The thesis contains no material which has been accepted 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 in the text. 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.

Signed...........................................................................................................
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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the social processes that produce more effective risk-takers in the practice of high-risk climbing. In a process of dispositional accumulation, climbers must undergo a change in the way that they perceive and embody vertical space. This extends the concept of ‘edgework’ (Lyng, 1990) into what I call critical necessity, where climbers become ‘committed’ and must continually remain engaged in specific and intense practices in order to return. The attributes of vertical space provide the perfect place to experience ‘social weightlessness’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 14). Those who can enter this space are not screened by arbitrary social requisites but instead by the mountain itself. The distinction of entering this space comes with a genuine threat of injury and death. But the climbing field is protected through an interplay of illusio and a doxic misinterpretation of the shift between the epistemological basis of the field, and the ontological experience of climbing itself.

Dispositions are argued to be developed through more than a simple transferral (Bourdieu, 1984: 170) but instead can be acquired in a variety of ways that must be considered in their empirical context. Along with thirty five interviews, this research is based on eighteen months of multi-site ethnographic fieldwork with climbers engaged in high-risk rock climbing styles and ice, alpine and expeditionary climbing. The concept of habitus has been a guiding concept for this research, as it allows for a careful study of the dispositional attributes of the climbing body. Habitus has been used with a two-fold purpose. It is firstly used as a means of understanding how agents gain skills and orientate themselves to climbing practice. It has secondly been used, through the researchers own development, as a means of gaining greater embodied awareness of the social process required to become a climber.

One of the crucial insights habitus offers is its improvisational and generative components. This is useful for exploring climbing practice, as climbing lacks organisational structures that guide its practitioners with authority – yet climbers maintain regularity. However, habitus is shown to have shortcomings in dealing with accounts of the individual in action because it has been theorised with an insensitivity to the scope of observation and analysis. In order to address this, the concept of the embodied echo is introduced as a means to explore the more radically embodied and experiential components of habitus. Through the use of echoes as an allegory for the construction of dispositions, it is possible to give specific accounts to the processes of dispositional acquisition, mutation and activation. In effect, it functions as a theory of the habitus in motion.
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction
During my undergraduate degree, I had the fortune to take a course that introduced me to ‘edgework’ sociology (Lyng, 1990). It was at a similar time I had moved away from an earlier interest in hiking and towards a passion for climbing. But I couldn’t help ask what was so interesting about climbing? The absurdity of climbing continually struck me was when I had started climbing and was about five metres off the ground. I had put so much time into planning what routes to climb, when to climb, getting there, who I was climbing with. Then, within moments my entire engagement with the world dramatically shifted. Everything prior almost seemed illusory, like a dream, and I had finally woken up, only to find myself desperately perched on some pile of rocks. The lack of urgency, the leisurely pace of gearing up to enter the vertical space gave way to the absolute peril and intensity of climbing, where getting things right had unambiguous consequences. This was often a troubling sense and at times I would think about being back on the couch, watching a movie, being safe. But the reality of this would give me a terrible anxiety, realising that I was just as mortal here in the vertical as I was on that couch. As I questioned my motives to climb I continuously met other climbers asking the same questions. The question was deeply infused in climbing literature and films. Indeed, even Simon Thompson’s (2010) history of British climbing is titled Unjustifiable Risk, hinting at the question as a sociological problem. The meeting, then, of sociological and personal interest in climbing was fateful. This led into my honours thesis Epic Hunters before beginning this PhD thesis.

There are certain parallels in my approach with Wacquant’s outlined in his work Body and Soul (2004). While initially utilising a boxing gym as a means of access into a poor black community in Chicago, he shifted towards an interest in boxing itself. Through this he undertook his own dispositional conversion and development to become a pugilist. Wacquant argues that sociology must try to examine and ‘convey the taste and ache of action, the sound and the fury of the
social world that the established approaches of the social sciences typically mute when they do not suppress them altogether’ (Wacquant, 2004: vii). Throughout the course of my honours and PhD projects I have undergone my own inculcation in climbing practice. While this shift in my own habitus is not the focus of this thesis, it has nevertheless had an important impact on its insights. The very topic of development and deployment of disposition is understood not only through countless observations made across the world of climbers deep in the urgency of action, but also through a practical empathy with the motives and practice of climbing. I draw extensively on my own body of experience (or my own body’s experience) to bring together a sociological account of the climber.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the question ‘Why do I climb?’ asked singularly yet by a community, was that it had seemed to have no real answer. It could be answered abstractly or specifically, using philosophical or spiritual accounts, escapism and challenge. Through what is now four years of ethnographic immersion in rock, ice and alpine and expeditionary climbing across Australia, New Zealand, North America, South America and Europe a sociological engagement with this question has been pursued. However, in many ways the original logic of the question was rejected. This is because, as will soon be seen, the question seeks a cognitively satisfying reason to engage in the deeply corporeal. The question and the practice occur in their own distinct ontological spaces. The reasons to climb look very different on the mountain to how they look chatting with friends over a drink. Purpose cannot be sustained by reason, but must give over to the durability of habit. This thesis, therefore, forwards that the pursuit of climbing is embedded deeply in the embodied development of disposition.

1.2 Climbing and Modernity
In order to understand climbing as an object of study, it is best to outline some of its characteristics. Firstly, some aspects of its history will be considered. This in no way is a comprehensive history of the development of climbing. Rather it is a selection of moments within this history to demonstrate the complex relationship it holds and has held with broader
social fields, and how shifts within the climbing field\(^1\) reflected events taking place at these broader levels. It is a history that encompasses areas as broad as countercultural rejection of bourgeois norms (Ortner, 1999; Simon, 2002), a close affinity with imperial ambitions (Bayers, 2003; Ellis, 2001) and a class basis that has shifted radically at various times in its history (Brown, 2009; Thompson, 2010). Perhaps, the only continuity within this history is a sense of distinction underpinning the motivations of those engaged in the practice.

While the occasional romp up a mountain had begun earlier, mountaineering is considered to have been legitimised as a sport in 1854 (Thompson, 2010: 31). Three years later the first organisation supporting mountaineering, the Alpine Club, began in Britain. In these early years of the industrial era a leisure boom was underway, with the formalisation of rules in boxing, football and rugby union (Thompson, 2010: 24-25). It is therefore reasonable to assert that climbing represents one of the oldest forms of voluntary risk-taking practiced today. Membership in the Alpine Club during this period was almost exclusively professional men, including doctors, the clergy, lawyers and academics (Thompson, 2010; Simon, 2005). This was also the case for the Scottish Mountaineering Club formed in 1889 (Thompson, 2010: 100; Brown, 2009: 317-318). These were not the only clubs that arose during the era, but they received the greatest cultural prominence owning to their elite membership. Simon (2005) considers that this became an effective way of producing social capital for Victorian professionals. It gave them the opportunity to demonstrate to their professional colleagues their ‘good health, energy and integrity’ (Simon, 2005: 221). Further, the negotiation of these perils allowed for a display of courage. The mountains thus acted as a proving ground, for the gentlemanly practices of the Victorian era prevented any show of these abilities and attributes within ordinary civilised life. Mountaineering acted as a metaphor of success in their personal and professional lives.

\(^1\) A discussion of the concept of field is more fully developed in Chapter 5: Constructing the Field.

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Over the next decades, an increasingly working class population was to dominate the world of climbing. The first of these periods was during the inter-war years, where the depression created unemployment and idleness for the working class (Perrin, 2006: 68; Brown, 2009: 319). This movement was centred in Scotland. The mountains were close and mountaineering could be done quite cheaply. It was possible to reach them via hitch-hiking and then to sleep in caves or under overhung boulders, eliminating some of the major costs of the sport. Further, unlike many other heavily regulated spaces of the elite, it was impossible to restrict access to the mountains. This movement accelerated in the post-war years, owing to a number of factors. Shorter work weeks and shorter work days freed the working class for longer periods of the week (Thompson, 2010: 197). Moreover, job availability was high, allowing individuals to quit jobs to go on extended trips knowing that finding a position on return would be easy. Coupled with better nutrition and pay, the working class had the time and energy to pursue what is a time-consuming and physically demanding pastime (Thompson, 2010: 197). Many climbing biographies of the 1970s and 80s in England also attribute the ease of collecting dole payments during a time of high unemployment as a reason why they began climbing, a reflection of conditions from 50 years previous (for an example, see Pritchard 1997).

During the post war era cultural changes occurred in the climbing field that reflected some of the broader countercultural movements of the time (Ortner, 1999; Taylor, 2010). By this stage, climbing had become well established in Western societies outside of Europe. One of the important emerging arenas of the climbing field was Yosemite Valley in California. By the 1960s the beat ‘revolution’ had firmly entered the climbing community. Best expressed by Jack Kerouac, the beat revolution sought a world where ‘existential play’ figured as the most authentic means of self-expression and identity (Taylor, 2010: 137). Taylor notes that in Yosemite this countercultural shift exhibited a rather paradoxical, yet consistent, series of attitudes. These were exhibited at their extreme by the elite climbers that inhabited ‘Camp 4’:

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Residents pursued a weird version of the self-made man, yet their goal was rather conservative. Their lifestyles were indeed radical departures from accepted norms. Underneath, though, was a familiarly gendered, very American belief about the need to control one’s destiny. Each climber yearned, as much as their fathers, to be their own man (Taylor, 2010: 138).

While climbers began pursuing alternative lifestyles from those offered in ‘mainstream’ society, they maintained many of its underlying philosophies. It hence only ever achieved countercultural status from the lifestyle of its participants. They still retained many of the doxic normalities of a broader hegemonic masculinity.

Climbing techniques, especially in mountaineering began making an important evolution towards new styles that reflected many of the cultural shifts occurring in the climbing field. Ortner notes that military-styled siege tactics\(^2\) became unpopular, in favour of climbing in ‘alpine style’ (1999: 188). This new style was characterised by removing the large parties of support climbers to the bare minimum required, two or three at most. Mountains would be attempted in single pushes, rather than having a series of stocked camps along the route of ascent that previously allowed climbers to rest. This meant that climbers had to carry everything they wished to bring, radically stripping down what was deemed necessary for a climber to make a successful ascent. This new style became essentially leaderless, working in partnerships, in contrast to the almost military-styled hierarchy that existed in siege tactics.

