience and practice as they traverse through fields. Wacquant (2014.a: 6-8) and Bourdieu (2000: 161) emphasise that habitus evolves in perpetuity with new experiences.

With these characteristics of habitus in mind, upon returning to the definition of affect as embodied meaning-making, we move toward an understanding of habitus as 'an affective ball of immanent dispositions, an assemblage of affective charges' (Threadgold 2020: 18). It represents a silo of social and cultural histories, disposing bodily responses relational to an individual's relationship to the 'game' they are playing at that moment; accounting for example, the fish-out-of-water feeling that rises as our bodies sweat, tense and pulse in a situation that we are not appropriately pre-disposed for. For Wacquant (2014.b: 7) the habitus is multi-staged. At the primary level is a general habitus that informs the evolution of a series of secondary habitus, specific to particular fields. There is a further tertiary habitus in which the embodied practices of individuals develop dispositions that make new practices more readily adoptable, dependent upon their similarity with the

ones that have been honed in adjacent fields. For example, a downhill snowboarder with years of experience riding in ski areas embodies many of the capacities needed for negotiating the backcountry. From their skill at controlling and manipulating their movements through their equipment, to the way they engage their senses with the environment to understand the conditions of the situations they place themselves in. At each stage, these dynamics of habitus are intrinsically affective. The orientation and nature of particular dispositions prime the individuals who hold them to be affected in particular ways. For instance, if you were to take the aforementioned downhill snowboarder and someone who had never seen snow or large mountains before and placed them atop a peak in the backcountry, their different habitus would dictate how that experience would be felt, and subsequently interpreted.

Critical to the development of the habitus is Bourdieu's notion of capital. For Bourdieu (1986) economic capital is central to all other forms. This concept of capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, resources and abilities that are relevant and available to an individual for success in a particular field. Social capital describes access to social networks that individuals have access to relevant to a field (Bourdieu 1986). These capitals can be understood as the 'active properties' of a field and are 'capable of conferring strength and power within that universe, on their holder' (Bourdieu 1985: 724). It opens doors and maintains circles of 'people like us'. Social capital is inherently affective (Threadgold 2020: 90-91). The personal relationships that constitute social capital overflow with affect, from 'just clicking' with another individual to the exclusion that can occur on the basis of nepotism or the subconscious desire for familiarity. Cultural capital shares these sorts of artefacts of affect and is understood in three distinct configurations; objectified, institutionalised and embodied (Bourdieu 1986). Objectified cultural capital represents the material resources pertinent to success in a field as defined by an awareness, understanding and acceptance of the doxa. As Threadgold (2020: 87 – 88) highlights with his discussion of the varied affectiveness of books, the materiality of objectified cultural capital has significant affective capacity. Buying books, and placing them on a shelf in an office or home can intimidate, consolidate opinion, prompt conversation, make someone else feel comfortable through their affect. In a similar regard, institutionalised cultural capital are the assemblage of qualifications, rankings, and certificates that an individual has gained (Bourdieu 1986). Critically, institutionalised

cultural capital carries status, with particular forms privileged and this is where the affective elements of it lie. The status of a degree from Harvard as opposed to the University of Newcastle has affective capacity when it appears on the resume of job applicant. Certain forms of institutionalised cultural capital provide higher octane fuel for those that possess them, accelerating their progress through a field.

Completing this three part conceptualisation of cultural capital is the embodied dimension. This is the collection of skills, knowledge and talents possessed in bodies which one may call upon in specific circumstances (Bourdieu 1986). From the tennis player's anticipation of where to move for the next shot, to a musician's ear for tone and rhythm to a multi-linguist's ease at switching between languages, embodied cultural capital represents all of the sensed and non-conscious abilities one can conjure from within themselves to navigate a situation. Embodied cultural capital sees those who possess it exert 'the affect of charm, usually through a mix of confidence and status' (Threadgold 2020: 86). That is to say that those with embodied cultural capital produce a trust and respect in others who recognise the legitimacy of that capital. For instance, consider two drivers: one that you see as being a safe driver, following the road rules, the other a dangerous one who speeds and shows no consideration for other road users. If we are placed in the passenger seat with either one of those drivers our experience is imbued with the affect of their embodied cultural capital. Our bodies might relax into the seat as we chat with the good driver, while a trip with bad driver may see us reflexively grasping for the door handle or stomping on an imagined brake pedal. Furthermore, these sorts of bodily capacities allow their owners to form 'a kind of affective competence' (Threadgold 2020: 86). When an individual enters a certain social situation embodied cultural capital is engaged by an 'affective affinity' for the setting to produce performance and behaviours that might be more or less appropriate or expected in that circumstance. It explains how some seem to be at ease in situations that paralyses others: for example, the contrast between a professor giving a lecture and the student delivering a presentation to the same classroom space. Through their experience, the professor develops the embodied cultural capital to speak confidently, keep the audience engaged, deliver the content in an appropriate manner, and has the institutional legitimacy bestowed upon them by postgraduate qualifications and time 'in the job'. As such the professor gains the confidence and respect of the students. Meanwhile, the student

without the same experience may feel unsure of themselves through being ‘out of place’ without access to the same sources of legitimisation and experience of the professor. Ultimately individuals accrue and exercise capital in their movement through fields, making alterations to their status as their access to capital of all ‘species’ grows. This means that ‘possessing cultural capital lubricates one’s trajectory in specific social spaces. That lubrication of practice happens affectively’ (Threadgold 2020: 84).

Returning to the game analogy, doxa can be understood as the rules by which the game is organised and played. These rules and constraints are internalised by individuals within fields who in doing so maintain codes of conduct and values of a field that become ‘common sense norms’ (France & Threadgold 2015: 624), or as Bourdieu puts it ‘what goes without saying’ (1998: 170). The strength of doxa remains consistent in the midst of any struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, even though some details of doxa may be altered over time. Such struggles represent attempts to either maintain or alter what is acceptable within a field (Bunn 2015: 5). Doxa results from the history of these struggles and comes to be mistaken as inherent or natural by the participants in the field. Part of the maintenance of doxa is the result of social gravity as it is the ‘tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of the rules’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 117). This means that *illusio* is the acceptance of doxa or buying into the rules of the game, and is crucial to the continuation of a field. As individuals follow a trajectory through a field and approach mastery, *illusio* is intensified as the gravity of their investment becomes recognised and they are pulled further into the field (France & Threadgold 2015: 625). As such these doxic norms and the *illusio* that consolidates them can be seen as ‘an ever-present ambient affective background’ (Threadgold 2020: 20). As individuals feel the increased weight of the social gravity brought about by their investment in doxa, it produces a mist of affect that lingers in all their encounters with the field. That affect unfolds through their practice and the perspectives and attitudes that are developed in relation to the field, with doxa inducing choices, practices and behaviours in direction over another.

Together, these conceptual utilities coalesce to produce the social gravity that draws receptive individuals towards lifestyle sports like touring. As Hage (2011: 85) explains, individuals move through fields following particular trajectories, producing and

encountering the affect from capitals, habitus doxa and social gravity. Bunn (2015) has explored these types of experience for lifestyle sports practitioners in his account of the social gravity that draws individuals towards the risky practices of high-consequence climbing. Bunn highlights the way that such individuals hone dispositions and accumulate capital in related fields, like hiking, to subsequently have them affected by encounters and exposure to other fields that hail them towards new pursuits. In other words, individuals master the skills needed in one particular field and in doing so develop a habitus that is primed to accept and appreciate the doxa of related fields. It is important to note that these dispositions cannot simply be stored in stasis. Instead, Bunn highlights that 'dispositions begin a process of decay the moment they fall out of use... compromising an urgency to act for the sake of maintaining particular abilities' (2016: 106-105). At the same time, mastery in a field exposes new doxa and with a receptive habitus, individuals begin to accept the rules and values. This completes the dynamic that Bunn terms 'embodied echoes' and exemplifies through observations of his own climbing practice. He describes debriefing a climb over coffee in an alpine hut and reviewing the aptness of the choices around the equipment he and his partner had brought with them. All of this is to suggest that the process of honing dispositions does not only occur in moments of critical practice, but that efforts towards 'dispositional enrichment' increase with investment in the field. With this increasing *illusio* that embodied echoes describe, individuals are drawn further into the field delving into deeper understandings of doxa, growing capital and find it difficult to escape the weight of the social gravitational forces this creates.

This magnetism can be further parsed through reference to Bourdieu's notions of fields of cultural production (1993.a; 1993.b). For instance Bourdieu highlights the polemical relationships and interactions between the 'elite' and 'popular' iterations of the art and literature sub-fields. Such fields are constituted by poles of opposite interests; the autonomous and the heteronomous (Johnson 1993: 15-18). The autonomous pole is based in symbolic capital and insulated from outside influences that might otherwise breach the field. Conversely, the heteronomous pole occurs in subordination to those outside pressures. The following of one pole over another amounts to adherence to a particular cultural legitimacy that is exercised in myriad practices occurring between the poles.

One can broaden the visualization of these poles to think of them as affective, where the illusio of the field has its most intense charge at the autonomous pole, but may be challenged, resisted, threatened or distracted at the heteronomous (Threadgold 2020: 115-116).

This highlights how struggles over capital appear in this polarity as individuals wrestle to preserve their notion of legitimacy. These conflicts signify the stakes held in both the conservation of traditional positions and the challenge presented by new 'modes of cultural practice' (Johnson 1993:17). It is the nature of these struggles that sees the preservation of both poles as there is an implied 'form of recognition; adversaries whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring them cannot be combated without consecrating them' (Bourdieu 1993.a: 42). Individuals whose practice is orientated towards the autonomous may never come to experience the existence of their opposites and will often deny the legitimacy or existence of them, but nonetheless these negative relationships and cultural practices unite and preserve the poles (Bourdieu 1993.a: 46). The struggles that emerge along the spectrum result in individuals being affected by social gravity that emanates from the poles with varying influence, drawing them, in one configuration or another, towards the cultural practice legitimised at the respective poles.

In this context the significance of Bourdieu's notion of distinction is brought to bear. Bourdieu (1984: 220) makes passing reference to the emerging lifestyle sports at the time in developing this concept. Bourdieu's description of these 'new sporting activities' carries a similar focus on flight as McCarthy (2017) highlights, but ultimately the significance of lifestyle sports, for Bourdieu, rests in the opportunities they create for distinction. In its most simple iteration distinction can be understood as the dynamics in which 'social subjects, classified by their classification, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make' (Bourdieu 1984: 6). Bourdieu ties this notion to class, whereby those with the most capital are able to adjudicate what is tasteful and moral. As such, distinction is realised in practice and performance whereby those who embody 'good' tastes for what is moral and cultured distinguish themselves from others. The struggles arising within cultural fields of production provide the basis for this type of distinction where those with the most 'tasteful' elements of such fields are found at the autonomous pole. 'Sticky affinities' for these cultured preferences form for those who embody the doxa through their practice, distinguishing those with the most status as a result (Threadgold

2020: 25-26). As such distinction can be understood as a significant part of the affective intensities that constitute the background of fields. By demarking different groups and individuals within fields, distinction affects and is affected by notions of superiority, jealousy, disgust and admiration that arise through corporeal practice and experience.

AFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES IN THE BACKCOUNTRY FIELD

Together these concepts and the themes explored in the literature review have formed an orientation that has guided the deployment of this project. This perspective has enabled me to animate the ephemeral moments of practice and affective backgrounds of the social contexts they occur in. In order to establish a basis for the use of this perspective through the analysis of Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I will first explain some of the ways in which affect pulsates between the human, non-human, physical and virtual elements of the backcountry subculture.

The most potent form of affect in touring is that which is produced and felt through embodied edgework practice. As these moments unfold, tourers enter intimate encounters that constitute an intersection of sociality, corporeal skill, and technology, the mountains, and weather and snow conditions that develop in a mist of affective intensities. Embodied cultural capital – skill and knowledge about using corporeal senses and capacities in the backcountry environment; objectified capital – having equipment fit for purpose; and institutionalised capital – a certificate from having completed an avalanche safety training course, all come together to produce a background to practice that ripples with affect. A tourer who has gained strong skiing skills, has high performing and well maintained equipment and is familiar with the terrain they are in might well be endowed with a sense of confidence in the authenticity of their practice that helps them enter edgework with focus and precision. This affective expertise can allow tourers to reach and return from the ‘edge’, to then be further affected by the experiential aftermath of their risky encounters. On the other hand, for example, in the tourer’s relations with the mountains there is always the potential for their embodied practice to affect that environment and trigger the event of an avalanche.

Furthermore, these affective capitals shape experiences of these sensual and fleeting intensities to develop dispositions that prime bodies to be further affected by them. The

convergence between the physical and virtual that is raised in this thesis is another site for affect to be dispersed by and amongst tourers. A spectrum of practice is formed between the autonomous and heteronomous poles in which those that align with the autonomous – related to *safe* embodied experience – are deemed ‘authentic’, with those that tend more towards the heteronomous as ignorant or distasteful. This is not to say that the practice of tourers constitutes a simple binary of legitimacy and inauthenticity. Rather the ways that tourers engage with the field are the manifestation of a range of struggles that emerge along this spectrum and the changes they bring to the subculture. At the autonomous pole, practice reflects tourers’ investment in doxa that prioritise several notions that together constitute a concept of ‘authentic’ touring. These include; tourers understanding what they *do not* know and *are not* capable of, in terms of skills and understanding about the mountains; a focus on making good decisions on the basis of capital that tourers do have; entering the backcountry with respect for that environment; and a humility that is reminiscent of that described by McCarthy (2017). While high level edgework might call on these types of dispositions, it does not necessarily require them, nor are these concepts predicated by high levels of touring specific cultural capital in its various forms.

At the same time, social forces that have emerged at the heteronomous pole – characterised by commercialisation, digital technology, media and innovative modes of practice – present a new, unfolding challenge to the monopoly of those ‘authentic’ notions. Prior to these heteronomous interruptions, it was largely the case that tourers would enter the field, affected by geographical proximity and realisation of its possibilities to be guided by mentors that would pass down the capital necessary for ‘authentic’ practice and outlook. More recently digital media and technology have expanded the reach of notions of the backcountry along with the aesthetics of McCarthy’s (2017) ‘the Red Bull sublime’ and Evers’ (2019.b) ‘stoke imperative’. The economic capitalisation of this dynamic has also broadened the availability of touring equipment. This has means that tourers enter the field guided not necessarily by mentors, but also the aesthetics of backcountry content from the likes of Red Bull and an atmosphere of expanding marketing and branding. The struggles for space in the field that follow these heterodox emergences enliven the social gravity felt by tourers. As such those who enter the field do so pulled, towards the potentiality offered at both poles. This is

articulated in the impacts that this affective force has on practice and outlook. New practices – recording oneself while touring with a POV camera to edit and post online have come to be definitive parts of touring experience for some. While for others who lean more towards the autonomous, digital technology is seen as a toolkit with which to supplement the observation and sharing of knowledge pertinent to conventional embodied practice. Both modes of practice represent these conflicts between the poles whereby practices that incorporate digital technologies flow from the heteronomous, however the way that tourers adopt them depends on their investment in the autonomous. In other words the increasingly concentrated infusion of human, non-human and immaterial elements of the field means that there are many more ways *to be* a tourer now. These vignettes highlight that the synthesis of Bourdieu and affect that I have embarked upon is not only necessary, but also a promising basis from which to do more-than-representational research.

CONCLUSION

This research is unashamed about choosing a side, so to speak, in the debates over exactly which bodily process come before and after affect. As Lorimer (2005: 83-84) highlights with his listing of different theorists' contributions, these sorts of discussions make, but all too rarely settle, observant and exciting points. Rather than continue those arguments here, this thesis is intended to advance the aims of more-than-representational theory by putting it to work both theoretically and methodologically. I argue that understanding affect as 'embodied meaning making' where patterned assemblages and their consequences are the result of everyday affective/discursive practices. This definition sees affect as pre-cognitive but not pre-social and provides the potential to pragmatically engage with both the affective and discursive. Subsequently this thesis follows the work of theorists such as Anderson (2014), Lorimer (2005) Threadgold (2020) and Wetherell (2012; 2013), to define affect as the background to a crucible of knowledge that emerges from a reality shaped by day-to-day life; the ephemeral moments of intersections between affect, capital, precognitive dispositions and sensory intensities. It is through this theoretical framework and its efforts to reconcile the incongruences of Bourdieu and affect that this project defines the subculture, practitioners, practice and experience of touring. As such, I aim to animate the corporality of lifestyle sports in heed of the calls made by scholars such as Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) with a commensurate

representation of the constructed knowledge that this affective background influences and is influenced by. Consequently this theoretical position has proven apt to engage with myriad material, non-material and human aspects of the backcountry field. This thesis will offer an application of this theory, together with the themes and concepts of the literature review that display the promise these notions have for pursuing more-than-representational research.

4. METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The analysis presented in this thesis draws on a range of data collected through interviews; field notes of discussions with and observations of tourers; a content analysis of media, specialised and otherwise; and considered application of my own position as a tourer drawing on autoethnographic fieldnotes. This chapter will discuss both the constructionist and more-than-representational underpinnings of the project; how and why these choices have been made; and the manner in which they have been enacted through the methods used. I have been able to reconcile the differences between these affective and discursive approaches of the project through the qualitative methodological orientation that I have adopted to ‘gain an intimate understanding of people, places, cultures and situations’ (O’Leary 2014: 130). These considerations have all been made in regards to their ability to best address the two key aims of the project, which are:

1. To explore the nature and development of commercialisation, digital media and technology in backcountry touring;
2. To investigate the impact of these influences on the experiences of tourers as they engage with the field.

In justifying the methods that are outlined here and their more-than-representational nature, I will also seek to clarify my position as an insighter (Hodkinson 2005; Sharp 2020) within the research process along with the benefits and limitations of such positionality.

The dynamics encompassed by the synthesised epistemology of the project bring to bear a range of perspectives on the reality of the social world. In order to make sense of this diversity of perspective through the research design and process, Schnegg (2015: 43) describes a four-staged process. The goal of the progression is firstly to ensure reflexive engagement necessary to maintain clarity as the project unfolds, but also to help round out understandings of the knowledge developed by the participants and through the embodiment of the researcher. The process emphasises the contextualisation of four elements of the research. Firstly, the participants (*and digital data*) and the knowledge they offer; the position and context of the researcher; the methods they utilise to collect that knowledge; and the theoretical framework with which it is analysed. With these

approaches in place a solid foundation from which to consider the socio-cultural context of each aspect is established, thus providing the basis to mitigate against the insider position of the researcher distorting the project. Along with detailing the research techniques employed in the development of this thesis, this chapter will explore the processes by which the project has followed Schnegg's (2015) suggestions to negotiate the challenges of the qualitative empirical research process.

DEFINING A MORE-THAN-REPRESENTATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

This thesis adopts an epistemology that understands knowledge as constructed, but also 'more-than-representational' (Evers 2016; Lorimer 2005). More-than-representational knowledge is that which is produced in 'multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice' (Lorimer 2005: 84). In order to align the methodological approach with this theory of knowledge, ethnographic and qualitative investigative traditions, and my own position and embodiment of the themes within the project have strongly informed the approach. As Pole and Lampard (2013: 6) posit, by garnering a robust understanding of these ideas and reaching commensuration of epistemology and methodology, researchers provide the capacity for their research to achieve its purpose, both in terms of the research question and potentially wider reaching applications.

Therefore it is necessary to outline the qualitative methodological framings of the project that make it possible to produce the more-than-representational knowledge that I aim to. Qualitative research 'appreciates subjectivities; accepts multiple perspectives and realities; recognizes the power of both participants and researchers' in an effort to explore the way that individuals encounter each other and their experiences within social groups (O'Leary 2014: 130). In this sense qualitative studies are concerned with getting amongst the action to see and understand the experience from the perspective of participants. Research of this nature gives rise to rich, deep data that can illuminate social worlds in ways that escape that of a more positivist, quantitative tradition.

To get amongst the practice and experience of touring means exposure to the sensory, unfolding and momentary encounters between bodies, the natural environment, equipment, identity and broader social forces that occur in backgrounds of lingering affective intensity. This gives the object of study a messy quality (Law 2004), added to by

the researchers place in it, but ‘this messiness heightens anticipation and draws attention to a vast array of feelings, relations, spaces, rituals, and practices’ (Evers 2006: 237 – 238). There is a gamut of established qualitative research techniques and methods that are proven to be effective modes of generating qualitative understandings of social worlds. However, qualitative traditions also provide the space for researchers to:

develop their own framework, and as appropriate to their research question, draw on some of the insights and strategies that are key to these various ways of knowing – making their research that much richer (O’Leary 2014: 131).

Therefore I have called upon a range of qualitative techniques (detailed further in this chapter) to give the project the potential to animate, interpret and understand the nuanced ‘messiness’ of the backcountry field through the more than-representational data it has sought to produce.

In assuming a particular epistemology, being cognisant of and wrestling with the paradigm’s concepts concerning the nature of knowledge is critically important. As such this project does not see knowledge as something, ‘out there’ in the backcountry, buried in the snow waiting to be discovered by an eagle-eyed investigator. Rather, in part knowledge is a construction, built through the interpretation of meanings that are generated in social interactions (Graue & Karabon 2013: 13; Williams 2006: 212). People produce knowledge as they develop frameworks and concepts with which to consider the meaning derived from shared language, practice and understanding. As Graue and Karabon attest, knowledge constructed in this manner is emergent (2013: 15) and these understandings are generated within a context imbued with the social and cultural forces present within a group of shared experience.

If some knowledge is constructed, the interactions that build it cannot do so without influencing the result. Therefore constructionists suggest knowledge is not independent or objective. The aim of the constructionist then is not to scour their focus of study for truth or finite reality. Rather, the constructionist’s task is to sketch a supposition about *perceptions* of reality as they emerge from the shared language, practice and experience of particular groups whose members are involved in the production of its meaning. (Schnegg 2015: 36; Williams 2006: 212). Drawing on the Kantian premise that “we can

never transcend the bounds of our own mind to see the world as a ‘thing-in-itself’”, constructionist epistemology suggests that the researcher and the researched are inextricable from any production of knowledge (Schnegg 2015: 35). A researcher’s senses provide them with the foundational tools to measure and consider social worlds, but they can never hope to perform these tasks with the same precision as a carefully calibrated scientific apparatus. This suggests that all understandings constructionist research arrives at have been percolated through filters of interpretation and extrapolation informed by experiential biases. A researcher might arrive at an understanding of social relations that their participant describes, with the participant’s understanding being another interpretation of an observation, representing what Rex describes as “a construct of a construct of a construct” (2014: 213, 219) with each scopic layer becoming a new site for renovations and alterations to knowledge.

This is not to suggest that constructionists deny the existence of a ‘real’, prediscursive world (Schnegg 2015: 36, 42). For instance, one can make objective statements about common objects we encounter in daily life like a tree; it is largely a carbon structure; we can know its size by positivist measurement; even gauge its age by examining its internal structures etc. However the perceptions that you or I have about the reality of the tree would be vastly different to that of a goanna if she could tell us hers. In this situation that constructionist research finds itself in, viability replaces a search for truth. Upon observation of a goanna’s interaction with the tree supposing her perception of its reality as constituted by understandings of the tree as a source of food and shelter, is viable but limited in describing the full reality of the tree. Similarly, my perspective, which sees the tree as important for the environment and an enjoyable feature in the landscape, as well as a potentially source of resources, is not a holistic perception of its reality either. The job of the researcher is to arrive at an understanding of reality based on the viability of these perceptions (Schnegg 2015: 36). Even if we could interview the goanna, how could she explain the way her sense of smell can pinpoint a vulnerable nest of eggs and stir her claws and muscle into action, allowing her to glide up the tree? As Toren and de Pina-Cabral attest, it is the job of the researcher to tidy up and reconcile these concepts through reflexivity that promotes ‘awareness and the management of subjectivities are critical in order to avoid misinterpretation of the knowledge the research deals with’ (2009: 7). But what if there were ways to viably animate those embodied, prediscursive forms of

knowledge without doing away with the researcher's entanglement in the process? Such research opens the possibility to ask questions not only about what the goanna thinks about the tree, but also what she *feels* about it and in doing so level the balance between the corporeal and the constructed.

In lifestyle sports like touring the sensory, corporeal feelings that practice induces form integral components of engagement in these fields. This has led to lifestyle sports scholars (see Evers 2016; Thorpe 2016; Thorpe and Rinehart 2010) looking to non-representational theory in order to account for what practitioners experience through their bodies. In this sense this project extends its definition of knowledge by drawing upon the work of non-representational researchers such as Vannini (2015.a; 2015.b.), Dewsbury (2010) and Latham (2003). Vannini posits that what sets research of this style apart from others:

is a different orientation to the temporality of knowledge, for non-representationalists are much less interested in representing an empirical reality that has taken place before the act of representation than they are in enacting multiple and diverse potentials of what knowledge can become afterwards (2015.b: 12).

In other words it aims to offer a sense of the ephemeral and fleeting, hard-to-express moments that make up the background of human interaction and social life. Inevitably this requires a reconfiguration of epistemological scope away from that of traditional research paradigms such as constructionism. In order to achieve such an orientation, Vannini describes the sites and nature of the knowledge that research such as this project seeks. 'Firstly, non-representational research concentrates on *events*. Events are happenings, unfoldings, regular occurrences inspired (but not overdetermined) by states of anticipation and irregular actions that shatter expectations' (2015.b: 7. Emphasis in original). By focusing on 'events' non-representational research has focuses on the emergent and unexpected that can develop on the basis of affect. This also provides a gateway for research to prioritise examining relations. This is essential as it is in relations that social life unfolds from the assemblages of encounters between the human and non-human. Quoting Anderson and Harrison (2010: 10), Vannini argues that:

a relational view of the lifeworld... zeros in on the crossroads between metaphysical and material, crossroads "where many different things

gather, not just deliberative humans, but a diverse range of actors and forces, some of which we know about, some not, and some of which may be just on the edge of awareness” (2015.b: 8).

Here Vannini is suggesting that knowledge exists only in the experiential aftermath of these junctions and can be known through interpretation and symbolism. Rather practice at and in these moments produces knowledge of the embodied and ephemeral nature sought by non-representational scholars. It also provides access to the background atmospheres of affective intensities that have the ability to impact and be impacted upon by everything arriving at these metaphysical and material crossroads. These spaces are often left unseen in research that does not explicitly engage with them but they remain important sites of investigation where ‘habitual dispositions regularly unfold’ (Vannini 2015.b: 9).

At this point I return to the contributions of Lorimer and his remarks on the restrictions that the term ‘non-representational’ places on research. As is attested later in this chapter, non-representational research makes no claims at dismantling the theories of knowledge that have preceded it in popularity. In this light, Lorimer (2005) prefers to avoid the hindrance of philosophical debates about the worthiness of representation and offer the nomenclature of more-than-representational. I align the epistemological premise of this thesis with Lorimer’s point of view that more-than-representational knowledge can drift in and around the discursive:

life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movement, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions (2005: 84).

Indeed, this definition of knowledge does not look to leave representation, subjectivity and construction behind, but concomitantly examine the discursive and non-discursive, parsing the latter through my own embodiment of touring practice and experience to animate the ineffable and sometimes chaotic corporality of touring. At the same time, this thesis also looks to understand this affective mist in the context of the knowledge that is constructed around those experiences by also drawing on the traditions of constructionist research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project approaches knowledge as constructed and intersubjective, but also ‘more-than-representational’ (Evers 2016; Lorimer 2005). For this study, that suggests comprehending the meanings and understandings that tourers create as they interact with the relations that make up the backcountry field together with the numerous sensory and affective encounters that punctuate them. The interpretations that tourers make are filtered through multiple layers of perspective and are inextricable from the researcher and the participants. They can never offer an objectively ‘true’ view of the social world, but collective understandings serve to produce subjective truths from which patterns can be observed and predictions possibly made. However ‘it is only by paying heed to what lies beyond construction that we can understand how the social gets made’ (Rutherford 2016: 287-288). As such the project has sought to generate data that provides the space to acknowledge and explore concepts of affect as they unfold in the backcountry field. More specifically, this requires a careful navigation of my insider position as both researcher and practitioner to allow the experiences and unspoken understanding I share with my participants to be parsed first through my own touring memories, and secondly through the theoretical perspective of the project. This will be explored in further detail later in the chapter.

I have utilised connective and multi-sited ethnographic techniques (Sterling, 2016: 54-55) to assist with the capturing of such knowledge, and its subsequent analysis. As with any ethnography it is necessary to define the field, however for the purposes of this project doing so presents several challenges. Burrell contends that conventional definitions in ethnography have been contingent upon the spatial locality of a research topic, or ‘the stage on which the social processes under study take place’ (2017: 51). This has meant defining the field based on the geographical location of the group or culture being studied. However the strength of this concept has been challenged over time to question the privileging of localised geographical spaces that have been assumed to house cultural homogeneity. Indeed for many (Burrell 2017; Hannerz 1992; Hine 2009) such a narrow focus fails to adequately capture the complexities of culture, particularly in late modern societies. Others including Urry (2000) and boyd (2009) posit that with the networks and general mobilisation of the digital, modern society has again brought traditional notions of the geographically defined field into question and instead argue

that a field should be fluid and unfolding. Similarly, examples of more recent multi-sited ethnographies serve to highlight how important it can be to explore culture across various sites to highlight ‘dynamic, geographically dispersed activities and social relations...’ (Friedberg 2001: 354). As well as the potential benefits of incorporating digital ethnographic methodologies and paradigms into such research (Gallagher & Freeman, 2011). Including the use of digital media and its technologies in the research toolkit presents ‘potentially valuable opportunities for action sports researchers’ (Thorpe 2016: 21). By opening the study to acknowledge these emergent and rapidly evolving elements of lifestyle sports subcultures, and to reconcile the issues of social worlds that entwine the physical and virtual, this study gains access to a more complete view of the social forces, relations and struggles that constitute the backcountry field. In doing so this project approaches the object of study in a more-than-representational way by following the suggestions offered by Vannini (2015.a; 2015b.), Dewsbury (2010) and Latham (2003).

To align the more-than-representational epistemology of this project with an appropriate set of methods I aim to shake off the timidity, as Vannini describes it, which lingers in methods of traditional qualitative research. This means much more than simply choosing adventurous data collection techniques and extends to asking ‘how we are going to configure the world, and how we question in practice to what extent we are able to configure different worlds’ (Dewsbury 2010: 324). This proposes the necessity of endeavouring to reorientate and action the ‘potentials of social-scientific knowledge, in taking dedicated risks, in exercising passion, and in finding ways to re-configure thinking, sensing, and presenting’ (Vannini 2015.a: 319). Consequently, more-than-representational researchers must look to their own embodiment within the research and draw upon how their own ‘passions, orientations, moods, emotions, sentiments, sensations, dispositions, colors, sizes, shapes, and skills work as the bodily fluids enlivening all relations in which ethnographic relations are entangled’ (Vannini 2015.a: 321). In other words, rather than rejecting their subjectivities, reactions and feelings more-than-representational researchers must recognise their ability to affect, and be affected by the unfolding net of relationships they encounter through the research process – ‘it is not enough for non-representational ethnography to be about affect; it

must also be affective’ (Vannini 2015a.: 321). This does not, however, mean that the methodologies of conventional social science to be wholly rejected:

Rather than ditching the [conventional] methodological skills... we should work through how we can imbue traditional research methodologies with a sense of the creative, the practical, and being with practice-ness... Pushed in the appropriate direction there is no reason why these methods cannot be made to dance a little. (Latham 2003: 2000)

Indeed, by magnifying the hidden affect written into Bourdieu that this thesis highlights, a songbook that sets the mood for that dance has been established. Moreover in tracing the map of more-than-representational ethnography laid out by Vannini, Dewsbury and Latham this project has been able to navigate the tensions arising between parallel epistemologies to enact a methodology that allows for the synchronised exploration of the embodied and discursive dimensions meaningful for understanding the practice of backcountry touring.

Stemming from this position I also follow the arguments of Burrell (2017) to propose a framing of the touring field as a heterogeneous network. This approach has provided the space to concomitantly acknowledge the human and non-human; embodied and interpreted; and physical and virtual elements of the backcountry field that the project has aims to explore. This conceptualisation of the field also allows for an emergent methodological design that has proven invaluable in responding to the challenges that have arisen through the process. For research that attempts to reconcile wide-ranging and complex notions of culture and social forces it is necessary that site ‘selection must become something that is done continually throughout the process of data gathering’ (Burrell 2017: 53). Despite this indeterminacy it is necessary to frame how the network of focus can and might develop. Burrell (2017: 56-57) offers six steps that can assist in the development of a field as a network:

1. *Find points of entry rather than sites* – The researcher must consider how they will enter the network. By tracing the paths of interconnectedness within a network it becomes possible to explore the relationships and interactions in a more meaningful way. Identifying Revelstoke as the first research site proved to be a particularly fruitful decision. As a hub of touring activity, I was able to connect with a broad cross-section of the touring community, enabling me to interview

athletes and other industry professionals that I gained access to through being in the field at the appropriate time. With these sorts of connections I was then able to further develop those networks to delve deeper into important nodes of the touring field.

2. *Acknowledge multiple types of networks* – It is important to follow people, things and stories in fieldwork, but also to understand the infrastructure by which they are followed. These can be intrinsic elements of a network and by acknowledging them the network can be understood as heterogeneous. In conducting this study in the context of media convergence and the dissolution of boundaries between physical and virtual spaces recognising the different networks of the field, whether they be online communities who fervently discuss touring, or tightly guarded ‘locals only’ groups that I encountered in Revelstoke, was of critical importance to conducting research that captured legitimate understandings of the field.
3. *Follow, but also intercept* – It can be beneficial to make a choice about major points of intersection whereby other nodes of a network can be detected. By prioritising a particular site within a network the flows and circulations of the network can become apparent and acknowledged. Again, my time in Revelstoke bore out the significance of this step. During my stay in the town and through the connections I made, I came to learn of collection of somewhat reclusive, yet amicable local veteran tourers. Many people I met would tell me; ‘you’ve got to speak with so and so, they’re a legend around here’ or something to that effect. As such it quickly became apparent that speaking to someone within this ‘node of the network’ needed to be a priority and the interview that this led to was of considerable benefit to the project.
4. *Attend to what is indexed in interviews* – Language can provide crucial hints as to the direction that research should follow within a network. By noting what is referred to in participant interviews, researchers can map out how particular social phenomena are perceived and constructed within, and by a network. As will be discussed further below, through the interviews it became clear that many

tourers share similar concerns about recent changes to the touring field and whether they perceive some tourers to be practicing in an inauthentic manner. As such I had hoped to speak with tourers who exhibited these concerns of other participants in their practice. However without the ability to specifically target such individuals in the recruitment process, no such ‘inauthentic’ tourers were interviewed. Nonetheless these observations have provided important insights into the way that tourers construct and experience the field that have been further analysed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

5. *Incorporate uninhabitable spaces* – The ways in which people imagine and interact with networks is varied and unpredictable and researchers must give consideration to these kinds of nuances as they act to shape real-world perspectives and practices. In the case of the touring field and this project, the most significant uninhabitable space that has been necessary to explore is constituted by the mist of affect that lingers throughout its practice and experience. Exploring how affect emanates from aspects of the field like the crucible of edgework practice and is dispersed from and acts upon capital has been of central importance to this analysis.
6. *Know when and where to stop* – The infinite nature of a heterogeneous network presents challenges to researchers in terms of what to include and exclude, particularly in terms of new sites that might emerge through the process. With time constraints and the like, it becomes impossible to cover all avenues, and decisions need to be made with regard to the most fruitful and relevant lines of inquiry. The correct choice might not always be apparent but with reflexive consideration researchers can arrive at a decision that is best for exploring the focus of study. Indeed, it would have been quite easy to continue scanning social media feeds endlessly searching looking for the perfect piece of data or diving into every backcountry related news story that emerged from the ether of the digital media ecosystem. As a result it was necessary for me to make a definitive decision about a date at which data collection would cease.

By defining the field as a heterogeneous network in this way it ‘transitions from a bounded space that the researcher dwells within to something that more closely tracks the social phenomenon under study’ (Burrell 2017: 58).

In this regard and to position, analyse and understand the data, I have also sought to conceptualise it with appropriate sociological theory. As Pringle and Thorpe (2017: 34) have highlighted, there is a need for researchers to establish the context in which focuses of study occur and in any setting this can require awareness of a wide continuum of factors. As such the establishment of a theoretical perspective involves both *a priori*, foundational processes and deductive, grounded approach that offer direction but also the potential to discover of new or unpredicted concepts. Through the acknowledgement of wide-ranging literature (as detailed in the literature review) and the adoption of the theoretical scaffolding described previously, this study has been able to scale a pre-existing trajectory of understanding and build upon an historic body of work. These conceptual tools have assisted in the providing explanations of the meanings participants generate from their embodied engagement in the subcultural practices of the backcountry field and the affective encounters with the immaterial and inhuman that they generate.

INSIGHTER RESEARCH

As I discovered during the course of researching my honours thesis, investigating a sub-culture that you are directly involved in presents some unparalleled opportunities, but also some unique challenges. Debates concerning reflexivity and bias continue (see Bennett 2002; Robards 2013; Sullivan 2003; Taylor 2011), however research undertaken with this positionality has conventionally been described as insider research. Insider research can be defined as that which is conducted by a researcher who comes from a position of subjective proximity in relation to their respondents (Hodkinson 2005: 132). While this definition is apt, it fails to incorporate some of the nuances that come with insider research. In this regard I follow Hodkinson’s (2005) and later Sharp’s (2020) suggestions of turning to a reformation of these concepts to describe this projects status’ as *insighter* research. In other words a researcher with understandings and insight and shared subjectivities, but whose positionality means they are never truly ‘inside’ while they act as a researcher.

Being a tourer myself, I have access to my own experiences and cultural capital that offers entry and understanding into the field that other researchers could not attain. I know what it feels like to leave the warmth of a sleeping bag at 4am to start skinning in the dark and cold. I have been ineffably affected by the experience of reaching the summit of peak with a few close friends. More than once I've caught myself wiggling my feet at my desk in mimicry of the turns I am watching in a YouTube POV video of a skier making her way down a snowy mountainside. This familiarity and knowledge have been used to formulate the project and assist in understanding and presenting the data and findings. However as Sharp describes in discussing her exploration of young, queer women's participation in punk, 'the concept of insider research did not seem sufficient to attend to the nuanced relationship I had with my research informants' (2020: 3). Greene (2014: 3) suggest that access to capital allows insider researchers to 'blend into situations without disturbing social settings'. In a similar experience to that which Sharp attests, throughout the data collection process I found that while my comfort in exercising my embodied capital – understanding and using slang, having an appearance that matches the subcultural aesthetic, my skiing ability – meant I could navigate interviews and field work with a degree of ease, I was not always an insider as Greene has described. With authenticity being of significant importance to many tourers, for participants with whom our only interactions were a series of emails before a video conference interview, it was apparent that for some my legitimacy as a tourer was not fully proven. At the same time an insider position can assist in providing access and trust with respondents who are likely to classify researchers who are interested in their lives and experience, therefore creating the potential for more complete disclosure from research subjects (Hodkinson 2005: 140). This dynamic would often evolve throughout the span of an interview with interchanges such as the following, conveying shared experience and unspoken understanding between myself and participants:

Michelle: ... I don't want to want to say playing the game, cause that's like, taking it too lightly [pause]

Interviewer: Yeah I follow your meaning...

Michelle: Yeah, you know, like, not just getting the best skiing, it's all the other stuff that goes into a good day...

Nonetheless, my position as a researcher was never dissolved in these situations and whilst my informants appeared to largely accept my legitimacy as tourer, differences in things like background (Australians are not particularly renowned alpinists³⁰) and geographically specific knowledge 'created ever present boundaries between assumption and knowledge' (Sharp 2020: 4). These unique dynamics produced through my insider status was further evidenced in the difficulties concerning recruiting participants who would consent to the recording of their embodied practice in the backcountry. This is further explored later in this chapter. Ultimately pre-existing cultural knowledge of insider researchers can aid in establishing meaningful questions, and generating holistic and truthful understandings of the focus of the research (Greene 2014: 3). However, that positionality can remain a barrier in other regards.