1.3 Climbing in the Contemporary Era
In the contemporary context, climbing has perhaps returned to domination by the professional classes. Mitchell notes that ‘executives, scientists and businessmen... constitute the majority of contemporary mountains climbers’ (1983: 224). Unfortunately, he gives this phenomenon a brief, somewhat romantic and unreflexive analysis. The elite in question are also ‘highly imaginative and creative persons’ that consider themselves to be ‘exceptional persons’ and climb mountains in order to release their abilities from the shackles of ‘bureaucratic regulations and organizational regimen’ (Mitchell, 1983: 224). This explanation fails to explain why at other

\(^2\) See Glossary 1: Terms.
points in history the working class have been dominant members of the climbing community. Rather, it romanticises the pursuit of climbing with little explanation of the manner in which climbing has made a return to being dominated by the middle class.

Mitchell’s work focuses primarily on mountaineers, that is, people who climb mountains. It is possible to draw together other studies to give a partial look into the various interest groups that exist within the climbing community. For clarity, a group that largely rely on climbers, but do not belong to the climbing community are, as Simon (2002) defines them, ‘Summiteers’. Summiteering is primarily about victory over mountains. Rather than the style and the qualities of the climbing route, it is about getting to the summit as the ‘primary experience’ (Simon, 2002: 192). But, because of these qualities, summiteers are rarely skilled climbers in their own right and depend upon professional guides and Sherpas to attain their goals. Simon uses the famous story of Bass and Well’s summiting of the highest mountain on each major continent as his primary example. These peaks, such as Everest, are climbed by individuals not belonging to the climbing field, but who pay guides to mediate the dangers, at least as much as possible, in order for them to attain their goal. In this form, climbing could be considered to have become a commodified pursuit (Lewis, 2001: 241). Lewis summarises that ‘commodification is geared towards the hermetically sealed and knowable experience. And commercial mountaineering must attempt to fulfil this ideal’ (Lewis, 2001: 256).

Perhaps, as Lewis wonders, climbing can still offer a space to non-commodified leisure and genuine adventure (2001: 240-242). Climbers do not typically climb in the naked pursuit of reaching the top: ‘the satisfactions of climbing are intrinsic rather than extrinsic; neither “getting to the top” nor even “surviving” are really intelligible as satisfactory ends unless they are thought of as part of the process of climbing itself’ (Heywood, 1994: 186). Climbing is more concerned with the means than the ends; ‘the justification of climbing is climbing... [it is the recognition] that you are a flow. It is not a moving up but a continuous flowing; you move up only to keep
the flow going. There is no possible reason for climbing except for climbing itself; it is a self-
communication’ (Csikszentmihalyi, quoted in Mitchell, 1983: 155).

A complementary aspect of the climbing field is that it is largely a ‘self-regulating community’
(Simon, 2002). While there are many influential organisations, such as national climbing clubs,
there is no strict governing body for designing and enforcing procedures. Rather, these are
worked out by climbers and often enforced by them. For instance, Mt. Arapiles in Australia has
a strict traditional climbing ethic that has been fostered throughout its historical development.
This is a practice enforced by the climbing community. In the Mt. Arapiles guidebook under the
title ‘Rock Police’ these ‘ethics’ are explained: ‘In the past where climbers have placed bolts in
inappropriate situations, they have been removed. Occasionally bolts are placed on existing
routes but this is very rare and done only after extensive consultation with local climbers and
the first ascensionists’ (Mentz and Tempest, 2008: 16). If the ethics of an area are transgressed
by a climber, their behaviour will be rectified not by an institution or some other regulatory
organisation, but by other climbers protecting ethics that they value.

Another component of climbing practice worth discussing here has been noted by Kiewa (2002)
in her study of traditional rock climbers in Queensland, Australia. She suggests that climbers
often become traditional rock climbers as a means of self-expression; as the stricter and riskier
climbing style presents a clear demonstration of identity. However, by becoming a member of
these groups, it becomes difficult to climb outside of this style, as it is deemed to be a
transgression of the purity of the style. Hence a dilemma arises: in order to be a traditional
climber, one must not be anything but a traditional climber. While this argument can be
critiqued for its universal application to social groups (in order to be defined as something, one
cannot be something other than that thing), the argument is relevant for showing some of the

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3 For an extended explanation see Glossary 2: Styles
4 See Glossary 1: Terms.
struggles that occur within the climbing field. These often revolve around issues of technique, ‘ethics’ and authenticity.

Lewis’ (2000; 2001) auto-ethnographic study is a useful development of the myopia of a particular style. He refers to ‘adventure climbing,’ a traditional rock climbing style that strictly adheres to utilisation of removable protection instead of fixed protection (for instance, bolts placed in the rock that can be used for safety by a climber). Lewis notes that ‘in resisting the perceived certainties of sport climbing,’ the practice of adventure climbing sustains not only experiential feelings of adventure but also serves to protect the cliff environment (2001: 271). This position is unfounded. During the first ascents of routes, ‘cleaning’ (also known as ‘gardening’) will often take place. That is, dirt is removed from cracks, lichen is stripped from rock, and plants are ripped from the ground (for a discussion, see Taylor, 2010). That is, if it is necessary (i.e. these things are obstacles to an enjoyable and aesthetic climb). Perhaps Lewis’ aim is to develop a picture of how romantically an adventure climber views adventure climbing. While the account is entirely false from an ecological point of view, it is useful for demonstrating a perspective that traditional climbers hold.

An obvious problem with this thesis is its blindness to gender. Climbing’s history has placed women on the periphery from the earliest periods of mountaineering (Craig, 2013). Even into the 1960s the assumption of male superiority in climbing remained (for instance, see Taylor, 2010). Indeed, Ortner notes that up to the 1970s Himalayan alpinism ‘had been an overwhelmingly male sport’ and was built on ‘male styles of interaction derived from other all-

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5 For an extended explanation see Glossary 2: Styles
6 See Glossary 1: Terms.
7 See note above
8 See Glossary 1: Terms.
9 See Glossary 1: Terms.
10 An example of this is a route in the Blue Mountains named ‘Firebug’ after the first ascensionists poured petrol down the route and set it on fire in order to clean out the vegetation. While this is an exception, it shows the problematic relationship all climbers have with sharing a cliff with vegetation. For an extended discussion of ecological research on the effect of climbing on cliff ecology, see Adams and Zaniewski, 2012; Meadows, 2008; Knight, 2002; Vogler and Reisch, 2011 and; Baker, 1999.

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male institutions, especially the army’ (1999: 217). Further even though climbers offered their purposes to include spirituality and selfhood the pursuit remained centrally ‘about masculinity and manhood’ (Ortner, 1999: 217). While some of the countercultural shifts within the sport have eroded this legacy, its effect still remains.

Gender has often been a focus of research regarding edgework (for instance, see Lois, 2003, 2005; Thorpe, 2008, 2009, 2010; Robinson, 2008; Forsey, 2012). Victoria Robinson’s *Everyday Masculinities* (2008) gives this issue sustained attention for the pursuit of rock climbing. It is not useful here to venture into this discussion. My study is not intending to look at these macrological issues, which require a broader lens for the purposes of discussion. It drives towards examining the specific constitution of dispositions in the risk taker. Of course, one of the particular mediators of this system of dispositions is gender. This would be an issue that could be carefully engaged with in future work to draw upon the incorporation of gendered dispositional systems in the risk-taker. However, it would also be possible to give sustained attention to aspects of class and ethnicity.

1.4 Risk
It would seem that the most forthcoming concern in a study of climbing would be the practice of voluntary risk-taking. That is, how does a community develop meaning around taking risks? This question presents edgework sociology (Lyng, 2005) as a useful starting point for inquiry. Edgework sociology aims to understand why, in contemporary Western societies, there is a prominence of activities that have at their core a navigation of an ‘edge’ that may represent the edge between life and death, consciousness and unconscious or sanity and insanity. Studies utilising this approach have included skydivers (Lyng 1990), BASE jumpers (Ferrell et. al, 2001) Forsey (2012) refers to a ‘gendered habitus’ as a means of explanation of some of the distinctions between gender roles in edgework activities. This fits with a critique that will be made in Chapter 4 of the use of the concept of habitus in studies of embodiment. It is suffice to say that gender does not precede habitus and as such we may only designate rough systems of habitus that constitute particular homologies before these systems succumb to the intersections of other macro-structural phenomena (i.e. gender and class, gender and ethnicity and so forth).

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and mountain rescue teams (Lois, 2005). These studies also have broadened to consider risk-taking as diverse as financial risks in stock-markets (Smith, 2005).

The manner in which the perils of climbing are defined is problematic. As Lewis notes, ‘what appears to the outsider as reckless, death-inducing activity, is, for the mountaineer, a moment of controlled and calculated risk: all potential hazards are continually assessed and reassessed’ (2001: 247). This is an aspect of climbing that has been more fully drawn out in West and Allin’s (2010) study of British adventure climbers. They find that traditional rock climbers believe that they are in control of the risks involved in climbing in most circumstances, only engaging in ‘edgework’ (discussed below) in occasional circumstances through climbing routes more difficult or dangerous than they would usually engage. In edgework sociology, risk, or voluntary risk taking refers to the deliberate ‘pursuit of activities that involve a high potential for death, serious physical injury, or psychic harm’ (Lyng, 2009: 107). These three categories are suitable for a discussion of climbing risk. However, Lyng adds uncertainty into this discussion. It is not just the probability of harm, but also the elements of edgework that are unknown, perhaps unknowable, that need to be addressed. He forwards that edgework may be better seen as a ‘general theory of uncertainty seeking rather than a theory of risk seeking per se’ (Lyng, 2009: 109, emphasis in original). If Lyng’s account is intended as a general theory, then what needs to be built here is a specific one. While climbing has numerous overlaps with other outdoor and edgeworking activities, it also has nuances that exclude a simple account of the risks involved.

While Lyng uses a straightforward definition of risk as ‘the probability of an adverse effect of a hazard’ (2009: 109) it is important here to consider a number of ways risk has (or can be) defined. Ewald notes that ‘nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyses the danger, considers the event. As Kant might have put it, the category of risk is a category of understanding; it cannot be given in sensibility or intuition’ (Ewald, 1991: 199). Ewald contends that risk is not an objective thing that...
happens to the agent (or society). It is instead a mode of recognition and perception; a means of framing events in terms of the probability of harm, damage or loss. Further, even though Ulrich Beck (1992a; 1992b) focuses on risk as a component of consequences of modernity returning on modernity – that risk is primarily about finding ways to deal with the consequences of human-constructed hazards – he also notes that prior to the industrial era hazards were primarily from some ‘other’, forces of the universe visited upon mankind (Beck, 1992a: 98). As will be seen in this thesis, climbing combines these definitions. Climbers construct risks through practices of management and control but then, particularly in the alpine, accept the looming threat of ‘objective hazards’: the uncontrollable forces of the mountain, where the mountain can visit unforeseen events on the climber.

One of the major difficulties with definitions of and research regarding risk is that it primarily concerns itself with cognitivist accounts regarding rational calculation that is unsubstantiated by empirical accounts of the embodied individual (Binkley, 2009; Farrugia, 2013). The difficulty with these accounts, particularly for this study, is that risk and uncertainty intertwine in the urgency of action that is demanded in vertical space. Risk becomes felt more than thought. Further, using risk-taking as a singular focus in this instance removes it from a more complex body of practices. A study with understanding risk-taking at its core would necessarily give less consideration to the amount of time climbers devote to things that are not considered risk-taking. That is, I am not only interested in the major notion of risk, but how an entire community of people devise practices and give not risk-taking but climbing meaning. Climbing is made of a web of aesthetics, community, movement, prowess, skills, histories, politics and autonomy. A focus on risk-taking would hide the attraction to these other components. Yet, these other components of the climbing field may help to understand the desire to take risks through their detraction from a sheer focus on risk. Thus, in order to understand risk, risk must be given the position in this study as it is found within the climbing field.
Nevertheless, this thesis gives emphasis to high-risk climbing styles and hence, it is difficult not to give a lop-sided perspective. The largest group of climbers do not concern themselves with high-risk climbing. This debate has readily been covered (for instance Heywood, 1994; Bogardus, 2012) and will be turned to at later points. Suffice it to say, the ‘risk’ elements of climbing are even limited within high risk climbing styles and are often extremely relative to the climbing area, the climbing route, the climbing team and the specific approach taken and the experience that informs it. This requires a basic familiarity with some of the central elements of risk in climbing (as these are often poorly understood). While there are a number of techniques (see Glossary 2: Styles), the main approach in climbing is what is known as a leading/seconding system of ascent, which will be more fully explored in Chapter 3: Edgework, Seriousness and Critical Necessity. For now, it is suffice to say that it is in this process that one of the major risks of climbing resides. The climber may find nowhere suitable to place a piece of this protection, meaning that they might climb two, five, ten or more metres between placements (what a climber refers to as a ‘runout’). These pieces of protection may be less than ideal, meaning that they would possibly fail in a fall. This would mean a longer fall, if not hitting the ground (what climbers sometimes refer to as ‘decking’). Or even, the dilemma where the leader’s strength is diminished, where they may fall off because they have spent the time placing/attempts to place gear or whether they should forget placing protection to climb through a difficult section but risk a large fall (known as a ‘whipper’). These are just some of the contingencies that must be dealt with and continuously reappraised throughout the process of lead climbing. Once the leader has reached the top of a ‘pitch’ (climbing to a convenient ledge or to the end of the length of rope) they will build an anchor using pieces of removable protection and securing themselves to it. This will allow them to belay the second up to this

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12 See Glossary 1: Terms.
13 See Glossary 1: Terms.
14 See Glossary 1: Terms.
15 See Glossary 1: Terms.
16 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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point. The second climber\textsuperscript{17} is thus typically safer, as the potential for long falls has been reduced to the stretch of the rope. They then follow the path that the lead climber\textsuperscript{18} has taken until they reach the anchor point. From here, the process repeats, where the climbers have the option of switching roles. But this is the barest examination of the risks in climbing. In the case of alpine climbing in particular, the equation of risk shifts to include numerous other hazards, such as avalanches, ice and rockfall, exposure (frostbite/hypothermia), exhaustion, altitude sickness, storms and a plethora of other potential hazards. These become interwoven in the fabric of risk experience, where each decision to reduce risk in one way may lead to its increase in another.

Taking risks in these environments are often not so much about risk negation as much as finding an effective balance between risks.

While analysing risks is useful for delineating progressive dispositional development, it does not accurately reflect the climbing field. This thesis builds on ‘edgework’ (Lyng, 2005) in order to entertain the notion of critical necessity. This conceptual approach to the risks of climbing emphasises the spectrum of experience that a climber must pass through in order to complete a climb. While the risks of being on lead – a space where threats of injury and death remain imminent – are physically and psychologically demanding, climbers must also learn to endure through less engaging spaces, whether this is remaining patient and alert during a two hour belay or feeling comfortable ‘enough’ about sleeping on the side of a mountain. The utter ‘edge’ of climbing is only ever briefly visited. The most important insight of this approach then, is the incorporation of edgework while retaining attention on the less edgy, though nevertheless taxing elements of the pursuit. From this position, it can be difficult to ascertain just what risk means.

Recently I was out at a climbing area west of the Blue Mountains, Australia. The area, while sporting a number of high quality climbs, sees a comparatively small number of climbers. We

\textsuperscript{17} See Glossary 1: Terms.
\textsuperscript{18} See Glossary 1: Terms.
did not run into anyone in camp nor while climbing. It is an extra hour of driving to reach from Sydney and the approaches to climbing areas are a minimum of 45 minutes (assuming good fitness and knowledge of the area, as it can be easy to lose approach trails). As I belayed later in the day, a friend asked me if I was including a discussion of ice climbing in my thesis. Since my discussion was about high risk, it seemed that alpine climbing was the main focus. This excluded ice climbing, since there are numerous routes that are easy to access and a careful, if not conservative climber should not really ever come to harm. I distractedly put forward that most ice climbs are in alpine areas and are often threatened by avalanches from above. This constituted an alpine environment and so it was quite risky in this regard. As I reflected later, it never occurred to me to emphasise that ice climbing involves climbing frozen waterfalls! Ice climbing, from most perspectives, would be considered risky. But what this encounter emphasises is what risk looks like from the logic of climbing. Once the gradual inculcation of the climbing field takes hold, it is difficult to understand the risks that the vertical realm present in any other way. Indeed, we were having this discussion while the lead climber I was belaying climbed a route that, while not technically difficult, was poorly protected enough that from certain positions on the route a fall could have been quite serious. But the lead climber knows he will not fall. The risk, far from being analysed and understood in a rational, cognitive sense, is broken down into a moment by moment play, where each movement is considered in a practical evaluation.

Climbing consists of peculiar systems of regulation and improvisation that are made all the more interesting through the omnipresence of danger. These do not correspond to a particular organisation, nor a rigid system of training. Instead, they are passed through the multiple local guidebooks and literature, the climbing community and the terrain itself restricting the reasonable options of movement, producing climbing ‘styles’, which are unified matrices of principles and practices that need to be present during an ascent. These may be ‘free’ or ‘aid’
climbing, ‘sport’ or ‘traditional’. These ascent styles constitute a central dispositional gravity. This is the core of climbing practice and where it is possible to observe the most coherent homologies. Climbers know ascents through their ascent style and struggle over the meanings of ascents, such as whether they are done in ‘good’ style. Chapter 5: Constructing the Field will develop a discussion of this homology in order to show that through these struggles styles become normalised and routine, hiding the lateral possibilities. While I argue that improvised embodiment lies at the centre of climbing practice, there is a fairly rigid system of definitions that constitutes the parameters in which this embodiment can unfold. This sediments in the field through communities and area-specific climbing guidebooks. Gradually, a rationalisation of climbing and an elimination of the possibilities of alternate ascent methods and techniques take place.

The incorporation into this system will begin from Bourdieu’s concept of illusio to understand how a ‘gravity’ is strengthened in the would-be climber. It examines how people become involved in climbing, in particular, and find it desirable to invest time and energy. This demonstrates that agents already possess a fairly malleable habitus, one that shares in dispositions from other outdoor pursuits that give the agent access to the logic of climbing prior to involvement in the field. Through gaining illusio the would-be climber is also entering a process of change, whereby new dispositions are being gained. The climber is not embedded in a heavily structured, formalised and codified system of learning. Rather, they must make time and negotiate climbing practice through a piecemeal engagement. The picture is often partial and requires a strong personal commitment. It is tempting to view this process as an example of the reflexivity of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). That is, through an institutional shift that demands the individual become a more effective manager of risk at the

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19 For an extended explanation see Glossary 1: Terms and Glossary 2: Styles.
20 The concept of illusio will be more fully explored in Chapter 4: Habitus and the Embodied Echo and Chapter 6: Entering the Field.

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personal level. This requires heightened levels of reflexivity, whereby the agent can consider the risks consciously and thus become responsible for personal transformation and biography. With this account, it would be very plausible that the growth in climbing and edgework activities in general is an example (or perhaps a consequence) of individualisation. However, numerous critiques point out the empirically untested aspects of this approach, which relies too heavily on a cognitivist approach to reflexivity (Binkley, 2009; Farrugia, 2013). Lash (1994) and McNay (1999) emphasise that reflexivity is itself reified in Beck’s account, as it is reliant on deeply embedded habits. They critique Beck’s approach because it overemphasises personal transformation while ignoring the more routinized, habitual components of everyday life and decision-making. What is critical in this thesis is to account for the slow process of change that the climber undergoes. This is marked neither by a distinct reflexivity nor habit: it is a process that requires levels of thoughtful and conscious engagement while also developing a durable, habitual configuration of practices. These abilities are deployed in the powerful urgency of climbing movement, where there is time for cognitive space. And yet, much of the learning of climbing comes from being in climbing space, again and again. Climbing is learnt, primarily, through climbing.

1.5 A Theory of Vertical Practice
The major theoretical influence of this thesis is the work of Pierre Bourdieu. While there are numerous well-rehearsed critiques (primarily of determinism21) levelled at Bourdieu’s work, these do little to reduce its explanatory potential. Indeed, zealous critics have been as damaging to Bourdieu’s legacy as those who apply his concepts in a simplistic and uncritical fashion:

the shabby way in which his work was treated arose as much from servile disciples who were happy (and unfortunately still happy) to apply untringly a model whose universal pertinence was beyond doubt in their eyes, as from opponents or even enemies who were

21 Bourdieu offers that one of the reasons he is read this way is that his sociology is ‘interested in the determinisms that are ordinarily forgotten, in the specific determinisms which weigh heavily on the thought of the thinkers. Because they regard themselves especially free, they are especially irritated by a sociologist who discovers that they are especially determined’ (Bourdieu, 1992b: 40).
in too great a hurry to cast him into outer darkness or relegate him to the past of a so-called classical sociology (Lahire, 2011: viii).