A final challenge for insider researchers is recognising the extraordinary and important elements of the study amongst aspects that they may find familiar and even mundane. Indeed, greater levels of familiarity can lead to research that lacks objectivity and is inherently biased (Greene 2014: 4) or lead to ignoring taken-for-granted aspects of the practice that may be sociologically interesting to 'outsiders'. Throughout the project it has been necessary to ask questions that challenge my own perceptions. In doing so it has been important to be cognisant that my extrapolation of the answers to those questions must be free to emerge without passing through a filter of my own subjective and embodied position. Van Heugten (2004: 208) suggests that the subjectivity of insider researchers must be 'open to intensive scrutiny' and 'challenged on an ongoing basis' to not only be aware of potential biases, but also mitigate against their infusion with the data and subsequent findings. Greene (2014: 7-9) offers several other techniques to assist in this regard. They include: maintaining thorough field journals and utilising multiple sources and methods of data collection to triangulate the overall approach. Indeed these suggestions have been helpful in the production of this thesis. As Greene and Van Heugten suggest I have maintained a process of reviewing my assumptions with an eye to extricate my biases and perspectives as tourer.

³⁰ An alpinist is someone who practices climbing, touring and other activities that occur in the mountains.

This proved to be an important element of the research process. My route into the backcountry came as a result of more than 20 years of skiing and spending time in the mountains. Through those experiences I gained a basic awareness of ‘authentic’ touring principles and developed a disposition that was primed to be drawn by the social gravity of the field. When I decided that I wanted to begin touring I had access to the social and cultural capital to find a group of mentors who passed on ‘authentic’ understandings of backcountry practice and identity that I became invested in. As such my interactions with the field have largely revolved around the ‘authentic’ self-identity that I maintain and its connection to my performance of masculinity. In my practice I prioritise safety above all else and find it jarring to see examples of touring that does not. My edgework and the connections I make with other tourers and the mountains are intrinsic to my enjoyment of touring. I like to think of myself as clear headed and competent when I tourer. I try to make efforts towards sustainable consumption. I prefer to repair something rather than replace it. I keep my hair uncut, my beard untamed and have a desire to embody a ‘ski bum’ or ‘dirtbag’ identity, and have it recognised by other tourers. In other words as a tourer I am heavily invested in the doxa of the field and seek to have that investment authenticated by others.

When I originally began to approach the themes that are addressed in this thesis with the development of my honours research in 2016, I did so largely as a tourer. I observed the changes to the field that I have examined here: wide reaching digital depictions of touring; increased availability of touring gear; and more people in the backcountry. As a tourer my opinions were guided by the self-identity that I had constructed and I became curious and concerned about the potential for these evolutions to negatively alter the nature of touring and subsequently, the distinction others would make of me as an ‘authentic’ tourer. I wanted to understand, and perhaps to a degree *show*, how and why some tourers were ‘doing it’ wrong. As such efforts to extricate myself from the reservoir of embodied touring experience and take the position of a sociologist proved challenging at different times throughout the research process. Through critique from my supervisors it became apparent that my insider positionality was impacting the nature of the analysis and that my exploration of the data was tinged with an underpinning binary classification of good and bad touring practice. This process also made me aware of my own performance of touring identity the way it conforms to traditions of masculinity and how it is expressed

through my practice, style, and ‘authenticity’. Becoming more cognisant of my position in the research also afforded a deeper awareness of the capacity for my body to affect and be affected by the project, examples of which are explored throughout this thesis. As a result, through this process of critical review, I came to more sufficiently occupy the position of insider researcher to realise the complexity and nuance in the ways that individuals approach, practice and understand their touring that I have aimed to animate and explore in this thesis.

CONNECTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

In light of the conceptualisation of the field as a heterogeneous network, multi-sited and connective ethnographic techniques have been used. Ethnography allows the researcher to ‘find out what counts as cultural knowledge’ (Green et al. 2012: 309), or in other words provides the basis to examine the perspectives of a group, and the cultural complexities that they experience to extrapolate the meaning and significance that they can hold. A connective ethnography examines two or more sites and their connections simultaneously, therefore permitting research to consider the digital and physical together (Sterling 2009: 54-55), again reflecting the framework posited by Burrell (2017). As previously mentioned, the first ethnographic site selected in this project was the town of Revelstoke (figs. 4.1; 4.2) situated in interior British Columbia, Canada and is a small mountain town located in between the alpine areas of the Selkirk Mountains and Glacier National Park. The town has long served as an important railway hub and has been active centres of mining and forestry, and has a proud local history of winter sports, however it is only in recent decades that the town has risen to prominence with wider snowsports circles (Revelstoke Museum N.D). Revelstoke Mountain Resort (fig. 4.2) began operations as a ski resort in 2007 and is located a short drive from the town. Along with a significant number of backcountry guiding and heli-skiing³¹ operations, the ski resort now constitutes a large portion of the town’s economic activity. In conjunction with these commercial factors the access it provides to extensive backcountry terrain, particularly in the area of Rogers Pass, has led to its emergence as an internationally renowned touring location.

³¹ Heli-skiing sees people transported into the backcountry and to the top of peaks by helicopter for downhill skiing. Can incorporate human-powered touring practice, but not necessarily.



FIGURE 4.1: Looking South-East down 1st Street, Revelstoke, BC.
SOURCE: Personal photograph.



FIGURE 4.2: Revelstoke town from the top of Revelstoke Mountain Resort.
SOURCE: Personal photograph.

As such, Revelstoke was selected as it offered access to a diverse range of individuals involved in backcountry touring, and the opportunity to observe their practice along with an economy in which the touring industry features heavily. Commencing in mid-January of 2018, I spent six weeks living in the town, meeting and observing locals and tourers from other places, skiing and touring with them, chatting in bars, ski shops, saunas and chairlifts. By choosing Revelstoke as the location for fieldwork I was able to gain access to professional skiers and snowboarders, brand representatives (social media managers etc.), avalanche forecasters, backcountry guides and recreational tourers.

Whilst some social researchers (Alaszewski 2006; Neuman, 2006; O'Reilly, 2005; ten Have, 2004) have warned against or ignored new methods resembling what can be described as a digital ethnography, there is a strong tradition of using new technologies as they become available. For example 'the stenographically documented interviews of the 1920s and 1930s Chicago School sociologists began to give way to magnetic wire recording in the 1950s' and researchers were ridiculed for recording interviews when tape recorders become widely available (Murthy 2008: 838). The need to make these innovations to social research methodologies is reflected in the broadening of digital populations and the subsequent entwinement of everyday life with digital practices and technologies that make it difficult to ignore the relationship between them and mainstream social phenomena (Snee et al. 2016: 3). As these concepts have been acknowledged a broad digital toolkit has been established to 'both celebrate and interrogate the specific qualities of digital forms of interaction and seek to situate them within a broader social context' (Snee et al. 2016: 5). However there remains several practical obstacles to be overcome with the use of digital ethnographic methods. Indeed, for Snee et al. (2016: 6) the evolving nature of digital phenomena means that digital methods require fluid techniques that can render data collection, analysis and presentation coherent with the rapidly updating situation that they exist in.

For the purposes of this research, digital media profiles were created on various platforms including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Reddit, TGR and Newschoolers to observe the practices of tourers in online spaces, although observations were not restricted to only these specific virtual spaces. Screenshot software on both mobile and desktop devices were used to capture content, interactions and practices that

convey the themes indexed in the interviews, drawing on the methods described by Stirling (2016) in her study of Facebook use in everyday life. Stirling describes the way that digital ethnography allows for the collection of rich field notes that can be augmented by the collection of asynchronous digital data. For example 'the use of digital screenshots to record what was seen was helpful and supplemented traditional hand written field notes' (Stirling 2016: 58). Screenshots were collected on the basis of their suitability in the context of the project, for instance examples of status updates, comments and tagging that encapsulated the cultural practices that formed the focus of the research. As Murthy (2008: 840) suggests while engaging in such modes of data collection and observing online practice, researchers can remain passive, whereby they do not interact, but simply observe digital interactions. This suggestion was followed in the digital ethnography of this project, however doing so also introduced a range of significant ethical considerations. Ethics guidelines about digitally based research have been in publication for over 15 years and as such, several key suggestions have been established for such studies (Hewson 2016: 207-208). These considerations revolve around the same ethical principles as physical, human-subject research however they attempt to resolve some of the unique problems that can arise in research of digital phenomena. For example, there can be murky understandings of public and private domain and when online activity can be left to posterity in public view what can researchers make of such data? Hewson (2016: 214) argues that decisions can be made based on the risks of harm to participants (in terms of reputation and anonymity) and contextual understandings of the data in question. Similarly issues of informed consent can arise for researchers engaging with data from digital sources. For this reason Hewson (2016: 208-210) contends that efforts need to be made to make information as simple as possible, and verify and document consent. In some digital settings consent may be hard to establish, and as such Hewson (2016: 209) suggests that following appropriate and contextual 'netiquette' (contacting site administrators etc.) to reach as many individuals as possible represents best practice. Following this advice, this study has sought to seek permission for the use of content that has the potential to harm or cause distress to the individual who has published it, and clarify its status as contained in the public or private domain.

MORE-THAN-REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Following these arguments and examples of researchers to pursuing innovative techniques that incorporate digital technologies (Dewsbury 2015; Latham 2003; lisahunter & Stoodley 2021; Murthy 2008; Snee et al. 2016; Sterling, 2016; Thorpe 2016; Vannini 2015.a; 2015b), the project design had intended to include a point-of-view (POV) camera amongst the ethnographic utensils used for data collection. I had hoped to use the POV camera to record ethnographic field notes and capture footage of myself actively participating in touring with research subjects, in a similar technique as developed by Evers (2016) in his auto-ethnographic exploration of masculinities in surfing. This not only provides the opportunity to capture data that can help to convey these embodied experiences, but also as a platform on which to unobtrusively record detailed field notes and make observations. Previously this technique has been utilised in the study of a range of lifestyle sports including mountain biking (Brown, Dilley & Marshall 2008) and surfing (Evers 2016). These studies have highlighted the ability of POV cameras to generate data that captures ‘experiential knowledge – cognitive, spatial, corporeal, material, sensory, emotional and affective’ (Evers 2016: 146). As Chalfen (2014: 305) suggests, POV cameras offer the opportunity to move past the restrictions of language and create broader understandings of emotions, bodies and movement in the situations that they occur in. As such this method of data collection was chosen to align with the concepts of affect that inform the focus of the research.

It was intended that this approach would afford the chance to generate data that is more-than-representational, and thus provide the basis for a thorough exploration of the affective nature of touring and its practices. At the same time however, using technology in this way for research is not without its limitations. As Brown, Dilley and Marshall (2008: para6.3) note, introducing a camera to the experience has the potential to disrupt or even alter the experience for the participants and influence the data. New issues surrounding informed consent and anonymity also emerge with the addition of a POV camera to the research toolkit. As Brown, Dilley and Marshall (2008) describe, in their study on mountain biking it was difficult to avoid capturing footage of non-participant riders and ultimately the researchers chose ‘to blur the faces of any ‘incidental’ participants’ (2008: para4.10). Over the data collection period I did produce such data as has just been described and it was indeed difficult to avoid capturing footage of non-

participant individuals, as such none of this data has been directly incorporated in this thesis, but it has been used as supplementary field notes and has proven useful in that regard.

The intention to incorporate these techniques in the data collection were curtailed by the emergence of unique dynamics in the relationship between the researcher and object. As Brown, Dilley and Marshall (2008) predict, the introduction of a camera to the research space represented a significant shift in the relationship I enjoyed as a researcher with potential participants, especially in contrast to interviews, informal discussions and more conventional participant observation. I was able to recruit interview participants for the project with relative ease, but securing participants who were willing to have their embodied practice documented as research data proved entirely elusive. It became apparent that while the tourers I interviewed and spent time with in the backcountry of Revelstoke recognised me as a tourer, there was an unease with concomitant application of my roles as tourer and a researcher. This is attributable to a perception that by being focused on collecting data, my 'authentic' practice would be limited and create the potential for increased risk. It is also possible that tourers felt that whereas an interview is an opportunity to display their authenticity and have it validated, video footage as data has the potential to undermine status and subcultural legitimacy. Both notions will be explored further in the proceeding analysis chapters.

However, more-than-representational methodologies encompass a much broader and more conceptual array of research tools than just the use of evolving technologies. While these technological methods can be useful, Dewsbury argues that there is a tendency in conducting more-than-representational research 'to speed fast into devising a research project that involves animating knowledge by using video capture of one form or another: the 'only way' to get at practice and performance, and any other present-tense action. This is ill-thought-out' (2010: 325). As such the failure of the project to capture the intended video data was not a problem, but rather an experience of the fluid entanglement of the researcher and object in more-than-representational research.

Part of the ethos of this type of research then is to keep the researcher alive to change and chance, to prevent the researcher from stopping their travels and forging a safe methodological territory to re-use again and again

impervious to new twists and turns of direction and focus (Dewsbury 2010: 324).

So instead of being a road block to the project's progress the lack of video data constituted a moment of 'change and chance' that has embossed the affective and embodied nature of the research in a way that perhaps would not have been possible had the initial plans been fruitful. The refusal to being filmed becomes a finding, data that resonates with issues of authenticity discussed throughout the thesis.

As Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010: 2) note in their discussion of feminist social science, this 'messiness' of research is nothing new and thus not particularly unique to more-than-representational research. However rather than trying to square these untidy corners of research through a stringent adherence to principles around the reflexive control of bias and dismemberment of researcher from the object, more-than-representational methods offer ways of navigating and even celebrating these imperfections. Dewsbury posits that by comprehensively parsing out the research process – as I aim to do in this thesis – to be clear about the notions used by the project to make meaning, scholars can position themselves to bring experiential edges to light. The 'move', as Dewsbury calls it, which articulates this position is:

in immersing ourselves in the space, is to gather a portfolio of ethnographic 'exposures' that can act as lightning rods for thought. It is then in those key 'times out' as we set upon generating inventive ways of addressing and intervening in that which is happening, and has happened, as an academic, that such a method produces its data: a series of testimonies to practice. (2010: 327).

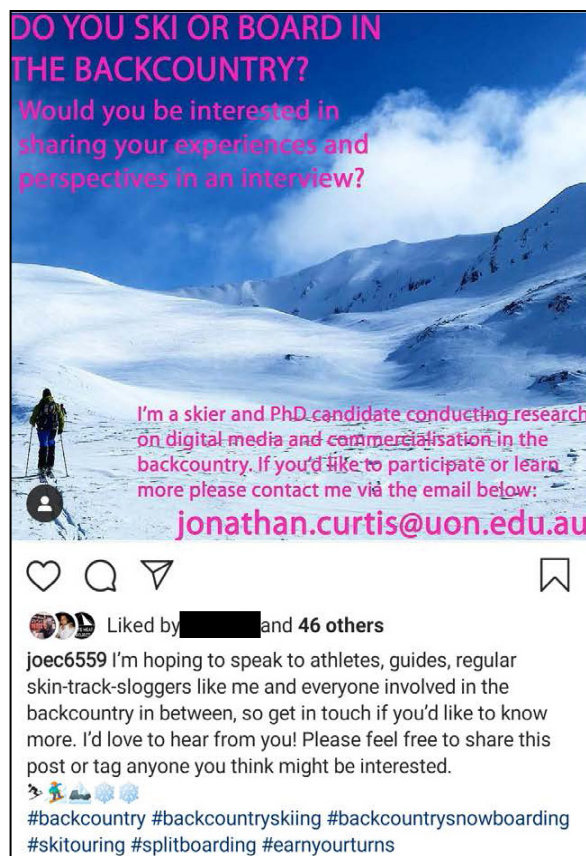
By immersing myself in the affective backgrounds of the touring field in this way the project has been able to approach knowledge as more-than-representational and produced in fleeting encounters between bodies, the non-material and non-human.

A significant factor in the capacity for the research to remain in sync with the unfolding nature of such knowledge has been the adaptability offered by engaging with Burrell's (2017) concept of a field as network. This definition of the field as emergent and criss-crossed with encounters between the human and non-human allowed me to maintain the focus on the affective background of the subculture and its ability to affect and be affected

by the bodies within it, not least of all my own. As outlined in the Chapter 3, this has seen the development of a thorough theoretical perspective that incorporates concepts of affect and a socially constructed, representative knowledge. The observed and recorded practices and experiences of tourers that have been captured by the project have been parsed through this framework and my insider position to understand many of the concepts that constitute the touring field through their ability to *affect* and *be affected*. As ever this has meant that it has been critical to be cognisant of the contextualisation of myself as both the researcher, the tourer, the duality that has presented in my relationship with the participants and the methods used and the knowledge produced (Schnegg 2015: 43).

INTERVIEW PROCESS, INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Ethics approval was granted for the project on 26th September 2017 by the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics committee (Ref No: H-2017-0157). To maintain the informed consent and anonymity of the research participants the protocols of the committee were followed including the use of pseudonyms and the redaction of any identifying information within the data. Interviewees were recruited to participate in the project utilising a range of techniques. Purposive volunteer sampling was employed, whereby posts that utilised the social media infrastructure of tagging, hashtags and sharing were made on relevant backcountry digital media platforms (see fig. 4.3), calling for interview participants. While in Revelstoke I was also able to post flyers (see fig. 4.4) on noticeboards around the community and in several ski stores around the town. Snowball sampling was of particular use in Revelstoke as I gained contacts through my time there, simply by talking with people on local buses, business and the chairlifts at the ski resort. Subsequently I was able to call on that network to help secure participants during and after my stay in Canada. As previously discussed, purposive hand-picked sampling was called upon to enable the participation of what O’Leary describes as ‘intrinsically interesting cases’ (2014: 190). Whilst in the past there has been a temptation to apologise for the lack of representativeness in such samples, these techniques offer the potential to explore unique, widely unknown and explored research focus and populations.



FIGURES 4.3 AND 4.4: Instagram recruitment post and flyer (phone number no longer in use) used in Revelstoke for the project.

After being informed of the interview process and their rights and responsibilities as participants, respondents were engaged in semi-structured interviews. This fluid interview framework, which sees the interviews follow thematic flows of discussion rather than a rigid schedule of questions corresponds to the epistemological approach of the research. That is to say that semi-structured interviews were chosen to produce data that allows multiple perspectives and intersubjective understandings room to grow, and the position of both the researcher and the researched to be acknowledged (O’Leary, 2014: 130). Rather than producing knowledge of great breadth, this approach builds knowledge of depth, allowing for engagement with the multiple layers of interpretation inherent to perspectives of constructed knowledge. This allows for the inclusion of ‘extreme, unique, unfamiliar’ elements of the population that the project requires (O’Leary 2014: 189).

Through these sampling techniques I was able to interview 22 tourers with a range of ages and nationalities as shown in table 4.1. These semi-structured interviews took place

over a period of approximately 14 months in 2018 and early 2019, with some occurring in person in Revelstoke, while later in the project interviews took place through a variety of digital communication platforms (Skype, FaceTime, Zoom etc.). The participants range in age from 25 – 47 and are employed in a range of industries, but 12 of the interview respondents working in the touring industry in roles varying from photographer and guidebook authors to professional touring athletes. The majority hold tertiary qualifications, although this is less common amongst professional touring athletes and others professionally involved in the backcountry industry. Although the participants all have unique backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, it is also important to note here the similarities shared by them. As researchers of other lifestyle sports, and particularly snowsports (Kusz 2007; Thorpe 2014; Wheaton 2013), have shown, these subcultures are typically populated by young, white men. This has been true in the case of this project, with all but one of the participants coming from white, European ethnic backgrounds.

TABLE 4.1: Interview Participants

Name	Age	Location	Gender	Education	Occupation
Cameron	47	BC, Canada	Male	Bachelor Degree	Bus Driver
Barry	31	Montana, USA	Male	Master's Degree	Withheld
Bill	27	New Hampshire, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Non-profit Manager
Gary	37	Vermont, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Event director
Michelle	31	BC, Canada	Female	Master's Degree	Accountant
Michael	25	Utah, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Realtor
Nathan	43	New Zealand	Male	Post-graduate Degree	Project Manager
Paul	28	Idaho, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Boat Captain
Phil	28	Alaska, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	PhD Student
Robby ³²	23	Colorado, USA	Male	<i>Withheld</i>	Property Manager
Audrey	28	BC, Canada	Female	Secondary School	Athlete
Carl	35	BC, Canada	Male	Secondary School	Athlete
Charles	36	California, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Athlete
Craig	38	Washington, USA	Male	Master's Degree	Photographer/ Editor
Dan	47	BC, Canada	Male	Secondary School	Guidebook Author
Jeff	36	Utah, USA	Male	Bachelor Degree	Guide
Jemima	36	California, USA	Female	<i>Withheld</i>	Athlete
Lara	29	BC, Canada	Female	Secondary School	Athlete
National Avalanche Organisation (NAO) ³³	-	-	-	-	-
Sam	28	Colorado, USA	Male	Secondary School	Athlete/ Podcaster
Sandra	27	Wyoming, USA	Female	Bachelor Degree	Athlete
Trevor	45	Washington, USA	Male	Secondary School	Photographer

³² As Robby's Instagram post was public, is referred to directly in this thesis, and his interview was related to that post, with consent his name has not been changed.

³³ A representative of the NAO was interviewed as spokesperson for the organisation, rather than as an individual.

Despite the differences in gender relations and equity in lifestyle sports as compared to other athletic pursuits outlined in the literature review, the gender makeup of the participants highlights the discrepancies that are present. Of the 22 respondents, only 5 identify as female and as Thorpe and Wheaton (2019: 424) note, it is often the case that self-selecting samples skew towards white males, reflecting the gender and racial disparities in leisure time and affluence.

An example from my interactions with one participant exemplifies this dynamic. After meeting him while skiing together at the Revelstoke ski resort, the participant invited me to his home to conduct the interview later that evening. When I arrived at his house he was home alone and we commenced the interview. After we had been proceeding for several minutes, the participant's female partner and children returned home together from work and after-school activities respectively. After I had been introduced and the interview explained, they began to carry out their evening routines – homework, preparing a meal and other household chores. I make no suggestion that the participant exhibited any display of overt sexism or misogyny, however the gendered dynamics that Thorpe and Wheaton (2019) point to were observable. This snapshot of family life highlighted how the participant had the privilege of more leisure time to dedicate to the interview than his partner, who was also tourer. As 3 of the 5 female participants were professional touring athletes the gender split of the participants also suggests that women who do accumulate relevant capital, for example embodied touring ability, are able to reach a reasonably high level of status and success within the field, whereby they are afforded the free-time and confidence to participate in the research and share their perspective.

It must also be noted that many of the experiences and perspectives divulged by the participants were similar to each other, and indeed my own (in my capacity as a tourer rather than a researcher) with the exception of one respondent. As will be discussed at length throughout the following analysis chapters the participants represent a section of the touring community that is heavily invested in the doxa and principles that have emerged from the autonomous pole. This means that they have a keen interest in the preservation of the conventional touring practice, aesthetics and paradigm that define their experience and as such see a project such as this one, as an opportunity to further

fortify the orthodoxy of those perspectives. Indeed as noted prior, while many of these tourers expressed concerns of the evolution of the touring subculture, only one respondent willingly described engaging in practices and experiences that the other participants would describe as troubling.

At the completion of the interviews and ethnography the data was collated, transcribed and analysed. Due to the multi-faceted nature of the data it was important to take care to ensure that one form of the data was not privileged over the other, but rather that each of the pre-textual, digital media and the representations provided by interview participants were exercised pragmatically (Brown, Dilley & Marshall 2008: para6.8). As such, the processing of the raw data and its analysis followed the framework of thematic analysis offered by O'Leary (2014: 307). In this process, raw data is first organised before being reduced and re-organised with regard to its thematic interconnectedness and finally analysed to generate a theoretically sound understanding. With this in mind the interview recordings were transcribed in full, and through that process I begin to render an understanding of the thematic content of the data and commenced a selection of key examples within it. Initially this thematic organisation of the data was on the basis of broad categories relative to the aims of the project such as: affect; commercialisation; digital media and technology; and edgework. With the transcript data collated in this manner, I began the process of distilling it by selecting the most suitable quotes and eliminating, but keeping note of, repetition of those comments from other interview participants. At this point I was then able to start mapping out the thematic positions and connections of the data in more detail following the schematics of theory and concepts offered by the literature reviewed and theoretical orientation outlined in the previous chapters. Although there are several pieces of software that can assist in this process, such as NVivo, and it was time consuming, I have found it beneficial in terms of my familiarity and understanding of the data to get my hands dirty, so to speak, and engage with the produce of the interviews in this more analogue fashion.

Throughout the time I spent in Revelstoke for fieldwork, while I was conducting interviews and during the process of their transcription and analysis, I was also conducting a digital ethnography through an analysis of the virtual practice, content and production of touring specific digital media. Mirroring the sentiments of many of the

participants, prior to conducting this project I had not personally been a heavy user of social media. I had long eschewed the Facebook profile I created as a teenager and had never activated an Instagram account, preferring to ‘lurk’, in the parlance of online communities, on pages and profiles that I could glean touring information and ‘beta’³⁴. As such at the commencement of this project I established several profiles on a range of social platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, as well as several touring specific pages and forums. With this I also began the process of following, liking and subscribing to relevant profiles and groups within the unique structures of each platform. For example, on Instagram I followed brands and manufactures involved in touring; well-known athletes, photographers and other touring professionals; hashtags such as #backcountryskiing, #earnyourturns, #skitouring, #splitboarding; and the public profiles of individuals who posted, tagged, liked and commented on post from the other profiles described here. On Facebook it was a case of joining local touring pages and groups such as but not limited to; *Backcountry Skiing Partners Rockies/Roger’s Pass*; *Australian Backcountry*; *Alaska Backcountry Ski Addiction*; *Utah Backcountry Ski Touring*; *British Backcountry*; and *Backcountry Touring in the Pacific Northwest*. Often it was the case that these pages required some form of verification of my status as a tourer before they would allow entry and the sharing of the information they held.

This creates ethical tensions around the reproduction of the content in ‘private’ groups of this nature. As such and in line with the suggestions of Hewson (2016), this thesis has not included any depictions of this type of non-public digital content. Furthermore beyond the recruitment posts that have previously been discussed, under the guidance of Murthy (2008) to remain passive in these spaces, I chose to be largely inactive, refraining from commenting or engaging too deeply with the content and communities I observed. The notable exception to this was on Instagram where I practiced liking and commenting on other profiles’ posts to firstly expand the scope of my ‘feed’, and secondly in a largely vain attempt to ingratiate broader interest in the project and the potential access to respondents. In hindsight, this is perhaps partly attributable to the limited display of touring capital and legitimacy exhibited on my own profile as a result of the aforementioned lack of social media practice I had engaged with prior to this study.

³⁴ ‘Beta’ is a term used by tourers to describe information collected by those in the field or with local knowledge. Often it is shared online in relevant groups and pages.

However, since conducting this digital ethnography I have found myself embodying similar attitudes and interactions with digital media, whereby my attention and engagement with it has expanded beyond the realm of this project into to my practice as a tourer and practitioner of other lifestyle sports. As will be further explored in the following chapter, my touring disposition and capital have ultimately been affected by my exposure to social media through the research process, just as is the case for the participants in the project and the other tourers they describe.

Nonetheless by regularly consuming the content that this engagement with social media provided I was able to become familiar with the breadth and nature of the practices that tourers engage with online. This also provided insight into the variation of content style that were legitimised by different sections of their audience and the responses, both positive and negative to them and represents. Through this process, it was also necessary to be cognisant of what *did not* appear online, or rather which elements of the touring community post and engage with which content. These choices were influenced by the recommendations of Burrell (2017) in defining the field as an emergent network and proved useful in finding ‘points of entry’ to the touring network. The thematic framework was again employed to allow the curation of screen-shot images, collected on both mobile and desktop devices that captured prominent examples of relevant virtual touring practice and content.

At this point, these screen-shots of digital media data were edited for readability; for instance multiple screen shots of a single post were edited together into a single image that could be placed within the text of the thesis and categorised along the emerging thematic lines I had established from the interview data. In examining the interconnectedness of the data, field notes were reviewed to help contextualise and give further detail the understandings I developed about the data. With much of the data thematically categorised at this time, I carried out a further reviews of the transcripts throughout the analysis process to ensure an accurate reading of the data that enabled the application of theory which follows. The outcome of this analysis is reported upon in detail in the proceeding chapters.

CONCLUSION

Through this study I have sought to address two key aims:

1. To explore the nature and development of commercialisation, digital media and technology in backcountry touring;
2. To investigate the impact of these influences on the experiences of tourers as they engage with the field.

With these targets for the project, I have taken up an epistemological orientation that brings together constructionist and post-structural understandings of knowledge and a commensurate methodological approach. This research design is intended to best capture a thorough understanding of the touring field as it evolves in the light of the social forces of commercialisation and digital media. This has involved the employment of a range of qualitative and ethnographic techniques that have been ‘made to dance’ by a methodology that has drawn on the foundational principles of more-than-representational research. Approaching the objects of study in this innovative manner has enabled a conceptualisation of the backcountry subculture as an emergent and unfolding network. This definition of the field has subsequently seen the project follow relevant nodes within that network to capture knowledge that emerges from the affective mist that cloaks the bodies, practices, subjectivities and materiality of the backcountry field.

5. 'MIND, BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT': EMBODIED TOURING PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE.

INTRODUCTION

Touring in the backcountry is a complex assemblage of practice and affective embodied experience. I explore this in reference to tourers' varying level of investment in the 'authentic' principles and the struggle to maintain these presented by the unfolding presence of digital technology in the field. These dynamics can be usefully understood as the autonomous orientation of tourers dispositions, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of practice and embodied knowledge. This understanding enables detailed exploration of the affective confluence that sees the corporality of practice intersect with experiential knowledge, technology and touring self-identity. This chapter will discuss how tourers equip themselves with the skills and knowledge they require in the backcountry, the evolving nature of the practices that capital allows, and how their edgework is experienced and understood.

The physical experiences and practice of tourers can be understood to be as undulating as the peaks that they scale and descend in remote mountain environments. Time in the backcountry is punctuated by moments of fear, stress, boredom, clarity, exhilaration, escape and bodily fatigue. In conjunction with previously described specialised equipment (see Chapter 1) tourers employ their embodied capacities to navigate a series of risks that are interspersed amongst longer periods of lower urgency. From skiing and snowboarding down steep and technical alpine terrain; to solving problems under the strain of fatigue or harsh weather; to building important and intuitive relationships, tourers time in the backcountry constitutes a varied and unique experience.

Conventionally, touring has been framed as a continuum of experience and practice directly related to tourers' corporeal experience. These can be categorised in two ways. Firstly, as the edgework (Lyng, 1990; 2004; 2014) that tourers conduct while they navigate precarious encounters with risks that can pose serious threat to their personal safety. The second aspect of the embodied touring experience can be understood as the fostering of strong connections with other tourers and the backcountry environment in which they practice. Together these safety and connection elements describe the

‘authentic’ embodied touring experience that have become the taken-for-granted rules of the field. This disposition prompts tourers to adhere to these principles concerning safe practice through good decision making, communication, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge. By following these guidelines tourers are able to engage with higher level edgework and build lasting connections with their environment and peers. In recent times however, digital technology has permeated the field to introduce and influence new heteronomous challenges to the orthodoxy of autonomous practice. As Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) and Edwards and Corte (2010) have previously shown, these heteronomous interruptions do not constitute a binary struggle and tourers routinely adopt new technologies that suit the needs of their autonomous practice. Nonetheless, newly legitimised practices have also emerged that are changing the nature of the backcountry experience on the basis of new possibilities that digital technology affords in ways that have been identified by the likes of Lupton (2017) and Thorpe (2016).

‘IN THE ZONE, RIDING THE HIGH’: THE EDGEWORK OF TOURING

Regardless of ability and experience, every backcountry tourer is an edgeworker. By engaging with the risky practices that touring necessitates, every tourer who spends time in the backcountry will invariably encounter their share of precarious moments regardless of the depth of their engagement (Lyng, 2005). From dealing with variable weather conditions, to skiing or snowboarding down steep slopes, to making crucial decisions to mitigate exposure to avalanche danger, a tourer’s practice in the backcountry regularly occurs in situations that present the threat of significant physical harm:

The hazard that comes out a lot is the avalanche hazard, but there’s obviously other risks. But it’s a very complex thing to take a whole bunch of variables and make a go or don’t go situation out of it, right? (Cameron, 47)

As Cameron alludes to, it is the successful navigation of these times on the edge and the sense of accomplishment and self-determination that it brings which make exposure to risk worthwhile for tourers. This aspect of the experience provides the space for tourers to exercise their cultural capital to test their capabilities, limits and find *their* edge. For example, Michelle describes an experience in which her and her partners had a difficult time with snowmobiles in the backcountry:

we literally broke trail for about 5 or 6 hours, got to the place we were supposed to start skiing, but it was too late to start skiing and we just turned around and rode down. And we'd spent the whole day just digging sleds³⁵ out and leap frogging each other trying to get the trail done and I think it's just, even those days, it's all part of the fun, getting yourself stuck like that and having to problem solve your way out of it. (Michelle, 31)

In a situation such as this, there are sets of skills required to safely return from time on the edge – being stuck deep in the backcountry with an immobile snow mobile – and as such the opportunity to test those capacities is an integral part of edgework. Having successfully completed their edgework, Michelle and her friends are able to look on the experience with pleasure and satisfaction at their accomplishments. These experiences also present tourers with the chance to consider building the cultural capital needed to do edgework in the backcountry. Equipped with an understanding of their own capacities, and more importantly, what is beyond their control, tourers are able to put their cultural capital to work and make safe decisions that allow them to locate, visit and return from the edge with a degree of security.

Without that capital, touring can be a difficult and frustrating experience, and place unwitting tourers in risky situations, as Gary highlights in describing his first time in the backcountry:

We didn't know where we were going per se. We had difficulty transitioning³⁶, then on the way out not being able to skate³⁷... there's all these things you don't know. I remember finishing that first time and thinking: 'why did I do that?' (Gary, 37)

Lacking the necessary skills meant that Gary was not able to overcome the inherent practical difficulties of touring to enjoy his first embodied experience in the backcountry. Instead his memories of that foray are overwhelmingly of struggle and lacking the descriptions of accomplishment and euphoria that more positive explanations of touring entail. Moreover, without the cultural capital and embodied skill to make these elements

³⁵ 'Sled' is a synonym for snowmobile – often used by tourers to access deeper areas of backcountry terrain.

³⁶ Tourers must transition their equipment from configurations that allow them to move uphill, to alternatives that allow them to ski and snowboard downhill.

³⁷ Skating is a technique used to move across short sections of flat or slightly uphill terrain whilst equipment is in a downhill configuration to avoid having to repeatedly transition.

of the touring experience easy, Gary and his partners were unaware that the lack of access to these resources exposed them to risk. As part of the set of 'authentic' principles that valorise safety, moving quickly through the backcountry is a rule that is commonly observed by experienced tourers to avoid prolonged exposure to any specific risks in a certain location. Without awareness of this, nor the ability to follow it, Gary and his friends had the potential to unknowingly place themselves in a situation of significant danger. In contrast, for Trevor who entered the backcountry under the guidance of experienced mentors, the initial exposure to touring was very different:

I remember asking a lot of questions about the gear and where we were going. I'd never really done anything like that and I didn't know what to expect physically so I was worried I wasn't maybe going to be able to make it out there, so things like that... avalanches, thinking about backcountry safety was definitely a concern cause I didn't know. Like, what do you have to do, you know? I felt like I needed to look at everything all the time cause everything was going to slide. (Trevor, 45)

With social capital to connect him to experienced tourers, Trevor's first experience and the reliance on mentors made him acutely aware of his inexperience in the backcountry, and therefore rapidly orientated his practice towards the autonomous pole and the project of accumulating the knowledge and experience to observe the principles and practices required.

These forms of requisite knowledge and critical decision-making skills that tourers must call upon also provides the basis for reflexive consideration of the self in relation to field. For Sandra, this means she makes an effort:

... to be really vocal. Like before we head out be like: 'Hey, I read the avalanche forecast this morning. Did you guys read it? What do you think? What are you seeing?' (Sandra, 27)

This highlights the ways in which edgework forces tourers to reflexively consider their position in relation to the field. In practical terms, tourers are in a perpetual project of self-reflection and learning in which knowledge and skills are sought through time spent in the backcountry. This means experienced tourers like Michelle and her partners: 'have this running dialogue and we're constantly watching every season and it's more like experience based learning'. In this way tourers use their bodies to make sense of their

sensory experiences in the backcountry. This is particularly acute for tourers like Sandra who live in the mountains. Through being in these spaces they build familiarity with the environments they tour in and the affective background of the backcountry. As I found during my fieldwork, with a necessarily honed disposition I became sensitive to subtle changes in the backcountry assemblage. Waking up in the morning every day and opening the door to mountain peaks bathed in sunshine or shrouded in mist (see fig. 5.1), my body began to perceive subtle changes in the weather – the temperature of the brass door handle; the drum of water dripping off the roof as snow melted; the squeaking of tires on a still frozen road. On the mountain, with my skis on my feet these sensory inputs are felt more intensely. Without thinking my movements would respond to the snow conditions and terrain that would be transcribed into my body by my equipment. As Wetherell (2012) suggests, all of this may be pre-cognitive, but is not pre-social. These intersections between my body, my equipment, the mountains, the snow form ‘embodied echoes’ (Bunn 2015). By being invested in touring principles, along with my body, my mind is receptive and attuned to notice what I sense and parse that corporality in ways that apply it to my touring practice.



FIGURE 5.1: Looking out the door of my accommodation in Revelstoke, BC, Canada.
SOURCE: Personal Photograph

Therefore by developing a reservoir of these sensory experiences, tourers can apply it to their practice and decision making process in the backcountry, or to 'be vocal' as Sandra describes. For example, I had made plans for a day of touring with two other skiers – Simon, 29 and Matt, 31 – who were staying in the same motel as I was that were ultimately scuppered by unfavourable conditions. We had noticed each other's touring gear and struck a conversation that led to these plans being made. With all of us being visitors to the area, we had agreed that we would not be venturing far into the backcountry or onto any serious or overly risky terrain. Having discussed our objectives for the next day over a couple of drinks in their motel room, I wandered downstairs to my own, noting the particularly cold, but calm evening – a perfect recipe for surface hoar³⁸ to develop. As soon as I stepped out of my room the next morning, I knew things had not progressed in our favour overnight. As I exhaled the cloud of my breath lingered as it hung in the humid, mild air and ten to fifteen centimetres of fresh, but damp snow was melting on the ground. Disheartened, I ventured on to the motel's breakfast room where I had arranged to meet the others and as I walked in the door Simon looked up from his coffee and said: 'conditions don't look good'. Overnight a storm front had rolled in, bringing with it warmer air and the precipitation that was on the ground outside. This weather arriving after the conditions of the night before meant that as a group, Matt, Simon and I all agreed that it was beyond our collective tolerance of risk to forge ahead with our plans. Despite briefly checking the avalanche forecasts and weather data from the night, our bodies' affective encounter with the conditions ultimately led to the decision to cancel our plans.