The insights that can be afforded from utilising concepts such as habitus and field come not from an ‘orthodox’ application, but rather used as a basis to begin a conceptual engagement that extends into new and original theoretical ground. Climbing affords a novel application of Bourdieusian theory while simultaneously pushing these concepts further than their more universal applications would grant them. Many of the critiques of Bourdieu miss this intention of his conceptual framework, which strives to be ‘polymorphic, supple, and adaptable, rather than defined, calibrated, and used rigidly’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 23).

Yet, while I offer a defence of Bourdieu, it is important to provide a legitimation for its inclusion as a major theoretical resource. Firstly, edgework sociology has provided numerous methods of theorising high-risk activities. Some of these resort to looking for sociologists who have shared an interest in risky behaviours. What Bourdieu’s theory of practice brings to the table is a capacity to examine the individual without forsaking the social/structural. As studies such as those of Wacquant (1992, 1995, 2004) Spencer (2009, 2012) and Garcia and Spencer (2013) demonstrate, many of the core concepts of Bourdieu can be used as a starting point for an examination of body-centric practices. The emphasis of this thesis is on the practices of climbers.

It is an effort to explore how social process become internalised in the agent and in turn how these move from a potential to act into action; how learning imposes durability of ability and how these are maintained, eroded or enhanced through continuing action. Risk is not something that can be entirely sustained through rational deduction of the odds. For the rest, agents are guided by a ‘practical sense’ that ‘precognises; it reads in the present state the possible future states with which the field is pregnant. For in habitus the past, the present and the future intersect and interpenetrate one another’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant: 1992: 22, emphasis in original). This is a critical springboard for this investigation, as the climber’s ability to anticipate,

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22 For instance, Lyng (2005) points towards the possibility of Foucault’s ‘limit-experience’ and also Goffman’s use of the term ‘action’ (Lyng, 2014).
to act in the present with an eye on the future that is informed by the past is how the edgeworker can give themselves over to the moment without constantly requiring reflexive engagement.

There is a need to move more deeply into these explosive and critical moments of action than habitus, arguably, has the capacity to provide. What will be explored here is a concept of the *habitus in motion*. As I have already noted, this thesis does not intend to simply reproduce Bourdieusian concepts regardless of the empirical conditions that they are being applied to. What is primarily emphasised and developed here is a more radical temporalisation of habitus. In particular, this will rely on the interplay of the concepts of habitus and illusio through the more nuanced accounts of the *embodied echo* and *social gravity*. These offer a way of conveying dispositional coordination in a more fluid movement and configuration of dispositions that draw not only from the doxa\(^{23}\) of a field but also from aspects of experience that rely on situational and environmental realities. These offer an account of fluid ontological spaces that rely on doxic (homologous) principles of fields but break into the specific needs of the task at hand. This is a critical point, as what this thesis emphasises is an empirical account of how dispositions *activate* and *deploy*:

> If sociologists should prove incapable of grasping particularly how the various types of “disposition”, “scheme”, etc. (types of “habitus”), are constructed by social experience, these terms would lose any heuristic interest and constitute simply one more *asylum ignorantiae* in the history of sociological concepts (Lahire, 2011: 175).

This is a key statement on the importance of the focus of this thesis, which seeks a characterisation of disposition, rather than using the concept as a means of giving a ‘theoretical gloss’ to the research (Grenfell 2010: 18). However, this conjuncture of the regulated and the improvised gives what is at times an over-emphasis on the bodily improvisation of the climber. Climbing practice is not all improvising, conscious engagement. One of the most powerful aspects of the doxic principles of climbing can be found in an analysis of accidents. While risk is

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\(^{23}\) The concept of doxa is more fully developed in Chapter 5: Constructing the Field.

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a primary element of vertical space, climbers must believe that these risks are avoidable. Where they do happen, they happen to others. And these accidents occur more often than not through misreading a situation, through human error. Yet, climbing practice is infused with risk and uncertainty. The configuration of conditions on a mountain vary and are varying through the time of the climb. Weather, avalanches, dehydration and exhaustion along with the mountains own variables present a continuing reconstruction of the scenario that climbers finds themselves in. Here, climbing practice involves a doxic interplay of epistemology and ontology, where the knowledge basis of the field disappears from the simply cognitive assessments and justifications of climbing into the sophisticated meeting of conscious and pre-conscious practices acted out in situ.
2. Methodology: The Climbing Researcher

For a sociologist more than any other thinker, to leave one’s thought in a state of unthought is to condemn oneself to be nothing more than the instrument of that which one claims to think (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 238).

2.1 Introduction

This analysis has relied on interviews, literature analysis (both books and online articles and forums), fieldnotes of observations of others, fieldnotes in discussion of my climbing partners (in relation to a shared experience on one hand and the variety of dispositional differences on the other) and finally a reflexive account of my position, experiences and interests. As a holder of climbing capital, I am entirely enmeshed in relations within the field at any point during research. I would argue that even the concept of a ‘climbing researcher’ establishes a particular position within the climbing field as much as it does that of the sociology field. This therefore requires careful discussion to reduce, as much as possible, the oversights that could easily slip by unnoticed.

The primary component of this research was to conduct a multi-site ethnography to uncover the lived experience of climbers. Through this process it was possible to uncover how people develop a desire to climb, and therefore how climbing becomes meaningful and how this meaning is maintained. It will also allow for an examination of how climbers develop skills that further their capacities and deepen their immersion within the field. This will also be broadened to consider the composition of the local social networks that develop around the climbing interest. I then consider the practical problems and benefits of having a climber undertake research on the climbing field. This project was approved by the University of Newcastle’s Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2010 – 1080.
2.2 Defining the Object, Defining the Field

In this research the primary object of study is the ‘climbing field’. The initial problem confronted with establishing a definition for this, is determining its boundaries. In doing so, one must avoid merely creating imaginary distinctions. Bourdieu notes that ‘in the work of empirical research the construction of a field is not effected by an act of imposition’, but rather through careful study of the field one ‘can assess how concretely they are constituted, where they stop, who gets in and who does not, and whether at all they form a field’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 100-101). He further notes that ‘people are at once founded and legitimised to enter the field by their possessing a definite configuration of properties. One of the goals of research is to identify these active properties, these efficient characteristics, that is, these forms of specific capital’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 108, emphasis in original).

Some reflexive considerations can be added to this. As a PhD student in sociology I am not ‘looking down’ from a higher class position than the research participants. Rather, I am looking sideways. The people who make up this research compete as my peers in similar fields outside of climbing, and are likely to exhibit traits that I may engage in an unreflexive struggle with. In contrast, if I were to be researching homeless populations, I would not readily relate to the struggles that characterise this social disadvantage, allowing me to project an academic ‘distance’. This is worthy of noting for the integrity of this research, as that ‘the stylistic conventions of academic writing are the product of a specific trajectory, one that all too often empties the world of its biting, incessant, primordial wailing, giving reality a comfortable hue that moderate tones reflect’ (Charlesworth, 2000: 68). That is, while there are aspects of this research that struggle with bias and judgement, these have helped to demonstrate the convenient fallacy that might exist in a field totally alien to me. In these fields I would have no pre-existing claims, and could ignore the need for reflexivity in presenting ‘distance’. Researching climbing has required a thoughtful approach to presenting the field in a
sociologically sophisticated manner. With this in mind, it is useful to turn to a discussion of ethnographic technique.

2.3 Ethnography

The first component of this research is aimed at bringing focus into a peculiar area of human experience. Climbing represents a very specific mode of corporeality, one that blends important aspects of skill, fitness, emotional resilience and knowledge. It follows that in order to assess this experience it would not be possible to remain detached, studying the object from afar. This rules out the sole use of quantitative methodology. Nor would it be possible to focus sheerly on interviewing techniques, as a discussion of such extreme levels of body-centric engagement cannot be fully appreciated through discussion. Ethnography has hence been a necessary methodology within this research. Ethnography:

Is a family of methods involving sustained and direct social contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience. Ethnography is the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 5, emphasis in original).

And,

The best ethnography... recognises and records how experience is entrained in the flow of contemporary history, large and small, partly caught up in its movement, partly itself creatively helping to maintain it, enacting the uncertainties of its eddies and gathering flows dryly recorded from the outside as “structures” and “trends” (Willis and Trondman, 2000: 6, emphasis in original).

Ethnography allows one to become deeply involved with the social groups under scrutiny. Methodologically, it lacks clear definitions. This can allow for the researcher to follow into the areas that are most relevant, modifying the research process as new information comes to light. Furthermore, as opposed to dry record, it is the basis for a study that can be written in a form as to deliver a fluent account of human embodiment. Wacquant brings forward a powerful argument for the study of the body through ethnographic immersion. As he states,

If it is true, as Pierre Bourdieu contends, that “we learn by body” and that “the social order inscribes itself in bodies through permanent confrontation, more or less dramatic, but which always grants a large role to affectivity,” then it is imperative that the sociologist submit himself to the fire of action in situ; that to the greatest extent possible he [sic] put his own organism, sensibility, and incarnate intelligence at the epicentre of

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the array of material and symbolic forces that he intends to dissect; that he [sic] strive to acquire the appetites and the competencies that make the diligent agent in the universe under consideration, so as better to plumb the inner depths of this ‘relation of presence to the world, and being in the world, in the sense of belonging to the world, being possessed by it, in which neither the agent nor the object is posited as such (Wacquant, 2004: viii).

His argument then urges the researcher to closely align their own experiences and passions with those being researched. This in effect makes habitus one of the methodological tools of research in order to ‘mirror’ the practical acquisition of dispositions that the subjects of study have themselves undergone (Wacquant, 2013: 19). In such a way, it is possible to understand how practices are constructed and maintained. Further, this intimacy establishes a deeper understanding of a field than research could otherwise achieve, as its nuances are not only studied by the researcher, but also live through them. A researcher may only have to call upon their own reflexivity and skills of analysis to determine the logics of peculiar practices. As Jenkins comments ‘Bourdieu’s point is that authority and epistemological integrity can best be produced by a reflexive encounter with the “known”, with the apparently familiar’ (Jenkins, 1992: 46).