Of course regular exposure to the mountains and the sensory experience just described are not available to all tourers. Indeed less initiated tourers can take part in practical training courses run by organisations such as the NAO to gain forms of social – meeting potential touring partners on the course – and institutional cultural capital. Tourers then take this capital into the backcountry contributing to the affective background in which they begin to accrue other embodied knowledge and abilities. Together with the embodied processes of learning, this is what allows tourers to keep adjusting their 'edge'

³⁸ Surface hoar is a term that describes changes to the surface of the snowpack, whereby clear and cold conditions cause the snow to form needle like crystals. These crystals can then be buried by new snowfall, ultimately creating a weak layer in the snowpack wherein the needle-like snow can collapse, causing the layers above to slide off and start an avalanche.

and ensure the continuation of its potential to produce affective encounters in the precarious moments on it. For Craig, this is a big part of the appeal of touring:

I love it, man. It's a way for me to advance my skills in the mountains. I love the puzzle of it all, I find it really intriguing and navigating the mountains in a smart way gives me a lot of joy. (Craig, 38)

Similarly, as professional skier Charles describes when discussing his motivations to start a recent video project, it is this type of personal challenge and the search for new opportunities to test one's abilities and limits that induces real interest from even the most accomplished tourers:

The motivation came from flicking through this book looking at pictures [of touring routes] and thinking: 'that looks amazing to ski', but not knowing if I necessarily could. I'd skied a few of them, so I knew I could ski some of them, and that's where it came from, like: 'I wonder if I could do this'. (Charles, 36)

Charles' project provides a unique and original opportunity to showcase his embodied skill in the backcountry in the context of his career, but at the same time, and importantly for him, also the occasion to test and expand on his already considerable capacity in the backcountry. This highlights the importance that autonomous principles hold in the way some tourers approach their practices. Indeed these autonomous principles that prompt reflexivity condition tourers to respond to their failures in the backcountry with a perspective that views them as opportunities to continue the process of learning. In a context where such failures might mean narrowly avoiding a serious fall over a cliff, or the triggering of an avalanche, this ability to reflexively consider risky encounters is of critical importance. As Sandra explains: 'If you don't take a moment to learn from mistakes and recognises error, then you could end up as one of those people [who die]'. With access to cultural and embodied capital plus the necessary disposition to be positively affected by such situations, rather than be overwhelmed, the emotion and feeling during these situations act as a catalyst for further learning and investment in the principles that emerge from and shape 'authentic' practice.

Together the experiences born of these elements of edgework form the basis for tourers to appreciate their time on the edge. Their success while working at their limits provides

a great deal of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment, as Phil details while discussing why he likes to ski in the backcountry:

It's a feeling like: I'm doing something that is really on the upper level of the ski mountaineering spectrum... you have to be totally independent and make the right decisions. And then you get to the summit and it's like: 'ok, I was good at planning that. I was good at that because there are a lot of things that have to come together'. So that's the satisfaction. (Phil, 28)

Indeed, this satisfaction that Phil enjoys in a successful navigation of the intersection between himself, his equipment and the environment, can be understood as a sense of mastery of body and environment, or in other words a feeling of self-determination and control. For example, in the type of experience Phil talks about, a tourer might enact any number of skills. These might include making detailed observations of the snowpack³⁹ through the digging of snowpits⁴⁰ (fig. 5.1) and the use of specific equipment such as avalanche probes, snow saws and measuring devices (fig. 5.2); complex navigation using paper maps and a compass; the use of crampons, ice axes, ropes and other climbing aids; and high level downhill skiing and snowboarding skills. Together enacting these types of skills and knowledge to complete edgework constitute the 'things' that have to coalesce to achieve the satisfaction and mastery of the situation that Phil refers to. At the same time, Laurendeau (2006.a: 177) posits that the sense of control that edgeworkers feel is illusory and ultimately the situations that edgeworkers place themselves in, and indeed their success and failures are in the hands of luck and chance. This is true in the backcountry, as there are limits to what even the most experienced tourers can observe and predict. For instance, avalanches can be remotely triggered as they propagate hundreds of metres across ridge lines. Nonetheless 'authentic' practice prompts an awareness of these factors. As Lara explains, many tourers are conscious of the uncertainty they face during their time in the backcountry: 'It challenges you, you're always mitigating uncertainty, you never know what the mountains are going to do. Which is also super petrifying, terrifying'. As Lara suggests these affective intensities – the vulnerability that Phil calls 'feeling small in a big environment' – induces moments of fear and subsequent

³⁹ Snowpack is a term used to describe the accumulation of snow from multiple snowfalls in a specific location over a winter.

⁴⁰ A snowpit is used to describe a small area, approximately 3m x 3m, in which a tourer will dig down into the snowpack in a specific and detailed manner to carry out test and make observations of the stability of the snowpack in relation to avalanche risk. It should be noted that a snowpit is by no means a clear indication of risk, but rather another piece of knowledge that tourers use to make critical decisions.

stress for tourers when they have an appreciation of the dangerous moments they might face. The reaction and the processing of this fear in the embodied experience can assist tourers in their future edgework as they learn from and utilise bodily responses to their benefit.



FIGURE. 5.2: A tourer testing the snowpack and making observations in a snowpit.

SOURCE: < commons.wikimedia.org >



FIGURE 5.3: BCA snowpack observation tools including a thermometer, slope meter, loupe and snow crystal measuring card. SOURCE: < backcountryaccess.com >

Tourers with the necessary disposition and access to capital can harness their feelings in these situations to induce a state of focus and determination that serves to enhance their capacity to control their time on the edge. This is evident in professional skier Audrey's descriptions of touring in high consequence terrain:

If you're going to summit a peak or ski a couloir⁴¹, obviously those days are lot more intense and obviously with those types of objectives the risks are higher. You're in a very complex terrain situation, where if an avalanche does rip out, the consequences are going to be higher... when you're going for that couloir, you're assessing it as you're going along, but you're moving efficiently and quickly through the mountains and it feels a lot more fast paced, I feel like there's more talking about what you're seeing, like, signs of instability, and what the most efficient and fast route to get up is. Then the switch over at the top happens a lot faster too, you're not, like, necessarily sitting down for lunch you know? (Audrey, 28)

When tourers are in situations like this, their 'authentic' disposition encourages them to firstly, be aware they are in such a position which concomitantly allows them to utilise their fear to hone their senses and embodied skills to assume an immediate focus on their environment and position within it. As Fletcher (2008: 322) has suggested, these sorts of fear based experiences that a tourer might have in the backcountry have been connected to the sympathetic nervous system and the 'fight or flight' response. Autonomous modes of practice equip tourers with the ability to respond to fear in the backcountry with a 'fight' response. For tourers armed with the skills and knowledge to overcome a scary incident, whether it be riding down a particularly steep slope, or watching a partner be swallowed up in an avalanche, such moments of particularly risky practice induce a focus that, sometimes, allows tourers to regain a degree of control and complete their edgework successfully. In other words, the acquisition of these affective forms of capital through experience and the embodied echoes of their practice leads to the development of a touring habitus. This disposition allows tourers to cultivate an instinct, or feel for the game. As you drive through a valley your eyes are drawn to the signs of avalanche debris on the mountains by your side. When you step into the cold air at the trailhead your ears begin to be pricked by a distant 'whumpf' sound that signifies instability in the snowpack.

⁴¹ A couloir is a narrow space aligned vertically on the face of a mountain, often defined by areas of exposed rock. They require strong touring skills to both ascend and descend safely.

As you ‘drop in’⁴² to your ‘line’ your body moves in sync with the terrain as it interfaces with the snow and ground beneath you. There is not the time or space to fill your mind with anything but the moment and its corporality.

Indeed, despite the precariousness and subsequent concentration that these periods on the edge produce, many tourers, such as Bill, describe them as moments devoid of thought:

You just get that sensation of being in the zone. Especially when you’re sending a big line, or a couloir or something. It’s just complete elation when you’re going down the hill, you know, totally focused, in the moment, just riding the high. (Bill, 27)

In these hyper critical moments of edgework tourers are able to achieve an almost mediative state of clarity, in which they can transform their reality and transcend beyond the stresses of their day to day lives, to exist in their immediate temporality and space. Lyng (2014: 454) argues that this clarity offers a reprieve from the struggles that individuals face in the conditions of individualisation and detraditionalisation in late reflexive modernity. For Lyng (2014: 454) this outcome of edgework is a chance for reflexive self-discovery and the real reward for edgeworkers. Paul describes this affect in discussing his edgework experiences:

When you’re going through it you kind of blackout. Like you’re really aware of your edges⁴³ and everything that’s going on, but you pretty much blackout and all your stress and worry is gone. (Paul, 28)

Paul is describing being consumed by his immediate circumstances as he switches into what Fletcher (2008) would label a fight response, and his mind is cleared of the constraints that many individuals struggle with in the society of late reflexive modernity. Ultimately this is enabled by Paul’s disposition that sees him gain focus in the face of precarity and enact his embodied skill instinctively to complete his edgework. Whilst this does go some way to explain the continued appeal of touring and indeed the significance of edgework for tourers outweighs its fleeting temporality, it does not align with what tourers themselves attribute as the ultimate reward for their risky practice in

⁴² Dropping in, or to ‘drop in’ is a term used by tourers to describe the moment that they start their descent of a mountain on skis or a snowboard.

⁴³ In this context ‘edges’ refers to the metal edges of skis and snowboards that allow them to cut into the snow surface and enable tourers to control their descents.

the backcountry. As Michael succinctly explains, it is the emotive and euphoric moments that the successful completion of edgework brings, which is most appreciated and memorable for tourers:

It's just everyone cheering and high fiving and laughing, you know? Like, it just doesn't get better than after you've stomped a big line that you think made you need to change your underwear, and all your buddies have done the same. (Michael, 25)

Many interview participants described similar memories and experiences of almost indescribable elation, or in Paul's words 'one giant orgasm' upon being affected at the completion of their edgework. The assemblage of conquered fear, calibration and testing of skills, successful decision making and the sociality of sharing these moments on the edge culminates with a unique experience in the backcountry. Whether it be the successful application of a set of skills that a tourer has honed to allow them to control their body and develop a sense of mastery or if technology has affected the experience this cumulative experience of edgework assists in explaining the ongoing appeal of risky practices that place tourers in positions of consequence, delicately balanced between order and chaos. Nonetheless, as is highlighted by the preparation for them, these vivid moments on the edge are just that, fleeting and temporal. As such, much of the embodied practices that constitute the touring experience exist outside the definition of edgework and require exploration.

THE BACKCOUNTRY PARISH: TOURING RELATIONSHIPS

Due to the centrality of the edgework experience to touring and its widespread reproduction in the aesthetics of 'the Red Bull sublime', some can see those who recreate in the backcountry as 'adrenalin junkies' looking for a hit. However, such risky practices are not the only component of the embodied touring experience that leads tourers to return to the backcountry. Michelle highlights this, stating: 'I think there's this perception in people that haven't done as much that you just go up and ski epic lines all day. But really it's all about the whole experience of it.' Or as Lara puts it: 'It's more than just strapping on your skis and gliding down a hill. Like, it's a whole mind, body, soul, spirit all coming together out there'. Indeed, factors such as geographical location and subsequent climate and terrain mean that some tourers can face significantly less risk than others during most of their time in the backcountry. Sandra provides examples of

this when explaining the differences in terrain and snowpacks in different parts of the United States:

Snow stability makes such a big difference. Like Jackson [Hole] is inherently more stable than Colorado just because of the amount of snow they get. And then terrain leads to different challenges and experiences too, like, if you're coming from Denver and you haven't been in the snowpack every single day that's, like, a different risk, or you're somewhere on the East Coast that doesn't have the terrain you just face very different challenges. (Sandra, 27)

Despite those risky encounters with the edge, for many tourers, including those who live and tour in challenging mountain environments, their time in the backcountry is equally well spent developing strong connections with other tourers and the mountain environment that they are in. As has been discussed, in many instances the forging of these connections coincides with the perpetual project of learning that tourers engage with to assist their edgeworking practice.

The totality of being in the backcountry and the myriad of moments that unfold through the experience affords the potential for tourers to establish lasting relationships with others they spent time touring with. As Gary highlights, the uniqueness of the experience – the remoteness, the scenery, the risk, the effort – coalesce to form the basis of strong connections:

You get to share that with somebody else [a great day and conditions in the backcountry] and those people are experience the same thing that you are, they know exactly what you're feeling and it's unique and that kind of shared experience is a special thing. It creates something. (Gary, 37)

Whether they be risky moments of edgework, or simply affective encounters with the backcountry environment, tourers like Gary feel fortunate to have access to these experiences. The friendships they build sharing these experiences become important parts of their lives.

Furthermore tourers spend a great deal of time in close proximity to one and other and as Michelle explains: 'you spend a lot of time going uphill, just chatting'. This time spent together in and of itself provides ample opportunity to build social capital. This is another

opportunity for tourers to develop a feel for the game. That is to say, an intuitive understanding with their partners that adds to the affective background of their experiences. Establishing innate understandings and trust with the people that they experience the backcountry with is incredibly important for tourers in the context of their edgework. As Sandra explains, tourers are often quite discerning in their choices about who they will spend time with in the backcountry:

There are people who I choose to ski with because I value the way they approach the day and I have really good friends who I choose not to ski out of bounds with because of their risk tolerance just being significantly higher than mine. (Sandra, 27)

Although it is not common for tourers to venture into the backcountry alone, they choose their touring partners based on considerations such as equity of risk tolerance, ability, experience and fitness to tailor the makeup of their group to work as efficiently and effectively as possible. The ability to do so calls upon access to social capital, and tourers in different locations may have more or less access to such capital. For example, while I was in Canada, it was very easy to find other tourers to ski with, while in Australia, there is a much smaller pool of potential partners. At the same time, often tourers will develop a small group with whom they do most of their touring, and subsequently develop the deepest understandings with.

Tourers describe how they develop unspoken understandings and trust in these relationships. This was clear to observe during my time in Revelstoke spent in backcountry with tourers and groups I was not familiar with. Despite being able to connect with a number of tourers and enjoy time in the backcountry with them, many were reluctant to participate in the project in a more formalised manner. Without having the time to adequately evaluate the legitimacy of my touring capital and assuming the potential for their own to be critiqued, most of the individuals I toured with declined to be interviewed or filmed with a POV camera while we were in the backcountry. This was most notable on one occasion in which the group, consisting of James, 29 Connor, 26 and Riley, 32 declined to be recorded after Connor specifically stated that he 'did not want to be analysed'. Nonetheless, during the day Connor took several photographs with his smartphone and later posted them to his private Instagram account, with which he can control the audience. This suggests that Connor is willing to have his embodied touring

experienced displayed if he perceives he can vet the audience and trust its ability to validly evaluate his touring practice. In the context of edgework and the required ability to call upon risky practices with aplomb, this cautiousness that tourers exhibit in their choice of touring partner is a logical step for them to take to preserve the ‘authenticity’ of their practice.

These social connections are symbiotically fostered with concurrent connections to the backcountry environment that tourers strongly appreciate. Tourers’ dispositions are often calibrated to appreciate being in wilderness environments like the backcountry long before they begin touring. As such the scale, magnitude and beauty of mountain environments are particularly seductive for many tourers. For Barry, this is one of the biggest attractions that touring has: ‘for me, it’s being out there in that environment. The snow, the trees, the solitude. Just being out there in it’. Indeed for some tourers, this experience can be exceptionally meaningful and even spiritual as Lara alludes: ‘you’re fully connected out there. It’s church’. Lara’s analogy here is telling. For those tourers that are inclined to appreciate it in such a way, the backcountry provides similar senses of belonging, purpose and community to that which organised religion has conventionally offered its practitioners. This level of connection to the environment can also lead to tourers making significant alterations to their touring practice and lifestyles more broadly as their embodied experiences in the backcountry lead to a sense of stewardship of those environments. This can be seen with Lara:

I’m building a house right now. It’s going up in April and it’s fully passive⁴⁴ and like, today I went to [local business] and they save trees from the big, like, industrial wood mills and make incredible pieces, so it’s all pretty cool to be learning about. (Lara, 29)

Lara’s connection to the backcountry and environment could be described as spiritual and has seen her sense of stewardship extend to the point of constructing an eco-friendly house. Notably, Lara’s ‘authentic’ touring self-identity that has honed her connections to the environment, also seems to be informing her new experiences of enacting a sustainable lifestyle. As she builds her house, Lara describes enjoying the process of gaining new knowledge and skills, mirroring the fulfilment that such efforts provide

⁴⁴ A passive house is a highly energy efficient building that accounts for local climate and conditions in its design.

tourers in the backcountry. Other examples of these environmentally orientated practices and lifestyle changes can be seen in the *Protect Our Winters (POW)* NGO, which is led by a collection of snowsports athletes who use their collective cultural and social capital to lobby governments to act on climate change. Similarly, professional skier, Greg Hill has embarked on a range of projects that have seen him make serious lifestyle changes that incorporate his backcountry related practices to campaign for climate awareness and has documented them in a short film, *Electric Greg*⁴⁵ (BC Hydro, 2019). These examples highlight the significance that the backcountry locations in which tourers practice hold for the overall touring experience. Together with the precarious moments and risky practices of edgework, the forging of these social and environmental connections constitutes what can be described as the autonomous embodied touring experience.

‘I DON’T WANT IT TO INTERFERE WITH MY BEACON’: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

Historically tourers have always incorporated technology in their embodied practice in the backcountry. Increasingly tourers rely upon its use to navigate their time on the edge, and indeed, enhance the bonds they create with each other and the mountain environment. From technical clothing to avalanche transceivers, tourers adopt the use of many technological items to augment autonomous practices. As Thorpe (2016) has identified across lifestyle sports, the increased availability, capability and portability of digital technology has seen the continuation of this trend with many tourers incorporating the use of various devices and apps in their touring practices in varied ways that produce several unique outcomes.

For instance, the ubiquity of smartphones means that their use is widespread amongst tourers. The presence of smartphones in the backcountry is a relatively new heteronomous addition to the field. For many tourers, their application of this technology represents the struggles that occur between the poles and their touring dispositions. For example, the consumption of information about avalanche and weather conditions has been made possible in field, in real time, where previously such data was only available pre or post the corporeal experience. As the NAO explains: ‘people are checking their

⁴⁵ *Electric Greg* can be viewed at: youtube.com/watch?v=ITL5l4CcBdE

phones in a tent or as their friends are driving and it's happening like we do a lot of other things, on the fly'. These digital practices directly reflect tourers' investment in established doxa and the ongoing project of learning and acquisition of capital that such tourers engage. Furthermore, the fundamental function of a smartphone – to make and receive calls – along with the exponential increase in connectivity means, as Bill highlights, that most tourers carry a smartphone: 'most of the time, cause as well as being a camera it's also a safety device, right?'. This reflects a paradigm that sees some tourers only willing to engage with technological practices in ways which support their 'authentic' practice and self-identity. Many tourers enjoy using their smartphone and other cameras to capture photographs that serve to prolong the experience in much the same ways as Ferrell, Milovanovic, and Lyng's (2001) skydivers. As Nathan explains: 'It helps retain the memory I think, if it's good or bad a picture just helps you to relive it'. Being able to take a photo affords Nathan the ability to recapture some of the embodied experience and tourers use the capacity of digital technology in order to dissolve the temporal and physical boundaries of the backcountry. Moreover, even technological practices that appear to challenge touring authenticity are often still strongly guided by it. In describing recording footage of some funny moments, Michelle, who specifically states that taking photos and videos is not a 'priority', expresses this:

Like the other day when we were stuck on our sleds, there was a lot of standing around there were definitely some videos and photos taken that day. We actually had to dig a tunnel underneath a tree to get our sleds under it, cause over was too big, so like, that got a video. (Michelle, 31)

Making light of precarious moments like getting stuck could be seen to be a departure from autonomous practice, but for Michelle and her friends who are equipped with the capital to deal with the problem, such a situation becomes an opportunity to further establish social capital and unique memories based on the relationships she shares with her touring partners. At the same time, this performance invokes some of the qualities of 'the stoke imperative' (Evers 2019.b) and 'the Red Bull sublime' (McCarthy 2017) such as a consistent attitude of stoke, humbleness and faith in the capacity of technology. While these principles are captured and reproduced in such marketing of lifestyle sports, their centrality to the performance of 'authentic' touring self-identity remains. The situation that Michelle shares has the potential to worsen, but the 'proper' way for a tourer to deal with the problems is to remain calm, and even make light of the situation. This sees

Michelle downplay the skills and knowledge called into action to make light of her group's ability to resolve the problem. Michelle's ability to use the technology to showcase her 'authenticity' in the backcountry works to distinguish her and her practice.

This focus on adapting and tailoring technology to aid autonomously orientated backcountry practice is further reflected in the way tourers utilise self-tracking devices and apps to enhance their experience. Many tourers use apps like Strava to self-record and produce 'lively capital' (Lupton, 2017: 205) which can impact the way they manage their digitised bodies and experience their time in the backcountry. Gary who uses such apps 'mostly just for fitness', argues that he is not 'going for a KOM⁴⁶ in the backcountry or anything'. This suggests that Gary does not conceptualise his use of these apps having a major impact on his touring experience. Nonetheless, by using self-tracking data to monitor his physical activity and improve his fitness, Gary is unquestionably increasing the embodied capital that he can employ in his edgework and time in the backcountry. By becoming fitter, tourers can more readily adhere to the 'authentic' principles that guide their practice in the backcountry. For instance, being in good physical condition means that an ascent is less taxing on the body of a tourer, who then, by being less fatigued, is in a better position to successfully navigate their time on the edge. As such these devices and apps that produce this sort of lively capital become part of the affective background of touring. Their wearability and potential of recording detailed physiological data means that tourers embodied capital becomes institutionalised and knowable, giving it added capacity to affect what they do in the backcountry. In other words, a tourer knowing that their fitness will permit them to cumulatively climb 1500 meters in a day, influences the way they approach their practice.

Similarly, the use of digital maps and similar devices can alter not only the success of time in the backcountry and on the edge, but also how those experiences are felt through the bodies of tourers. For example, on one occasion after I had returned to Australia from Revelstoke, my regular touring partners and I had made plans to take advantage of a particularly heavy snowstorm that had passed through Australia's Snowy Mountains. In the days leading up to our intended departure we watched the weather fastidiously, and

⁴⁶ KOM (or QOM) stands for King (Queen) of the Mountain and is a term used to describe the individual with the fastest recorded time over digitally marked sections of a particular route.

agreed that the storm would still be raging the morning we went into the backcountry, but would abate in the early afternoon and with our GPS devices, familiarity with terrain and skills we would be prepared to manage it. After driving from our homes around Sydney and then taking a snowcat to Charlotte Pass we found ourselves standing in the middle of a whiteout – often and accurately described as like being stuck inside a table tennis ball (see fig. 5.3). Despite questionable looks from a couple of ski patrollers⁴⁷ as we had a final coffee in the resort bar, we felt confident and well equipped to deal with the conditions as we set out.



FIGURE 5.4: The researcher touring in a whiteout near Charlotte Pass, NSW, Australia.
SOURCE: Personal Photograph

We made very slow progress by using a compass and paper map to proceed 50 meters on a bearing, before completing the process and after an hour or so of this with no sign of the weather settling and calming the wind ripping through the valley, an uneasiness settled over the three of us. It can be quite a discombobulating experience being in the mountains in a white out. The sky blends into the ground and you lose all sense of space and depth perception. As we continued fighting to read the map in the wind, it felt like the needles of icy snow that pelted my body stung harder and each stride on the skis

⁴⁷ Ski patrollers work on the 'Ski Patrol' of a ski area. The Ski Patrol offers emergency medical care and carries out risk mitigation around the ski area. They are required to be experienced and highly skilled skiers/snowboarders, and often tour outside their work.

required a more concerted effort. At this point my mind began to work against me: ‘why are you doing this?’, ‘what an idiot for going out in this!’, and I am sure my companions had similar internal dialogues. After recognising that things were not improving, we grouped together like Antarctic penguins for a huddled conference. With several hours of the day having already passed we decided that we needed to get to a protected spot, pitch our tents, and hunker down for the night. Up until this point we had been refraining from using our electric devices, as the colder weather drains the battery faster and we had hoped to be using them over the next 3 days.

The urgency of our predicament was heightened by how the corporality of the experience was starting to affect our dispositions and I was very pleased when we agreed to pull out the GPS device and follow it to a spot that we knew would act like a harbour in the conditions. As if our environment was suddenly illuminated by the dull, black and white screen of the GPS device as we followed it through the weather everything felt a little lighter. My pack, though still heavy no longer felt like it was going to buckle my knees. I seemed to be able to feel the tips of my fingers in my gloves again. The aches in my feet were dissipating, and we made it to our campsite with relative ease. After riding out an uncomfortable night in the tent, we awoke to a beautiful sunrise and subsequently had two rewarding, yet uneventful days of touring. The interaction of those material devices with our practice, skills, self-identity, conditions etc. had a lasting impact on the experience. Without their presence the situation could have become much more difficult and potential irrecoverable, in terms of how my two companions and I experienced the trip and highlights the affective potential of technology in the backcountry.

For other tourers the capacity of smart devices to affect their practice in these ways is something that they are keen to highlight, and remain in control of. Michelle uses a GPS enabled watch to map and record routes in areas that she tours regularly. She identifies some of the ways this practice can influence her time in the backcountry and her awareness of how the technology may have the potential to challenge her ‘authentic’ self-identity:

I think it’s a good influence, like, like it’s nice to have those GPS coordinates constantly. We use it like: ‘how do we get back to where it’s safe?’. It’s also

nice having that awareness when you go back and it's not such good vis⁴⁸ or you know there is something you want to avoid, you can just pull it up and check. I can see how... Our group, we wouldn't override the conditions with the map just because we know where we're going. (Michelle, 31)

The practices that Michelle describes here are guided by the autonomous orientation of her practice as she uses the data that is produced to assist in her in making good decisions which allow her to safely complete her edgework. At the same time, she mentions the possibility that having access to this information could influence tourers to make less successful choices and increase the riskiness of their backcountry experience like I had previously experienced. However, Michelle suggests that her access to relevant capital means she navigates this challenge by tailoring her technological practice to help conduct herself in a way that prioritises safety. However, had I been asked a similar question about the use of technology like this at the time I went out into the whiteout, I have no doubt I would have responded in kind – it is the 'authentic' answer. Ultimately, as Carl posits: 'GPS has been huge... then you have watches that give you your altitude and stuff, which are super useful when you're dealing with layers⁴⁹ and stuff like that'. The true nature of the affect that these devices emit in the backcountry is difficult to isolate. However, their ability *to* affect the experience of tourers has seen their widespread use to the point where these technologies have become integral tools in the practice of touring.

Self-tracking devices and the data they generate are also being used in ways that enhance the social capital element of 'authentic' touring experience while simultaneously representing the heteronomous challenge offered by technology. For example, Gary, who is employed by an NGO in Vermont, USA that works to build community networks that establish and maintain backcountry routes in the region, describes his organisation's use of such technology:

We're working with a group here in town and last year and this year we've had trail counters⁵⁰ out at the Brandon Gap zone and a couple of other

⁴⁸ Vis is a colloquial term for visibility which can often be impacted by weather events such as fog or blizzards in the backcountry.

⁴⁹ Snow accumulates in layers that reflect individual snowfalls over a winter. The interaction of these layers influences the stability of the snow in avalanche terrain. Factors such as altitude and temperature can impact the nature of the interaction of these layers in the snowpack.

⁵⁰ Trail counters are devices that are used to measure human traffic past their location.

places. And this afternoon we just had a meeting discussing, like, how we want to see that program expand and continue. So, we're working on gathering that use data. I think we just need to get that data and figure out how to analyse it. (Gary, 37)

For Gary's organisation, the type of data generated by devices like the ones Michelle uses would be invaluable in assisting them to direct resources towards supporting touring communities in their region and further establishing the connections that those groups share with each other and the backcountry. This sort of data produced by touring bodies could offer the organisation insights into things like how, when and where individuals access the backcountry routes that Gary and his colleagues maintain. At the same time however, this again highlights the challenge that these new technological influences have constituted within the field. Not only would this application of data serve those established principles of community and the sharing of information, but it also provides a tourer like Gary with greater job security as his organisation grows and expands its activity. These examples highlight the potential for technology to be directly adopted in support of the principles coming from the autonomous pole and the ways that tourers are locked in a dual between them and broader social forces.

Digital technology has also been harnessed by several independent companies (often founded and staffed by tourers with relevant education and professions) to produce new products specifically for use in the backcountry. An example of this is Propagation labs⁵¹, who state on their website that their goal is not to:

... replace the snowpit and trained professionals with fancy electronics. On the contrary, we want to enhance the current systems: making it easier to record and analyze data when snowpits are dug, and providing the tools to quickly see into the snow pack when they aren't (Propagation Labs, 2019)

This statement highlights several things about the way tourers incorporate technology into their practice and the operationalisation of tourers ideals of authenticity in the marketing of products to them. Firstly, it signifies how tourers are cautious to accept potential interruptions to their embodied experience. Bill highlights these sentiments while discussing the way he uses his phone in the backcountry:

⁵¹ Propagation Labs have developed a sophisticated digital snow probe that allows snow scientists and avalanche professional to collect a range of data about the snowpack (fig. 5.5).

The whole point of going into the backcountry is to separate yourself from that, especially if I'm in high consequence terrain, I try to not be using my phone, mainly because I don't want it to interfere with my beacon⁵². (Bill, 27)

Despite enjoying capturing a few photographs to remember the experience, Bill doesn't want his safe navigation of the edge or broader 'authentic' backcountry experienced to be interrupted by the intrusion of a phone call or changing camera settings. Moreover though the practical reality that a phone signal could disrupt the function of his avalanche beacon Bill prefers to leave his phone switched off while he is in the backcountry. This represents a case of the paradigms concerning safe practice that Bill is invested in, overriding the challenge presented by technology in the backcountry. In order to address these concerns, Propagation Lab's statement also highlights the companies own observance of these taken-for-granted rules by downplaying the effectiveness and functionality of their own product in favour of established autonomous practices. Furthermore, by utilising awareness of these notions in copy like this, the company can manipulate this knowledge to produce targeted advertising that appeals to snow scientists and avalanche professional that might be likely to use a Propagation Lab probe. Ultimately, and despite tourers' historic and increasing reliance on technology, these points reflect the difficulty that tourers invested in these principles have with the potential disruptions that technology presents to the meaning and understanding they give to their embodied experience and the backcountry field.

⁵² The signals sent and received by a smartphone can interrupt the function of an avalanche beacon, rendering them useless.

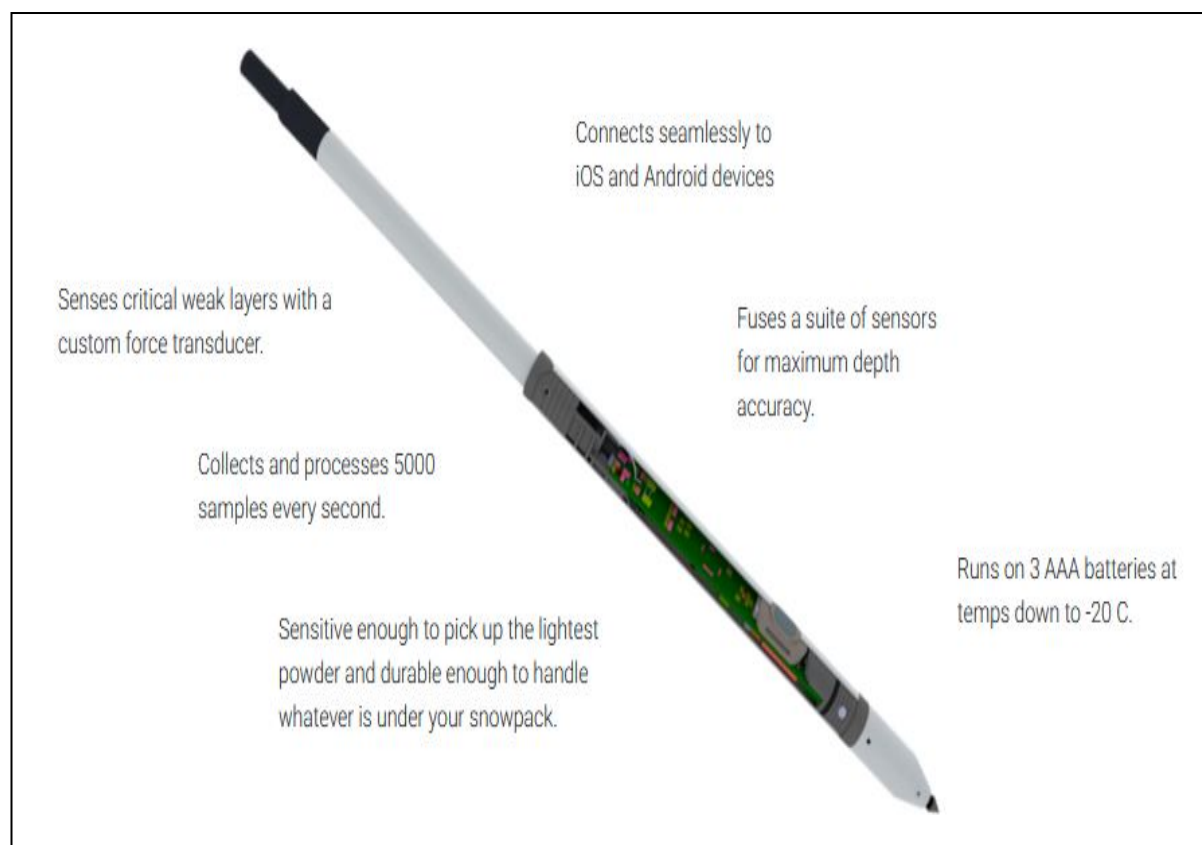


FIGURE. 5.5: Diagram of a Propagation Labs digital 'Scope' probe used by avalanche professional to collect digital data.
SOURCE: Propagation Labs

At the same time as tourers adopt these technologies in ways that reflect their adherence to autonomous pole, digital technology is also used to engage with new practices that are legitimised at the heteronomous pole and challenge established doxa. For some tourers, these heteronomous challenges to autonomous orientation are successful, and subsequently those tourers speak of the practices that they adopt as being integral to their touring experience. Exemplifying this, Sandra explains that: 'It's really rewarding to get cool photos or video and I think I would be bored just skiing around, not trying to progress or capture something'. Producing high quality content has been made possible for many tourers through the proliferation of sophisticated and wearable POV cameras (such as those produced by *GoPro*), and more recently, drones, and as such tourers like Sandra have made the relevant practices fundamental to their touring experience. Sandra's touring self-identity has been shaped to reflect her 'authenticity', but her exposure to producing content through her work as a professional tourer has led to a struggle between the gravitational pull of both poles. Indeed, Sandra displays the difficulty she has in reconciling the opposing magnetism of these influences by using

reflexivity in speaking of the potential disruption to practices relevant to safe edgework that content creation in the backcountry presents:

You know, there's the expression of 'Kodak Courage' and people try something cause it's on film and I think it rushes the whole process and that leads to problems. (Sandra, 27)

In situations of edgework where tourers must call upon their problem solving skills and embodied abilities, Sandra sees the potential for the practices that she has made crucial to her enjoyment of touring to disrupt her return from the edge. Many tourers describe instances in which they have encountered others in the backcountry who, in their opinions, have failed to make good and safe decisions as a result of prioritising content creation. These encounters are exemplified by Michael's references to his own decisions that have been influenced by capturing video footage:

Man, I've made some dumb decisions for the camera. Like, just hucking⁵³ things that I look back at and it's like: 'well that was fucking stupid' ... but I can't say it won't happen again. (Michael, 25)

The sort of action Michael alludes to – jumping from a large cliff – would most likely be ruled out by many tourers in the critical decision making process. Factors like access to medical services in the event of an injury or the potential to damage equipment would prevent tourers from making that decision. Nonetheless the ability to capture such feats and gain attention means that some tourers are affected to alter their decision making process and engage in embodied practice that moves away from conventional paradigms of safety. As Lupton (2017) posits, the digitisation of the body, in this case through wearable POV cameras, has the potential to impact the way that tourers conceptualise their practice, bodies and experience in new ways. As others (Edwards & Corte, 2010; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011) have shown to be the case in lifestyle sports like BMX and skateboarding, the introduction of these heteronomous challenges to the backcountry field does not constitute a binary struggle between the poles. Rather, and as can be seen in the examples of Sandra and Michael, tourers are affected and engage with new backcountry practices and conventional autonomous ones concomitantly, adapting and tailoring what constitutes their touring practice and experience as they see fit.

⁵³ Hucking, or to huck (for instance) a cliff, is a colloquial term to describe skiing or snowboarding off a natural feature to become airborne with a degree of reckless abandon.

Along with these alterations to touring practice that Sandra and Michael describe, the same heteronomous stimuli can produce new perspectives of touring practice that are of a more abstract nature. For example Paul likes: ‘to snap a lot of photos... take a lot of videos of the pits that we dig’, which is ostensibly an autonomous practice; i.e. producing and sharing information related to safety. However, the motivations that Paul details for his engagement with these practices introduce new considerations. Paul suggests that part of his desire to produce this content is because: ‘If something were to happen I don’t want to be written up as the guy that didn’t have any experience, wasn’t prepared, wasn’t skilled enough’. Paul’s performance of distinction as such stems from the investments he has made in the observance of the ‘authentic’ ideals. Nevertheless, seeking wider personal validation outside the immediate realm of one’s touring partners and community is a practice which is influenced by the new potentialities that unfold from encounters between tourers, technology and subcultural identity. Touring, and the subsequent reporting of accidents that occur within its community reach much wider whether it be through personal social media, or news reports about tourers involved in fatalities. For Paul it is important that those who might read or hear about his hypothetical passing are not confused about making a distinction between knowledgeable, well equipped tourers *like him*, and others who might be entering the field without the same ‘authentic’ outlook. This shift in paradigm can be understood in the context of the affective publics that Papacharissi (2015.a; 2015.b) and Renold and Ringrose (2016) describe. With digitised bodies existing in spaces of increasing convergence, tourers such as Paul, Sandra and Michael are engaging in these practices in order to help create narratives about their identities and how they have come to construct them. These technologies allow tourers to tear down boundaries between the physical and virtual and the architectures that such digital assemblage establish prompt those tourers to alter their approach and perspective on the backcountry in these ways.

POWER, PRESSURE AND PROS: WORKING IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

It is important to note how tourers experience and engage with this spectrum of practice can be heavily dependent upon their status as recreational or professional. For most of the recreational participants, their experiences in the backcountry as well as their perspectives on them, are heavily guided by their *illusio* in established rules and principles of the field. For instance, the incorporation of technology into their experiences

is largely reflective of their autonomous practice, as is brought to bear by Nathan's depiction of the types of photographs he likes to take in the backcountry: 'I try and get quite a few photos of just my mates or the scenery. But in terms of coming down, not really'. Tourers like Nathan do not make content creation a priority in the backcountry and instead focus on their edgework and the fostering of relationships.

Conversely the average day 'at work' for a professional tourer in the backcountry can be a vastly different experience to that of the recreational tourer. As professional skier Carl describes: 'everybody has a nice camera, we have drones, we have GoPros, all this technology to document the day' and as such this technology has significant influence over the way that touring athletes conceptualise their professional embodied experiences in the backcountry. Professional tourers identify three distinct categories to describe their professional backcountry practice and experiences. Carl explains them as follows:

So there's the days you go with some friends. You might snap a few photos or whatever, but it's not a super well documented day. Then there's days where we go out, and because we work with filmers and everything, we know how to get shots, so we'll take shots of each other and then it'll be a much more documented day but still on the fun side and we'll still be moving through the mountains quite quickly. But then you get the straight filming days and they're completely different. (Carl, 35)

The user friendly and lightweight nature of the relevant technology means that most of the time that professional athletes are in the backcountry they are capturing content and performing work to convert their embodied cultural and social capital to economic. Situations Carl describes as 'not a super well documented day' may see athletes tour in their local area, with another professional and a helmet mounted POV camera with which they can capture photographs or short amounts of video footage that assists in cultivating their social media profile. Alternatively, a 'more documented day' describes backcountry experience in which athletes are proactively working to produce a self-directed project. Technology such as drones and sophisticated digital cameras may be included as tourers work with some degree of a plan in order to create content that could be used in their

‘season edit’⁵⁴. Finally, filming in a commercial context is another variation of touring athletes’ backcountry experience. These situations involve significant planning, resources, co-ordination and for athletes a lot of waiting, as the right lighting conditions etc. are sought. They will often occur in remote location with the support of helicopters and mountain guides with local expertise. As such these types of experiences see touring athletes engage with some of their most critical edgework, indeed often several orders of magnitude more complex than the edgework that recreational tourers will often ever complete. The combination of these two factors, higher order edgework and the saturation of technological practice, signify the discrepancy between recreational tourers technological practices and those of touring athletes, and again, the potential for technology to influence the nature of practice and experience.