This research, it should be noted, is not intended as a form of autoethnography. I agree with Gans (1999) and Brunt (1999), who both malign the technique. They argue that it does not serve the primary purpose of sociology: the study of ‘how people define their world’ (Brunt, 1999: 503, my emphasis). But rather, autoethnography consists of an ‘egocentric soul-searching of the investigator’s own motives and experience’ (Brunt, 1999: 504). This is not to suggest that my personal experiences do not serve their purpose, as Bourdieu remarks: ‘nothing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself [sic] into his research’ (Bourdieu, 2003: 287). My intention is to utilise my own grasp of climbing as a means of interpreting the experiences of the field, ‘to deal with people directly, how they relate to each other, what they think’ (Brunt, 1999: 504). It is not hard, therefore, to forward the potential of studying the climbing field from inside it. Climbing is an embodied practice that weaves together an unusual form of movement, that
in many of its manifestations can result in catastrophic injury should its execution be delivered poorly. Its seeming absurdity does not lend itself to an understanding outside of its practice.

2.4 Dangerous Methods
Some of the peculiar elements of an ethnography of voluntary risk-taking require some attention. One of the crucial components of a successful ethnography of edgework is to engage with a social field to a point where ‘co-presence’ has been established between the researcher and the research subjects (Lyng, 1998: 224-225). Co-presence ‘means not only occupying the same spaces and experiencing the same events as one’s subjects but also sharing the circumstances of their lives with a constitutional stance that matches theirs as closely as possible’ (Lyng, 1998: 225). I would argue, therefore, that this stands for climbing. There is a certain logic that exists only within the experience. Those who have experienced it can talk about it. But words never fully articulate these experiences. As Lyng discovered in his attempt at understanding the edgework experience:

I needed to capture the phenomenological aspects of the risk-taking experience... But when this topic was broached, most of my subjects had little to say. I later discovered that the reluctance to talk about the experience is common to participants in almost all forms of voluntary risk-taking, a finding which led me to identify ‘ineffability’ as one of the defining characteristics of edgework (Lyng, 1998:224).

Climbers do speak about climbing. But it is usually to other climbers who do not need the situation explained in detail. And, in my experience, they do not speak about the phenomenology of the experience, wondering at its nature. They speak with a pragmatic reliving: ‘I placed this cam; it was behind a loose flake. I just did the move anyway’. While not conveyed by the words, this sentence suggests a dangerous situation and apprehension by the climber. In most cases it is harder to reverse the situation than to continue moving forward into a possibly worsening position. By carrying on, the climber may be suggesting a cool attitude, but is more likely suggesting something akin to fatalism: there was no choice but to go up. Therefore, climbers talk to climbers with an assumption of empathy. As they speak about events, say a

24 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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hold\textsuperscript{25} breaking off, the listening climber can imagine in graphic detail the experience, whether it be horror, shock or even humour. These, I would contend, are only fully transmitted to those who have experienced similar situations. What this means is that to complete an ethnography of climbing, one must also climb, along with participating in the events that structure a climber’s life. Immersed in the climbing field, I am already a proficient climber. But, as Lyng’s title, ‘Dangerous Methods’, suggests, this entails a level of risk in order to pursue this research area.

2.5 The Convergence of Illusio

\textit{How can one be both subject and object, the one who acts and the one who, as it were, watches himself [sic] acting? (Bourdieu, 2003: 281).}

I often question what it means to do research on a field I belong to. I sit in a campsite and look at my surroundings: sometimes it is isolation, a tent or two, a neat selection of climbing equipment to reduce weight during a long approach, a bottle of scotch-whisky and a frugal selection of foods. At other times, I see there are tents everywhere. A lazy mix of items lay across the camp: climbing gear of all sorts, camping chairs, and beer bottles. Then at other times it is a cheap motel room, where the day’s ice climbing equipment is strung about the room in strategic positions in order to dry before the next day’s climb begins. I look and wonder, ‘is this exceptional?’ When I sit in my harness, suspended in space with my feet pressed to vertical rock for balance, hundreds of metres above the trees below and find myself discussing the existence of Israel with another climber, I ask, is it strange to be comfortable enough to digress from mortal concerns? This, as Bourdieu notes, is a component of all fields: ‘Because native membership in a field implies a feel for the game in the sense of a capacity for practical anticipation of the “upcoming” future contained in the present, everything that takes place in it seems sensible’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 66, emphasis in original). A methodological concern within this research then, is that with familiar surroundings, it is easy to take things for granted as the anticipatory capacity of my own habitus does not provide the space for reflective or reflexive

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\textsuperscript{25} See Glossary 1: Terms.
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consciousness to emerge. If I, like many other climbers, primarily associate with climbers, then how will I know the difference? Hence, while it is possible to posit that a certain level of discernment will successfully navigate these questions, it is possible that I have overlooked important aspects of the climbing field because of this familiarity. To break this, Bourdieu believes ‘a radical doubt’ is in order:

How can the sociologist effect in practice this radical doubting which is indispensable for bracketing all the presuppositions inherent in the fact that she is a social being, that she is therefore socialised and led to feel like a “fish in water” within the social world whose structures she has internalised? How can she prevent the social world itself from carrying out the construction of the object, in a sense, through her, through these unself-conscious operations or operations unaware of themselves of which she is the apparent subject? (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 235).

It is worth noting that Bourdieu refers to a broader society than I attempt here. He sees assumptions being made about histories, concepts and language at the widest dimensions of the broadest fields. While I may concern myself with the immediate wonders of gymnastic motions on a peak piercing the clouds, Bourdieu’s wonders are of the most mundane, unquestioned aspects of social fabric. Where there is a ‘social problem’ now there was a vast history of struggle deigned to bring this into the public sphere in order to seek solutions. In some manner, the reflexivity he is seeking is a little easier to locate in my own work. This is because ‘one only has to suspend the commitment to the game... to reduce the world, and the actions performed in it, to absurdity, and to bring up questions about the meaning of the world and existence which people never ask when they are caught up in the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 67).

While climbing is a normal activity for me, it is not a flawless sense of normalcy. But climbing exists in a spatially bounded place that is separate from other physical spheres of life. This means climbing and similar fields must actively work to create a sense of normality within the field, as fields that do not share in the content of its logic – even contradict or invert it – flank it in the individual’s entire body of practices (habitus). Therefore, my reflexive engagement with this research has come through the continual movement in and out of an exceptional practice. However, while the problem of enacting reflexivity may be easier, it does not mean that this questioning will penetrate into many of the basic assumptions of societies. The radical doubting...
Bourdieu refers to must tear apart histories, concepts and language (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 235-247). Retaining this ‘radical doubt’ has been difficult in this research but has nevertheless led into questioning of many of the structures of the climbing field that are shared more broadly. For instance, the notion of ‘leisure’ obviously impacts upon the climbing field, which has, in only recent history, become a taken-for-granted component of life in Western societies. Hence, the process of radically doubting the composition of the climbing field leads into questions about many of the basic assumptions that reside within social fields.

2.6 Multi-Site Ethnography

While traditionally ethnography is carried out within a single site, optimally over a course of years, a multi-site ethnography pursues a research object across a wide range of sites, and utilises an array of techniques (Marcus, 1995: 106). This includes collecting data in many different ways from a disparate array of sources (Hannerz, 2003: 212). This approach echoes Law’s (2003) call for ‘messy’ methodologies to counteract the trend towards methods that present the world as neat and tidy. Research is ‘messy and heterogeneous’ and requires a ‘disciplined lack of clarity’ (Law, 2003: 3).

While the major fieldwork time has been devoted to climbers in key sites in North America, it has also drawn on other climbing sites and participants as these have become relevant and/or available. This raises the issue of how deeply integrated the researcher can become with participants in comparison to traditional, longer term and/or single site studies. Hannerz provides a defence of multi-site ethnography, contending that:

Most multi-site studies really also have built-in assumptions about segmented lives, where some aspect (work, ethnicity or something else) is most central to the line of inquiry, and other aspects are less so. The ethnographer may be interested in the embeddedness of a particular line of belief or activity in a wider set of circumstances, but this hardly amounts to some holistic ambition (Hannerz, 2003: 209).

It would be immensely difficult to follow a group of climbers in a holistic fashion, in their occupations, homes and so forth. And of course, it is not the intention of this study. The core focus is the practice of climbing, and considering external practices and dispositions would be
an impractical digression. Further, while many climbers local to a fieldwork site have participated in this research, many participants have also travelled specifically to the climbing site from a regional, national or international origin. Therefore, it is necessary to select sites when and where they are the most appropriate. Climbers live within a fragmented, individualised and reflexive social context. Climbing does not exist as a consistent practice, but is often won through negotiation of responsibilities to allow for enough free time to pursue it. People may have periods where broad amounts of time are opened up for climbing, while at other times it may be a rather narrow opportunity. This is also the case with climbing partners and social networks. Climbers will at times have regular partners and friends. At other times climbers may move quickly through partners, climbing in different places and times and having partners who fit this schedule. As Hannerz adds ‘in some sites now... there are no real natives, or at any rate fewer of them, sharing a life time’s localized experience and collectivized understandings. There are more people who are, like the anthropologist, more like strangers’ (Hannerz, 2003: 210). In the context of this research the sites remain constant, but the people change. This will allow for an eclectic analysis of climbing styles as well, eliminating one of the problems with many studies of climbing discussed earlier. Hence, a multi-site ethnography reflects the messy characteristics of the climbing field. This study has gathered these scrappy opportunities together to demonstrate the basis of the climbing life.

But this methodological justification eclipses some of the practical realities that demand an approach of this type. Ethnography ‘is an art of the possible’ (Hannerz, 2003: 213). It can only be slotted in where the demands and responsibilities of the researcher allow them to break free for a period of research: ‘professional or domestic obligations make the possibility of simply taking off to a field for a continuous stretch of another year or two appear rather remote’ (Hannerz, 2003: 212-213). Therefore ‘we do it now and then, fitting it into our lives when we have a chance’ (Hannerz, 2003: 213). Being a devoted climber already, it makes sense to pursue a subject where fieldwork is likely to intersect with my ordinary practices. It will allow for more
time in the field, a greater immersion and a depth and breadth of understanding of the research object.

Hence, this fieldwork has been conducted across multiple sites based upon time restrictions, the places I can get to and the current climbing season. Most of these fieldwork times are concentrated with a small number of climbers (between two and six) but gave the opportunity to engage with broader groups of climbers who are locals or visitors to particular areas. The preliminary fieldwork site was two months spent in various rock climbing sites in the US. This culminated with a month spent in alpine rock climbing ranges in Wyoming, US and British Columbia, Canada mid-2011. These served as an important formational period that helped me orientate my methodology and research question. After returning to Australia, I then returned to Colorado for the first two months of 2012 for the ice climbing season. Colorado is home to internationally renowned ice climbing. The primary fieldwork time was spent based in Squamish, Canada from June 2012 to February 2013. Squamish is an international destination for granite rock climbing, also being in close proximity to alpine climbing and ice climbing destinations.26 During this time I embarked on trips into several alpine climbing regions within the area. In July and August I joined a climbing expedition into Greenland. I spent November and December in the Canadian Rockies during the ice climbing season and spent a month between January and February 2014 in Norway for their ice climbing season. After returning to Australia for my write up I again left and spent six weeks in the Peruvian Andes.

While these periods served as the concentrated body of fieldwork time, a substantial amount of important time was spent with Australian climbers in rock climbing areas across the states of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. This has put me in contact with a number of different groups of climbers, though there have been a number of central groups and informants. These spaces have been accessed during disperse periods across the entire length

26 See Glossary 3: Places.

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of my PhD from 2011 to 2014. Importantly, these gave me crucial opportunities to discuss with climbers aspects of my research and conceptual positions.

Given the breadth of areas that have informed this research, it has been important to remain reflexive about the changing nature of sites and the way a researcher is likely to be received:

In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation. Only in the writing of ethnography, as an effect of a particular mode of publication itself, is the privilege and authority of the anthropologist unambiguously reassumed, even when the publication gives an account of the changing identities of the fieldworker in the multi-sited field (Marcus, 1995: 112).

It is important to give reflection to this component of multi-sited ethnography. Although across sites my identity remains reasonably consistent (a zealous ethnographer-climber) subtleties and nuances of each site must be taken into account. Climbing culture, as a ‘largely self-regulating community’ (Simon, 2002) are prone to having different sets of practices for different areas. Being acquainted with these is often an important component of being accepted into different climbing areas. This implies a shifting identity, one that moves with the ‘landscape’ of which is currently inhabited.

2.7 Ethnography and Interviewing
Along with the practice of observant participation, 35 formal interviews have been conducted with climbers to discuss their experiences and perceptions of climbing and the climbing field. These began by asking a respondent to fill out a questionnaire in order to collect demographical data, as well as some broader information about respondent’s climbing practices. The interviews were semi-structured or unstructured (Bryman, 2008: 438), depending upon the context of the interview. These lasted anywhere between 40 minutes to three hours, and were conducted in homes, cafes and bars, through to campsites and alpine huts. The standard interview addressed areas such as risk, climbing history and climbing practice more generally. Some of these interviews were completed with partners after climbs as a means of reflecting on common experiences. These situations also offered the opportunity to include questions about various events that occurred that a number of climbers had varying perspectives on. In other situations
respondents would become particularly passionate about specific aspects of climbing ethics and style and would be followed in the interview. While I had a range of questions that could be asked, these were only occasionally asked directly. Most of the questions would be covered by continuing one discussion of climbing experiences towards another area of questioning. This would often appear as an intentional tangent, which allowed me to avoid having to use techniques such as ‘structuring questions’ or ‘probing questions’ (Bryman, 2008: 446), which would potentially disrupt the flow of the interview.

As Bourdieu states the goal of the interview is to ‘reduce as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted through [the interview] relationship’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 609, emphasis in original). That is, the goal of the research is not to over-exert the role of being an interviewer and operationalising linguistic circumstances that would typically be outside of the social context known to the respondent. This relationship may often see the researcher ‘by a more or less controlled imitation... adopting the interviewee’s language, views, feelings, and thoughts’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 609). Bourdieu argues that a way to achieve this type of relationship in an interview is through existing within similar social fields, so that the characteristics of the interviewee are shared by the interviewer and that the interviewer’s questions ‘spring from their dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 611). Hence, it is difficult to completely express the position that I placed myself in. Firstly, it was semi-reflexive. At times, I was deliberately attempting to maintain a natural feel, a ‘climber-to-climber’ relationship. As a climber myself, this is a known identity, one that I use in extended periods of my weekly activities. However, at times this would slip from my reflexive grasp, and I would invariably lose my interviewer status. I would talk climbing for climbing’s sake, and find it difficult to navigate back to the sociological component of the interview. At other times, I would find myself too dependent on asking sociological questions and unable to locate a relevant reply – whether it be to probe, to change subject, to encourage or to empathise. The interviews then consisted of the difficult work of maintaining reflexive awareness of the interview in order to monitor ‘the effects of the social structure
within which it is occurring’ (Bourdieu, 1999: 608) in order to skilfully balance my responses. Nevertheless, in this context, ‘insider research’ (Hodkinson, 2005) boasts some significant advantages. It is easier to communicate and build rapport, the probability of deeper descriptions is enhanced as details are given to someone seen as empathetic. Equally, the researcher has the ‘ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses’ (Hockey, quoted in Hellawell, 2006: 488). For instance, in the below example I am interviewing an experienced climber, Derrick:

Derrick: It’s so...I love the Winds a lot. 27
Interviewer: It’s a beautiful place.
Derrick: Awesome, yeah.
Interviewer: Incredible granite, like...
Derrick: Oh, just flawless even. Flawless.
Interviewer: [Laughs] Ohh.

In this example we are commenting on the aesthetics of granite mountains in the Wind River Range, Wyoming. I empathise with Derrick’s passion for the range because of its rock quality. But importantly Derrick refers to the rock as flawless. This is a term that climbers use not just to comment on the aesthetic beauty of a mountain, but also the experience of climbing rock that is solid and clean – rather than deteriorating, loose or grassy/dirty. In fact, this excerpt comes from his discussion of the appearance of the rock even though he had only ever hiked through the range without climbing it. But through my ethnographic experience with Derrick and a familiarity with his climbing experience the depth of his experience with granite is revealed. Derrick had spent most of his climbing experience on similarly immaculate granite climbing areas. In this example I can grasp that this is an import of this understanding. This allows me to take the interview into a deeper form of ethnographic interviewing (Sherman Heyl, 2001) than possible without embodying similar competencies and understandings of climbing and its terrains.

2.8 Taking Fieldnotes
The process of taking fieldnotes does not adhere to a rigid methodology. It is a process that is ‘intuitive’, in that the researcher must discern what the most important observations in the field are for the purposes of the research (Emerson et.al. 1995: 11). It is also ‘empathetic, reflecting the ethnographer’s sense of what is interesting or important to the people he [sic] is observing’ (Emerson et.al. 1995: 11). This shifting focus therefore allows for a vast number of occurrences with a field to be explored. In some settings, it may be the sharp skills and confidence of a climber, in others the learning of basic skills, and in some others the delicate practice of a highly cherished set of ethics.

A basic means of practicing note taking has been used within this research. The first of these is taking ‘jottings’ (Emerson et.al. 1995: 19). These are short notes, sometimes one or two words, sometimes a few sentences, in order to help recall events later on when these events could be recorded in detail. This has been an invaluable technique, as most climbing settings do not present many opportunities for private moments where notes could be taken. After a climbing trip, the recording of extensive notes was facilitated by these jottings. Notes were taken on a voice recorder to facilitate faster note taking and hence giving the option for more extensive recollection. These have been catalogued with outlines of the content of the note to make future retrieval easier. One of the primary reasons for this approach was that it allowed me to take notes quickly when the opportunities presented themselves. Many climbing areas give little space for extended time alone to write notes – there was often little opportunity throughout the course of a regular climbing day. I would instead use ‘rest days’ (days allocated where no travel/reconnaissance/climbing were being undertaken) to record hours-worth of notes on the course of the previous few days. At times I would take these fieldnotes with close informants in order to attempt to capture some of the nuances of experiences that I may have missed. I would then do a secondary set of notes without informants at a later point. I would listen to these notes after returning from the field and create detailed summaries of the events. While these
were not akin to full transcripts, they provided me with specific reference points within my fieldnotes.

2.9 Conclusion
In order to fully grasp the development of climbers this thesis draws on a strong ethnographic and immersive methodology. The researcher himself has undergone the same development of habitus that climber’s themselves undergo as a means of appreciating climbing practice, along with gaining deeper access to the field and empathetic understanding of climber’s experience. This has drawn extensively from methodologies proposed by both Pierre Bourdieu (1999) and Loic Wacquant (2004). This has been pursued across multiple research sites in order to survey different climbing practices that take place based upon location and season. This has also given a significant depth to the interviewing process, where the interviewer can maintain discussions of practice based upon his position as ‘native’.
3. Edgework, Seriousness and Critical Necessity

3.1 Introduction
This chapter will serve to clarify a number of ‘foreground’ aspects of the climbing field. It will firstly consider what is meant by the term ‘climber’ and the basic practices for negotiating risk in vertical space. The second point of clarification will look at some of the primary techniques within climbing in order to demonstrate some of the elements of risk. This will lead to an important extension of the concept of edgework. That is, while risk is central to the structuring of climbing experience, I argue that necessity is what is generated. Climbers utilise leisure space in order to produce circumstances where choice is restricted to absolute imperative. This is particularly the case in high-risk climbing, where even though edgework is not characteristic of the entire experience, necessity is. This, however, is not social, economic or material necessity. Rather, while climbers require high levels of improvisation through a series of carefully honed abilities, they nevertheless are forced into resolving the climb before returning to the safety of the horizontal realm.

3.2 What is a Climber?
Climbing is one of the oldest and most well-known forms of voluntary risk activities. It has regularly made its way into the eye of the public. Disasters such as the 1996 Everest season documented by Krakauer’s Into Thin Air or even Simpson’s Touching the Void have become well known both inside and outside the climbing community. Even at the time of writing, a substantial amount of publicity has arisen in the wake of a massive avalanche killing sixteen Sherpas who were ‘preparing’ the route on Everest for guided ascents at the beginning of its 2014 guiding season (Douglas, 2014; Ives, 2014; for a more extensive report see Schaffer, 2014). However, there is a substantial amount of misinformation about climbing practice, its varieties, the guided and non-guided ascent and the particular nature of the risks of vertical environments.

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Perhaps the most publicly recognised method of ascent is what Simon (2002) refers to as ‘summiteering’. This approach ‘fetishises’ the summit, where the primary goal of climbing is, in effect, about reaching the top (Simon, 2002: 191). Climbing Everest typically involves guides and dependence on others (such as Sherpa) to both utilise skills, judgement and, in the case of fixed lines and oxygen, even remove the labour. Yet, even with all of this support ‘the ultimate triumph [of reaching the summit] is singular and personal’ (Simon, 2002: 191). Summiteering is a limited, even disdained component of the climbing world and its practitioners would not generally be regarded as ‘climbers’ inside of the climbing community.