Nonetheless, and as is highlighted by the aforementioned examples of Charles’ project and *Electric Greg*, the infusion of these heteronomous influences into touring athletes’ practice are still distilled through the prism of their autonomous orientation. For instance, Audrey, an up and coming touring athlete, details her desire to absorb as much knowledge as she can on a commercial film project she was a part of:

When I went to [location] with [sponsor] last year I went to the guide meetings in the morning because I wanted to know what was going on and what discussion were being had about avalanche conditions. We didn’t have to or anything, I just wanted to know. (Audrey, 28)

As suggested, in these types of situations, athletes can rely upon expert guides to handle the burden of critical decision making and may largely focus on performing to their full ability during their edgework. At the same time however, many athletes like Audrey describe the desire to maintain their project of knowledge acquisition, particularly in the context of being in high consequence, complex terrain that a commercial project will often place touring athletes. Further illuminating the struggles that occur between the poles, engagement with this type of autonomous practice in this context can be used beyond the corporeal experience. For an athlete like Audrey who is working to establish her career, this performance of ‘authentic’ touring self-identity affects her colleague’s

⁵⁴ A season edit is a short (5-10min), often self-edited, film produced by professional athletes (or recreational tourers) and released on a loosely annual basis to showcase their accomplishments over the course of a winter.

confidence in her and her touring capacity. For athletes where the consequences of their professional edgework are substantial, being seen to be not only concerned about safety, but actively engaged in a process of learning stands to ingratiate such athletes with their fellow professionals and open doors to further opportunities.

It is also in this context that another variable which can alter the professional experience is raised. All edgework induces a degree of pressure on the edgeworker to successfully navigate the edge at risk of consequence. However for some touring athletes, completing their edgework in a professional setting can compound that pressure and induce other stresses. For athletes who are establishing themselves and their position in the backcountry field performing to the requirements and desires of sponsors, photographers and the attention economies that these assemblages exist in can be daunting for some:

Just noticing the different pressure of the camera when you'd be like: 'oh I need another minute' and then you're delaying your group. Or you feel like you've been brought into this opportunity to push yourself and if you back out of something it makes you question: 'should I be here? Are they upset at me?'. There's definitely I think a power dynamic between you and the photographer. (Sandra, 27)

As Sandra details, being in professional situations in the backcountry can place some touring athletes out of their comfort zone and in potential risky encounters where they may be less than comfortable. It is also necessary to consider the role of gender in these experiences. Lifestyle sports industries, although less so than some mainstream sports, remain male dominated. None of the male athlete participants mentioned these types of experiences. The role of Sandra's gender in the power dynamics she discusses cannot be ignored. Indeed in order to overcome these moments, Sandra has called upon the social capital that she has accrued:

I've been really lucky to have [professional skier] as a mentor and she's taken me under her wing and really been like: 'Remember Sandra, all they do is press a button, you're the one putting your body on the line. I know you feel like you have to prove that you belong to have this photographer invite you back again, but just remember that'. (Sandra, 27)

Along with employing their embodied capacity and dispositions that allow them to process fear and use it to focus them for edgework, tourers like Sandra drawing upon these kinds of resources in the form of advice from a more experienced mentor to mitigate these difficult moments and realise her own power and capacity while practicing as a professional in the backcountry.

Despite these potential gender imbalances, an athlete's experience and status in the field can strongly inform their conceptualisation of the pressures and their approach to surmounting them. Indeed, in the case of Lara, an athlete of high status, the perspective that such a position grants is evident: 'At first, there was definitely a pressure of having to throw down and go bigger and push yourself for sponsors. But now I could give zero fucks'. Lara has been through the types of experiences that Sandra has described, and has established a position within the field as a high level athlete. By earning symbolic capital, Lara is now able to dictate the nature of her professional touring experience. Moreover, such experience and knowledge also means that established athletes have the ability, often reflecting the conflicts that arise in the spectrum of practice between the poles, to process these pressures in varied ways that mitigate their impact. For Carl:

The pressure comes internally, because this an opportunity to showcase your skiing, you want to get good shots in the movie, you want to continue to be sponsored. (Carl, 35)

Although Carl states that the pressures are internal, the sources that he lists are all external. It appears that Carl rationalises this position on the basis of his touring self-identity. Instead of allowing himself to recognise challenges like showcasing a high standard of skiing to an audience as external, Carl reframes these struggles to be part of the broader personal challenge that his autonomous touring practice presents. In this way, and concurrently with his aforementioned use of technology, Carl is able to conceptualise his professional touring experience and its heteronomous influences in a way that he can reconcile with his investment in the subcultural rules born of autonomous practice. Meanwhile, Charles whose status is equally high, uses the embodied experience and its potential to block out the struggles of reflexive late modernity to manage how he deals with the same pressures:

I personally have never thought about my sponsors while I'm out in the backcountry, you know. I think the pressures, they come in the background,

they come in summer, like when you're actually out in the field, I've never thought like: 'man, this could affect my career'. (Charles, 36)

To perform at his best, Charles uses his focus on authentic practice to mute any external pressure that he might otherwise feel while he is in the backcountry performing his edgework. Furthermore, with their established status, athletes such as Carl and Charles have more time and creative freedom insofar as being able to lead the development of the projects they pursue. In many instances, and as can be seen in Carl and Charles own bodies of work, these athletes' trajectory is often guided by well-considered edgework and their relationships with nature.

The way that professional touring guides experience their time in the backcountry, and the contrast between it and their own recreational touring, again serve to illuminate the differences that recreational and professional touring produce. To become a qualified guide, capable of leading paying clients into the backcountry, tourers must become highly experienced and skilled mountaineers, skiers, first aid administrators and leaders. As such, guides are often highly accomplished tourers, with embodied abilities that can closely resemble that of touring athletes. For professional guide Jeff, this sees him engage in more critical edgework during his personal touring with greater regularity than a recreational tourer would:

When I'm out with close friends that I have a lot of trust in, the envelope will often get pushed much further than it would if I had clients, but it really depends on what's going on [with avalanche conditions]. If it's a hair trigger, you just avoid it all the time, but if it's manageable, yeah, often times those are the situations where you can end up being a liability skiing with a good friend [nervous laugh]. (Jeff, 36)

While still observing principles of risk mitigation, Jeff uses his embodied skill to navigate more consequential edges, and as has been shown, finding the limit of bodily capacity is a large part of the touring experience. As such, Jeff's personal touring is characterised by a higher risk tolerance and more encounters with precarious situations, than he would ever expose his clients to. Jeff's ability to recognise this and subsequently adjust the location of the edge to his clients' needs is a critical part of his job. As he explains, ultimately: 'everything is in your hands, all the decisions, everything, the clients

experience is on you'. This dynamic means that Jeff's professional experiences differ significantly from his personal time touring:

You want to be conservative, a lot of the time I'm counting on people not being able to handle stuff. So a lot of the time it's about avoiding the problem. So there's a lot less tolerance for exposure⁵⁵. (Jeff, 36)

Without the same embodied capital that Jeff possesses, his clients require him to tailor their backcountry experience to a level that satisfies their expectations. However, in some cases this can be easier for guides to achieve than others:

That can be hard if you have go-getter clients, people with really high expectations... sometimes people think they're in a ski movie and push it, regardless of how well they actually ski. But it's not always like that. Most of the time people are coming here to ski good snow, so you can usually spin it, but I really I think most people have a pretty low risk tolerance. (Jeff, 36)

With clients who hold varying degrees of the knowledge and capital relevant to touring backcountry guides like Jeff must use their own skill and knowledge to satiate what can be hyperreal expectations. In the examples Jeff provides his description of 'spinning it' alludes to a 'feel for the game' which allows for a concurrent assessment of his clients' ability, expectations and how to reconcile the two. For clients who want to ski steep and challenging terrain but might not have the skill required to do so, Jeff must opaquely use his knowledge to recognise this and then take them to a slope that will challenge them but not place the client in danger, all the while without their knowledge. These types of responsibilities move away from the self-reliance and preparedness that conventional touring experiences require, dramatically altering the way that professionals like Jeff practice in and experience the backcountry. With new additions to the backcountry assemblage, professional touring can present unique challenges that are beyond the scope of recreational tourers. At the same time, and again reflecting the non-binary nature of the struggle over what constitutes the touring experience, many professionals engage with these different challenges in ways that ultimately reflect the paradigms that underwrite the 'authentic' embodied touring experience.

⁵⁵ Exposure describes exposure to risk or danger. For instance, exposure to a cliff or avalanche prone slope.

CONCLUSION

The experience of touring in the backcountry is constituted by the unique intersection of human, non-human, material and non-material elements within the field. Tourers' bodies, their equipment, terrain, snow and atmospheric conditions, and encounters with risk coalesce to constitute a lively assemblage in which the affective intensities produced exert influence over tourers' experience. When tourers venture into the uncontrolled backcountry they inherently expose themselves to risks. As such, tourers put their capital to work, exercising their skills, knowledge and the performance of their equipment to produce a sense of control and mastery of both their body and their environment. From observing and testing snowpack stability, to skinning efficiently to maintain energy, to navigating through technical and steep terrain as they descend slopes on skis and snowboards.

Together these practices and engagements with the field act to hone the dispositions of tourers, prompting them to invest in the doxic principles that are born of these corporeal and sensory experiences. As such the established notions of touring, concerned with mitigating risk in edgework through 'authentic' practice to enable the continued acquisition of subcultural capital, are grounded in the embodied experiences that they encourage. At the same time digital technologies present emergent challenges to the stability and sanctity of these types of perspectives toward the backcountry. Nonetheless, tourers have always been quick to adopt new technologies that can augment their practice, starting with the likes of Nansen and Urdahl over a century ago who developed innovative equipment, modern iterations of which are regularly used today. In the time since those expeditions through Scandinavia and the Arctic, tourers have embraced, with a degree of caution, technologies like avalanche beacons, airbags and GPS. These kinds of technologies are used to help tourers observe the principles of safe practice and risk mitigation that backcountry experiences orientate them towards, therefore preserving the orthodoxy of these ideals within the field. Concomitantly however, some tourers' use of technology represents an intense battle between these outlooks, the modes of practice they catalyse and new ways of interpreting and experiencing the backcountry field. The affectivity of heteronomous intrusions, for instance, the way viewing touring content can influence decision making in the backcountry, means that tourers' embodied practice is determined by a much greater spectrum of understandings about the backcountry.

As these emergent changes to the field unfold, the long established conventions of the autonomous embodied touring experience cease to be the only legitimate perspectives of touring. It is no longer the case that the embodied experience of taking risks by moving through challenging terrain, sharing experiences with friends and appreciating the mountains is inherently the foundational element of touring for some individuals. Indeed, touring experience and practice must now be recognised to include the range of additions that technology, and broader commercial forces have introduced as the touring field continues to expand and unfold.

6. 'I'M MORE ABOUT TRYING TO SHARE THE EXPERIENCE, I DON'T WANT TO BRAG': THE IMPACTS OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON TOURING PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

The experiences described in the previous chapter constitute integral parts of what it means to be a tourer. That is to say, one cannot be a tourer unless they go into the backcountry and test their abilities in the mountains. However with those practices come a range of secondary engagements that constitute a significant portion of the activity in the field. As many studies of lifestyle sports have described the relationship between media and these subcultures is foundational to many aspects of them (see Coates, Clayton & Humberstone 2010; Dumont 2017; Ferrell Milovanovic & Lyng 2001; Gilchrist & Wheaton 2013; Kusz 2007; Lewis 2016; Pavlidis & Fullagar 2014; Thorpe 2016; Wheaton 2010; Wheaton & Beal 2003; Wilson 2008; Woermann 2012). For example the preservation of specific subcultural knowledge, aesthetics, language, skills and style in sports like touring stem from their dissemination through various forms of media content that relies on evolving technologies. This chapter will explore how tourers encounter these immaterial elements of the field and how they can produce emergent practices and understandings of the backcountry. As such, this chapter also examines how these developments induce in concern for some tourers about the preservation of their own 'authentic' perspectives on embodied practice and experience.

Until recently much of nominally touring media content was consumed in the form of 'old media' such as magazines, books and VHS/DVDs. This was largely constituted of practical information pertaining to the embodied touring experience whilst also celebratory towards noteworthy accomplishments of individuals. For instance, descriptions of skills and techniques, proper use of equipment and avalanche safety are commonly found in backcountry books. The pre-digital touring community partly relied on these forms of media to curate shared sets of knowledge, experience and practice that preserve the doxic principles of the backcountry field. As exemplified by the aforementioned *Blizzard of Aahhhs*, mainstream snowsports media have also regularly incorporated images of the backcountry in the production of ski and snowboard films and marketing. With the steepest, most technical slopes and the most untouched powder snow, commercial film

production companies and snowsports brands have used the backcountry to showcase their products and the highest, most 'extreme' level of skiing and snowboarding to garner attention in a competitive market. This content is often characterised by high-energy video edits cut with fast paced music or spectacular still photography that captures the precarity of the tourers' edgework and environment, often with tourers not necessarily being the target audience. In contrast to touring books and magazines, these hyperreal depictions of the backcountry, colloquially known as 'ski porn', have served to create an extreme, or gnarly, aesthetic that has been further proliferated since the advent of digital media.

Having completed a digital ethnography for this project, my own social media feeds are saturated with images of the backcountry from a seeming bottomless reservoir of content. Should an individual tourer choose to do so, they could view constantly refreshing images of the backcountry indefinitely. The ubiquitous connectivity of devices such as smartphones and tablets, along with the gamut of platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook and Instagram, means that most tourers have perpetual access to whichever backcountry content they chose to consume. They watch, like, share and comment on this content, and these heteronomously orientated practices serve to quantify and validate the status and capital that is produced in the struggle for attention for which the content ultimately competes. By following athletes and brands based on the forms of currency that emerge in digital platforms (likes, views, tags etc.), tourers can filter the content they consume, making choices that are reflective of their investment in 'authentic' values of the field. As such tourers have also adopted these technologies and adapted their practice with them to align with their own backcountry dispositions. Constant connectivity means that tourers find increasingly sophisticated ways to share information, pass on the lessons of their experience and offer collective, digital modes of mentorship to new tourers. These changes to media practices in the field can be understood as manifestations of the affective intensities that emerge from the entanglements of tourers, their bodies, technology and the natural world that occur within the field.

‘I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW I’VE BEEN OUT THERE’: EMERGENT, DISRUPTIVE, DIGITAL TOURING PRACTICE

The wide ranging audience and economies of attention (see Franck, 2019; van Krieken, 2019) present in the virtual spaces of the touring field, mean that a significant portion of this online, largely audio visual content, involves a reproduction of an extreme aesthetic that stand in contrast to depictions of authentic touring. These portrayals carry many of the characteristics described in McCarthy’s (2017) ‘the Red Bull sublime’. As one participant, professional athlete Carl, suggests, ‘most people on there [digital media] just want to see ski porn’. Here Carl highlights how the most attractive and exciting exhibitions of edgework resonate with the audience that backcountry media now reaches. On a much smaller scale than that at which Carl conducts his digital practice, I found this to be very much the case. As described in Chapters 2 and 3, in fieldwork I leveraged the accessibility of the experience of backcountry on social media by using Instagram to recruit interview participants. I used several different styles of posts to recruit for the project. Some of these were simple, text based images, while other incorporated imagery of the backcountry (see fig. 4.3). However the post that garnered the most attention was POV footage, edited to music, of myself skiing at Revelstoke on a day with particularly good powder⁵⁶ conditions, accompanied by a caption referring to the project (see fig. 6.1). Responses to such displays of action, as Goffman (1972) would call them, create an atmosphere which Sandra describes a constant ‘pressure to be doing something more unique, bigger, better than anyone else’. For tourers like Sandra, who is looking to establish a career as an athlete in the touring industry, this media landscape produces an atmosphere of affective pressure that has the potential to disrupt their autonomous practice.

⁵⁶ Powder is a type of snow with a very low moisture content, meaning that it is light and fluffy. Snow only maintains these properties when it is quite cold (<-5°C) and for a short time after it has fallen. It is much sought after by skiers and snowboarders who experience a sense of weightlessness when riding through powder (as opposed to on top of snow in other states).

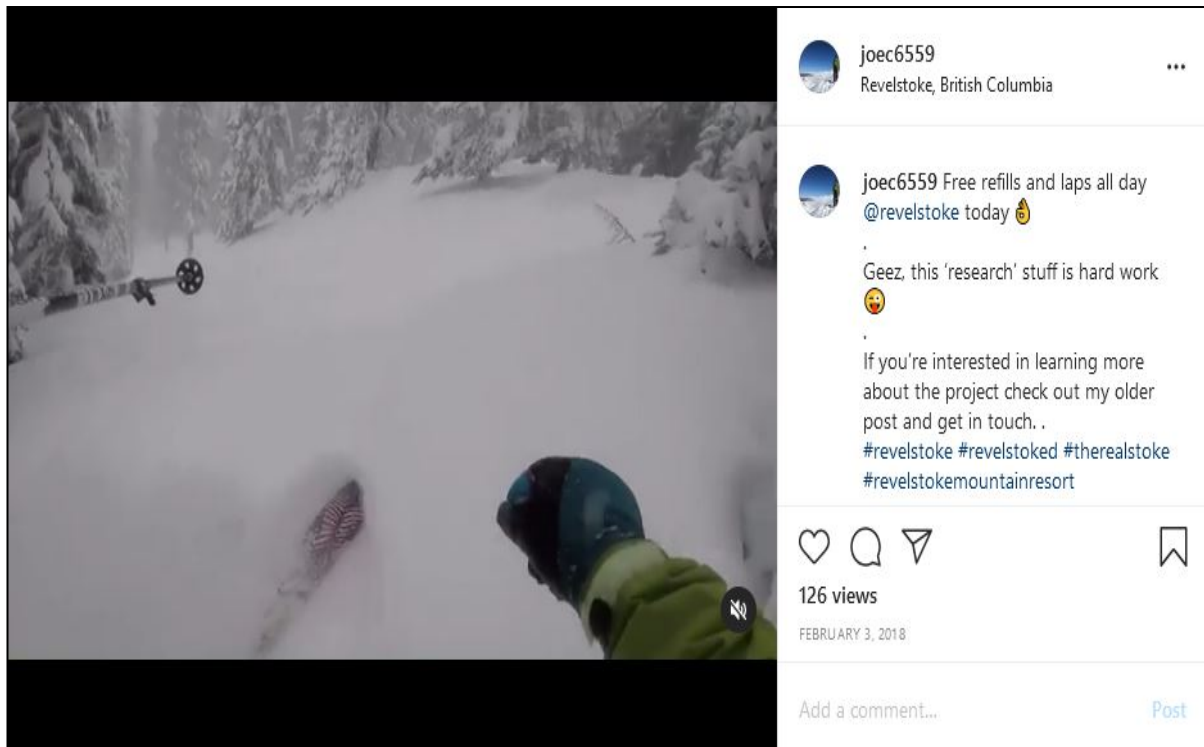


FIGURE 6.1: The researcher's Instagram video post used for recruitment during fieldwork.

With the broad popularity of extreme content outweighing content that is produced with a view to representing 'authentic' practice, the possibilities for it to influence understandings of the backcountry and experiences within it, are acknowledged by tourers:

The average Joe doesn't see what goes on behind the scenes to get people where they are and doing what they do, and I think that might lead to them short-cutting the process if they're inspired to get out there. (Jeff, 36)

Tourers like Jeff feel that this creates the potential for those who do not possess the skills and knowledge required, to be inspired by and then try to recreate and reproduce the content they consume. This dynamic occurs in the context of tourers competing for attention in these emergent and virtual sites of struggle within the field. Tourers compete for attention and subsequent status, relying on likes, views and other social media currency to quantify and legitimise their exhibition of touring experience. These economies of attention (Citton 201; Franck 1999; 2002; 2019; van Krieken 2019) motivate tourers such as Jeff to participate.

These new struggles in the field together with the mainstream reach of digital media also expose tourers to broader social pressures that constitute new challenges and issues. Problems related to gender stereotypes and inequalities draw focus from the achievements and feats that tourers try to exhibit, as Lara explains:

I'll put out a shot of me skiing this incredible line, crazy mountain... and I'll get like half the amount of likes as a fucking selfie on top of a mountain. Like, smiley, pretty girl... it's pretty similar for men too though. Like if you're a good looking guy and you're active they want to see your face too. I mean, look at Johnny Collinson, he's made an entire career off his face.
(Lara, 29)

For Lara, a professional skier whose career success is partly dependent upon social media metrics, it is disappointing that she cannot let her skiing do the talking. Instead she uses her youth, fitness and femininity to augment the attention and validation that her skiing derives. Moreover, as with all digital media, tourers who engage with digital practices do not escape the negatives that come with trolling.

One notable example of this within the touring field can be seen in the case of accomplished professional skier and mountaineer, Caroline Gleich. As is detailed in numerous snowsports media articles (see Hittmeier, 2017; Parris, 2018; Siber, 2017), Gleich has received significant levels of gendered harassment in response to posting about her numerous touring achievements. With many lifestyle sports emerging during the social change of the 1960s and 70s, they have developed without the same strength of influence that cultural, historical and institutional gender inequalities have held in more traditional, structured sports (Wheaton & Thorpe 2018: 319). As such, lifestyle sports have also been used to demonstrate the need for understandings of gender relations, and particularly masculinity to account for their 'multiplicity, dynamism and fluidity' (Thorpe 2010: 177; also see Beal 1996; Evers 2004; 2006; 2009; 2016; 2019.b; Wheaton & Thorpe 2018). However the manifestation of misogyny and sexism in the case of Gleich highlights the interruptions to the field brought to bear by the exposure of digital media. Digital media and the broader audience it provides athletes means that they have become more exposed to these forms of symbolic violence, emerging as gendered harassment in misogynistic online comments. With increasing competition for attention in more and more mainstream setting on digital media, these sorts of issues are likely to

continue to intensify, particularly for those whose identities do not fit neatly with the white, masculine image of ‘the Red Bull sublime’ hero. Gleich has spoken about the personal difficulties she has faced in dealing with trolling, but she has also been able use her position to respond. Together with exposing the trolls, and as figure 6.2 depicts, Gleich has used her platform to comment on women in the backcountry and femininity more broadly. By calling for women to be recognised for their strength, determination and capability Gleich is challenging broader and dominant social mores that see women in her position viewed as objects. Moreover through social media she is able to demonstrate her own embodiment of these qualities and use her corporality in the backcountry to lead by example and expand the possibilities for participation and inclusion of women who tour.



FIGURE 6.2: Instagram post from Caroline Gleich about women in the mountains and femininity. SOURCE: Instagram – @carolinegleich

With the challenge that these heteronomous digital practices pose to conventional backcountry principles, some tourers, like Phil, reject engagement with virtual depictions of touring practice for its own sake altogether: ‘I’m using social media when I can learn something, but not to follow skiers or watch videos, I’m looking at reports and things like that’. For those like Phil, their investment in established subcultural values makes

following athletes, or watching video edits on Instagram uninteresting and antithetical to their understanding of legitimised touring practice. Indeed, as Craig explains, some tourers feel that extreme content constitutes a serious challenge to preserving and understanding safe and legitimised embodied practice:

They'll run photos of an avalanche breaking off, or you'll see in a ski or board movie, segments where they're just taking off slide after slide and outrunning it. I think that's utter bullshit. Making that seem like an ok or even admirable thing to do is leading people in the wrong direction in terms of how they should behave in the backcountry. (Craig, 38)

Again, extreme content challenges the taken-for-granted rules that some tourers have invested in, and as a result they reject its legitimacy and find content like Craig describes offensive to their backcountry dispositions. For example figure 6.3 shows a video published on the official GoPro YouTube channel that captures a skier falling into, and being rescued from a crevasse. As Craig suggests the extreme and scintillating nature of the danger depicted in the footage is celebrated with the video description asking the audience 'how epic is that?'.¹

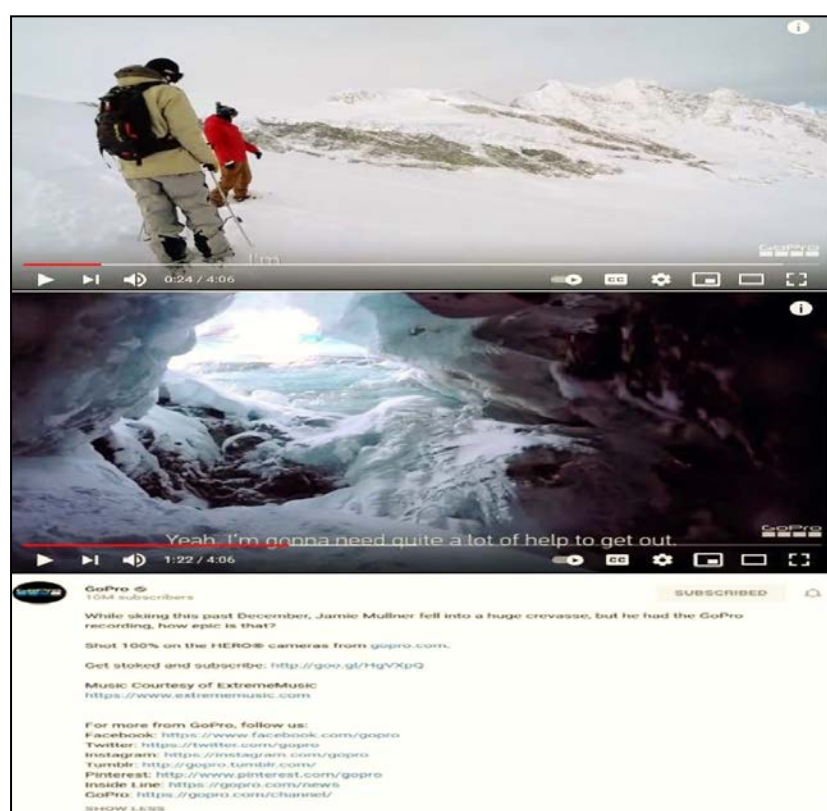


FIGURE 6.3: 'How epic is that?' Screenshots of a YouTube video posted on the official GoPro channel, depicting a skier falling into, and being rescued from a crevasse. SOURCE: < youtube.com/watch?v=9FGNCu-al4g >

Instead of this more extreme content that is rejected, tourers who maintain ‘authentic’ self-identities do engage with online media that they feel supports their understanding of backcountry practice. Subsequently how they curate their digital media consumption reflects their observation of the principles that have been established from autonomous embodied practice. For professional athlete Lara, this means her audience:

want to hear about the moments skinning up there, or the mental struggles that you had to get to that point. They don’t just want this like, glorified shot. Cause everyone and their mum can go out with an iPhone as an influencer, setup a tent, put their feet up outside the tent and makes them look like they’re in the backcountry and they don’t even sleep there, they pack it up and go back home that night. And it’s like: ‘where’s the authenticity in that? Where’s the human struggle and connection? (Lara, 29)

The type of content that Lara describes here that captures things like the vulnerability that tourers feel, stands in contrast to that which conforms to the aesthetic of the ‘the Red Bull sublime’. Social media posts such as that shown in figure 6.4 epitomise the relatability and more holistic representations that Lara argues her followers desire. In the post, professional skier Kaj Zackrisson conveys his touring self-identity, delving into broader parts of what it is to be a tourer beyond his prowess as an edgeworker. Zackrisson describes his focus in the backcountry as being on the fun and play that comes with testing your capacities, rather than simply the extreme parts of his practice. While this does echo elements of ‘the Red Bull sublime’ and the ‘stoke imperative’, the vulnerability expressed by Zackrisson constitutes an interruption to those aesthetics. He is also careful to note that he and his ‘good friend [photographer] @chritoffershoots played as safe as we could high above the [Chamonix] valley’. This explicit recognition of his prioritising of safety further acts to authenticate the nature of the post and make it relatable to tourers who have made similar investments in these principles. Notably, Zackrisson also draws attention to the privileged lifestyle of a professional snowsports athlete in mentioning the ‘11 seasons’ he spent in touring hub of Chamonix surrounded by the biggest peaks in the French Alps – a dream for any tourer. Nonetheless the authenticity that is decoded by his audience mitigates a negative response to this element of the post with, the number of ‘likes’ a representation of its affect on the dispositions of some tourers.



FIGURE 6.4: Instagram post by professional skier Kaj Zackrisson exemplifying relatable and ‘authentic’ content. SOURCE: Instagram - @kajzackrisson

Alongside these ‘authentic’ depictions of the backcountry, tourers also produce and consume a wide array of digital media in practices to augment their corporal practice. Figures 6.5 and 6.6 demonstrate this type of content. Figure 6.5 shows a list of ‘threads’ within the TGR ‘The Slide Zone’ forum. In this space, tourers come together to discuss avalanche incidents, conditions and safety, forming ‘embodied echoes’ (Bunn 2016) back to their physical practice. Similarly, figure 6.6 highlights the earnestness with which tourers enter these virtual exchanges. Instagram user @ggagne offers musings on difficulties that they have been experiencing, incorporating some detailed observations of conditions in their assessment of avalanche conditions. In sharing this and describing it as a ‘fun problem’ to resolve they not only act to distinguish themselves as an authentic tourers, invested in the learning process, but also encourage the same recognition of its importance amongst their followers. The positive responses from this audience and the level of activity amongst ‘The Slide Zone’ threads are testament to the ways that this sharing of practical tips and advice to disseminate subcultural capital are effective in preserving and sharing of established subcultural values.




















FORUM: THE SLIDE ZONE			
Info and discussion on avalanche conditions, incidents and equipment.			
		Forum Tools ▾	Search Forum ▾
Title / Thread Starter	Replies / Views	Last Post By ▾	
 STICKY: Backcountry Links Thread (Was Backcountry Jong Thread) [redacted] 1 2	Replies: 43 Views: 48,036	[redacted] 11-10-2018, 09:24 PM →	
 STICKY: 2008-2009 Colorado Snowpack Observations [redacted] 1 2 3 4 5 ... 20	Replies: 479 Views: 154,896	[redacted] 07-08-2017, 08:14 PM →	
 STICKY: Snowy Torrents Of TGR [redacted] 1 2	Replies: 34 Views: 43,010	[redacted] 09-07-2016, 09:01 AM →	
 Pieps DSP Pro Broken Switch [redacted]	Replies: 7 Views: 334	[redacted] Yesterday, 03:05 PM →	
 13 Feet Under [redacted]	Replies: 1 Views: 525	[redacted] 06-03-2019, 09:07 PM →	
 CO Avy Season Claims 8 Lives Much To Learn [redacted]	Replies: 0 Views: 543	[redacted] 05-25-2019, 09:27 AM →	
 CO: House Destroyed - House Saved - D4.5 Slide [redacted] 1 2	Replies: 28 Views: 2,766	[redacted] 05-20-2019, 08:21 AM →	
 Jones Pass Fatality [redacted] 1 2 3 4 5 ... 10	Replies: 240 Views: 20,965	[redacted] 05-11-2019, 10:46 AM →	
 Pemberton Back-country Death. [redacted] 1 2 3	Replies: 50 Views: 6,069	[redacted] 05-08-2019, 09:59 PM →	
 David Lama, Jess Roskelly, And Hans Auer Missing In Canadian Avalanche [redacted]	Replies: 2 Views: 1,695	[redacted] 04-30-2019, 10:25 AM →	
 Mt Washington Avy Fatality April 11, 2019 [redacted] 1 2	Replies: 35 Views: 3,881	[redacted] 04-27-2019, 10:29 PM →	
 California East Side Avy, 4/14, Tinemaha [redacted]	Replies: 10 Views: 1,481	[redacted] 04-24-2019, 01:16 AM →	
 Loveland Pass Avalanche 4.20.13 [redacted] 1 2 3 4 5 ... 18	Replies: 443 Views: 89,599	[redacted] 04-20-2019, 05:19 PM →	
 Forecasts, Radios, B/c And A Couple Slides [redacted]	Replies: 20 Views: 1,084	[redacted] 04-20-2019, 04:50 PM →	
 RIP Tone, Tough Read. [redacted]	Replies: 15 Views: 1,549	[redacted] 04-18-2019, 02:34 AM →	
 Not An Avl [redacted]	Replies: 3 Views: 693	[redacted] 04-11-2019, 04:55 PM →	
 Super Sketch In AK Valdeeeez And Girdwood [redacted]	Replies: 4 Views: 939	[redacted] 04-09-2019, 02:47 PM →	
 Bear Creek-Telluride [redacted] 1 2 3 4 5	Replies: 122 Views: 8,884	[redacted] 04-07-2019, 07:25 PM →	
 One Killed In Roof Avalanche Crested Butte [redacted] 1 2	Replies: 28 Views: 2,297	[redacted] 04-03-2019, 12:15 PM →	

FIGURE 6.5: ‘The Slide Zone’ – TGR forum threads on avalanche conditions and incidents. SOURCE: <tetongravity.com/forums/forumdisplay.php/17-The-Slide-Zone>

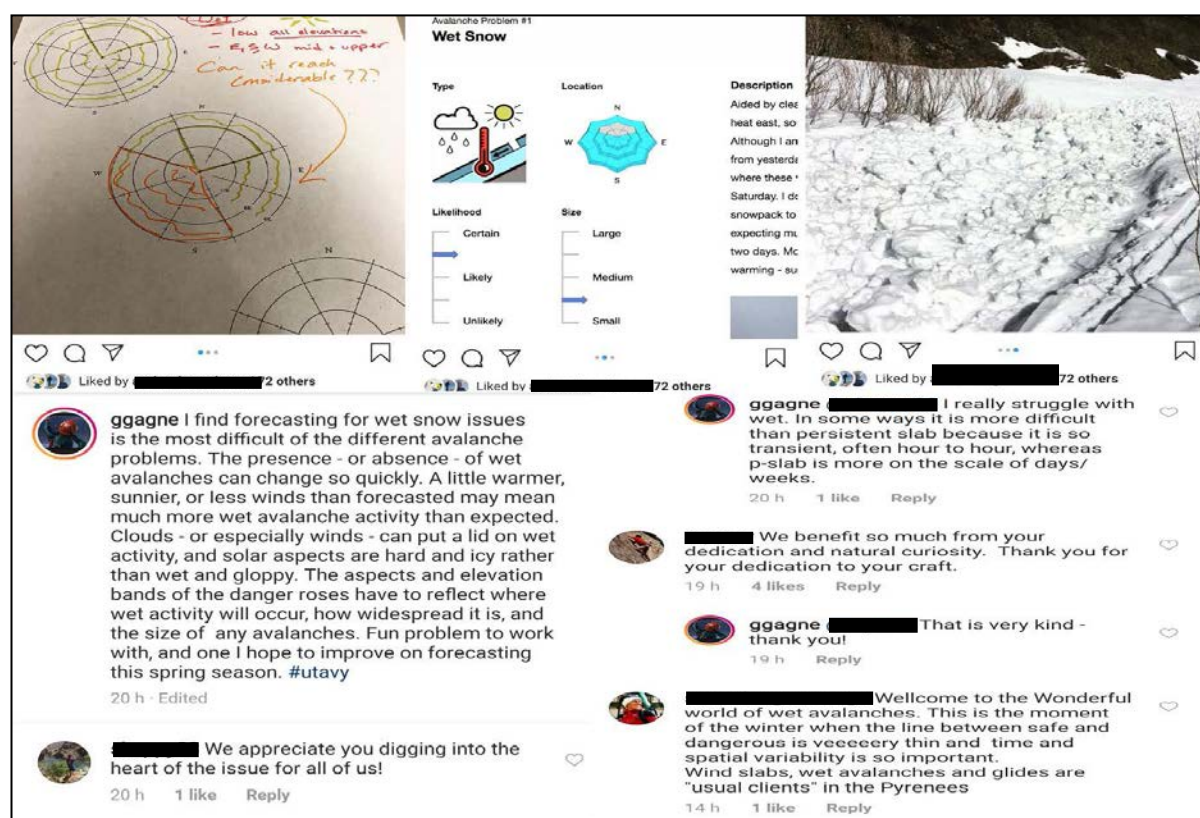


FIGURE 6.6: Instagram post sharing ‘beta’ about avalanche conditions with multiple photos and discussion of avalanche activity. SOURCE: Instagram - @ggagne

These differences in the digital content consumption practices and choices of individual tourers are influenced by the level of their illuſio towards the taken-for-granted rules of the field. Furthermore, the nature of content to which tourers expose themselves can serve to further impact their backcountry dispositions and physical practice in it. In this context, the consumption of digital media becomes an affective practice for tourers. Touring digital media affectively inspires and induces aspiration for tourers in terms of their embodied practice:

I know I’ve made decisions based on: ‘oh, conditions look good on that line, someone’s skied it’ or ‘wow, that’s a beautiful line I want to go ski it’. So I’ve used what I’ve seen on social media as a something that influences my decision making to ski a line. (Barry, 31)

As Barry describes, digital media content has the potential to be aspirational and inspirational for tourers, regardless of their investment in ‘authentic’ notions. For Barry, online activity consists of looking at things like conditions and natural beauty rather than impressive edgework and consuming digital content can be a part of the decision making process that determines when and where he skis. Conversely for those who have not

made the same outlay in observance of these principles of ‘authentic’ practice, portrayals of the backcountry that do conform to ‘the red bull sublime’ and ‘stoke imperative’ aesthetics have the potential to calibrate their practice in other directions. Ultimately the outcomes of this affective inspiration are not prescribed, however they emerge in relation to how the struggles between the autonomous and heteronomous unfold in the experience of individual tourers.

This dynamic is further contributed to by the opportunities to extend, prolong and re-live the embodied experience that digital media offers. Watching footage on YouTube or looking back at old photos on Facebook is affective insofar as it allows tourers to re-live and re-experience their embodied practice in the backcountry. When I sit at my desk and watch footage of touring, I find my body drawing on its affective well of experience, moving in mimicry of the images I watch. My feet and legs shift and I lean with the turns that I see on the screen. This augmentation of the corporeal experience is nothing new, for tourers or indeed other lifestyle sport practitioners, (see Ferrell, Milovanovic and Lyng 2001; Woermann 2012), however the saturation of content that digital media facilitates is a recent development. As such this exposure increases the potential for tourers to be inspired to alter their corporeal practices in the way Barry has described above. For instance, pushing the limit of their edgework, finding new places to tour in or heading into the backcountry for the first time altogether. Together with these affective nodes in the digital consumption practices of tourers, it is also crucial to address the ways in which tourers produce their own content online.

The production of these various forms of digital media contents also represents emergent changes to the field that have come to alter aspects of the overall backcountry experience. Some tourers regularly exhibit themselves and their embodied practice through the digital media platforms mentioned previously. Often the posting of this content is preceded by the editing of photographs, video and audio with tourers making further use of modern technological functionality. These efforts allow tourers to create content in their own vision, yet often this output constitutes derivations of other media. Moreover, the nature of the digital media that is produced is reflective of the way tourers wrestle with the new influences on their touring dispositions and understandings of experience.

Figure 6.7 shows an Instagram post that encapsulates many of the elements of ‘the Red Bull sublime’.

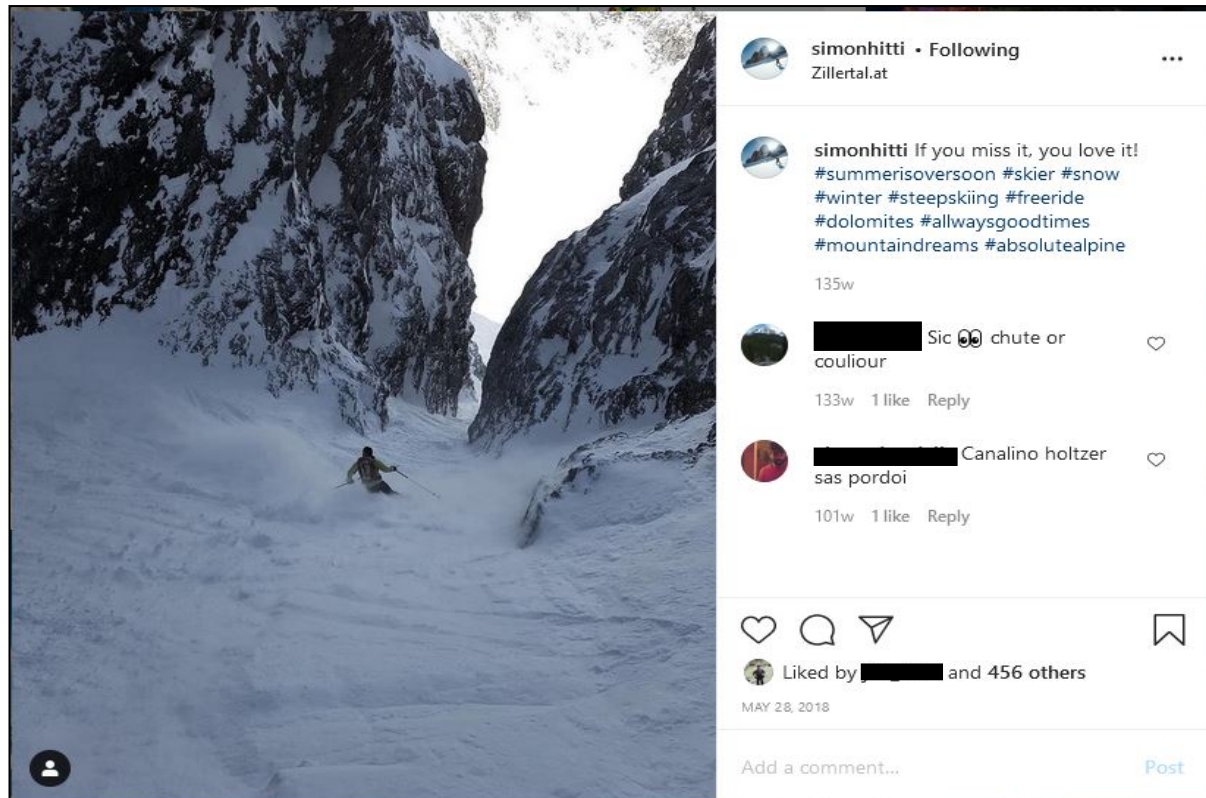


FIGURE 6.7: Instagram post highlighting the extremity of edgework and a playful attitude towards it. SOURCE: Instagram - @simonhitti

The framing of the photo brings the narrowness and steepness of the couloir into focus to highlight the edgework, while the caption and hashtags that accompany it convey the playful attitude of the tourer towards their risky practice in such spaces. In contrast, the post depicted in figure 6.8 explicitly addresses the risks of touring practice whilst also conveying spectacular imagery of the backcountry. The image captures the poster’s group digging a snowpit and making observations in the context of the mountains that surround them. In offering some explanations and points to consider through the detailed captioning and hash tagging employed, this post seeks to affect a different understanding of touring practice that is observant of established ‘authentic’ principles and disengaged from more mainstream touring aesthetics.



FIGURE 6.8: A tourer addressing risk in an Instagram post by showing and discussing avalanche safety. SOURCE: Instagram - @mahleedaylee

Tourers engage with these practices for several reasons. Firstly as Woermann (2012) has shown and participant Michael points out, it is simply an enjoyable part of the whole touring experience: 'It's fun to go out get some footage and come home with your buds and make an edit. Like, it's just another part of it and if you post it and people like it, you're even more stoked'. For many, often younger, tourers who have strong digital literacy, exercising the skills involved in producing content is a fun way to spent time and maintain their connections to others. Doing so also constitutes another opportunity for the performance of touring self-identity, and as Michael suggests, have it validated. These digital encounters are intertwined with the corporality of tourers' time in the backcountry as they showcase their embodied capacities in the hope that it will distinguish them as legitimate.

The outcome of this is ultimately determined by the dispositions of the audience that responds, but the status and legitimacy that tourers can access by participating in these

digital practices contribute to the backcountry's affective atmosphere. For Michael this means that if he captures:

a good photo or some cool footage then I'm going to put that up but if not, then I'll still post something... I hate saying this, but I guess I want people to know I've been out there. (Michael, 25)

Michael's first choice is to post something 'cool', which in this context can be understood as that which incorporates the extreme aesthetic. Michael wants his embodied ability to capture attention and distinguish him as someone who has 'been out there', conducting edgework and taking risks. However the importance of the quality of the content in that regard is ultimately outweighed by his desire to be seen as someone who has, in Jeff's words: 'the notoriety of being able to say they've been there and skied that'. For tourers such as Michael, whose social media audience is largely comprised of non-tourer friends and family, the wide reach of digital backcountry content means that he can still receive validation from a less initiated, but well-primed audience who are able to recognise, but not necessarily make sense of, the touring capital he likes to display. Simultaneously, the quantification of status that occurs through the distribution of social media currency also serves to directly affect the understandings that tourers hold of their touring experiences and identities:

This is going to sound really conceited, but a lot of times I won't follow people back. Just cause I like the idea of having a lot of followers and me not following a lot of people.... It just makes me think, fuck yeah, I'm a badass. (Paul, 28)

For Paul, the metric of followers has a definite impact on his perception of himself as a tourer and the legitimacy of his practice in the backcountry. This type of practice is reminiscent of techniques used by 'micro-celebrities' and influencers (Leaver, Highfield & Abidin 2020; Marwick 2013; Senft 2008) to engender an appearance of exclusivity. By manipulating the figures, Paul distinguishes himself as someone that others should divert their attention to and when he is able to achieve this, his understanding of his own experiences and identity is affected. For tourers like Paul, who appreciate being seen as a 'badass', or in other words, display their edgework to have its extremity validated, the social media currencies form a crucial and intrinsic part of their digital media, and general backcountry practice.

Meanwhile, other tourers who participate in digital content production practices express alternative motivations that align more closely with their adherence to 'authentic' values and principles. In this context, tourers draw on notions concerning the appreciation of the natural, mountain environments and sharing those experiences with others to establish lasting and meaningful relationships. Like Lara previously, Craig points out, tourers want 'to portray it [the backcountry] as a wonderful place to be explored'. In this context tourers can use technology to achieve these ends, but they have limited control over how these mediated depictions are interpreted by their audience. This is further intensified by wide-reaching, mainstream understandings of touring that are heavily influenced by 'the Red Bull sublime' – the valorisation of edgework and an aspirational attitude of perpetual 'stoke'. As a result of the struggles between these competing aesthetics some tourers reflexively consider how their social media activity is perceived. As Bill explains: 'I'm more about sharing the experience, I'm not necessarily trying to brag, even though that's how it comes off when you're posting it to social media'. Bill feels the pressure being exerted on his touring disposition and practice by the new challenges digital media brings to the field. It is no longer the case that he can feel confident that the distinctions his social media audience make about him and his experiences will align with his own touring self-identity. As such Bill is left feeling the need to reflexively clarify the intentions of his social media activity. Nonetheless, tourers continue to employ digital media in their practice. As Bill, Craig and Lara claim, part of the impetus for doing so comes from their desire to share their experiences and affect their audience to join them in backcountry.

The permeation of digital media into the backcountry field has presented several new avenues for subcultural development. Practices have emerged in the spectrum between the poles to induce pressures on the status quo of touring practice and experience. These alterations to the affective background of touring mean that there are evolving ways for tourers to understand and approach their backcountry experiences. As a result some of the emergent impacts of digital media present significant concerns for some tourers who perceive the challenge that heteronomous practices present as serious and destabilising to the 'authentic' principles they adhere to and the doxa they are invested in.

AN AVALANCHE OF TECHNOLOGY: FEARS AND CONCERNS OVER THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The introduction of this wide range of digital media and technological innovation to the backcountry field have produced concerns for many tourers who maintain an ‘authentic’ self-identity. There is angst about the preservation and adherence to established touring principles and safe embodied practices. Similarly, the ability of digital touring content to reach wider, and less initiated, audiences also represents substantial challenges to the subcultural rules that some tourers follow.

On 13th October 2018 Instagram user Robby Emmons (@robbyemmons) posted footage⁵⁷ he recorded on a POV camera of an avalanche he triggered in the Loveland Pass area of Colorado. The 20 second clip show’s Robby ‘dropping in’ to a ‘line’ before triggering an avalanche instantly. Robby manages to cross the slope and out of the avalanche path before the camera turns to show snow cascading to the valley floor below. There are two things that are immediately apparent to a trained eye. Firstly, the presence of wind-affected snow⁵⁸ represented by the ripple pattern noticeable at the start of the clip raises questions about the stability of the snowpack. Secondly, and particularly after Robby has skied out of the avalanche path, the footage shows a relatively large convexity⁵⁹ in the terrain. When coupled with a snowpack of questionable stability⁶⁰ this means that the slope Robby is on could hold considerable avalanche risk.

The footage was picked up by snowsports media outlets and reposted on other social media platforms, generating significant discussion amongst tourers. The opinions and perspectives put forward (an example of which can be seen in figure 6.9) highlighted several of the concerns that tourers have about the presence of digital media use amongst the backcountry community. The comments of Reddit user neatopat are particularly acute exemplars of some of the sentiments expressed in response to Robby’s videos. The commenter confidently suggests that the ‘snow isn’t even skiable’ through their

⁵⁷ This footage can be viewed at: <[instagram.com/p/Bo20i0MFerp/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bo20i0MFerp/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)>

⁵⁸ The impact of wind on snow and avalanche conditions can be significant and can lead to considerable avalanche risk.

⁵⁹ A convexity is a feature in mountain terrain that is shaped like the exterior of sphere whereby it becomes steeper when descending. These can act as trigger points for avalanches.

⁶⁰ Depending on conditions and the way in which the layers of snowpack form, it can become more or less stable and subsequent low or high avalanche danger, respectively.

knowledge of the area and observation of warning signs in the clip, acting to make a distinction between their ‘authentic’ self-identity and Robby’s ‘inauthentic’ practice.

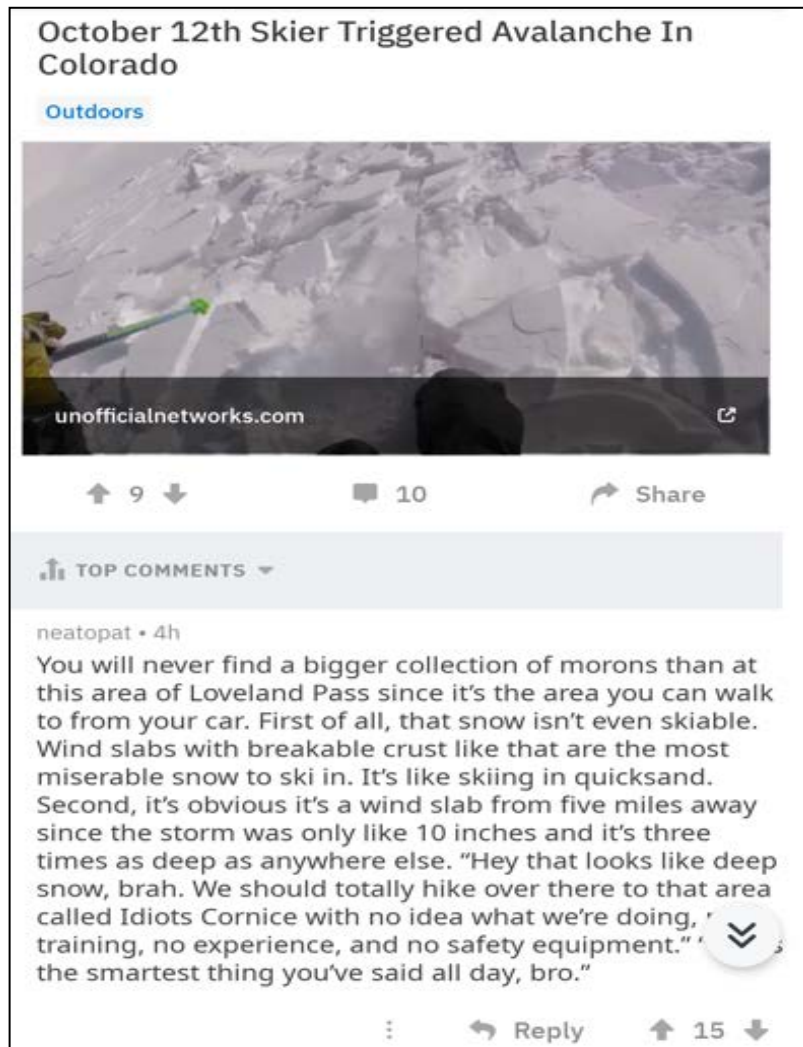


FIGURE. 6.9: Reddit user neatopat’s comments on Robby Emmons’ video.
SOURCE: <reddit.com/r/skiing>

Evidence of symbolic violence can also be seen in neatopat’s labelling of tourers like Robby as ‘morons’ and the mock quotations that seek to further characterise the assumed practice leading to the avalanche as ignorant and a transgression of touring rules and values. This distinction is one that was shared by other tourers, as evidenced by the fifteen ‘upvotes’ neatopat’s comment had received at the time the screenshot of figure 6.9 was captured. The repetition of similar assessments of Robby’s practice across various digital platforms legitimises the authentic self-identity of tourers who hold these opinions. This performance of distinction also acts to repress the challenge that alternative interpretations of Robby’s practice present to established backcountry ideals. However, Robby expresses that in initially posting the video to Instagram he ‘wanted to

maybe help someone from making the same mistakes’, reflecting an investment in aspects of ‘authentic’ practice and the misguided nature of many online comments. Ultimately the desire to make this distinction as clearly as *neatopat* does is the culmination of concerns that many tourers hold about others entering the backcountry without what is seen to be the requisite knowledge and skills.

Amongst these apprehensions the largest fear for tourers is that the increased audience generated by digital media is exposed to a heavily mediated reality of touring and the backcountry. As a result some tourers feel that others may be engaging with the embodied practices of the subculture without the guidance, skills, and experience that many consider necessary. As Barry explains:

... if you follow other people skiing at high level on Instagram you see people skiing the Grand Teton and the Middle Teton, pretty extreme routes that took a lot of people a couple years of looking at it, a couple of failed attempts to ski, but you see that on a daily basis, so it kind of normalises a really high level of skiing that can get people in trouble. (Barry, 31)

As Barry describes, the relentless flow of content that features high-level edgework creates an affective atmosphere whereby that concentration of such content produce a hyperreal distortion of the backcountry. In reality the opportunities to successfully complete such edgework only occur in small windows, where conditions and other factors align. These feats take months or years of preparation, yet the regularity of their portrayal online produces a misguided perspective that they constitute ‘normal’ touring experience. As such Barry worries that the affect produced through these depictions has the potential to entice tourers towards unsafe practice and away from developing ‘authentic’ backcountry dispositions. Carl expands on this notion, explaining the sensory elements of his touring experience and how he uses what he feels through his body – the conditions, his vulnerability in big mountains – to make good decisions:

We’ve [professional tourers] learnt to check ourselves. Like: ‘what are you scared of? Why are you doing this?’. So you really have to be in touch with those emotions. Whereas the average weekend warrior might go out there and maybe isn’t as in touch with that sort of thing and it’s more like: ‘it’s my weekend, I gotta get some footy [footage] for the boys!’. (Carl, 35)

Here Carl is pointing to the potential for these distractions – getting exciting video footage – to prevent tourers from developing the same ‘authentic’ understandings of touring practice. In other words, consuming digital content that fails to incorporate the totality of the embodied experience, as described in the previous chapter, has the potential to affect the perspectives of tourers that these hyperreal exhibitions draw to the backcountry. Ultimately for tourers whose practice and attitudes that have been shaped by their ‘authentic’ self-identity, the potential that digital media might be inducing others to unwittingly push themselves beyond their ‘edge’ is concerning.

These sentiments are held by many tourers, however there is a lack of empirical evidence that could suggest a causal link between the issues raised by these types of concerns and accidents in the backcountry. Indeed, as has been previously raised, tourers who are killed by avalanches are most often experienced and well prepared (Green & Logan 2020). Nonetheless many tourers hold an opinion that accidents, and even fatalities can be explained in part by these kinds of heteronomous practice:

I can’t call this a correlation or anything, but there’s a line in the Tetons called [name of line]... I think it was 2 years ago, it got skied one week, by someone with a pretty big Instagram following, and the next week someone died on the line... (Barry, 31)

Despite suggesting otherwise, in recalling this anecdote Barry assumes there is a causal link between the tourer’s death and the online attention that the line had received in preceding days. This description underlines the affectivity of these types of intersections between the myriad elements of the touring field. Like *neatopat* previously, Barry responds to the affect emanating from assumed inauthentic practice, seeking to distinguish himself as some with ‘a feel for the game’ who understands the situation and the cause of the accident. His experience in the backcountry and his *illusio* makes Barry confident that not only is his assessment correct, but that a tourer like him would not make the same mistake.

Concomitantly there is the potential that Barry’s assessment is accurate, and the tourer who died was inspired to ski the line by the Instagram profile that Barry describes. In the case of an example described by Sandra, the influence of these kinds of interruptions to autonomous practice are much more apparent. In discussing an individual that she knew

personally, Sandra underlines the way that digital media can add to the affective atmosphere of the backcountry.

He'd skied this line up on [Name] Peak you can access from Jackson. And they'd videoed it, but it was a firm day and it wasn't the way he wanted to ski it, so he went back to film again, but it had warmed up and he was standing on the cornice⁶¹ looking at it and it broke away, and yeah... [he died]. (Sandra, 27)

Sandra posits that although the victim was an experienced tourer who should have identified the dangers and been able to avoid them, the affectivity of digital media caused missteps in their observation of safe practice. This notion describes an entanglement of several elements of the touring assemblage, also shared by Barry's example. These include: the sophistication of technology and the ease with which users can capture close-to-perfect footage; natural terrain and environment; embodied prowess and the confidence it affects to practice in those spaces; a desire to capture those capacities and the attention that such depictions can bring. Together the interaction of these elements produce an affective intensity to which tourers like Sandra apportion some of the blame in accidents such as she describes. The influence of affect produced by encounters with digital media is further explained by Bill who discusses one of his social media followers:

I know a guy who follows me on Facebook and he'll go and try and ski something I've skied but he doesn't have skins so he's hiking up in snowshoes and ruining the skin track⁶², he doesn't have any avalanche training or a beacon, he just wants to go and ride, and I can respect that, but you're not going about in a safe way. (Bill, 27)

This suggests that while media content can affectively inspire people to venture into the backcountry, it does not inherently impart the capital and embodied expertise required to do so safely. For tourers who prioritise 'authentic' practice and were often guided by mentors that bestowed knowledge to touring safely, these changes to the nature of embodied practice are of concern. Together with these investments in the validity of established principles, the changes that tourers notice within the field – higher

⁶¹ A cornice is an accumulation of snow that hangs over the edge of a ridgeline or mountain peak. As they are unsupported and can break loose causing avalanche and other dangers to those on or below them.

⁶² A skin track is a path worn into snow by people skinning. Smooth, clear and neat skin tracks are preferred by tourers as they make the practice easier, and there is a range of skin track etiquette that helps to maintain those conditions.

participation and wide reaching depictions of the backcountry – combine to affect their interpretations of practice that does not align with their own dispositions.

As a result, tourers report situations where they have encountered others in the backcountry whom they deem to be under prepared and equipped, and often attribute this to digital media and the lack of appropriate guidance that this social gravity affords new tourers. As Paul describes:

A month ago we ran into this college kid and he was out by himself, no beacon, no probe, no shovel⁶³, on an aspect⁶⁴ I've seen slide⁶⁵ twice and I asked him: 'do you have a beacon on ya?' and he said: 'no, this is my first day out', and I said 'we'll why don't you have a beacon' and I scolded him and lectured him, you know, even if he's by himself, what if we see him get buried? He just wanted to get a cool shot for Instagram probably. (Paul, 28)

For Paul who has spent time developing his skills and knowledge by engaging in 'authentic' practice, the inadequacies of the tourer he encountered are satisfactorily explained by the assumption that he was inspired to be in the backcountry to reproduce the extreme aesthetic and gain the status that comes with it. In instances such as these, tourers distinguish themselves as doing the right and tourers like the individual encountered by Paul, as distasteful, unprepared and unsafe. Importantly this distinction acts to signify those like Paul and their practice as authentic, with the other described as illegitimate posers. The strength of this reaction – Paul confronted the individual he encountered - illuminates the affectivity that lingers in and around touring practice. The embodiment of an 'inauthentic' performance in the backcountry is jarring to witness for a tourer like Paul in much the same way as Wetherell's (2012: 109-110) middle-class shopper experiences the 'heebie-jeebies'. In this instance Paul was affected to the point where he was compelled to address the transgressions against the taken-for-granted rules he observes. To rationalise such an experience, some tourers attribute blame to the impact of digital media practices on backcountry practice and experience, in this case the desire to reproduce content that has been previously consumed online. This example

⁶³ Avalanche beacons, snow probes and shovels which are used for avalanche burial recovery are seen by tourers to be the bare minimum of equipment required in the backcountry.

⁶⁴ Aspect refers to the directional orientation of a particular slope, which can significantly impact the stability of the snowpack due to factors like sun and wind exposure.

⁶⁵ A slide is a colloquial term for an Avalanche.

displays the affective mist that hangs in the background of the encounters between human, non-organic and non-material elements of the field. In the context of the heteronomous challenge these digital permeations present, the affective atmospheres of the backcountry have greater potential to act upon tourers, and be acted upon by them. As such these worries about how digital media practices are affecting the embodied practice of, particularly newer, tourers represent the most significant concern for tourers.

These are not the only issues that digital media has raised for tourers. Many also feel uneasy about the exponential increase in the numbers of people venturing into the backcountry and the impact this has on perspectives and practices concerning avalanche safety and sound decision making. As Cameron describes, tourers have noted more and more people in the backcountry in the recent past:

I mean, the first years I'd go to [location] it could have been weeks after a storm and you'd still be skiing fresh tracks. But now I've seen the [location] completely moguled⁶⁶ out some years after only a week. (Cameron, 47)

For tourers whose observation of the 'authentic' rules leads them to value the solitude that the corporeal backcountry experience can offer, these changes are difficult to accept. As Bill says 'a lot of arguments are generated on the forums, where it's like: 'oh no you're giving away our secret powder stashes... people can get very territorial'. An example of this can be seen in figure 6.10 which shows the way tourers question the role of social media in exposing their secret spots and giving away, what are sometimes viewed as, *their* mountains and snow.

⁶⁶ Moguls are bumps in the surface of the snow that develop as skiers and snowboarders turn, pushing the snow into mounds.



FIGURE. 6.10: Facebook post pondering the impact of exposing backcountry areas on social media. SOURCE: Facebook – Australian Backcountry Group

The free sharing of capital relating to long-guarded secrets can be frustrating for some tourers, particularly in the context of the concerns raised above. Often it is the case that this is the result of a perceived potential for the core components of the embodied experience, like solitude and remoteness, to be degraded. For example in response to the questions posed in the post depicted in figure 6.10 one Facebook user suggested that ‘social media has put it [the backcountry] as right here, right now’ and that they ‘love cyber skiing, looking at places, bringing back memories BUT it is far more crowded out there’. This commenter indicates the enjoyment that they receive from the affect of others’ content of places that they are familiar with, but at the same time adopts a somewhat despondent tone about the side effects of them being able to enjoy this elongation of their own experience. Similarly, and reflecting some of the previously discussed opinions of Barry, Carl, Sandra and *neatopat*, another comment on the post proposes that:

inexperienced people have visited not understanding the conditions and associated risks and have been seriously injured... social media is much easier to consume than buying a book for your specific interests. (Reply to the Facebook post in fig. 6.10)

Again, this argument makes the distinction that there are tourers, like the commenter, who are experienced and practice safely. Meanwhile others are seen to conduct themselves without the same ‘authenticity’ and endanger other tourers that they might be in proximity of.

Conversely other tourers see the practicalities and physical demands of touring as gatekeepers that mitigate against these concerns about raising awareness of specific locations. Indeed one commenter on the Facebook post in figure 6.10 argues that:

‘the effort required to ski/split tour is the primary restriction rather than knowledge of terrain... you might see a few more hardcore tourers out there next year. You won’t see droves though’.

There is objective accuracy to this statement insofar as it is physically difficult to access many backcountry areas around the globe. Moving uphill on snow covered ground while carrying several kilograms of equipment, often at high altitude, is taxing on the body, and this can prevent those without the fitness and skills to move efficiently from venturing very far. This was very much the case at the commencement of my own touring experiences. As I had started to explore the Australian backcountry, I had also begun to read about legendary lines skied on peaks like Mt Sentinel and Watsons Crag. Without being fully aware of the considerable effort, expertise and infrequent conditions required to access these slopes I would keenly state how excited I was to ski them as soon as an opportunity arrived. Very quickly it became apparent that I had neither the skill nor fitness to contemplate attempting such feats at that stage of my touring experience. The capacities of my body acted to recalibrate the outcome of the affective inspiration I felt in reading about those lines to a process of accruing the skills and fitness necessary to do so.

With this dynamic in mind, it is also important to note that other tourers, like Lara, are partly motivated to use digital media as they ‘want people to understand how important the natural world is and to get outside’. As was explored in the previous chapter, tourers establish intimate relationships with the environments that they practice in, sometimes leading to practical and attitudinal changes in everyday life. For some like Lara, this provokes a desire to evangelise those positively perceived changes and share those experiences with their friends, family and followers. However it can be difficult for them to reconcile those sentiments with their ‘authentic’ self-identity and the reality of environmental impact of more people being drawn to the backcountry. In this context the increase in those skiing and snowboarding in the backcountry and their environmental impact is concerning for many tourers who identify as environmental stewards for the mountains:

one of the glades we cut⁶⁷ was covered in dog and human waste and garbage. It would be nice if everyone practiced 'leave no trace'⁶⁸, but it's just not realistic and that's a major downside, the more people that go through a zone because they saw something on Facebook... you can't count on everyone being on the same wavelength as far as being an environmental steward. (Bill, 27)

As was the case with Paul's encounter with the unprepared tourer, Bill is quick to fault the impact of digital media as the major contributor to the negative experience of seeing the kind of environmental impact he describes. As such, these intersections between the elements of the touring field again signify a potential struggle to preserve, the backcountry, in a literal sense, but also the values born of their experiences in it. At the same time, the perspectives of others such as Lara highlights the affordances of digital media to engender the type of environmental stewardship that Schild (2019) has explored and shown to guard against these worries.

Together the hypothetical manifestations of these concerns shared by participants and commenters on social media are representative of the unfolding dynamics found in entanglements of these technologies and other aspects of the field. At same time, some older tourers feel that these worries are unfounded and that technological innovation in all forms should be embraced, understood and utilised. Echoing the concerns expressed by Urdahl in the infancy of touring, the introduction of innovations such as avalanche beacons, airbags and GPS to the subculture have all, at different times, provoked uneasiness about their impact on the way that tourers practice. Although as Jeff posits, the influence of technological additions to the field do not necessarily produce simple positive and negative outcomes:

I mean I think it affects people's risk tolerance, can't make an argument that it doesn't. Avalanche beacons do though, having a shovel with you does, skiing with another person does, so I don't know where you draw the line.
(Jeff, 36)

⁶⁷ In some regions, forests are maintained over summer to ensure their ecological sustainability and allow touring within them that limits any direct damage to the environment.

⁶⁸ Many tourers follow a 'leave no trace' principle whereby everything they carry into the backcountry is carried out with them.

These examples underline how there are numerous variables that can affect the way that tourers engage with their practice and the outcomes of it. These are not prescriptive, but rather are dependent on individual tourer's disposition and capital. These social forces act as a framework to guide attitudes and any affective response to the incorporation of things such as digital media and technology into the array of touring practice. Nonetheless, as Dan highlights when discussing responses he received to addition of a GPS device in his touring practice, these fears persist, despite often being unfounded, narrow-sighted and poorly conceived:

... it was like: 'you can't navigate in the mountains with a GPS because the batteries will die or you'll drop it and the screen will break!' ... well I can remember a time I was on the Rogers Pass Bugaboos traverse and I didn't have GPS, I had a *paper* map and you know what happened? I dropped it in the creek, I watched it go under the snow. I've bashed technology until I realised: 'what the hell are we doing here?' Like, let's try and work with it instead of bashing it. (Dan, 47)

In this example Dan shows how analogue technology like paper maps are not necessarily any more reliable than their digital counterparts and instead of focusing on imagined potentialities, tourers should turn their attention towards effectively using what is available to support their autonomous embodied practice. Indeed for Dan, this angst over the introduction of new technology is hypocritical, suggesting that: 'if you don't like technology, give me your beacon, your airbag⁶⁹, your skis, your goggles, your pack, your fucking Gore-Tex⁷⁰'. In other words, embodied touring practice is entirely supported by various forms of technology that have been adopted and adapted by tourers to become essential elements of the principles concerning safe practice in the backcountry. For Dan, there is no reason why tourers should not be able to utilise and tailor their engagement with digital media and technology to do the same.

Emergent digital practices that challenge the taken-for-granted rules and values that some tourers hold produce concern. Tourers worry about the degree of skill, knowledge

⁶⁹ An avalanche airbag is a safety device used by tourers in the form of a backpack. Upon triggering an avalanche a tourer can instantaneously inflate bags with gases that help to keep the tourer above the avalanche (gas is less dense than snow) and protected from some impact trauma.

⁷⁰ Gore-Tex is a long established and highly regarded textile brand that produces waterproof and breathable fabrics that are used in the manufacturing of touring outerwear.

and subsequent safety with which some tourers enter the backcountry and the attitudes that are present as a result of their engagement with digital practices and virtual touring experiences. At the same time, some suggest that these concerns are misguided, and energy would be better spent adapting these digital influences to the benefit of autonomous practice. Indeed, the ways in which tourers are adapting digital media and its associated technologies to suit their 'authentic' interactions with the subculture present considerable potential to counter the negative impacts that some perceive.

'GATHER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE': AUTHENTIC ADAPTATIONS OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The same tourers who voice concerns about the impact of digital media and technology on subcultural practice and experience are also optimistic about the potential for these unfolding influences to effect positive progression for the backcountry subculture. As the accessibility of technology along with digital literacy has increased, tourers have adopted various digital media technologies and adapted them to facilitate the development of evolving virtual practices that are guided by their 'authentic' dispositions. For the NAO, digital media presents a raft of new opportunities, with the organisation suggesting that it is 'at the cusp of doing things a little bit differently... a lot of that is going to revolve around social media and taking our products into how the mainstream are communicating with each other'. Tourers have been incorporating digital elements into their practice for some time. More recently however, organisations like the NAO that stand as paragons of 'authentic' knowledge and practice have made conscious decisions to increasingly shift their focus towards virtual spaces. These changes are symptomatic of not only the prominence of digital media in the field, but also the potential for virtual practices to augment and develop conventional embodied encounters with the field.

Adaptations of digital media practice have emerged as tourers have sought to maintain established principles in light of the previously discussed challenges brought by technology. In this regard, many of the practices that are incorporated into the makeup of touring experience are grounded in the definitive values that emerge from the embodied backcountry experience. Many tourers, particularly those with significant audiences, such as Lara, use digital media to:

...bring in the thing we worship the most, Mother Earth, that's the goal... People are just losing this connection to the natural earth and I think that's where we can make a bridge. Like, we are supposed to be responsible for Mother Earth. (Lara, 29)

Inspired by their backcountry experiences, most tourers express a degree of environmental awareness and concern, and as discussed previously, becoming an environmental steward is a crucial 'authentic' principle in the field. Indeed, for professional touring athletes like Lara and Xavier de la Rue (whose Instagram post is shown in figure 6.11), using their digital profile to raise environmental awareness is an important part of their online presence. The careers of professional tourers see them consume considerable resources. From international air travel to the production of the equipment they rely upon, the reality that these modes of consumption are impacting the climate that tourers rely upon is something that many tourers are cognisant.

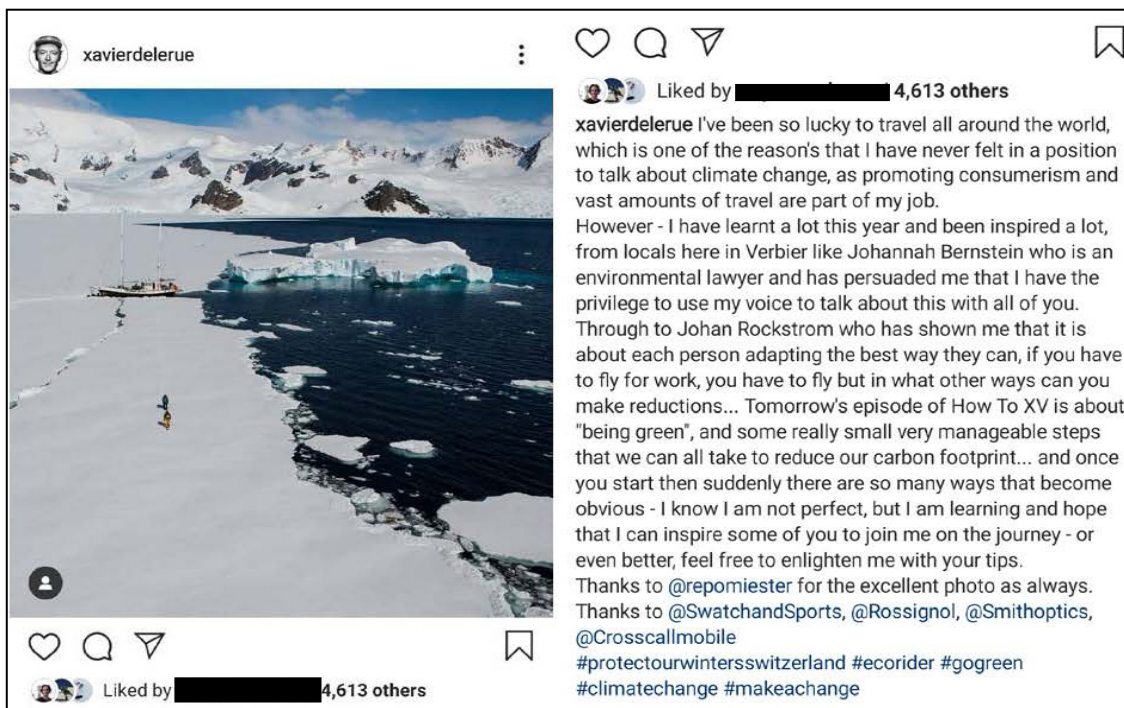


FIGURE 6.11: Professional snowboarder, Xavier de la Rue's Instagram post raising climate change discussions. SOURCE: Instagram – @xavierdelerue

This sees some use their profile to set an example, so to speak, to encourage their audience to, as de la Rue states, make an effort so 'that we can all take to reduce our carbon footprints'. Beyond this use of Facebook and Instagram to promote these ideals of environmental awareness and stewardship, examples such as *Electric Greg*, raised in

the previous chapter illuminate the depth of struggle that some tourers experience around their impact. However as Figure 6.12 displays, it is not only those tourers with large profiles that incorporate environmental discussion in their digital media practice. Digital media is often used to convey regional issues to a localised community through platforms such as Facebook pages and forums. In the case of figure 6.12 a local Facebook group has been used to convey information about the impact that touring can have on grizzly bear populations who inhabit the same backcountry that tourers do. In doing so it seeks to enact the sense of community, environmental stewardship and the learning process that tourers invest in to affect understandings of the issue, and subsequent alterations in practice to address it.



FIGURE. 6.12: Facebook post raising environmental issues within a local touring group.
SOURCE: Facebook– Backcountry Skiing Partners Rockies/Roger's Pass

The practice of tourers on social media also facilitates the sharing of important knowledge concerning the skills and techniques tourers need to support their backcountry experiences. As figure 6.13 displays, within Facebook groups and other digital platforms, these community members share information and advice about relevant equipment, events, training and education. In figure 6.13 a new tourer can be

seen asking for ‘beta’ about which backpack other tourers use. Several others can be seen responding to this request by drawing on their own experiences and preferences that have emerged from their time touring. In some cases, these groups can have more defined objectives. For instance Sandra highlights that in her community ‘there’s some women’s groups like *Jackson Babe Force* that tries to help women get into the outdoors and they organise information events and things like that’. These examples showcase yet more opportunity for digital media to be utilised in the preservation of key touring notions of ‘authentic’ practice.



FIGURE. 6.13: Facebook post seeking advice about equipment in a local touring group.
SOURCE: Facebook– Boulder Backcountry Ski & Snowboard Group

The most widely acknowledged use of digital media technologies amongst tourers is to produce and access information pertinent to an individual tourer’s corporeal practice. Essentially these digital activities are engaged with to augment established practices and as such largely revolve around the collation and dissemination of information and the cultural capital necessary to interpret it. In this regard, tourers use digital media in

several unique ways including, but not limited to: reading and posting weather reports and avalanche forecasts; discussing local conditions; and posting trip and incident reports. For those who have invested in the ‘authentic’ touring principles, the collection of this type of information is a crucial element of their practice. The increased volume and access to this knowledge that digital media provides is well received. As Carl explains: ‘it’s one of these things, when there’s a grey area you need to gather as much information as possible before you make a decision. So in that regard it’s great’. For those like Carl who are so inclined, the availability of information online means that they can equip themselves with as much data to support their practice as possible.

One example that offers the potential for further exploration of these forms of digital practice is the NAO’s Conditions Reporting Platform (CRP)⁷¹. The CRP is essentially a reporting network that allows users to access localised avalanche condition reports, and forecasts, as well as posting trip reports and their own observations of conditions. The CRP can be accessed by an app, or through the NAO’s website. As is seen in figure 6.14 the CRP app utilises familiar digital infrastructure to make the information as simple and accessible as possible. Digital maps are used to identify relevant reports, and universal colour gradient schemes and icons are included to assist in the smooth communication of this information. Similarly, the website’s reporting page includes digital form and functions users are accustomed to, like the ability to upload photographs. These features help tourers accurately and succinctly communicate their experience and observations.

⁷¹ CRP is a pseudonym.