In contrast, the climbing community consists of self-identifying individuals who engage in the personal internalisation and practice of skills, technique and risk awareness. Dependence is upon other self-identifying climbers, who may be more or less proficient, but do not enter into formal economic exchange to build these skills. Indeed, ‘while anyone can go and get themselves killed on steep rock, the social reality of high performance, high risk, climbing involves exacting physical and mental preparation, considerable knowledge and a careful calculation of the odds’ (Heywood, 2006: 456) that is a ‘commitment to long-term development of skill, not a quest for immediate validation’ (Simon, 2002: 195). The climbing community emphasises the building of these skills and a sense of self-reliance while favouring challenging ascent styles and routes, rather than simply summiting by any means.

While it has been argued that only people with a high level of ‘discretionary income’ (Fletcher, 2008: 315) may participate in edgework activities such as climbing, I would argue that the most important factor is time. High consequence climbing styles have important spatial and temporal characteristics. Firstly, the areas of practice are geographically determined. These temporal elements of the sport work symbiotically with the spatial demands. A climber must go to where there is climbing. But only a few cities in the western world can boast easy access to mountains...
In most cases, a climber must travel long distances, firstly by plane, boat or car and secondly by foot before being at the base of an objective. Even when a city is in close proximity to a climbing area, it will take, at a minimum, a whole day’s commitment. There are some areas where ‘half-day’ routes can be completed, but these are exceptional circumstances. This is the very base of the time commitment to the actual practice of completing an objective. During my fieldwork I have participated on climbing trips that have ranged between half of a day to over a month at a time. When factoring in other components of the commitment to the pursuit of climbing, temporal demands tend to grow exponentially. Developing proficiency takes time and dedication in order to reach a level of independence in the field. Also, maintaining many of the abilities that will be discussed in the coming chapters requires high levels of temporal investment just to hold ground. For a serious aspiring climber the investment of time will be enormous.

Another narrower distinction can be made regarding high-risk climbing styles. These are primarily traditional rock climbing, big-wall climbing, waterfall ice climbing and alpine climbing. In contrast to these, there are a few forms of rock climbing that are being excluded, namely sport climbing, bouldering and top-roping. While Lyng (1990) considers rock climbing to be, generally, an edgework activity, I argue that the aforementioned styles of rock climbing do not qualify as edgework. This is not to suggest that they do not have inherent risks. For instance, some boulders border into spaces of extreme gymnastic difficulty and are high enough that a fall could result in serious injury (known as highball bouldering). Nevertheless, the two common features of these styles is a limited engagement with a range of climbing skills and the deliberate minimisation of risk in order to facilitate climbing at more gymnastically demanding levels. In

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28 Denver and Boulder, Colorado, are excellent examples of proximity to quantity, diversity and quality of climbing. Though again, these are exceptions.
29 This idea could become a complicated discussion. While major population centres generally are not underneath desirable objectives, climbers tend to 'gravitate' to areas where ease of access is possible. This generally comes with some level of sacrifice in order to be practical, such as taking undesirable work (professionals working in service industries for example) or commuting long distances for work.
contrast, high-risk climbing embraces what Simon refers to as mountaineering, which ‘in the technical sense of persons competent in traversing mountainous wilderness areas, which includes the techniques of climbing (placing protection devices, using rope belays, alpine rescue and so on), but also knowledge of plant and wild life, emergency medicine, and stream crossing’ (2002: 181). ‘Mountaineering’ assumes climbing with significant levels of difficulty in high mountain regions/areas.

The high risk-climber, in this sense, practices across a wide variety of skills that allow a greater resourcefulness and breadth of competence, albeit limiting the gymnastic demands of the sport for all but the elite high-risk climbers. For instance, my fieldnotes often include concerns about not attracting bears into camp (and even discussions about whether or not to bring a gun for protection against polar bears in the arctic circle – we did). Or, in another, the alpine route that we were preparing for required us to place a raft at the end of the alpine ridge, in order to traverse a river back to a pick-up point (we hired a helicopter to reach the beginning of the route). Many climbing areas, particularly as they become more remote, require a rounded understanding of wilderness spaces in order to reach objectives. But of course, the primary dangers a climber is concerned with are those of the vertical environment.

To clarify some of the risks inherent in climbing it is important to have an understanding of the process of leading and seconding. The basic formula in high risk climbing styles is to begin at the ground and climb up. In order to accomplish this, one climber must ‘lead’ while the other ‘belieas’. The leader climbs with the rope running from the ground. To begin, falling off would mean falling until one hits the ground. In order to avoid this, the leader uses what is known as

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30 Both Mitchell (1983) and Simon (2002) refer to ‘mountaineering’ as the particular combination of skills that are required for climbing mountains. I have avoided using this term for a number of reasons. Firstly, my participants usually referred to mountain climbing as alpinism or alpine climbing. Further, there is a vast category of high-risk climbing environments, (for instance, expeditionary big-wall climbing, or even remote traditional rock routes) that demand a similar application of skills that may not necessarily be classed as mountaineering. I am using the term ‘high-risk climbing’ to try and incorporate some of these differences.

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‘running belays’. Here, the climber either places a piece of removable protection in the rock/ice/snow or in some cases uses fixed protection (bolts). This is then secured to the trailing rope. Provided that the protection holds the force of a fall, this will prevent the leader from falling to the ground. The leader will still fall twice the distance from their last running belay. In effect, if they have moved two metres higher than their last piece of protection, they must fall four metres before being arrested. But importantly, high-risk climbing styles enshrine a ‘do not fall’ ethos, for ‘to fall is to ask big and serious questions concerning one’s ability to protect the climb’ (Lewis, 2000: 63). While in some forms of rock climbing falling remains an option, in ice or alpine climbing falling is tantamount to injury or death. Once a rope-length has been climbed, the leader will build an anchor and belay the second climber to this point, where they can begin the process again.

Figure 1: A climber seconding, taken from a lead climber at an anchor. The seconder will continue to the lead climber who has built a suitable anchor where they can repeat the leading/seconding process again. (Photo: Matthew Bunn, Feb 2013)
3.3 A Serious Undertaking

A topic that continually emerges in high-risk climbing is that of ‘seriousness’. In its most pragmatic form, seriousness is used to refer to a combination of factors that can be presented on a climb that increase the overall level of risk. I use the term risk here cautiously, since not only does the climber’s ability heavily effect the risk level, but there are many uncertainties within this context as well. Seriousness includes factors such as: avalanche, rock and ice fall potential and how frequently one is exposed to it; the remoteness of the climbing area and the difficulty of retreat or rescue; the length of the climb, since this will increase the level of difficulty of retreat and the time exposed to general mountain dangers; the difficulty and extent of protection, as this will increase the negative consequences of a fall; and the weather conditions local to the mountain, since weather patterns of mountain ranges can vary widely. A technically easy climbing route may be exposed to avalanches and poor rock while a technically demanding climb may go through steep, well protected and solid rock, meaning a clear standard is difficult to ascribe. Guidebooks attempt to capture this by giving an overall seriousness or commitment grade. These grades are hence intended to give the climber a ‘feel’ for the route, or, as it is suggested in Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies, ‘the idea is to give a relative measure of the “magnitude of the undertaking”’ (Dougherty, 2008: 13).

It is no wonder that guidebooks often show a hesitance when noting alpine grades because of the immense variability of possible conditions on a mountain. For instance in Palman’s Aoraki/Mount Cook: A Guide for Mountaineers alpine grades come only as an indicator for an experienced mountaineer to judge: ‘it is stressed that grades provide only a rough indication of difficulty. The grades assigned to the routes in this guide are for normal conditions. Grades can often be misleading because conditions vary so much’ (2001: 26). A recent storm or a drier-than-usual season can radically alter the real and perceived seriousness of a climb. The way in which these events combine can draw together to require that the climbers themselves understand how to evaluate the conditions that they are likely to face. Some guidebooks may forgo a
seriousness grade, but emphasise general precautionary behaviour. For instance, the ‘big-wall’
climbing of Baffin Island has limited exposure to avalanches, but the guidebook emphasises the
danger of rock fall. The guide suggests that a wall should optimally be observed ‘for a few days’
before making an attempt at climbing it while avoiding areas of walls that function as ‘natural
drainage’ for the mountain (Synnott, 2008: 25). What this discussion of seriousness
demonstrates is the complexity of the undertaking and the immense variability in the risks and
uncertainties that could be faced. With this in mind, it is possible to begin considering some of
the way that risk and edgework are constituted in the climbing field.

3.4 Risk and Edgework
I begin this section with a reflection on a discussion I had recorded in my fieldnotes. I was
chatting with Trevor while I was in a mountain range in Canada. He was telling me about his
desire to spend time ice climbing while on top-rope. He would climb up, then be lowered by
his belayer again and again, so that he could build up hours on the terrain. His reasoning was
that he had done little ice climbing as his experience was primarily on rock. He made the point
that on alpine routes he would occasionally get to a section of ice which would cause him
problems. He had no measure for interpreting this terrain: how difficult it was based on climbing
standards or how dangerous it was relative to his experience. By top-roping in comparative
safety he was giving himself the opportunity to learn the terrain; what it ‘felt’ like and when he
was likely to fall off. By doing this, the next time he was on an alpine route and confronted a
section of ice he would know just what kind of risk he was taking. I never did find out whether
Trevor developed his ice climbing proficiency but this example serves to highlight an important
part of the strategy for risk taking in the climbing field. Rarely does absolute uncertainty
dominate the experience of climbing. Instead, each of its components are pulled apart, explored,

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31 For an extended explanation see Glossary 2: Styles

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developed and reconstituted as an assessable risk. This can then be related back to the climber’s level of experience to make an ultimate decision as to whether a route is within their abilities.

One of the most interesting elements of risk in climbing is the complexity of preparing for it. The dangerous terrains of climbing require careful attention paid to detail during the experience but also in *anticipation* of the dangers that will be present within the experience. It is important to make this point explicit. One of the major governing principles of the climbing field is the requirement that climbers actively develop their ability to assess the particular circumstances that they are likely to face. Many of these will eventually be normalised, but nevertheless this process will be continuously and consciously dealt with. It is here that it is valuable to turn to a consideration of Lyng’s (1990; 2005; 2009) discussion of edgework. Edgework is quite generally conceptualised by Lyng as allowing a very broad range of categories to qualify.\(^{32}\) As a state of negotiating of boundaries – edges – edgework activities must nevertheless possess a number of particular attributes. Firstly, the activity must involve a ‘clearly observable threat to one’s physical and mental well-being or one’s sense of ordered existence’ (Lyng, 1990: 857). Secondly, edgeworkers will require a very particular set of skills that are arranged for the specific function of the negotiation of the relevant boundary space. Finally, edgework is accompanied with sensations that, while vary across edgework activities, have a number of common features. These include a heightened sense of self and emotional states (fear and elation for instance), and a greater sense of control over particular spaces and objects through which things feel ‘more real’, a ‘hyperreality’ (Lyng, 1990: 860-861).