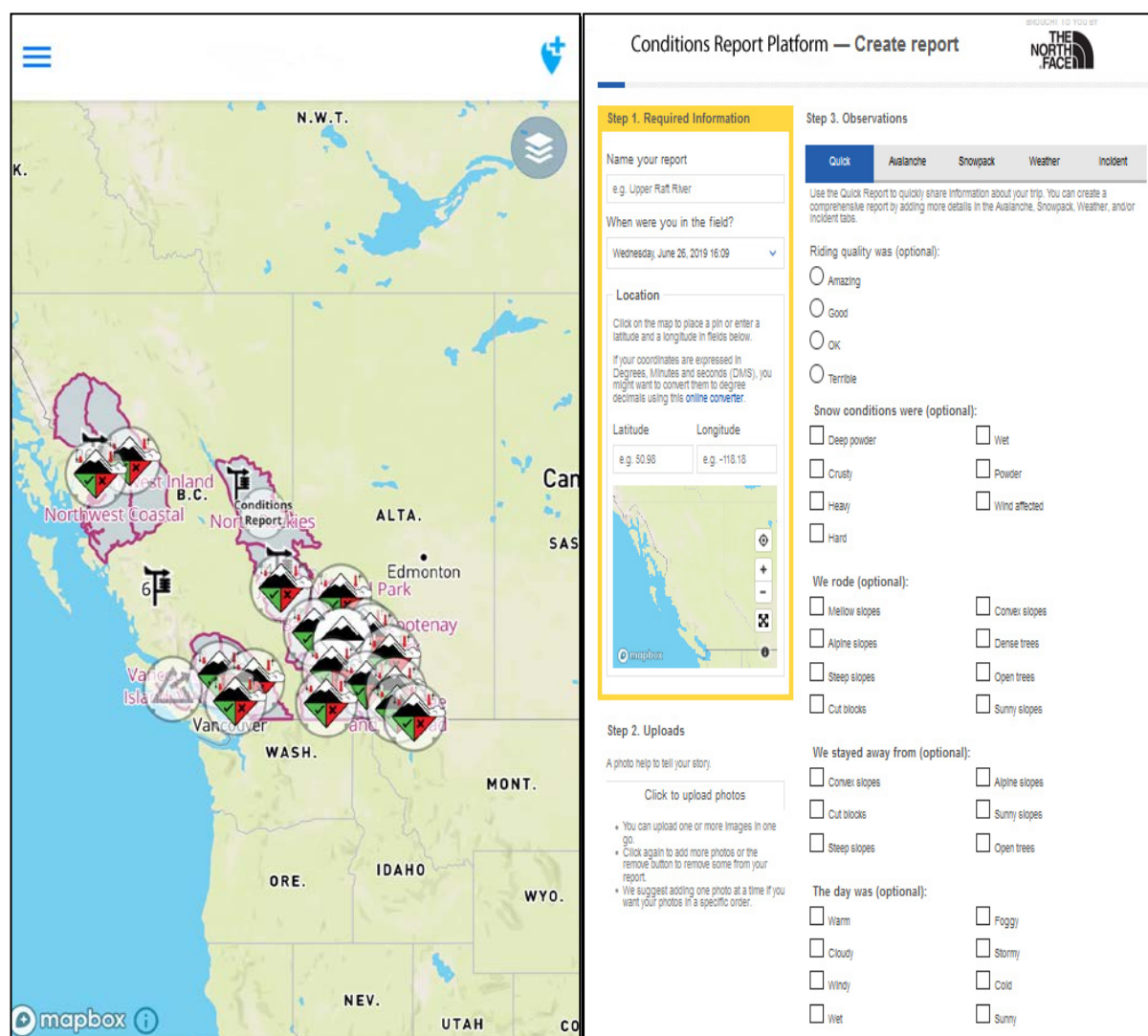
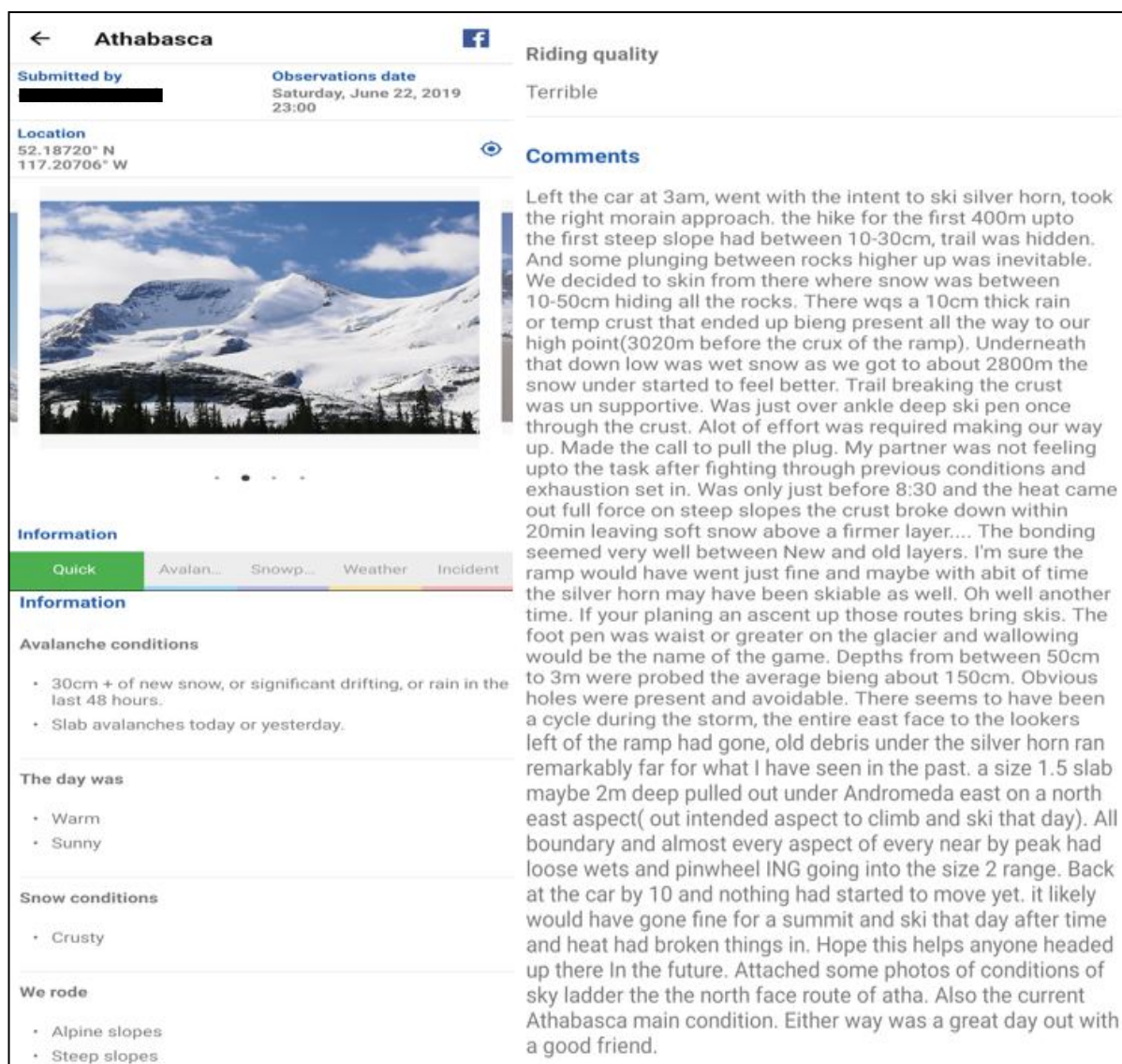


FIGURE. 6.14: CRP App landing page (left) and website reporting form (right)
SOURCE: CRP App & NAO Website

It is of note however that the NAO believe that ‘about 10% of those submissions were coming in using the app and 90% using the website’, suggesting that while tourers might use the app when they are in the backcountry to gather information, it is likely that they are not making reports until they have returned home at the end of the day. There appears to be two primary reasons for this. Firstly, tourers who observe ‘authentic’ principles and are more likely to use the CRP, prefer to incorporate digital elements into their touring practice that augment, but do not detract or distract from their embodied practice. Taking the time to complete a CRP report, on top of making the observations and analysis necessary to do so, would indeed be an unwanted delay for many tourers. Secondly, by allowing time to process their analysis and observations, tourers can

produce more accurate and useful reports. For individuals who the NAO describe as being 'engaged and interested in playing a lead role in their local communities as a safety ambassador or lead the decisions of where to go and what to do', the quality of their reports in a space like the CRP can contribute to affective atmospheres that their community tours in.

Fulfilling the community role described by the NAO, the report shown in figure 6.15 offers a detailed account of the conditions experienced by the poster and their friend. Evident through the relatively vivid language of the report, the poster has drawn on their encounters with affect – the way their body has sensed the changes in conditions – and their capital to offer a thorough consideration of those experiences. The embodied meaning making displayed here serves add to the knowledge of other tourers by engaging their own experiences to parse the detailed information in the report. With quality information available in this way community engagement with technology like the CRP app means that tourers can affect widespread and increased observation of the principles that inform 'authentic' practice. Furthermore, the practices of producing reports such as that in figure 6.15 stands as another opportunity to have backcountry self-identity validated and achieve a distinguished status for tourers amongst their peers, locally or otherwise. Indeed, the NAO reports anecdotally that 'there is a core group of people who are keen within each area... something like 70% of observations are probably made by 20% of users'. These approximations underline the opportunity for distinction that these practices present.



Athabasca

Submitted by [redacted] Observations date: Saturday, June 22, 2019 23:00

Location: 52.18720° N 117.20706° W

Riding quality: Terrible

Comments:

Left the car at 3am, went with the intent to ski silver horn, took the right morain approach. the hike for the first 400m upto the first steep slope had between 10-30cm, trail was hidden. And some plunging between rocks higher up was inevitable. We decided to skin from there where snow was between 10-50cm hiding all the rocks. There was a 10cm thick rain or temp crust that ended up being present all the way to our high point (3020m before the crux of the ramp). Underneath that down low was wet snow as we got to about 2800m the snow under started to feel better. Trail breaking the crust was un-supportive. Was just over ankle deep ski pen once through the crust. A lot of effort was required making our way up. Made the call to pull the plug. My partner was not feeling upto the task after fighting through previous conditions and exhaustion set in. Was only just before 8:30 and the heat came out full force on steep slopes the crust broke down within 20min leaving soft snow above a firmer layer.... The bonding seemed very well between New and old layers. I'm sure the ramp would have went just fine and maybe with a bit of time the silver horn may have been skiable as well. Oh well another time. If your planing an ascent up those routes bring skis. The foot pen was waist or greater on the glacier and wallowing would be the name of the game. Depths from between 50cm to 3m were probed the average being about 150cm. Obvious holes were present and avoidable. There seems to have been a cycle during the storm, the entire east face to the lookers left of the ramp had gone, old debris under the silver horn ran remarkably far for what I have seen in the past. a size 1.5 slab maybe 2m deep pulled out under Andromeda east on a north east aspect(out intended aspect to climb and ski that day). All boundary and almost every aspect of every near by peak had loose wets and pinwheel ING going into the size 2 range. Back at the car by 10 and nothing had started to move yet. it likely would have gone fine for a summit and ski that day after time and heat had broken things in. Hope this helps anyone headed up there in the future. Attached some photos of conditions of sky ladder the north face route of atha. Also the current Athabasca main condition. Either way was a great day out with a good friend.

Information

Quick | Avalan... | Snowp... | Weather | Incident

Information

Avalanche conditions

- 30cm + of new snow, or significant drifting, or rain in the last 48 hours.
- Slab avalanches today or yesterday.

The day was

- Warm
- Sunny

Snow conditions

- Crusty

We rode

- Alpine slopes
- Steep slopes

FIGURE. 6.15: An example CRP report
SOURCE: CRP App

However despite the commitment that these CRP contributors have to quality and useful information, tourers express a need to be discerning about the value of information that these technologies collate. Trevor argues that 'if people are out there taking forum posts as gospel... that seems dangerous to me'. The user generated nature of internet forums and apps like the CRP mean that there is limited ability to control the quality of information that is shared. Anyone can create an account and after satisfying some basic requirements, post on TGR's 'The Slide Zone' (see fig 6.5) or submit a CRP report. In some instances the communities that occupy these spaces can police the content through platform infrastructure such as commenting, liking or reporting to admins. Nonetheless the potential remains for 'bad' information to be shared and interpreted by these

communities. The NAO itself posits that some of the CRP posts may not be particularly helpful, but also highlight some efficient methods of discerning the quality of information in a report:

I found within 5 to 10 seconds I would know if the [CRP] post was useful and had valuable information. And the two things there are whether or not it had photos, and the second thing is: does it describe an accurate situation. But I'd say maybe 80% of [CRP] posts have something useful.

(NAO)

The NAO is suggesting here that a post that includes a photograph is inherently useful because information can be gleaned from the picture, regardless of the accompanied text. Secondly, by making a fast assessment of the nature of the content, tourers can assess if a post will be useful. However both methods rely upon pre-existing knowledge and skills that not all tourers who make use of platforms like the CRP possess. To be able to interpret the information in a post like that of figure 6.16, a tourer requires experience, knowledge of snow science and the capacity to apply it in order to make use of what it describes. Furthermore, some tourers, like Michelle, feel as though the users of the CRP and similar services may not be the most in need of what it offers:

I feel like the people that are engaged with it are people like me who probably don't need it. I can sit down with my roommate and get it on Infoex⁷² and get it that way, I don't really need the [CRP], but I look at it.

(Michelle, 31)

As such, the current efficacy of these platforms is limited and this is partly the reason why organisations such as the NAO are consciously making decisions to further engage with digital platforms and make better use of their potentials. By continuing to adapt digital media and associated technologies, organisations such as the NAO have the opportunity to bolster the efficiency and accuracy with which they deliver their products, and subsequently preserve and spread 'authentic' values, skills and practice.

Ultimately tourers perceive these virtual encounters as positive avenues for growth within the backcountry field. For Trevor these unfolding changes represent the

⁷² Infoex is an industry level snow and weather conditions raw data reporting and information exchange platform.

opportunity for ‘embodied echoes’ (Bunn 2016) to supplement his physical practice and he believes that the ability of these to affect other tourers is a positive influence:

I look online and I’m constantly looking at forums, and the conversations always have a safety component, it seems like that’s maybe the number one thing... So I think things are drastically improving, especially compared to when I started, it was, you know, the internet was there but it was hard to get information like we can now. (Trevor, 45)

Tourers recognise the potential for digital media to help maintain the skills and knowledge of the broader community. This describes a situation that can ensure that as much as digital media might inspire unsafe practices, it can also be used as a dispensary to equip tourers with the capital they need to explore the backcountry in a way that other deem safe and ‘authentic’. This sees tourers like Phil find social media useful ‘when I can learn something. I think in that regard it’s really good, there are lots of websites with reviews and that kind of thing’. Tourers engage with practices that maintain their adherence to notions of safety and the indefinite acquisition of knowledge. In doing so they use digital media to collate, preserve and codify touring practices, utilising platform infrastructures to quantify and define what is authentic and appropriate.

As explored in the discussion of the CRP, in such virtual sites of struggle over autonomous legitimacy, tourers accumulate capital and status based on the accuracy, usefulness and volume of their contributions. Subsequently tourers like those described by the NAO as ‘engaged and interested’ can achieve significant distinction and reverence in digital touring spaces and Carl explains how:

it became quite cool to know what you’re doing over the years. Kind of like when I grew up, it was like, you thought guides were lame. And then it became quite cool to become knowledgeable. (Carl, 35)

The evolution of attitudes that Carl describes coincides with the advent of digital media and the possibility for tourers to engage in virtual practices in which they display their ‘authenticity’. This connection highlights the affective potential for autonomous adaptations of digital media practice to assuage the concerns that some tourers hold through their ability to preserve, codify and widen the reach of conventional touring *illusio* and *doxa*.

The concerted efforts of tourers to establish, refine and share legitimised forms of knowledge, values, embodied practice and experience through their adaptations to digital practice serves to counteract the angst that more heteronomous virtual participation generates. Exposure to and exploration of the content produced in these practices affectively orientates tourers towards the conventional touring principles, endowing them with ‘authentic’ cultural and social capital in form of knowledge, skills information and local relationships. In the past access to this capital was largely through mentorship and time spent developing skills through experience. Digital media has democratised that process, with new modes of mentorship made possible by committed and localised individuals whose expert status can be validated and contributions amplified through the production and consumption of digital touring content to reach more tourers and affectively direct their understandings and the nature of embodied touring practice.

TEXT, IMAGES AND BIG DATA: THE AFFECTS OF PLATFORM FUNCTIONALITY

Tourers regularly use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and a number of touring specific forums, blogs and networks to engage with the subculture and participate in the various practices detailed above. As other studies have shown (see Boyd 2011; Handyside & Ringrose 2017; Leaver, Highfield and Abidin 2020; Marwick 2013; Senft 2008) the design of these platforms promote unique modes of use, and as such these variations in functionality impact the nature of tourers’ engagement and experience of them. Indeed, even variation within these media platforms can induce such differences. Some platforms promote modes of digital practices that reflect authentic principles and identity, while others are more conducive to use that reflects the unfolding challenges to that status quo.

The infrastructure of more textual based platforms such as Facebook and touring specific blogs, forums and networks provide the necessary stage for digital touring practices that have been adapted to conform to ‘authentic’ values held by some tourers. These types of platforms provide the space and facilities for in-depth discussion about information that some tourers seek to prepare themselves for the embodied experience (see figs. 6.13; 6.14). Furthermore, by creating local or regional Facebook pages or forum threads, tourers can further coalesce into geographically proximate communities. This not only provides access to a greater quantity and quality of relevant information about avalanche

safety and touring routes for example, but also community events and initiatives that, as previous highlighted, often pertain to established principles such as environmental stewardship and making strong connections with other tourers (see fig. 6.10; 6.11; 6.12). Ultimately the infrastructure of these types of platforms encourage and allow tourers to tailor their digital experience to reflect their observance of these their shared ideals. However, that is not to say that platforms such as Facebook are void of content that can be categorised in the 'extreme' aesthetic. Visual representations of edgework, moments of precarity and 'gnarly-ness' are all still to be found on touring forums and Facebook pages, but they are not the predominate form of content that tourers engage with in these virtual spaces.

Meanwhile the inherent visual nature of some platforms such as Instagram promote modes of digital practices that highlight the more 'extreme' elements of the touring experience. As a result, tourers vie for attention by producing content that is intended to excite, inspire and titillate audiences by capturing the extreme, or 'gnarly', elements of edgework and the corporeal touring experience (see figs. 6.3; 6.7). Moreover, the ability to alter and enhance content, that is, the editing of photos and video with sophisticated software, means that tourers often engage with these practices to garner attention with hyperreal depictions of touring. As such this content can present a challenge to the orthodoxy of the conventional values in the subculture. Nonetheless, the currency of Instagram – likes, views and follows – serve to quantify and legitimise these practices amongst tourers who engage with them and consume the content that they produce. During my fieldwork in Revelstoke I was able to use these dynamics to generate interest in the project and recruit participants. Initially my attempts to do so were largely unsuccessful as my posts maintained a simple and text based approach which I ultimately realised did not conform to the doxa of Instagram field. By altering my approach to include the use of editing, hashtags, tagging of people and more visual stimulation (see figs. 4.3; 6.1), I enjoyed a degree of success by forging into this ecology of attention and managed to recruit several participants as a result.

However as has been suggested throughout this chapter, these differences in platform infrastructures do not simply constitute a dichotomy between autonomous and heteronomous practice. Indeed, there are also inbuilt utilities of Instagram that present

variables to the nature of this engagement. Here it is important to delineate between a regular, permanent Instagram post and the more temporal Instagram ‘story’. ‘Stories’ are posts that can be cumulatively added to by the user to create a narrative that might cover a whole day or trip. As Michelle notes, ‘...the ‘stories’ trend now, where things are more like real life... like permanent images, people only post their really good ones, but ‘stories’ kind of represent how the day is happening as it is, and that’s cool to see’. Instead of only displaying the pinnacles of a tourer’s success, ‘stories’ are used to convey the trials and tribulations of touring that practitioners regularly encounter. Figure 6.16 shows one such ‘story’ that typifies this aesthetic. The series of images in the post include depictions of elements like getting prepared at a trailhead⁷³; skinning uphill for several hours through changing terrain; conducting snow-study tests⁷⁴; environmental beauty; edgework; and celebrating at the end of the day. For many tourers with dispositions developed in autonomous practice, new digital engagements of this mode are appealing as the narratives that are depicted match with their own experiences of the backcountry. As can be seen from figure 6.17 Instagram users also employ regular Instagram posts to share their knowledge. Tips and tricks are offered for other tourers who find them useful in their embodied practices, and indeed the visual orientation of platforms such as Instagram can be useful in this regard. In the post shown in figure 6.17 the poster has used a series of images to explain a resourceful method to repair a broken ski binding in the backcountry. Encounters with social media in this way work to change the nature of ‘authentic’ practice by transposing autonomous practice from the backcountry to the screen. These social media platforms and the spectrum of engagement that they encourage are not the only sites of virtual practices for tourers.

⁷³ Trailhead is a term used to describe the point at which tourers enter the backcountry. They can be formalised locations with car parking and information boards, or simply the starting point for entry into touring areas.

⁷⁴ Field observation tests to measure avalanche and other snow conditions.

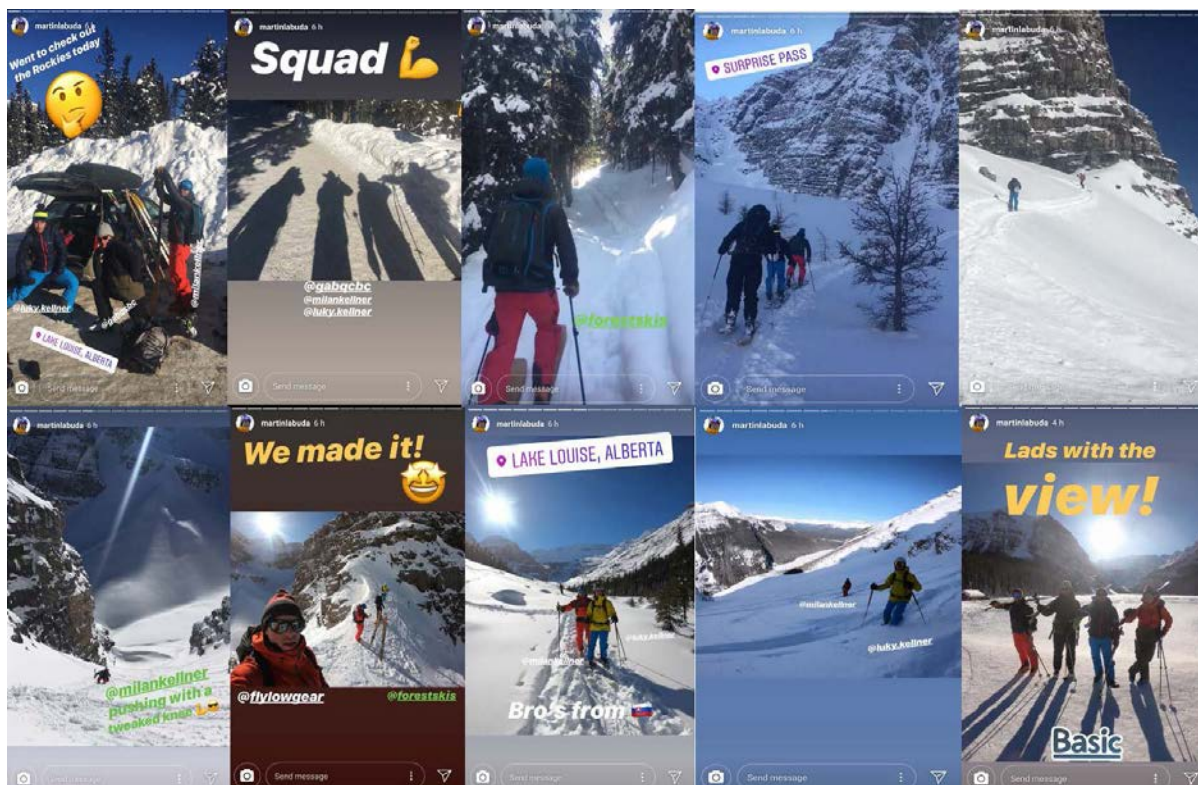


FIGURE 6.16: Narrative driven Instagram 'stories' post conveying snapshots of the different aspects of the embodied touring experience.

Source: Instagram - @martinlabuda

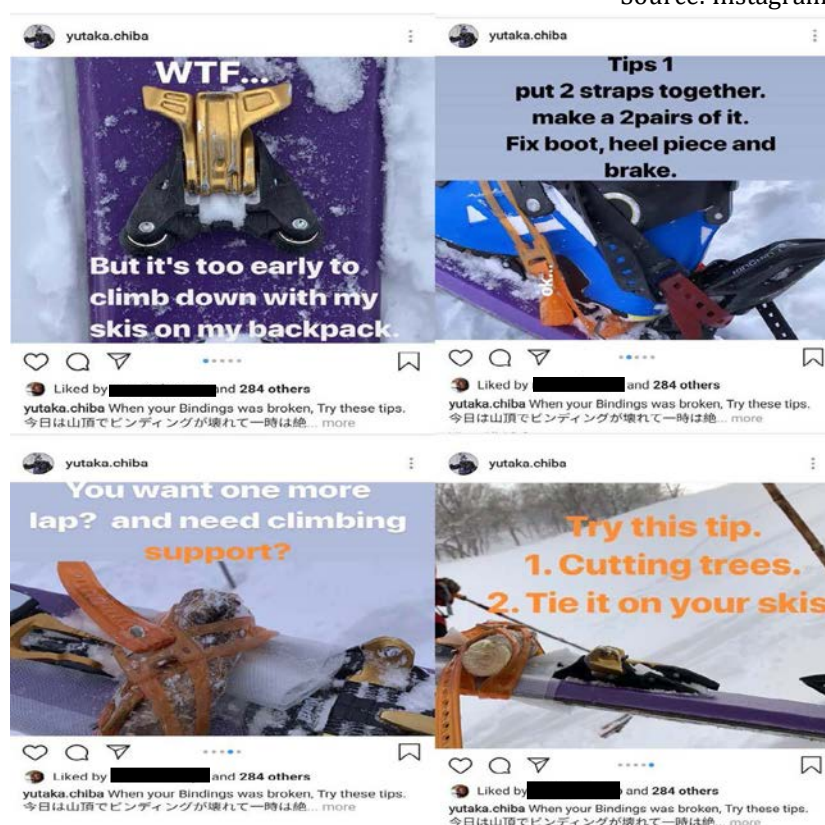


FIGURE 6.17: A series of Instagram posts with tips for repairing broken equipment in the backcountry. SOURCE: Instagram - @yutaka.chiba

As a significant portion of touring related digital content is audio visual, video streaming services such as YouTube are inevitably a site of tourers' virtual practice and engagement. Like other platforms, the touring content on YouTube is as varied as it is extensive. Hours upon hours of adrenalin charged short 'edits' of touring edgework and indeed accidents and incidents are available for tourers to consume, offering the type of inspiration and experience augmentation described earlier in the chapter. Some tourers contribute to this collection of content, producing their own 'edits' that attempt to reproduce the extreme edgework aesthetic as is allowed by the ability to self-produce and publish. More interestingly however, this democratization of audio visual content production that platforms like YouTube provide, means that tourers are now able to produce content that preserves and champions the conventional principles of the subculture. In other words, unbridled by profit driven production companies and the demand for 'ski porn', tourers now have the capacity to counter the type of content and representations of embodied backcountry experience that they worry could lead to unsafe practices. An example of this dynamic can be seen in a YouTube series that was launched over the 2018/19 Northern Winter by one participant, Charles. The videos consistently highlight the process of touring. They show the planning, discomfort, issues, safety concerns, tedium and failures that come with spending time in the backcountry, leaving only a small portion of each video dedicated to showcasing the athlete's high level edgework. As will be explored further in the following chapter, Charles has leveraged his position as an established professional skier to make his project possible. Charles can use his status to ensure that his video series can capture enough attention to make supporting the project worthwhile for his sponsors. Therefore allowing the content that he produces to veer away from the 'ski porn' of conventional commercially backed projects to instead focus on more holistic representations of the backcountry.

These variations in the way that tourers engage with specific platforms and technologies presents several practical considerations for bodies such as the NAO, who aim to reach as wide an audience as possible with their reporting and forecasting products. The NAO conceptualises the consumption of their products in two categories, 'push' and 'pull'. 'Pull' consumption describes the active seeking out of information and the NAO:

feel that users who are keen and engaged and interested in playing a lead role in their local communities as a safety ambassador or lead the decisions

of where to go and what to do, those people are highly motivated so they'll pull that information regardless of where it is. (NAO)

These types of tourers have heavily invested in 'authentic' principles. And their engagement with a process of knowledge acquisition and observance of safe practice mean that the NAO is confident about their abilities to be informed. That is to say, the 'pull' consumption that the NAO describes refers to groups of tourers who are active in resourcing the available information from whichever sources they can. Whereas 'push' based use sees the information provided directly and purposefully to the user. In this regard the NAO envisages:

a secondary group of people who might be without the same planning elements and we feel as though they might be better served by a push element, something comes to them so they don't have to remember to do it, they don't have to take that extra step of going to the website. (NAO)

This categorisation allows for some parallels to be drawn between them and the tourers' dispositions and the digital practices that they engage with. The seeking and collection of information the 'pull' category describes can be understood as form of autonomous virtual practice, while a 'push' user is more likely to practice closer to the heteronomous pole. As such it is important to understand the impacts of platform functionality and tourers' engagement with it for organisation such as NAO to operate as effectively as possible, and moreover to recognise the potential to harness and make use of what digital technology affords.

The opportunity to harvest data of this nature has been noticed by the NAO who have put efforts into developing and refining their CRP smartphone app which the organisation describe as:

important for people who want to fire up the app when they're going into the mountains and that's all it does, they don't need to remember what website to go to or anything. (NAO)

Nonetheless the NAO recognises the further potential that digital media and technology offers to widen the reach of their reports and forecasting and are actively planning and developing ways to take advantage of this dynamic, suggesting that the organisation is:

going to be in the business of tailoring our products to suit specific user groups a lot more. We're going to be moving into a time where we're going

to be placing certain pieces of information within certain products purposefully. (NAO)

These possibilities for the NAO to expand the efficacy of the information and products they disseminate represent the potential of digital technologies to support the maintenance and observation of approaches to the backcountry grounded in principles around safe practice and learning.

Big data, the internet of things and the integration of capacities are all relevant developments that could also be harnessed in this context. One particular form of this potential exists in the availability and abundance of GPS and location data generated by the ubiquity of devices that quantify the body (Lupton 201; 2017). As described in the previous chapter, many tourers carry smartphones or other devices with them in the backcountry and it is also common for them to generate self-tracking data during their corporeal practices. These technological practices capture information specific to tourers bodies, but also data about collective trends of the touring community in particular locations. As such, it is identified by both tourers and the NAO that relevant data of this nature could be utilised to significant effect. For Michelle, the use of push notifications and location data through the CRP app could help to get important information to those who it most pertains in that moment: 'One thing that I really want to see happen with it is when people arrive in a popular parking, lot they get a push notification of the day's avalanche conditions'. By delivering pertinent information, triggered by a user's location, organisation like the NAO would have the ability to inform tourers about conditions, even if they have not made the same proactive preparations that those like Michelle have previously described.

These possibilities are underpinned by the ability to make use of the data that tourers produce concerning their bodies and practice. For the NAO, gaining access to self-tracking GPS data would be invaluable:

We would love to know where our users go. We have very large regions in [this country] and almost on a daily basis we have discussions about: where does the data apply? Where are you pitching those dangers? We think we know where people are going, but I think our knowledge is based on personal experience, what we hear and where we go ourselves, so it's very

likely bias and not accurate. So, I think it's a great idea and I'd be very interested in seeing some of that data for sure. (NAO)

As such, gaining access to GPS location data would be of immense value to the organisation in terms of directing resources towards areas and communities that need, or could make best use of them. Indeed, the potential applications of these forms of data are indefinite for both tourers and organisations like the NAO alike. At the same time however, the emergence of these nodes provokes discussion of them in the context of immaterial/affective labour that will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The functionality of the various digital platforms that tourers engage with has direct implications on the nature of those virtual interactions. The infrastructure of platforms encourages, but does not prescribe, particular modes of use that fall along a spectrum of autonomous and heteronomous practice. The way that tourers adopt and adapt to the functionality of platforms presents insights into their touring dispositions and self-identity, and broader becomings of affective encounters between the immateriality of media, the materiality of technology, and tourers' bodies.

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of digital technologies, practices involving them, and the products of their use are unfolding influences in the touring field. Together the emergence of these features within the subculture contribute to an affective atmosphere that acts to alter the approach and practice of some individuals in the subculture. The advent of digital media has meant that tourers are now able to consume and produce a vast array of touring content. The nature of this media is a representation of the struggles that have emerged around it. Some articulations of these practices result in content that valorises the extremity of edgework, seeking to capitalise on the attention that scintillating exhibitions of touring can bring. In this regard, some touring content glamorises the inherent risks of the backcountry, while also constituting derivations of 'the Red Bull sublime' that celebrate human conquest of the natural world and the technology that allows it. Many tourers have become concerned that the affectivity of these portrayals of touring encourage unsafe practice and approaches to the backcountry from those who have not honed their dispositions through observation of 'authentic' practice.

However, many of the tourers who share those worries also describe how the intrusion of digital media can stand to preserve the values in which they have invested. By offering dynamic new ways of sharing and collecting information digital technology offers one avenue of resistance to the degradation of conventional touring ideals that some perceive. Tourers can access a multitude of platforms wherein they can interact to equip themselves with sophisticated information and understandings about their practice, acting to develop touring dispositions in a similar manner as those constructed through the mentorship that has characterised routes to the backcountry in the past. While the outcomes of these engagements with technology are heavily determined by tourers' existing understandings of the backcountry, the inbuilt functionality of specific digital platforms also plays a role in encouraging particular online depictions and interpretations of touring. Image based platforms like Instagram and YouTube offer a habitat for tourers to depict their embodied prowess, the beauty and scale of the backcountry and their touring self-identity. At the same time the space provided in spaces such as localised Facebook groups and TGR forums present emergent opportunities for detailed, text based discussion of knowledge relevant to 'authentic' practice.

Together these evolving manifestations of the struggles over legitimised modes of practice that occur between the autonomous and heteronomous are representative of significant change to the backcountry field. The practices of touring has been expanded beyond those that are embodied and physical to increasingly include activity conducted behind the glow of a smartphone. As such what it means to be a tourer, and the performance of touring self-identities are now entangled with the myriad possibilities offered by digital media and their associated technologies.

7. 'SEX SELLS, BUT SAFETY DOES TOO': THE COMMERCIALISATION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY FIELD.

INTRODUCTION

The commercial composition of the touring field has seen rapid evolution in recent years, expanding from a niche of the snowsports market, to become a significant focus for commercial actors beyond snow and lifestyle sports. As such this thesis builds on the forms of BMX commercialisation offered by Edwards and Corte (2010) to posit a 4 part model of touring commercialisation. In doing so, this chapter explores the unique ways in which different categories of tourers reconcile these struggles and take advantage of new opportunities that occur in interactions between their touring-self identities, equipment and commercial forces. From touring athlete's needing to deal with jarring experiences of producing self-promotional content, to evolutions in the consumption options and practices of recreational tourers, the commercial nature of the field has increasingly strong influence on how tourers encounter the subculture.

Until recently the touring industry was serviced by a relatively small range of largely independent commercial actors who were supported by an equivalently sized market of tourers. In this context these commercial actors delivered all the products and services that tourers consume. From specialised equipment manufacturers and independent retailers who sell their products; to guides and avalanche forecasters, the needs of tourers have long been catered to by these types of businesses. They are owned and operated by tourers who use their cultural capital to offer products and services that not only appeal to tourers and their needs, but also preserve subcultural values. For example, there are a number of snowsports retailers in Revelstoke who offer similar ranges of touring products, however some have been long delineated as backcountry or touring shops, while others are seen to be snowsports shop that sell touring gear. This distinction manifests through the prominent display of products like maps and guidebooks, along with staff gently directing their advice for customers enquiring about touring towards the knowledge and equipment to engage with the backcountry in a safer manner. While these atmospheres have always appealed to tourers, grassroots commercial actors now find themselves in a situation whereby they have been exposed to new competition and

challenges. At the same time however, these changes to nature of backcountry industry provides opportunities for these grassroots actors to engage with a much bigger market.

With this in mind, the commercial space of the backcountry field is now much more complex than it was just 10 years ago. There are 3 emergent forms of commercialisation developing to vie with grassroots modes to capitalise on the increased popularity and compete for the attention of touring consumers. As has been shown to be the case in the commercialisation of numerous other lifestyle sports including BMX, parkour, skateboarding, snowboarding and surfing (see Beal & Wilson, 2004; Coates et al., 2010; Edwards and Corte, 2010; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013; Stranger, 2010; Thorpe & Dumont, 2019; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2019), touring has seen its subcultural styles and aesthetics co-opted for the purposes of marketing un-related consumer products. This form of commercialisation utilises depictions of high-level edgework and an aesthetic of more ‘extreme’ touring to entice interest in products that are sold in this context. These types of depictions, while showing elements of touring practice and experience, do little to contextualise their use and as such often feature inaccuracies (for example, incorrect applications of equipment) or practice that is contrary to that which tourers engage. As can be seen in figure 7.1 examples of this include images of touring being used in advertisements for products such as a mobile sports gambling app.



FIGURE 7.1: Screenshots from *Bet365* T.V advertisement with depictions of touring
SOURCE: <youtube.com/watch?v=23omFtns3OI>

In this case a tourer is shown using their smartphone, while skinning through alpine terrain, to connect with a gambling app, signifying the potential to gamble anywhere, even in the remoteness of the backcountry. As has been described in the previous chapter, the use of technology like mobile phones in the backcountry is not at all uncommon, but the way that tourers make use of these technologies is antithetical to the situation present in the advertisement. There has also been an emergent opportunity for auxiliary industries to capitalise on the consumption practices of tourers and the commercialisation of the sub-culture. Many tourers do not necessarily live in alpine regions where touring takes places, and as such hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related business have been able to capitalise on the growth of touring. This has seen these types of business market themselves to tourers, offering amenities that tourers may find attractive.

Most significantly however the commercial evolution of the touring industry has seen mainstream snowsports equipment manufactures and brands becoming much more involved in offering products to backcountry specific markets. As the Product and Marketing Chief at Kästle⁷⁵, Philipp Giselsbrecht has explained that ‘the trend in the Alpine region is continuing, in the touring sector especially, and we’re registering major growth’ (Klingelhofer, 2018.b). This growth of the touring market has meant that entering into competition for that market is much more attractive for companies who see new customers and profits emanating from the backcountry sub-culture. In discussing the future direction of Active Brands⁷⁶, CEO Espen Krogstad highlights the attention touring and tourers hold for these commercial actors:

We expect a particular increase in ski touring. Sweet Protection, within the Active Brands Group, has increased its focus on the segment with a new apparel line for ski touring. That’s a development for Sweet Protection, as the brand comes from the freeriding sector. Thus, this user group is a “new” target group for us. (Klingelhofer, 2018.b)

This targeting of the touring market has induced new and more robust commercial competition as mainstream snowsports actors introduce new options and, at times, greater value for the consumption of touring equipment. Indeed, as is explained by

⁷⁵ Kästle is an Austrian ski manufacturer.

⁷⁶ Active Brands are a Scandinavian group of outdoor recreation equipment manufacturers.

Hilmar Bolle, a Country Manager for Rossignol⁷⁷, mainstream snowsports brands use their unfolding focus on touring to augment the development of products and equipment for that mainstream market:

The starting point in our product development often stems from the extreme requirements in these niches [touring]. We derive products for other target groups from this variety of the sport. (Regel, 2018)

In other words, by engaging with innovative equipment designs that support the edgework and embodied practice of touring, companies like Rossignol can generate significant knowledge and experience which is then fed back into the production of mainstream snowsports goods. Ultimately these companies rely upon their engagement with touring athletes to help develop their products and ensure that they provide the performance that tourers desire. For example, touring athletes like Carl and Charles (whose experience of commercialisation is further discussed below) have been heavily involved designing and testing touring specific products that have been introduced by their mainstream snowsports sponsors. As a result these brands can enjoy some of the benefit of an 'authentic' touring self-identity, with the symbolic capital of athletes like Charles and Carl bestowing a legitimacy for these companies amongst tourers when the influence of these athletes can mean that brands are able to successfully reproduce sub-culturally valid aesthetics. At the same time however, mainstream snowsports companies are often less directly involved in the creation and maintenance of subcultural values, for instance around prioritising safety.

By building on the model of lifestyle sports commercialisation presented by Edwards and Corte (2010), these changes to the backcountry industry can be described in four categories that are outlined in table 7.1. At the grassroots level, commercial activity is characterised as integral to the practice of touring. The defining feature of grassroots lifestyle sports commercialisation is the integral involvement of tourers. Whether they be owner/operators of localised stores selling equipment and offering advice and knowledge or equipment manufacturers that specialise in touring gear, all these modes of commercial involvement are driven by tourers themselves. As well as providing materials and knowledge about practice many of the values and principles of the field are

⁷⁷ Rossignol is a French snowsports equipment manufacturer.

maintained and supported by the activity of grassroots commercial actors. Moving through these strata, mainstream snowsports also contribute to the performance of touring and how it is experienced. With recent growth in participation there is increased impetus for manufacturers and brands that have conventionally focused on the more common forms of snowsports to engage with the touring market. These commercial actors are not always staffed by tourers, but it is often the case through sponsorship of athletes, that those who venture into the backcountry are involved in the development of new products. These dynamics have combined with the size and capital of these companies to offer tourers with a raft of new innovations and options when it comes to their consumption of backcountry products. At the same time, businesses like hotels and restaurants within region where tourers travel have also sought to capitalise on the popularity of the backcountry. For example, in partnership with a local guiding company my accommodation in Revelstoke offered discounted backcountry guiding, dependent on a minimum stay, in order to entice more of the touring market. Again, these businesses do not necessarily employ tourers. However in mountain communities, restaurants, hotels and other actors in the hospitality industry are often a major source of seasonal employment for tourers. Finally mass market commercialisation describes the co-optation of depictions and interpretations of touring experience to market unrelated products. As highlighted in figure 7.1 often this activity is divorced from established touring principles and does not involve the perspectives of tourers themselves.

Together these developments in the commercial nature of the touring field signify a departure from the grassroots commercial activity that defined the industry for much of its existence. As a result tourers' experiences have also been altered, offering new ways for tourers to engage with the sub-culture and progress through the field at the same time as presenting noteworthy challenges to orthodox principles that have defined touring practice and experience in the past.

TABLE 7.1: Forms of touring commercialisation

Form of Commercialisation	Products/Services	Tourers' Involvement	Consumers
Grassroots	Independent Retail, Backcountry Guiding, Avalanche Education and Forecasting, Equipment Manufacturing Touring specific media	Tourers own and control these brands, employing others tourers to design, develop and market products.	Tourers
Mainstream Snowsports	Equipment manufacturing and retail, Snowsports media that exhibits touring.	Tourers are employed and have some influence over product design and brand identity.	Tourers, mainstream skiers and snowboarders
Auxiliary Industry	Hotels, restaurant and other tourist business in areas where touring is prominent.	May be employed in secondary industries but is not directly related to touring	Tourers, mainstream skiers and snowboarders
Mass Market	Mass-market consumer products unrelated to touring	Limited - none	Broader consumer market

PROFESSIONAL TOURING ATHLETES' EXPERIENCE OF COMMERCIALISATION.

Professional touring athletes have faced significant and unique changes to their roles and responsibilities within the backcountry industry. In the last 10 years the role of a touring athlete has moved away from largely being just the performance of high level edgework to encompass a range of practices. These relate to the proliferation of digital media, as discussed in the previous chapter. It was once the case that any editing or production of touring footage was conducted by a group of diversely skilled individuals (videographers, editors, producers etc.). Athletes today must now equip themselves and their bodies with the relevant skills to take on these roles with increasingly sophisticated digital literacy to allow for the self-production of content. In doing so there is also the expectation from sponsors that athletes will cultivate an online profile by conducting affective labour to facilitate engagement with the expanding audience for touring content. As professional skier Jemima explains, establishing an online presence and following has become just as important for touring athletes as their corporeal practice and athletic performance:

It's ridiculously important. I hate it. The focus has turned from quality to content and numbers. At the beginning of my career, you were noticed if you were good. Now people are noticed because they have figured out Instagram and they don't really need to know much about skiing or the mountains. It's a slippery slope. (Jemima, 36)

Like Jemima describes, many athletes view this evolution negatively. Their encounters with the inbuilt metrics of social media platforms have created new ways for sponsors and other interested commercial parties to gauge the reach of the athletes they use to advertise. Therefore aspiring athletes need to be concerned with their ability to 'get the likes' and the crossroads it forms with their embodied practice and edgework. These dynamics present a challenge to orthodox touring principles concerning the sanctity of that embodied practice and experience. The expectation of digital presence and 'getting the likes' significantly shifts the landscape of identity for tourers – where commercial interests through digital presence become reified and prioritised on the same level, or above, the physical and athletic expertise and practice of the sport. In other words, athletes often see themselves first and foremost as tourers, but as these commercially driven responsibilities emerge and become so important, they struggle to reconcile this with an authentic touring practice. Furthermore, the alignment between commercial interests and tourers are seen to be actively eroding the significance of embodied touring

practice. For many athletes like Lara, the commercialisation of the backcountry industry is directly to blame.

It's [social media metrics] everything for them... You're in a corporate world and numbers are the one thing that translates. It makes sense to people that don't live in the mountains. (Lara, 29)

This frustrates tourers whose embodied labour has become alienated from their success in the industry because an athlete's value is increasingly measured in likes and views rather than their ability to demonstrate embodied prowess. It may be the case that content which shows high level corporeal practice can produce high levels of engagement that sponsors are looking for, but this is not always the case. Indeed increasing commercialisation also increases the potential for the commercial exploitation of things like gendered beauty stereotypes, as Carl explains: 'I'm sorry to say it but if you're a cute girl and have a cute ass and put that on there, it's gonna get a lot of likes'. The permeation of these types of broader social norms and expectations is jarring for touring athletes who find their value being measured by like how well they measure up to conventional beauty standards rather than how well they ski or snowboard.

As a result of the way that many athletes characterise these experiences of the intersections of their bodies and the immaterial, they are quick to identify the labour that they do digitally as *work*. Jemima highlights this when she says that she sees 'it as work. So much that I can't understand why the general population would want to bother with having an online presence'. As Lara puts it, 'it's not like I'm just going skiing everyday'. Indeed, successfully crafting an attention grabbing online presence requires careful planning and strategic thinking about how to make best use of social media infrastructure. As Carl describes, this requires much more than just taking a photo on a smartphone while touring:

What I've realised over the last year or so [is] how much work it is to get quality. Like if you just go out every day and post a photo, but it's a crap photo, it's pointless. So the amount of energy it takes to go out there and get quality photos and then come up with something creative to say, or edit videos, it's an epic amount of work. And that's thrown on top of everything we're already doing. (Carl, 35)

From accumulating the necessary equipment, to having a plan, to finding a window of suitable weather conditions for filming, this labour is far more involved for athletes than simply being in the backcountry with a camera. Thought must be given to what will generate engagement in encounters with an audience and then how such content can be produced. Success or failure in mediating and manipulating affects in this regard have direct bearing on an aspiring athlete's professional progress through the field.

The addition of these more commercial digital aspects to touring practice have widened the struggles for resources that aspiring athletes can access to progress their careers. As Carl describes, that greater competition has diluted the pool of sponsorship, making it much more difficult for athletes to establish themselves as Carl has done through his career:

I think it's harder than ever before now because... if you look at the ski world, all the pros from my era, we're all still doing it and it's very few people who have like, managed to get into the mainstream side of filming and my line of thinking is that there are so many people out there that are creating amazing content, skiing at such a high calibre, that it's almost impossible to pick them... I'm glad social media wasn't around when I started, it's such a competitive game now and it's so hard to be unique.

(Carl, 35)

When Carl began touring professionally his chances of achieving the status and position he now holds largely correlated with his embodied skill in the mountains. While this is still an intrinsic component of an athlete's chances of success, with more people engaged in the practice of touring, it has become much more difficult for young athletes to generate necessary exposure that can be transformed into a career in the context of attention economies (Citton 2017; Franck 1999; 2002; 2012; van Krieken 2019).

While these virtual aspects of their role are conceptualised as work, other elements of being a touring athlete are not. As Charles explains 'skiing is still skiing' and the enjoyment of those physical practices that make up the touring experience are what have driven athletes to pursue their careers. As such many athletes are keen to delineate these parts of their role which ultimately sees them conducting immaterial labour with their bodies and skills to produce the content with which they then must work to generate

value. However athlete's experiences do not constitute a simple binary of positive or negative. Rather, it is the case that some athletes find benefits and enjoyment in aspects of the digital additions to their roles while remaining unappreciative of the increased workload and intrusion on 'authentic' perspectives. As Sandra explains, some athletes enjoy working with the content that they produce in much the same way as recreational tourers described in the previous chapter, while feeling discomfort around the purpose of that labour:

I see that [social media] as work. Like, it just doesn't catch my interest. I like looking through my photos, I like editing, but I don't like the process or pressure of being like: 'ahhh, what do people want?', trying to think about hashtags and grow followers. It feels relatively contrived and done to earn sponsorship. (Sandra, 27)

Like many other tourers, Sandra happily engages with digital media practices but much like Lara, she senses the commercial exploitation of her embodied skill and the challenge her involvement in the process presents to her self-identity as an 'authentic' tourer. At the same time, athletes are also able to perceive some positives from commercialisation that, while not necessarily rationalised as such, present conflicts to values that inform an 'authentic' touring self-identity. As Sandra describes, the jarring feelings that some athletes experience around their commercial responsibilities can alienate them from the value of their embodied labour, leading to them to think of their work for sponsors as contrived. However these same athletes may put to rest these sentiments when their autonomous practice intersects with the material rewards of sponsorship:

I don't have one [an airbag]. For financial reasons primarily... I think I'm going to get one, I'm writing to some companies to see if I can get some more sponsors. But trying to keep that same mentality of like: 'this isn't going to save my life', but I think it's a good tool to have. (Sandra, 27)

Here Sandra discusses the self-advocacy she has been conducting in order to equip herself with an avalanche airbag that can help her to continue to find the limits of her edgework. At the same time Sandra feels negatively towards parts of her job like making strategic social media posts for the purpose of exposing her audience to her sponsors. Nonetheless when those sorts of tasks contribute to her ability to perform embodied touring practices then she can cope with this discomfort. Indeed, Sandra is careful to note that this pursuit of additional sponsorship and the fruit that she hopes it will bear will not

impact her autonomously aligned approach to touring practice, signifying the internal struggle over these contradictions.

The way that athletes understand these parts of their work hinges on two key variables. Firstly their standing within the industry, as determined by experience, embodied ability and gender. Secondly, and to a slightly lesser extent, the position and image of the brands that sponsor the athlete. For example, Audrey, who has much the same status as Sandra – young, skilled and female – experiences the commercialisation of her role much more positively:

I don't get much pressure from brands to put up anything in particular, I've just been really lucky to be supported by brands that are really excited about what I'm excited about, so they're happy with me and how I operate.

(Audrey, 28)

Without some of the pressures that Sandra has previously described, Audrey is more at ease with the expectations of her sponsors and feels able to exercise a degree of self-determination in regards to how she manages her social media output. For instance she describes being more able to direct focus towards her skiing prowess and broader elements of embodied touring practice than Sandra who discusses feeling 'pressure to make it [social media content] sexualised'. This is possible for Audrey as her major sponsors are mainstream snowsports brands, but they have fully committed to engaging with the touring market and look to their athletes to assist them in producing marketing that affirms that commitment through the representation of athletes' embodied touring capital and 'authentic' practice. That is, more than contextualised displays of adrenalin inducing high-level edgework. Where Sandra's sponsors have engaged with the touring market, those interactions are somewhat shaped by heteronomous influences, like gendered and sexualised beauty ideals (Toffoletti, & Thorpe 2018.a; 2018.b; 2020), while Audrey's sponsors are largely drawing on established touring conventions and principles to attract the touring market. Some younger athletes like Audrey experience these parts of their roles in this way, it is much more common for more experienced athletes to feel independence and control over the precise nature of the expectations placed upon them.

A prominent example of this can be seen in Charles, who is an established and respected athlete, and has used that status and the affordances of digital media to produce a

YouTube video series of which he maintains full creative control. Charles has gained these freedoms through years of building a career and profile within the snowsports world as a highly talented skier, capable of edgework of the highest order. This means he can operate in his role with a greater degree of trust from his sponsors that whatever he produces will garner attention. Despite this and as Charles intimates, this freedom has been contingent upon his sponsor's willingness to support the project, which even with his position, could not be taken for granted:

I pitched it to my sponsors, which is a hard pitch to hear, like: 'hey, this is going to be like 80% not skiing'. I was like: '80% of the episodes are going to be me speaking. About the planning process, the decision making and then the skiing is going to be boring'. So there's very conscious decisions there. (Charles, 36)

So while Charles feels that if he is 'stuck at a computer it's work' and this shift in direction sees more of that work, much like the core component of embodied touring practice, Charles can take control and realise a significant degree of autonomy that can be aligned with 'authentic' touring principles. Indeed, where some athletes like Sandra feel heavily conflicted over the 'contrived' nature of their social media output, Charles discusses his project with pride in the unique way that, for him, it represents a 'real to life' version of his touring experiences:

There have been some small projects that do stuff like that, but, not that I know of that are this in depth, and I don't want to say authentic... but real to life... Like showing what being a professional skier actually is, cause a lot of people don't quite understand it, they think we're superheroes, but I think of myself as just a normal skier. We get scared, we back away from things, we make cautious decisions and we make mistakes, but I wanted to lay it out there. (Charles, 36)

These are deliberate choices that Charles makes to perform the type of gendered emotional labour, similar to that described by 'the stoke imperative' (Evers 2019.b). As a result Charles can produce content that he feels offers a truer and more thorough representation of the backcountry and touring than other projects his peers are involved in. As such, the full gamut of the embodied and virtual practices that make up touring are often shown in Charles' episodes to construct an intimate and 'authentic' performance of touring and in the way Abidin & Ots 2016 and Wellman et al. 2020 describe. From

reviewing avalanche forecasts online; to calling people for first-hand accounts of conditions; to waking up at 3am to reach a summit at the optimum time, the multitude of practices described in the previous chapters are present in producing this content Charles is able to express his touring self-identity. Moreover the autonomy with which Charles now works, means that he has the opportunity for the entirety of his time in the backcountry, touring in a professional capacity to be guided by autonomous embodied practice:

It gives me a lot of freedom. There's a lot of constraints on working with other people... I didn't want to have that pressure to be dictated to by a schedule to deliver an episode. Because we mightn't have skied a line cause of conditions and then all of a sudden you're pushing it and you might decide to go. It also allows for creative freedom and for me to control the destiny of the media so that it doesn't affect my inherent desire to [complete the goal]. (Charles, 36)

Here Charles is explaining the freedom he now experiences to tour in a way that follows principles of good decision making and safety. Where in the past there may have been a necessity to ski on a day with questionable conditions as bigger productions function on tight schedules, Charles now has the freedom to wait for safer conditions, following that paradigm of safe decision making that characterises much of the conventional day-to-day experience of touring. This ability to remain true to his self-identity and touring practice allows Charles to keep the focus on being 'out in the field [where] it's play' and he can utilise his embodied skill rather than having his motivation diminished by its encounter with work. These factors coalesce, allowing Charles to reconcile and rationalise the challenge to his touring self-identity that being a professional athlete in an increasingly commercial industry creates.

This also rings true for other athletes as previously described by Audrey and highlighted by Carl who discuss the satisfaction that can come with building an affective, digital presence and how it can be orientated to serve his own aspirations:

I've learnt with social media that you can tell a story and then people will follow along. It's a really good way to get people engaged... So I put up whatever is inspiring me at that particular time, it kind of helps me to stay inspired to do what I'm doing. (Carl, 35)

Much of Carl's social media output features very narrative driven content, focusing on elements of touring like connecting with nature and the mountains and he uses these to tell stories that facilitate and affective connection, not only with his audience but for himself too. Much like the freedom Charles describes, Carl has found a route to personally tame the conflicts that have been established between athletes work and touring self-identity and outlooks as their careers venture more and more into a corporate environment. Athletes like Charles and Carl have made these dynamics, not only for themselves but also their sponsors:

I think that's what the new generation etc. is looking for, for people to be authentic, you know, even if you have a bad day out there, they want to see you say, 'it rained to the top today, it sucked', I think people appreciate that.

(Carl, 35)

Indeed, the decisions to offer what they feel are more genuine portrayals of touring that these athletes have made, are extremely well received by their audiences. Both describe overwhelmingly positive reactions to their content and their 'authentic' representation of touring and the surrounding sub-cultural values and aesthetics as is highlighted by Charles' description of the audience engagement he experiences:

The level of response and positivity behind it has just been through the roof... People are more jazzed when I turn around⁷⁸ and they get to see the decision making more than anything else. (Charles, 36)

As such athletes like Charles and Carl can generate the metrics with content that they prefer to produce, eschewing some of the more 'extreme' backcountry aesthetics that might be presumed to garner the most attention. As Sandra describes 'there is still a surprising amount of ski videos that show avalanches and then don't have a follow up discussion, but more and more it feels like it's changing'. As athletes with the status of Charles and Carl drive these changes the evolution they represent is likely to continue.

Another element that contributes to the changeable meanings athletes give their experience of commercialisation can be seen in how they conceptualise any perceived responsibility concerning messages about safe embodied practice and environmental concerns. Dan, who as a guide book author, takes his touring expertise and subsequent

⁷⁸ A fundamental element of the decision making paradigm followed by tourers is to turn around if conditions are unsafe, rather than push through them to reach a goal.

responsibility seriously, summarises common attitudes held by what he sees as ‘authentic’ tourers on this issue:

I know some heavy hitters that make them and I’ve tried to give them my side of it [safety is important], but sex sells so I can’t argue that. But I have noticed them pushing the safety thing a little bit more. Jeremy Jones and those guys, I think they’re awesome with what they’re doing, really pushing that. Cause that guy’s fucking rad, and has been there and gone, like: ‘I’m a huge influence here and I need to help these people out’ ... that’s important for those people to get people on board that are real about it. Instead of pretending... (Dan, 47)

Dan laments the way that companies use ‘ski porn’ to engage an audience and grab attention, and admires the directions being taken by professional tourers like Charles, Carl, or in this case, Jeremy Jones, as, real, genuine attempts at distilling subcultural knowledge, skills and values that he prioritises. Many athletes share this perspective and as their feats in edgework and wider touring practice reach extended audiences there is a need, as Jemima explains, to ‘be responsible and convey messages of safety because people are looking up to us’. Other athletes like Sandra however are more ambivalent: ‘I think it’s a beneficial thing to do, but I don’t know if it should be required or anything’. This perspective on how codified the relationship between the content athletes produce and their responsibility to detail the reality of their touring is expanded upon by Charles:

I don’t think we have a responsibility whatsoever... like I don’t think if you’re a professional skier you *have to* share information about what’s going into it. I can’t be liable for the decisions that someone makes when they watch too many ski films. And if they just see you ski the line and not the decisions that went into it and then try and ski the line and hurt themselves, that’s not my fault. But I also feel like if you have a platform, then it’s not a bad thing to share that decision making. But I don’t think there is a responsibility to show it. (Charles, 36)

These attitudes are informed by the principles and valued experiences of autonomously influenced touring practice: self-control and determination; personal responsibility; decision making and an awareness of one’s own knowledge and limits. In other words, while Charles likes the opportunity to share those forms of subcultural knowledge about his practice by highlighting his decision making process, he and other athletes feel that

he has no requirement to his audience to do so, and that he is not accountable for an incorrectly parsed interpretation of the content that he produces.

For many athletes who do not experience the same autonomy as Charles and others of his status, their ability to exercise control in this realm can be curtailed. Athletes who cannot maintain full creative control of their projects often find that decisions around editing and representation mean that any discussion of safety or environmental concerns are jettisoned from the final product in favour of attention grabbing content such as high-level edgework. As Carl explains, when decisions are made years in advanced to gain or protect a profit margin, it can be unappealing for companies to alter that course:

It takes a company with structure and a long term plan to really invest in that side of things. It's the same as the environmental side of things, I think these outdoor companies have a huge responsibility to be giving back because that's literally the market that is supplying their cash and they need to protect it, I think. I think it's probably more delicate than they anticipate. (Carl, 35)

This again speaks to the struggle felt by athletes between the different types of labour they perform and their touring identities. Carl highlighting the paradox that for companies profiting off subcultures like touring, the environment is ultimately what is providing the basis for those gains, and by failing to directly address issues like climate change, these companies are acting in ways that are antithetical to their interests.

As such some athletes find other ways to reconcile their contribution to subcultural knowledge with the commercial representations of the backcountry in which they are involved. For Carl this has meant becoming involved in the grassroots delivery of formalised touring safety education:

I work with the [NAO], I do a lot of stuff in the fall, going and talking, and I've taught a few avalanche courses, like gone and helped out other guides and stuff like that and the idea in my mind is that our voice has weight behind it. When they see us being safe and stuff like that. So we do a lot of case studies of mistakes that we've made, and I think stuff like that is very... I think that's the most powerful thing, but I think it's very difficult to get the mainstream [skiing and snowboarding market] on (Carl, 35).

Carl, who at times feels constrained by what is commercially required of him as an athlete, finds that he can use his profile within his localised touring community. By involving himself in the delivery of avalanche training courses and the like, Carl maintains his authentic touring self-identity by engaging in the practice of sharing and disseminating subcultural knowledge that he has accumulated through his experiences in the backcountry. Indeed, many professional and recreational tourers suggest that this is the most effective way to educate new tourers, as involvement continues to grow. As Sandra posited, 'it ultimately comes from that social push of like, telling people to do a Level 1 course and refusing to ski with people who haven't'. So whilst the commercial experiences of athletes can have an impact on other tourers' conceptualisations of safety and taking responsibility for the backcountry environment, many tourers believe that the outcome is dependent on 'authentic' perspectives about information and knowledge sharing.

INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL'S EXPERIENCE OF COMMERCIALISATION

One of the major intersections between industry professional and athlete experiences of commercialisation concerns opinions and attitudes on corporate responsibility as the marketing of touring and its products expands. As has been suggested, many tourers share fears about the transmission of hyperreal portrayals of the backcountry to audience without the necessary capital to interpret them as such. For professionals within the touring industry like avalanche forecasters, photographers and backcountry guides who personally benefit from an increased market, this represents a delicate balance where they use their touring self-identity and autonomously tuned practice to avoid promoting touring that they see as dangerous. These attitudes are best summarised by the NAO:

There is a sense that a lot of retail marketers are treading a line between appearing that their gear and equipment has the potential for a great amount of both enjoyment, but also kudos in terms of being able to take you to places other equipment might not take you, and enable you to do extreme, exciting things. But at the same time they have to deliver that with a certain amount of responsibility. (NAO)

Here the NAO describes this perspective on commercialisation that is felt by many involved in these elements of the backcountry industry. With more funding for research and development, and marketing, touring equipment has become increasingly obtainable

and user friendly and as such it is now ubiquitous in ski shops and mountain towns around the globe. During my fieldwork in Canada, I would regularly catch a local bus from my accommodation in town to the ski area fifteen minutes away. During those trips I would observe what sort of equipment other skiers and snowboarders were carrying with them, and there was not a single occasion that there was not at least one of my fellow passengers who had touring specific equipment with them. While this is welcomed in some respects, at the same time many industry involved tourers feel discomfort around the way these products are marketed and consumed, at times, without what is seen to be an efficient induction into appropriate embodied touring practice. For Craig, much of the concern he feels around these issues stems from this increased availability of touring gear while what he feels would be appropriate messaging remains absent from much of the consumption environment tourers engage with:

I think a lot of it has to do with e-commerce. You know, you can just go and click on backcountry.com and buy it. The point of sale has no instructional content whatsoever. It's just like: 'I read about those on TGR forums, they're the sick ones'. (Craig, 38)

Here Craig singles out e-commerce specifically as the culprit in this dynamic, but this serves to highlight the way that these fears align with those discussed in the context of proliferating digital media practice and how the two are constructed in symbiosis. In other words both manifestations of these concerns emerge in the light of the other, whereby tourers like Craig worry that others will be affectively inspired by backcountry digital media content, to then consume readily accessible equipment and attempt to reproduce the feats they have seen, to unwittingly put themselves or others in dangerous or deadly situations.

These perspectives on the expanding touring market have led to some industry involved tourers to not only feel an increased sense of responsibility over the dissemination of relevant subcultural knowledge and understanding, but also take proactive steps to control the affect produced in their interactions with commercial forces. For example, Craig, in his role as the editor of a snowboarding magazine which features the backcountry regularly, makes conscious efforts to counter what he sees as irresponsible and 'shameful shots that you see in some of the bigger movie productions' by including

content that provides context and discussion around what goes into those types of extreme examples of edgework:

We run a column called [Column Title] and it focuses on these significant lines that people have ridden and walking through the decision making process that's gone on. And we're not saying: 'you must do this or you must do that'... but at least we're allowing people to start thinking about it. At least having the discussion. (Craig, 38)

Once again this an example of the way an investment in conventional doxa impacts how tourers engage with broader elements of touring experience. Here Craig explains he makes the effort to provide the information that his readers can learn from, but ultimately he is compelled to have that learning process remain unprescribed in order to foster the responsibility and self-determination that embodied touring practice necessitates. In a similar light, photographer Trevor takes the responsibility he feels seriously and uses it to guide decisions around how his work is utilised:

if I happen upon a photo like that [featuring avalanche scenarios], and I'm shooting it and it's going to get used, I won't let anybody use it unless it's part of an educational component... I don't ever want a photo like that to be used to showcase the excitement of it, because it's not exciting, it's terrifying... I feel a great sense of responsibility about this stuff. (Trevor, 45)

As a tourer who has seen the consequences of what can happen in the backcountry, Trevor is horrified by the thought of his work being used to glorify unsafe decision making. Therefore he uses his position and the symbolic capital it affords to dictate the context in which he will allow his photographs to be used, although due to context collapse his control is, of course, limited. Like Craig's, these choices revolve around a backcountry self-identity that has been developed through embodied experience and to align with the paradigms of safe decision making that characterise many tourers' approach to practice in the backcountry.

These perspectives have also informed the way that the NAO has harnessed commercialisation to their benefit and in a way that remains congruent with their driving purpose of the organisation; to actively disseminate knowledge and information that assists tourers to practice safely. As such the NAO uses wider corporate opportunities to

expand their funding, add to staff and resources, and increase the reach of their products. However the organisation is careful to only engage with partners who share their values and support their role:

We certainly have some partners that we work with, MEC, Mountain Equipment Co-op is a big one we have and they have a corporate culture that puts back into the community and encourages safety in the mountains so they're a very good fit for us. (NAO)

Indeed, the NAO is equally careful to avoid working with brands whose image could erode their messaging and have actively chosen not to partner with some brands who have expressed interest because of a sense that values and perspectives on the backcountry were not a match. Nonetheless, there are companies such as those mentioned by the NAO who act in ways that do augment the efforts of the organisation. This is explained by the NAO in discussing the more material benefits of these partnerships, insofar as providing access to equipment for the staff to use in their corporeal professional practice in the field:

There's some place where we have to be a little cautious, like I said, to not suggest this is the best transceiver or whatever, but we don't mind being photograph with an FXR logo or wearing Arc'teryx clothing. I guess part of it is just the financial situation that we find ourselves in, that if we do a little bit of that, provided it doesn't go too far and take time and have it become a distraction from our message, we can generate more money and do more for avalanche safety, so we balance those. (NAO)

In other words, the staff of the organisation use their own touring capital to make decisions around which brands are acceptable and how to incorporate the requirements of the agreements they make, for example, product placement in a way that can be reconciled with maintain touring 'authenticity' so as to not disrupt the messaging and reach of the organisation's product. Ultimately these types of commercial reproductions are designed to capitalise on awareness of subcultural aesthetics, values and style to legitimise the message being expressed.

Nevertheless, the reproduction of particular types of imagery related to touring is a common part of the commercial experience for industry professionals. In this regard Trevor suggests that showcasing the performance of the equipment his employer

produces is still a major focus, but there is also significant inclusion of broader touring content:

It's primarily the action stuff but there is a bit more of the lifestyle component that getting more important. Like anything from getting up in the morning, putting your boots on and getting into the car, putting on your skins, putting gas in the snowmobile, all the components involved in getting out there, you know. Skinning up a skin track, riding the sleds out, loading in a helicopter. It's actually really complete, there's no part that gets skipped really. (Trevor, 45)

In his role as a photographer Trevor is fundamentally required to highlight equipment like snowboards interacting with tourers' bodies to maximise their capacity in the backcountry. At the same time however he also feels that capturing other parts of the touring lifestyle is burgeoning part of his work. An example of which is displayed in figure 7.2, an Instagram post from mainstream snowsports manufacturer Armada Skis.

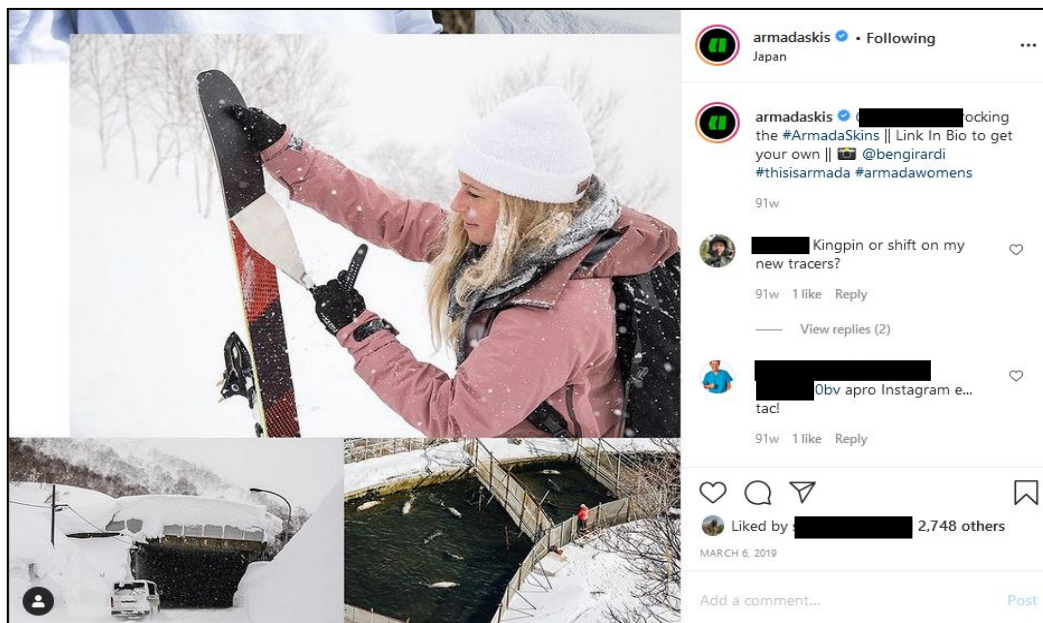


FIGURE 7.2: Armada Skis Instagram post depicting touring lifestyle imagery.

SOURCE: Instagram - @armadaskis

The post highlights a range of intersections between the human, non-human and immaterial dimensions that can constitute touring including removing climbing skins, driving through the mountains on snow covered roads looking for a trailhead and visiting unique spaces within them. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it means that Trevor, like Charles and Carl, is able to use more of his 'authentic' touring self-identity to inform the way he approaches his work. Rather than just focusing on capturing depictions

of high-level edgework, Trevor is more able to include imagery or a touring experience that is truer to the lived experience of a broader spectrum of tourers. Although these kinds of portrayals that Trevor has described do not specifically include decision making and the like, the discussion of them highlights that there is incentive to show more than just extreme edgework. As is the case with worries over digital media practice, this dynamic presents a counterweight to the concerns tourers have expressed about increased commercialisation. Indeed, as backcountry guidebook author, Dan, explains: 'Sex sells. Sure. But I don't think the big wigs behind the desk have realised yet that safety fucking sells too. People want to live'.

Regardless of the motivations behind what is sought from industry professionals like Trevor, the outcomes of the work they produce is intended to be encounter its audience with affective intensity:

I think you want to present it as a lifestyle. I think if you present it as a lifestyle activity and people can see it as, 'hey I really want to be a part of that', then that's the best thing to keep the industry going, you know sales going... You want to feel like you're part of something greater, and that's what any manufacturer really wants: to get somebody to identify with them, the product that they make and feel like they're a part of the brand.

(Trevor, 45)

Here the experiences of athletes and industry professionals come together as commercial factors drive a need to do more than just showcase product, but maintain a sustained engagement with consumers. As athletes are encouraged to do, tourers like Trevor, Craig and the NAO must use their backcountry identities and knowledge to make decisions about how best to forge those connections with the broader touring market. As Trevor describes, some manufacturers and snowsports brands now seek to capitalise on the holistic lifestyle of touring by producing narrative driven content, that carries a degree of familiarity for average tourers, all the while remaining aspirational and enticing. Figure 7.3 epitomises this where the ski film production company, Matchstick Productions, utilises its YouTube channel to offer a 'behind the sends'⁷⁹ discussion of an avalanche that had been included in its last feature; *Return to Send'er*.

⁷⁹ A play on words of 'behind the scenes', send (or to 'send it') is a term that describes skiing or snowboarding a 'line' with aggressive confidence.

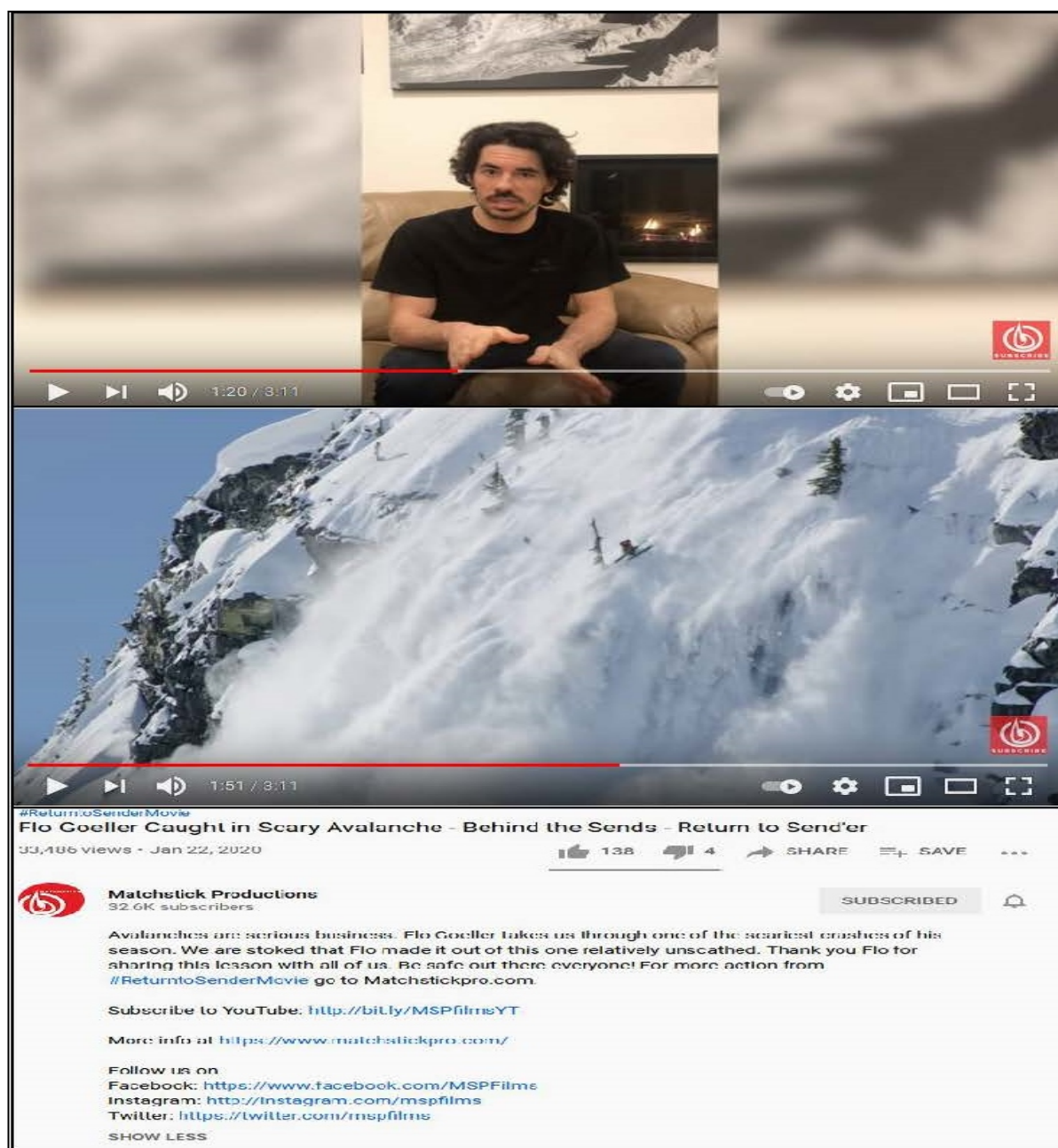


FIGURE 7.3: ‘Avalanches are serious business’ Screenshots of a YouTube video from Match ick Productions, depicting and discussing a dangerous avalanche triggered but survived by tourer, Flo Goeller. SOURCE: < youtube.com/watch?v=1Rxyap5NVU4 >

In the video the skier who was caught in the avalanche, Flo Goeller, looks back on the mistakes he made, sharing subcultural knowledge about warning signs of avalanches and human error. The need to participate in this type of affective marketing can be difficult for more independent and small businesses in the backcountry industry, like Jeff who owns and operates his own backcountry guiding company. Like many athletes describe, Jeff conceptualises trying to capitalise on the affordances of digital media very much as work and something that he would rather not have to do:

You know, I do [use social media] now because of work. It's something that I have to go out of my way to remember to do and force myself to do it... I certainly have a lot of mixed feeling about it. (Jeff, 36)

As is the case for many athletes, Jeff has ultimately pursued this career to facilitate as much time in the backcountry as possible and intrusions to that by labour in the form of digital media practice is jarring to both his enjoyment of his lifestyle and his 'authentic' touring self-identity. Part of this displeasure comes from not being aware of the real impact that these forms of work can have for a business such as Jeff's:

It can help, it has more potential to help than it does to hurt. I think some clients probably enjoy seeing material and certainly I think it helps to keep the business fresh in people's minds. As far as drawing new clients, I'm sceptical about how successful that will be. (Jeff, 36)

Without the resources or the digital literacy to effectively analyse data that is available to them, small businesses can find it difficult to make headway, losing out to better funded and digitally savvy competitors. Nonetheless, tourers like Jeff recognise the need to participate in this aspect of the industry and can find some positives from commercialisation that are congruent with his outlook as an 'authentic' tourer. Although the ubiquity of digital media necessitating virtual practice might be frustrating for tourers like Jeff, he recognises how it can also produce outcomes that are in his interests. For example, Jeff suggests that 'one of the things is that there is a big increase in the numbers of people who are concerned about wilderness conservation in the wintertime'. This stands as another example of the way that tourers attempt to reconcile the inevitable tide of commercialisation that presents noteworthy challenges to 'authentic' touring perspective and practice.

As has been explained, industry professionals can exert a degree of control around the outcomes of their labour to align it with their 'authentic' touring disposition. However opportunities to do so can have much to do with specific roles and the position of companies they are employed by within the schema of LS commercialisation (movement, paraphernalia, mass-market). As Trevor explains it can be easier for grassroots companies and independent, mainstream actors, which are generally smaller in size, to maintain an 'authentic' image that acknowledges the taken-for-granted rules of touring:

I think the size of the brand I work for makes it a little easier. I worked for a much, much bigger brand that was across a lot of categories and it sort of diluted their message. (Trevor, 45)

In Trevor's experience, bigger, more corporate employers can limit the connection and legitimacy that a brand can have in its encounters with the the touring market, and subsequently the ability for staff to make decisions and conduct their labour in ways that are congruent with their personal touring dispositions.

RECREATIONAL TOURERS' EXPERIENCE OF COMMERCIALISATION

It is in the experience of recreational tourers that the outcomes of these various commercial machinations intersect. From engaging with content produced through the affective labour of athletes, to forming the market that commercial actors are capitalising, to being the ultimate arbiters of brand identity and touring legitimacy, recreational tourers are at the forefront of the commercial evolution of the field. It is even the case that recreational tourers own practices have partially facilitated the commercialisation that they now experience. As digital media practice has proliferated through the touring field, recreational tourers have conducted immaterial labour to produce models of content that reflect the range of legitimised backcountry aesthetics from conventional to extreme. Commercial actors are easily able to reproduce these types of portrayals and feed them into the constellation of content that is consumed by tourers, fostering a dynamic where affective marketing can seamlessly co-exist with non-commercial content. Furthermore, the infrastructure and metrics of digital platforms can promote practice that represents other modes of immaterial labour:

I like to tag brands and stuff in posts. Like, I have Armada skis so I always tag them, and a couple of times they've liked my posts and it helps to get the views up... all my friends are the same, those companies should give us some free stuff for all the advertising we do, haha. (Michael, 25)

Michael highlights the way that he keenly engages with brands through digital media, making use of features like tagging to not only augment his experience of digital touring practice, but importantly, also act as an uncommissioned conduit for the messaging and engagement that brands seek. Michael conducts this digital practice to compete for an audience in the attention economy of touring digital media, but ultimately these actions serve to promote Armada more than they do Michael as a tourer. Moreover the ubiquity

of these modes of digital touring practice has further normalised the presence of surreptitious marketing in touring content, while at the same time representing challenges to the orthodoxy of principles that prioritise resourcefulness and ‘purity’ of the backcountry. This normalisation of commercial content has come to the point where an organisation such as the NAO, that has achieved an ‘authentic’ status, can incorporate product placement and the like in their products without compromising that standing within the field. Therefore highlighting the way that these dynamics have added to the commercial potential of touring and aided with the pace of the evolution that have seen the perspectives of tourers co-opted for commercial gain.

This unfolding commercial activity is experienced by tourers in a number of ways, but most directly through their consumption practices:

The brands are bringing out stuff that’s more accessible and I think people know about backcountry more. Even people from places that don’t have backcountry are more aware of it now I think. More aware of, like, tech bindings⁸⁰ and what they look like. (Michelle, 31)

Equipment like the touring specific ski bindings that Michelle describes had once been unfamiliar and off-putting⁸¹ to mainstream skiers and snowboarders but now it is recognisable to a much larger range of snowsports participants who own their equipment:

It’s been a thing since the 70s around here, but it wasn’t apparent to me, even though I live in a touring Mecca, until 5 or 6 years ago when it started becoming more mainstream. (Bill, 27)

This awareness and understanding about the nature of touring gear has seen it become ubiquitous in snowsports retail settings, with consumers interested in the broader options touring gear offers. This is a significant departure from the situation of the past, where it was difficult to find reliable sources and options for touring equipment, even in locations where there have been longer traditions of venturing into the backcountry:

⁸⁰ A style of touring-specific ski bindings that look and function differently to more common downhill bindings (see figs. 1.13 & 1.14).

⁸¹ Due to the prioritisation of low weight functionality, a lot of touring equipment might be described as looking ‘flimsy’ or unreliable by someone who is not familiar with it.

It used to be that you didn't find touring gear at a, quote, ski shop, they just didn't sell it. Now, it's probably hard to find a shop that doesn't have some kind of touring binding available. (Jeff, 36)

In Utah where Jeff is from, there is a strong alpine culture and a large population of people who like to recreate in the mountains, but it has only been recently that touring equipment has been a regular sight in stores, and it is now so common that Jeff describes it being difficult to find retail outlets that do not offer some form of equipment that allows people to tour. As Bill highlights, this transition has also meant that 'stuff like boots, bindings, skins, all that really specific gear, it's like smartphones and stuff, everything's getting a lot cheaper and easier to acquire', increasing the potential for tourers and those with attuned dispositions to encounter and be affected by them.

In the bigger, more competitive market manufactures have also been forced to retail their products at lower prices to maintain or gain a share of tourers' consumption. These rapid evolutions to the market have also seen a wider range of commercial actors becoming involved in industry. In the past, touring specific gear had for the most part been manufactured by just a few, largely grassroots companies, as Bill explains where 'Black Diamond or G3. They were your options for skins'. In the last 10 years new manufacturers have been drawn to the potential of capitalising on touring. These emerging commercial actors range from tourism operators like restaurants and hotels, to most prominently, multi-national, mainstream snowsports brands like Salomon and Marker. The size of these companies brings with them the impetus and funding for innovation in design and widespread marketing of new equipment that further entrenches the dynamics described above. For tourers like Gary, the entrance of these new players in the backcountry industry is welcomed, albeit with caveats: 'Salomon's got some great product out there right now, but they're definitely more of an alpine⁸² ski brand'. This hints at some of the unease that is felt by tourers who are torn between the exploitative outcomes of commercialisation that challenge their 'authentic' touring identities but at the same time present some benefits to their embodied practice and experience.

⁸² Alpine skiing is another term for downhill skiing as someone would participate in at a ski area.

There are several ways in which recreational tourers experience commercialisation in a positive light. Firstly, the opportunity to welcome more tourers to the field and have them gain the experiences that lead to a deep appreciation of the backcountry is not unnoticed. As Trevor illustrates, many tourers want to share that experience as widely as possible, and the commercial changes to the field have made that more possible:

I think it's great. Honestly, I think it's awesome. I want people to, I really want people to get out and experience it. The difference between touring into something and riding it with no one around compared to a resort day with a \$150 lift ticket, they might as well be completely different activities. There's something just so awesome and peaceful about it. I want everyone to have that experience. And I would think that the manufacturers making gear, makes the gear get better and better and better and that just improves the experience. (Trevor, 45)

Here Trevor highlights how recreational tourers' experiences of commercialisation is not entirely one of co-optation. In fact, like Trevor most tourers overwhelmingly see increased commercial activity as a positive that brings benefits and new potential to the field. By drawing more people to the field in this way, many tourers are excited with the opportunity presented by commercialisation for more individuals to interact, be affected by, and affect backcountry assemblages. These perspectives are also generated by the relationship between commercialisation and the benefits that it presents for the practicalities of embodied touring practice. The expanded touring market has seen more money invested in innovation in higher better performing equipment that ultimately has a large impact on the experience tourers have in the backcountry:

When I started touring, the go to binding was like the *Silveretta* 404⁸³, and that wasn't that long ago, I haven't been doing it for 30 years. And then you'd use your downhill boots which were monsters; it was like having 2 anvils on my feet, which made things quite slow and tedious. And the tech binding at the time was kind of a joke. It was actually a really good binding, it just looked finicky and small and people didn't dare... it took me quite a while to accept those bindings. (Cameron, 47)

⁸³ The *Silveretta* 404 is a once common, but now obsolete, somewhat unreliable model of touring binding.

Here Cameron is reflecting on the capacity of equipment to intersect and transform his practice with regard to how much equipment has improved in the time he has been touring. From gear that was heavy, unreliable and limited their bodily capacity, tourers like Cameron now have access to wide range of user-friendly, high performance skis, snowboards, bindings, boots and the range of other paraphernalia required in the backcountry. As Trevor explains, 'every manufacturer has a splitboard, the bindings are incredibly good now, everything is super reliable'. These outcomes of commercialisation that relate directly to embodied practice and edgework are welcomed by tourers in a wholesale manner. With higher performing gear tourers are more reliably able to calculate their limits to test their capacity on the edge and return safely, inducing those previously described affective experiences that are fundamental to the corporeal experience. At the same time, the scope for this equipment to carry some tourers beyond their edge is difficult to ignore for many.

As is the case for many athletes and industry professionals, recreational tourers also discuss how wider promotion and awareness of the backcountry means that there need to be more voices sharing information that leads to safe practice and embodied experience, or as Michelle puts it, 'there's this public responsibility to pay for the wonders that commercialisation has pushed people into'. For Paul, that responsibility lies squarely with the retailers who profit from the sale of increasingly advanced equipment that can deliver tourers to locations and situations that carry consequence:

Splitboards have definitely gotten way more popular, and made it way easier to get out there. But there is also probably some responsibility on the part of the retailers. Just to say like: 'hey' [be aware of the risks]. But everyone is just trying to make money. (Paul, 28)

Indeed, as is described by Michael Vogt, marketing director at ABS Protection⁸⁴ 'more and more people are increasingly looking for adventure and in part for the extreme... You could say that the entire market moves a few meters higher every year [in terms of the performance consumers desire from their equipment]' (Regel, 2018). In other words, as equipment performance has increased, so too has the expectation of consumers that their gear will support them and their embodied touring practice. As is indicated by the

⁸⁴ ABS protection is a company that manufactures avalanche 'airbags'.

comments of Vogt, brands have recognised this and look to develop equipment that can handle the stresses of high order edgework and touring practice to offer consumers the products that they desire. Resulting from these these dynamics, many recreational tourers share these sorts of concerns that are derived from their experiences in the backcountry whereby they have seen unsafe or ignorant practice and associated it with the new condition of those tourers' gear. During my fieldwork, this is an experience I had on several occasions. In one notable example I overheard a conversation between two ill-equipped snowboarders who had just returned from a day in the backcountry. They were discussing how their new splitboards made it easy to access challenging and exciting terrain, before going on to reflect on how lucky they were to make it back before it got dark as they had gone further into the backcountry than they had realised. It is very much the case that modern touring equipment allows tourers to test their limits in edgework like this example and in ways that can bypass an arc of progression that bestows tourers with the embodied capital necessary to return from that edge. So while tourers rejoice at the altar of equipment innovation and performance increases, there is a recognition amongst experienced tourers that there is still a requirement to accumulate knowledge and skills in order to experience the backcountry with safe practice. As Michelle suggests, 'the gear might be great, but it's not going to give you a heli flight back to the hospital'.

On the other hand there are also examples of companies dealing with the responsibilities that tourers see, and often these efforts share a community and cultural focus. Many ski resorts that provide skiers and snowboarders lift-accessed downhill riding have also attempted to capitalise on growing interest in the backcountry and touring. This has seen many such companies provide formalised points of access to the backcountry, often in the form of clearly marked gates at ski area boundaries and with restrictions on access such as possession of an avalanche beacon. This dynamic sees skier and snowboarders transported from the relative safety and controlled environment of a ski resort, through a threshold that immediately deposits them in a space where edgework becomes mandatory. These developments have been managed with a variety of techniques, but as Sandra highlights, cases that rely on community and sharing touring specific capital in an organic and affective way stand as strong examples of how some commercial entities have actively taken the responsibility that tourers describe:

I think Jackson [Hole] as a resort is very impressive with how they deal with their backcountry scene. The gates are clearly marked, they have an avalanche report and a place to check your beacon. Every exit on the tram⁸⁵ ride up they give a whole spiel about the backcountry, it's like, 'if you don't have a partner, plan and the knowledge...if you don't know' and then the whole tram chants back, 'don't go!'. So it's a big cultural part of it. And I think that is an awesome way to bring it into constant communication. (Sandra, 27)

The events that Sandra details prompt the community to engage with the discussion around safety and knowledge through the interaction of their bodies and reliance on the derivation of that message from an 'authentic' touring outlook. In this manner some commercial actors have found an effective and affective way to balance their capitalisation of the backcountry and the care that tourers feel needs to be taken in doing so. At the same time, other tourers feel that this is a dynamic that could be further strengthened with more initiative and a wider acceptance of the responsibility:

I wonder if there is this social responsibility piece that ties all these commercial factors, like gear, and I guess like, restaurants, hotels all these places that benefit from getting people into these environments. And I think, bring that back around and create initiatives, like, funding search and rescue, and that kind of community focused thing. (Michelle, 31)

Michelle recognises the range of commercial actors who are benefiting from the growth of touring highlighting the way secondary industries might also have a role to play in mitigating against the hazards of ushering people into the backcountry. Michelle also suggests here creating schemes to channel some of the profit from commercialisation back into resources that would directly benefit the wider community of tourers. This proposal reflects the complex nature of tourers' responses to the commercialisation of their subculture and how that response is indicative of their touring dispositions. Rather than reacting positively or negatively, Michelle offers a considered approach accepting the insurmountable growing commercial interest and transforms the challenge to her touring principles into a problem that can be resolved by shifting the outcome to one that supports her embodied practice.

⁸⁵ Tram is a colloquial term for cable car.

Together with the example of Jackson Hole describe by Sandra, these experiences of commercialisation suggest that conventional touring values and corporate interests are not mutually exclusive. By engaging the community and drawing on those backcountry principles born of the embodied experience, commercial actors have the chance to not only help to effectively initiate tourers and protect the sustainability of their market, but also create a brand identity that is validated and embraced by it.

As has already been described in the experiences of athletes and industry professionals, the connections established between recreational tourers and the companies whose products they consume are an integral feature of how commercialisation continues to manifest in the field. It is here at the meeting point of consumption, subcultural style, knowledge, and legitimised practice that these connections are most pronounced. When commercial actors engage with recreational tourers through marketing that is encoded to affectively engage them, tourers respond on the basis of how well the aesthetic of the marketing and performance of equipment align with their own touring outlooks. That is to say, these determinations are made by measuring how touring is portrayed against the experience of the tourer who is consuming it. As such tourers describe a spectrum of 'authentic' to 'non-authentic' brands acting in the touring field with those that most effectively recreate an 'authentic' brand identity being embraced by tourers who see their own touring self-identities represented:

I would say backcountry skiing is more than just a sport, it's a lifestyle, specifically an IPA-and coffee-fuelled-dirtbag lifestyle, so brands that promote an image that meshes well with that backcountry vibe. Folks like me that are too cheap to buy a lift ticket and companies that cater to that freedom, that kind of you're-not-doing-what-everyone-else is-doing and cater to that vibe, they're what I'd say are backcountry brands. (Bill, 27)

As Bill describes here, many tourers see themselves civilisation-shunning, counter-culture individuals drawing some inspiration from the image of previous generations who have been similarly characterised. As such, brands must navigate through a minefield of commercialising a subcultural identity that is often held to be inherently anti-commercial and DIY in a similar vain to the punks that O'Conner has previously investigated (2016). As Michelle describes, companies like Arc'teryx who produce high-

end outdoor clothing are able to generate the kind of loyalty and consumer engagement they seek by appealing to these sorts of principles held by tourers:

I'm a big fan of Arc'teryx, I've had their stuff forever... just, they value the quality and longevity of their products more than the disposable type of thing. They want you to have your jacket forever. (Michelle, 31)

By building a reputation of high-quality and performance, Arc'teryx has established itself as a brand that enjoys significant status amongst tourers. Along with the practical realities of performance during embodied practice, this reputation has been built through the successful messaging of corporate values concerning the importance of longevity with that performance that Michelle has repeated here. Figure 7.4 highlights how this interpretation and subsequent loyalty is buttressed by the digital practice of its sponsored athletes.



FIGURE 7.4: Greg Hill's Instagram post promoting the 'values' of his sponsor, Arc'teryx.
SOURCE: Instagram - @_greghill_

In the depicted Instagram post, Arc'teryx sponsored athlete Greg Hill calls on his embodied experiences of 'mundane practices' – going to sales meetings – to convey how he *feels* about being sponsored by the company. This message draws on subcultural ideals of community to establish Arc'teryx's touring legitimacy. Therefore Arc'teryx is able to

capitalise on these sentiments selling their products to tourers who use them, not only for their high-performance, but also to outwardly present their own touring ‘authentic’ self-identities to their peers who recognise the same shared values in the brand. So while a \$600 jacket might not appear to be compatible with the type of self-identity that Bill describes, that incongruence is reconciled by tourers being aware and affected by the values that the company presents and seeking to symbolise their own adherence to them through the consumption of their products, regardless of the price.

By normalising these consumer relationships and subsequent practices, increased commercial activity means that there is potential for the loyalty and trust that tourers place in brands to be exploited without any discernible benefit for the tourer themselves. With brands seeking to promote affective engagement by employing the labour of athletes like Carl and photographers like Trevor, recreational tourers can be vulnerable to having reproductions of their own aspirations and touring principles be used to engage them in the market.

Well, I hate *TGR*, but I think it’s kind of cool, those guys get to live these dream lives and even when I was living in Jackson, like Griffin Post and I rode the bus together all the time and shit, but they live a pretty gnarly lifestyle and I’ve kind of brushed the surface of it, just in my own life, so I have a lot of respect for them, and I think it’s pretty cool when someone like that thinks that I have cool photos or whatever, cause I admire those guys for sure. They’re living lives way beyond the norm for most people.
(Paul, 28)

Here, Paul’s expresses his dislike of the commercial principles of *TGR*, but nonetheless he is drawn in by its effective expression of an alignment with his construction of an ‘authentic’ self-identity. As such it is clear that tourers like Paul, although they might outwardly deny it, categorise a brand like *TGR* that conveys the holistic touring experience as valid in the field.

At the same time, some tourers appear to be aware of this dynamic, and nonchalant in their summation of the situation:

I’m completely falling victim to marketing here... but generally speaking a brand that has advertising in backcountry mediums, like in Backcountry

Magazine or the Banff Film Festival, brands that sponsor that, you know, I think of them as backcountry brands. (Bill, 27)

As Bill exemplifies here, tourers are largely unbothered by these dynamics, as long as they are not directly causing interference with their own experience and practice. However, these are the sorts of considerations that are made in placing brands on the inauthentic end of the spectrum. These attitudes are best surmised by the NAO who exist in a somewhat liminal space in this regard; benefiting from the increased funding that growth and commercialisation have brought, but largely operating from a set of values derived from the authentic touring principles of the organisation's staff. As such, the reasons that the NAO would choose not to partner with a particular brand are reflective of how some brands come to be seen as inauthentic by a broader range of tourers:

If we felt as though a company was promoting inappropriate use of the backcountry or unsafe use of the backcountry then we would probably choose not to be associated with them. (NAO)

While tourers may enjoy watching a clip of high-level backcountry edgework, using that extreme aesthetic without context does not help brands that use such images achieve a status of legitimacy among tourers who see themselves as 'authentic'. As has previously been discussed in this thesis, the concerns that these sorts of dynamics produce for tourers mean that their values and outlooks limit the amount they are willing to engage with companies and products that do not appear to observe those principles.

Importantly however, brand identities can often be genuinely aligned with the interests and outlooks of tourers. As has been suggested, many brands that are deemed authentic by tourers are active in fundraising and promotion of environmental and backcountry safety causes. This is evident in Paul's description of why he chose the snowboard he owns:

I have a *Jones* board, I do like the *Jones* board, he's [Jeremy Jones⁸⁶] got the whole campaign for global warming and Protect Our Winters and stuff like that which I think is pretty cool. But then too, on my snowboard, it has the 5 red flags [of avalanche danger] printed right on there, which I thought was pretty cool. Like every time I look down, they're right there. (Paul, 28)

⁸⁶ Jeremy Jones is a very high profile snowboard athlete

Part of the brand identity presented by Jones Snowboards includes the company's connections to non-profits like Protect Our Winters. Tourers are keen to align themselves with brands that are legitimately involved in initiatives that can benefit tourers. Unlike his affinity for TGR, the values represented by Jones around the environment and safety means that Paul is happy to align himself with the brand's products. Similarly the connection of commercial actors to the realities of corporeal touring practice also informs the relationships tourers can form with commercial actors in the field. As has been highlighted, the relationship between the reliable and high quality performance of equipment and embodied experience is acute and many tourers hold certain manufacturers in a higher regard:

They're culture, like they come at it... they're less like a Volkl or Technica comes more from the alpine skiing world and they happen to have some backcountry products, whereas Dynafit, they're a backcountry mountain sports brand, developing products for that pursuit. (Gary, 37)

Dynafit has been making touring equipment since 1950, well before touring became more popular and the industry more self-sustaining. Tourers like Gary see Dynafit as being truly part of touring, rather than a commercial intrusion and see their loyalty to such brands is part of that longevity and the maintenance of values it affords. The nature of this relationship is further enhanced by the focus of such brands to the practicalities of touring and producing equipment that directly serves the needs and desires of tourers. Moreover, digital media can allow brands like Dynafit to engage their consumers in ways that entrench these perspectives. In the Instagram post displayed in figure 7.5, Dynafit seeks to capture 'authentic' principles. By invoking a tourer's encounters with the backcountry by describing a sense of 'oneness with my natural environment' the post serves to render Dynafit's understanding of and adherence to the same values as its market. By using social media to highlight design process, product functionality and profile their staff who are most often tourers themselves, these companies can act to further legitimise themselves in the eyes of tourers like Gary. So while the equipment from other manufacturers without that standing may be just as high performing, without the storied relationship of the brand and the broader touring subculture, it is difficult for them to be as accepted by the tourers in the same fashion.



FIGURE 7.5: ‘An overwhelming sense of oneness with my natural environment’. Portraying a relatable and authentic touring identity on the Dynafit Instagram page. SOURCE: Instagram - @dynafit

CONCLUSION

In the past the touring industry has consisted of grassroots commercial actors who have played important roles in developing and preserving subcultural values, knowledge and aesthetics. These businesses served a niche market of tourers, offering goods and services like equipment retail and backcountry guiding that provides the basis for fundamental practice and experience of touring. As such many of these brands have developed loyal followers who buy into reputations of authenticity and an ostensible alignment of values between touring consumers and grassroots companies. More recently, and concomitantly with the proliferation of digital media practices and technology, new commercial actors have made incursions into the touring industry and have presented several challenges to the status quo that have altered some of the experiences of tourers.

For professional touring athletes, this has seen a significant expansion on the expectations and requirements placed upon them by sponsors and the commercial atmosphere to ensure their professional success in the field. It is no longer the case that athletes can plot a trajectory based on their embodied capital and touring prowess. Instead it is now necessary for this category of tourers to develop digital skills that can be harnessed for self-promotion in a way that aligns with the goals of the companies that support them. While this does not necessarily diminish the enjoyment of touring and being in the backcountry for these athletes, the broader process of producing content is largely viewed as work as their bodies intersect with commercial forces and material elements of the field. As such some athletes experience a disconnection from their self-identity as authentic tourers because of the contrived nature of the content that they produce in their roles as professional tourers. For other athletes who have gained prominent status and respect, these types of commercial developments have meant that they are able to operate with a greater degree of autonomy that allows them to use their touring identities to shape the content they produce for their sponsors. At the same time, some athletes discuss the ways in which digital media and more commercial influence have made it more difficult to establish a career as the ability to create content and garner attention has been democratised by digital technology. Concerns are also expressed by athletes around depictions of touring used in marketing that have the potential to push tourers beyond their edge and into situations of serious consequence in the backcountry.

Other categories of tourers, including recreational tourers and industry-involved professionals share these worries. Like athletes, industry professionals – guides, avalanche forecasters, photographers etc. – describe a sense of responsibility towards disseminating subcultural values and knowledge around safe touring practice and openly decry cases where this type of messaging is absent. Nonetheless the growth of the touring market has meant that there is increased opportunity to express these sorts of ideals. As a result some brands who can temper these concerns with more holistic and familiar portrayals of touring practice are seen as 'authentic', even when engaging with these commercial dynamics which is conceptually antithetical to the 'IPA-and coffee-fuelled-dirtbag' self-identity that many tourers construct. Despite these types of challenges to self-identity and subcultural values, many recreational tourers approach the commercialisation of their lifestyle with a degree of positivity born from the recognition

that increased profits has led to more innovation and development of touring specific products that assist and increase their ability to practice edgework in the backcountry.

Ultimately the commercial changes to the backcountry field present a raft of challenges and opportunities that tourers engage with and subsequently impact their experience and practice. The unfolding nature of this means that these experiences are not conceptualised in a simple binary of positive and negative outcomes. Rather, the perspectives that tourers take towards commercialisation are nuanced and most often reflective of their own touring identities dispositions and the practices that have shaped them.

8. CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

In exploring the confluence of the human, non-human and non-material elements of the backcountry field this thesis has offered a range of findings that have addressed the aims of the project as stated in Chapter 4:

1. To explore the nature and development of commercialisation, digital media and technology in backcountry touring;
2. To investigate the impact of these influences on the experiences of tourers as they engage with the field.

These aims have seen the project examine a range of themes that, together with the more-than-representational theoretical perspective of the project, have enabled me to animate the embodied and sensory elements of touring practice and offer explanations of the way that tourers interpret their experiences. With little existing qualitative research on the touring field and its constituents, this approach has generated new knowledge that provides insights into the perspectives of tourers, and the dynamics of lifestyle sports more broadly.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this project I have attempted to underscore the necessity of researching lifestyle sports subcultures with a view to accounting for the sensate, corporeal and felt dimensions of the practices and experiences that constitute them. Tourers experience their engagement with the field through their bodies. From the becomings of bodies that occur with rushes of adrenalin when the metal edge of a ski or snowboard slips as a tourer makes their way through an icy patch of a steep slope; to my desire to affectively distinguish myself as 'authentic' through my embodiment of touring 'style' and identity; to the immaterial and affective labour undertaken in the field; to the comings together of hyperreal images of the backcountry and embodied capacities, affects infiltrate all the nooks and crannies of the subculture like a mist spills through a valley, to transform how tourers sense and understand the backcountry.

Affect is pre-cognitive but not pre-social. It is embodied meaning making that results from encounters of human bodies, non-human, organic, immaterial. In these interactions,

affect is dispersed through tourers' bodies drawing on wells of embodied experience to be felt in relation to the dispositions they have formed. The distillation of the affectivity in Bourdieusian concepts I have presented in this thesis is therefore expedient to explore the discourse that surrounds the sensory and non-discursive aspects of touring practice. Tourers are drawn to their practice by the social gravity unfolding from their encounters with the mountains, media and related experiences. They accumulate the various capitals that direct how they *feel* about their bodily response to practice, both physical and virtual. In turn these potentialities shape future touring experiences, dispositions and the capacity of their bodies to affect and be affected. Between the autonomous and heteronomous poles these dispositions are displayed in a continuum of practices influenced by the affectivity of established, 'authentic' doxa and *illusio* and the challenge that emergent influences present to the stability of their status quo.

The qualitative foundations of the project have been necessary to reach this more-than-representational view of the field that I have sought to take and that this theoretical approach supports. Furthermore, by enabling the affective capacities of my body and insider position to infuse my encounters in the research process I have further shown the capacities of more-than-representational research to get to the messy, hard-to-pin-down, momentary interactions that constitute lifestyle sports subcultures. At times, my position as a tourer challenged my abilities to perform as a researcher, even one aware of the need for reflexivity. As I developed as a researcher and became immersed in this project's data, this has affected my own understanding of my backcountry self-identity. Despite these trials, my insider position has come to be an integral dimension of the project that has expanded the depth of its analysis and allowed me to effectively animate the sensory, bodily elements of touring.

A FIELD IN FLUX

The backcountry subculture is currently in the midst of a period of unprecedented rapid and widespread change. As Urdahl was inspired by Nansen over a century ago, far reaching media depictions of the backcountry are enticing more and more individuals to traverse into uncontrolled mountain environments to expose themselves to the experiences these spaces offer. The rate of participation in touring has piqued the interest of commercial actors who have seen the potential of capitalising on this growing market.

As such innovative new products and equipment with near universal availability mean that tourers can push further and higher into the backcountry. In doing so they expand their embodied capacities that draw upon the capital they accumulate through their experience and engagement with the subculture.

Together these emerging developments can be understood as being born of encounters at intersections between all the constituent elements of the field. Encounters between human bodies, the non-human and immaterial abound and unfold to defy the established principles and rules of the field. Some tourers sense the affectivity of these struggles and express concerns about how other tourers are ‘doing it’, yet the range of responses to the opportunities, concerns and alterations to the subculture have the potential to limit the realisation of these fears. As well as introducing new modes of practice – for example producing digital content in an attention economy – that have a disruptive potential, commercialisation and the proliferation of digital media and technology constitute new means to preserve and express the subcultural values that may be seen to be under attack by those that distinguish themselves as more authentic tourers.

ENTANGLED PRACTICE, EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITIES

Amongst these sweeping reconfigurations of the field resulting from the entwinement of digital, commercial and embodied factors, the corporeal experiences in the mountains of the backcountry remain fundamental to understandings of it. A significant element of these experiences comes from the relationships tourers develop with those they spend time in the backcountry with and the mountain environments in which they practice. Spending time in these environments engenders a sense of intimacy and stewardship amongst tourers who come to regard ‘being out there’, sharing these experiences with friends with reverence.

At the same time, voluntary risk taking, that this thesis understands as edgework, stands as a major component of this embodied experience. In mitigating against avalanches, remoteness and harsh conditions tourers employ their embodied and objectified capital to stimulate feelings of mastery and control of their bodies and environments. The result of employing their skills and knowledge to successfully return from the edge produces moments of ineffable euphoria that tourers celebrate. Whether it be from snowboarding a particularly ‘gnarly’ line, or solving a complex problem like extracting a snowmobile

that has been wedged into a snowdrift, the embodied overcoming of these types of challenges is seductive for tourers. A significant part of these practices can involve the use of digital technologies that support them. Tourers rely on devices like avalanche beacons and GPS to augment their 'authentic' experiences and engage with the backcountry in a way that conforms to their interpretation of their practices and conveys it to others.

The combination of these corporeal experiences creates an affective mist that hones tourers' dispositions to see them invest in the established 'rules of the game'. These boundaries of practice prioritise an orientation towards safety, sound decision making and an awareness of ones' fragility in the context of the 'big environment' of the backcountry. These principles form an ideal of 'authentic' touring practice that are reinforced by embodied echoes in which tourers embark on a perpetual process of knowledge and skill acquisition, constructing 'authentic' self-identities.

The uptake, ubiquity and sophistication of modern digital technology has meant that tourers can now engage with these embodied echoes in emerging ways. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and TGR enable tourers to disseminate subcultural knowledge, aesthetics and styles to ever wider audiences, adding to the affective intensities of the field that orientate touring experience and disposition. Tourers also use digital media to distinguish themselves as 'authentic' and the practice of others as inappropriate and illegitimate. By expressing this self-identity of authenticity through the sharing of accurate knowledge, status is bestowed on individuals within localised and broader touring communities, further establishing the sanctity of these conventional principles.

Despite the ability of digital media and technology to support the orthodoxy of these taken-for-granted rules, it has also generated significant concern amongst tourers. Emerging from experiences of the spectrum of practice between the poles, tourers feel worried about the possibility of backcountry content to degrade the stability of established and 'authentic' ideals amongst the community. Digital media allows portrayals of the backcountry to reach audiences beyond the touring community, and often these depictions can fail to incorporate a holistic representation of embodied practice. In this regard backcountry content can be representative of 'the Red Bull

sublime’ wherein the conquests of tourers in the mountains and the extremity of their edgework, underscored by the sophisticated functionality of specialised equipment is made the focus. Content of this nature is intended to be exciting and awe inspiring, but fails to illuminate the intersections of preparation, decision making and embodied prowess that manifest such imagery. As such tourers have become concerned about the possibility that those without ‘authentically’ honed dispositions will be encouraged to attempt to reproduce these aesthetics and attitudes towards the backcountry. These sentiments are exacerbated by the increased commercial activity that has occurred within the field as awareness of touring has been raised.

Until recently the touring industry was largely comprised of a range of grassroots business and brands. As well as manufacturing and selling touring gear and offering guided backcountry experiences, these commercial actors have also been essential to the maintenance of the conventional subcultural values that tourers have invested in. Owned and operated by tourers, local backcountry stores serve as community hubs where tourers not only by the equipment they needed, but could be introduced to mentors that pass on knowledge and skills about how to use it appropriately and ‘authentically’. Specialised touring brands who manufacture that equipment draw on their understandings of the embodied practice in the design and innovation of gear that supports the perspectives of tourers who have honed their dispositions in the corporality of their experiences in the mountains. The touring industry has now evolved to a point where new commercial actors have entered the field, seeking to capitalise on the increasing interest in touring. Mainstream snowsports brands have dedicated considerable resources to developing innovative equipment that has been successfully marketed to a wide range of snowsports enthusiasts. Gear like splitboards, tech bindings, climbing skins and avalanche beacons can be ubiquitously found in outdoor recreation retail outlets. This availability has catalysed a familiarity with these types of gear that has seen its widespread consumption amongst individuals who have not toured before. These unfolding commercial dynamics are seen by some tourers to form a symbiotic relationship with digital media representations of backcountry practice. Subsequently many tourers express concerns about the propensity for the uninitiated to enter the backcountry without a grounding in what is thought to be the requisite knowledge and capacities to do so safely and ‘authentically’.

However these fears remain difficult to validate. Many participants relayed anecdotes whereby they *assume* the motivations of an ‘inauthentic’ tourer they have encountered are derived from the affects of commercialisation and digital media. Yet, only one of the informants could be said to interpret their own practice and experience through a prism that prioritises the ‘gnarliness’ of edgework and the status that it brings beyond the touring community. As has been outlined in Chapter 1, statistics on backcountry fatalities and accidents show that instances of these are trending downward, and that those tourers who are caught up in the consequences of edgework tend to be experienced, knowledgeable and well equipped. Moreover as Urdahl felt prompted to do in the 1800s, the ‘authentic’ outlook of many tourers leads them to make concerted efforts to disseminate relevant cultural capital necessary to preserve the orthodoxy of those principles.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

At the most foundational level this study was limited by the scope afforded by the financial, time and human resources available to the project. Despite the successful completion of fieldwork and 22 semi-structured interviews, expanding the project’s engagement with these elements of the research would have borne out more vivid and detailed knowledge about tourers and their practice. Interviewees were recruited from a range of backgrounds, nationalities and ages, however the sample size of 22 means that the findings are not generalisable. Furthermore, the commonalities of the sample in terms of their perspectives on their practice, experience and the field more broadly, suggests that the majority of interview participants became involved in the project as a result of their ‘authentic’ self-identities.

There were also methodological obstacles that arose through the data collection process that have also constrained the project. Dewsbury (2010) argues that it is ill-advised for more-than-representational researchers to dive head long into a methodology that prioritises audio visual data, and instead to explore other research techniques that can animate the social beyond the discursive. Nonetheless the ability to capture footage of the affectivity of touring and embed it within the presentation of this document would have

augmented the other more-than-representational approaches to data that the project has adopted. This kind of data would have enabled a more targeted exploration of how elements of the field such as digital media practices add to its affective background and how it impacts tourers and is impacted upon by them. For instance, cataloguing the embodiment of a tourer becoming excited about conditions they have been reading about in forecasts and how that affect might be transform their body and practice would offer further insights into how tourers experience their activities within the subculture. One of the barriers to completing this mode of data collection is the result of the insider position of the researcher. As Sharp (2020) contends an insider research can never truly stand inside an object of study in their investigations of it. In other words the insider researcher must consistently negotiate the reality of embodying the focus of their investigation while at the same time remaining separated from informants by the duality of their position and power as a researcher. Nonetheless, conducting research as an insider has afforded the opportunities to engage deeply with the data that was collected by the project and in doing so animate both the corporeal and discursive aspects of touring.

Through the research process it also became clear that the scope of this project did not allow for a thorough examination of several pertinent social structures and their manifestation within the field. Although class, gender, race and ethnicity have been pointed to in the study, it is clear that these constructs have a significant role in determining who can and cannot be an 'authentic' tourer. Other researchers of lifestyle sports have explored the barriers of entry to these fields experienced by women, people of colour and those without access to considerable economic resources, yet it has not been possible for this project to fully explore these phenomena within touring.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As intimated above, future research into touring would be well placed to engage further with notions of gender, class, race and ethnicity. For example others (Bunn 2017; Newmahr 2011) have highlighted the need to reconfigure the concepts of edgework to do away with the latent hegemonic masculinity and colonial ideals written into its understanding of voluntary risk taking. Taking up this cause would allow future research to better explore the experience of women in the backcountry to establish the different

approaches to risk that some individuals might take. Similarly the homogeneity of the sample, mostly white and relatively affluent, requires more investigation. While this is not at all unique to touring, the dynamics that unfold as a result of gendered and classed inequalities require further illumination. For example exploring how the punk-like DIY self-identities of tourers align with privilege that has seen them be involved in snowsports from a young age represent prospective nodes of knowledge that stand to be understood.

Beyond social science, this project has also uncovered a need for further multi-disciplinary engagement with its findings. Academic work concerning topics like snow and atmospheric science and psychological approaches to group dynamics have long been incorporated into established understandings that inform the practices of tourers. This thesis shows that there is need to incorporate the themes that have been discussed into this conference of ideas and research. For example, exploring the media consumption of tourers involved in avalanches. Research that can offer answers to these types of questions would present new ways of understanding how fatalities and accidents could be guarded against, arming tourers with further knowledge to buttress their safe and 'authentic' practice in the backcountry. This has been made particularly acute in recent months with the ramifications of COVID-19 on snowsports and touring. Ski areas have restricted ticket sales meaning that many people who ski and snowboard have found themselves unable to do so as they would like. As such sales of touring equipment, booking in avalanche safety training course and online discussions have accelerated throughout 2020, particularly as the 2020-21 northern hemisphere winter approaches. This has prompted many within subculture to question how this influx of new tourers might impact what is occurring in the backcountry. These sentiments are epitomised by the comments of Halsted 'Hacksaw' Morris, President of the American Avalanche Association seen in figure 8.1 wherein Morris calls on 'expert members of the community to encourage and mentor the newer folks about such things as avalanches'.

Nonetheless this thesis has highlighted the potential of more-than-representational epistemologies and methodologies to capture and animate discourse and embodiment of field like touring. This approach has been derived from the work of theorists such as Lorimer (2005), Threadgold (2020), Vannini (2015.a; 2015.b) and Wetherell (2012;

2013) to produce a methodological and analytical approach that speaks to the experiences of tourers and the encounters between their bodies, equipment, the mountains and knowledge. As such this thesis stands, not only as an example of the appropriateness of such a perspective, but also as model for the future application of more-than-representational approaches to social research.

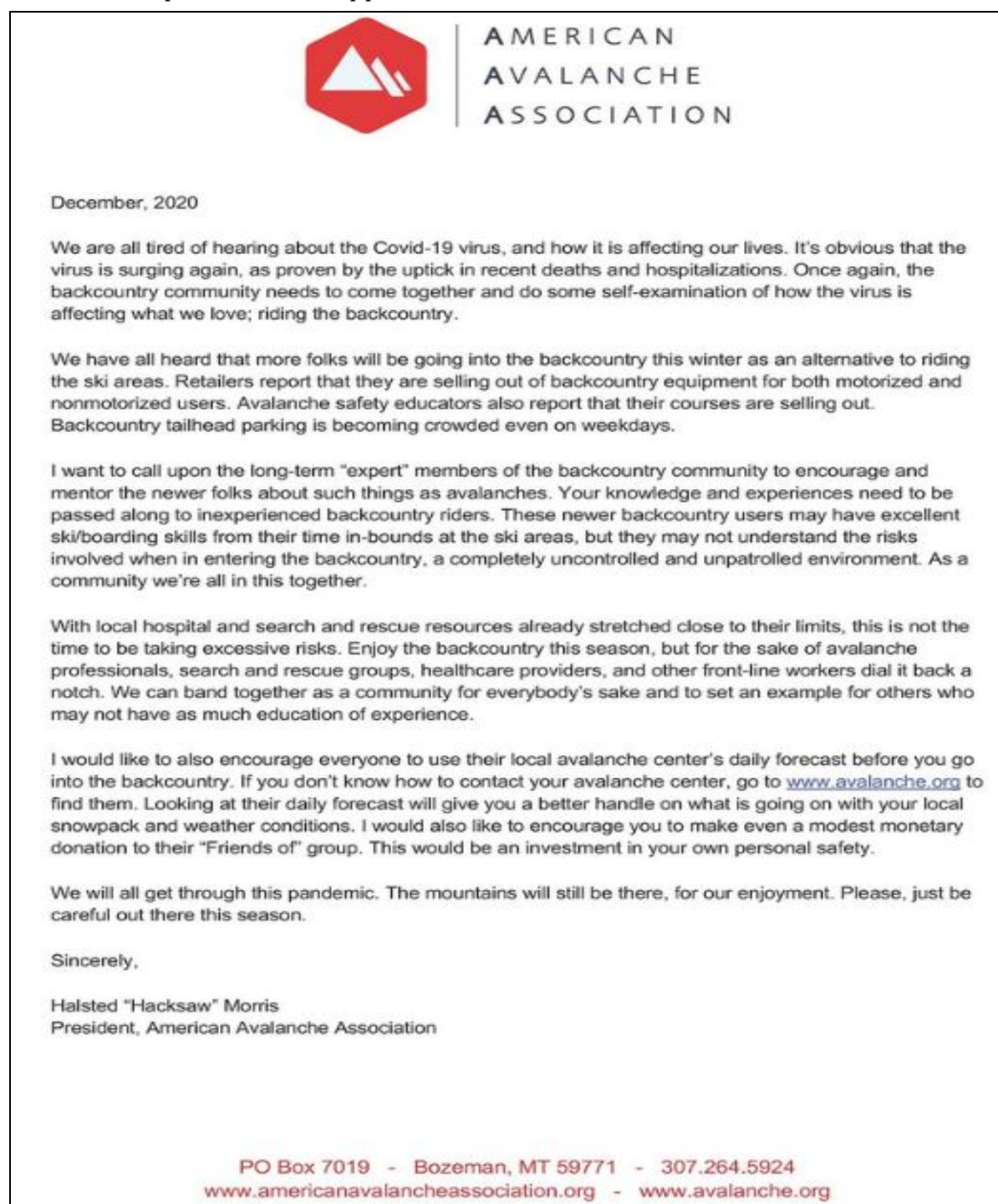


FIGURE 8.1: An open letter to the touring community from Halsted 'Hacksaw' Morris the President of the American Avalanche Association, to address the impacts of COVID-19 on touring. SOURCE: Facebook – American Avalanche Association page.

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