Edgework in the climbing field is difficult to define. In many regards it is the prototypic edgework activity. Yet, it is important not to overdramatise the time spent engaged in edgework. Climbers spend very little of their time firmly at the limit of their capacities. As one interviewee remarks,\(^{32}\) Giulianotti (2009) calls for risk analysis to be expanded across sport more generally, rather than only examining its constitution in extreme sports. This points towards the need for a narrower view of the concept of edgework to deal with exclusively zero-sum situations.

\(^{32}\) Giulianotti (2009) calls for risk analysis to be expanded across sport more generally, rather than only examining its constitution in extreme sports. This points towards the need for a narrower view of the concept of edgework to deal with exclusively zero-sum situations.

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‘it’s hard to climb at your limit, you know? It doesn’t…it only happens like 1% of the time’ (Jess).

In the process of understanding where the edge is, it is not uncommon to be reasonably conservative about how close one should get. In many scenarios getting too close could be paid for with your life. This brings us to a core point. One of the engaging aspects of risk taking is not simply found in the execution of a risky moment, but the accumulation of practices and the ultimate application of the ability to assess risks and negotiate through them. This is an important distinction. Climbing is not Russian roulette, a risk with ultimately little more than chance governing the outcome. Climbers invest vast amounts of time, money and effort in understanding the risks of vertical environments, even if they never, or rarely, step close to the edge.

In this regard climbers are modifying not only their interpretation of the edge, but the edge itself. Edgework becomes a relational exercise. For instance, a climber may attempt a climb but while pulling on a hold realise that they are too close to the edge, that if they continue they may not have the strength to place protection and take a long fall. So they back off, take a small fall, or rest while hanging on the rope and retire defeated. But here they can begin the process of training their body to be stronger in order to be able to complete the climb with greater ease. They then come back to the climb and return to the same move and, while challenged, feel confident that they can complete this section and set protection without falling off. In this way the climber has returned with a better capacity to address the given risks of the climb. Yet in this same motion they have shifted the edge outwards. Their capacities have increased and the potential that this is an edgework moment is diminished, even if only slightly. As Lois emphasises, the feeling of edgework is ‘addictive and compels them to pursue high-risk activities repeatedly. Yet the intense feelings they experience at one level of risk may quickly become routine and unexciting, largely because once they accomplish a feat, they are not at the “edge” anymore’ (2003: 85; also see Robinson 2004). Here we enter a challenging area of this discussion. Reflexivity would therefore be a demand of the field. Since climbing is about pursuing
the goals of the field without dying, the field requires individuals who have the capacity to continually adjust themselves to suit the demands of the objectives of the field without crossing the edge. With little to no formal restraints, it is entirely possible for a novice climber to walk into the terrain of the veteran (as it is the veteran to retreat to the terrain of the novice). It is therefore required of climbers to execute a careful evaluation of their abilities in order to properly match their goals with their level of immersion.

Hence, the overall logic of the field - the doxic assumptions that are embodied by its members – is a method of leaving for a climb and returning unharmed but stylistically pure. It is important to realise the stylistic rules of climbing. Climbing and its rules are arbitrary and distinct to the field. A well-known essay by Lito Tejada-Flores titled (2006 [1978]) ‘The Games Climbers Play’ explores climbing doxa in quite an insightful way. It makes arguments about the way that climbers set out rules in the field. For instance, if summiting a mountain by any means was the goal, then why not get a helicopter to the top? If ascending a boulder was the objective, why not use a ladder? The answer is that the climbing field is defined through its relationship with a subjectively developed but objectively realised edge. The doxa therefore is more complicated: it is about climbing and surviving, but it is about climbing objectives that push close to the abilities of the climber. An elite climber on a moderate route will see little praise for the accomplishment. In contrast, a novice climber making their first steps into more challenging terrain is far more likely to receive support and encouragement for the effort. But as they do so, they will learn what can and cannot be done as a part of the styles of climbing they engaged. The honing of the climbing body, the mastery of its skills and the understanding of transgressions and distinctions will be carefully articulated in the moments of action.

Thus, I propose for the purposes of the following discussion that the logic of the climbing field is about a twofold process of development. The first is that practitioners must continually interpret and re-interpret their relationship with the edge in an ongoing realisation and transformation of
its possibility. In the second count therefore, the climber is shifting the edge deeper into the objectives of the field, or at least attempting to do so. While this process, as will be discussed in relationship to the climbing illusio, is far less straightforward than a linear path into harder and scarier routes, my argument is that this is one of the underwritten components of the climbing field. Climbers, even if caught at a certain level of competence, will nevertheless feel the pull, a strengthening gravity, of the greater objectives of the climbing field even if they will never be able to realise them. A further point must also be established here. Risk and taking risks are experienced as positive (for instance as a sense of self-actualisation). But it should not be forgotten that the risk is only valid if negative consequences are possible. This thesis is about developing a discussion of the intricate process of interpreting where the edge actually rests in practice. A climber may ultimately never even near the edge, should they choose not to. This raises an important question of the experience of edgework: what is an edgework activity when the edge is not being negotiated? To answer this I will begin reframing the climbing space from one characterised not just by risk but also one characterised by necessity.

3.5 Temporality and Critical Necessity

...Because we believe that the experience is worth it. But I think we do give up a lot of things. We can't...you can't just turn it off... Like turning off the TV. You can't just walk away. You're in it (Paul).

One of the defining characteristics of risk in climbing, particularly on larger routes, is what climbers refer to as being committed. It is the firm reality, as Paul acknowledges above, of being entirely immersed within the vertical space, where the only possibility of exit requires deliberate and focused engagement. In this way the vertical space is entirely encompassing. Unlike other edgework practices such as BASE jumping (for instance, see Ferrell, 2001; Ferrell et. al, 2001; Laurendeau, 2011), climbing requires substantial amounts of time in risky space. The temporal dimension of climbing requires a reframing of edgework. Time is not necessarily consumed by edgework practice as currently defined by Lyng (1990). For instance, a belayer may sit at an anchor 400 metres from the ground below. If the pitch that their partner is leading is difficult...
and/or long they may find themselves in this position for a long period of time, upwards of an hour. This situation is compounded as the belay ‘stance’ is particularly uncomfortable. It might be a ‘hanging belay’ where, for absence of a good ledge to construct an anchor on, the belayer hangs from the anchor point with feet pressed against the rock. Although they can shift around, movement is quite limited as the belayer must still hold the rope for the leader. In addition, it can be unnerving to continue to put extra strain on the anchor, or even because it upsets the delicately coiled ropes that the belayer is slowly feeding out for the progressing leader. The belayer is probably in idle thought – about things at home, whether or not animals are attacking the campsite, or worrying about having to take the next lead. They are more concerned with trying to find some comfort, especially as time wears on and their harness begins cutting into their sides. They may be getting sleepy and generally feeling quite bored (sometimes disrupted when a leader screams ‘rock!’ from some undetermined location above). From my ‘insider’ perspective, this is not edgework, as very little in the experiential properties of the situation are engaging the belayer in a sense that their actions here are critical for their survival. They have no choice but to hang and wait, to carefully belay the leader (rather than fall asleep) because the belayer’s life does depend on the leader’s wellbeing. The option to ignore the safety of the leader, or to unclip from the anchor would put both climbers in mortal peril. But it does not really fall under the conceptualisation of edgework. Yet simultaneously, the leader is very possibly in a state of edgework. This is because every move, every body-position, every choice about protection will have a direct impact on the outcome. Therefore both people are at risk but only one is in a state of edgework.

Because of this, I propose the term critical necessity to refer to the components of climbing practice where climbers are in danger, but are not in the same heightened engagement of consciousness and skilfulness that edgework entails. Long routes, whether day or multi-day,  

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33 While this state seems fairly normal from the inside, from the outsider perspective even the moments that climbers consider to be fairly mundane could seem quite edgy.

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have many moments where the risks are very real, yet do not necessitate edgework. This leads to a second crucial point: critical necessity refers to engagements of risk that are moving the agent into or out of edgework moments. It should be noted that this differs from Lois’ (2005) discussion of stages of edgework. She identifies a preparatory stage prior to engaging in edgework for search and rescue workers. But this relates to preparation before a mission. To translate this insight into climbing, we would consider the strategies and tactics (that pertain to anticipatory imagining of an edgework performance) before departing for the climb. Here, my discussion relates to the differing experience of edgework during the climb. One of the characteristics of the dynamic of the leader/seconder relationship is a division of edgework labour that engages different ontologies. While the belayer slowly feeds rope for the leader, bored, drifting in thought and absent to the peril, the leader is switched on, engaging carefully and consciously with the potentially explosive situation at hand. They effectively are separated not just by physical distance, but from the different material practices on the vertical plane.

3.6 Critical Necessity and Edgework in Greenland
To illustrate the concept of critical necessity, I will utilise an account from my fieldnotes.

*During an expedition to make first ascents of mountains in North America, we had decided to attempt the largest peak in the cirque*[^34] *that we were climbing in. Since most of the options of reaching the summit via its faces*[^35] *seemed too threatened by rockfall, we decided to utilise a couloir*[^36] *on its northern side to reach a ridge that, although we couldn’t be sure, seemed to lead towards the summit. We brought food and equipment for two nights spent on the ridge, anticipating that we would find snow or water somewhere.*

[^34]: See Glossary 1: Terms.
[^35]: See Glossary 1: Terms.
[^36]: See Glossary 1: Terms.
We crossed unstable scree\textsuperscript{37} to reach a decaying and unstable glacier. We were at risk at points during the approach because of an unseen hanging glacier that was occasionally bombarding the slopes below the couloir with rock and ice. We tried to veer away from this and made it to the couloir safely. We roped up and I took the lead. I crossed into the couloir and began climbing upwards. The rock was loose and very unstable, but I continued to anticipate that the situation would improve, only for it to remain the same or worsen. In some sections it was necessary to move my feet faster than the slipping rock that I was standing on. We anticipated plenty of snow climbing, but the snow present in the gully had hollowed underneath and was generally unstable. We unroped and soloed through the middle of the couloir as there was no protection, meaning the rope would just get in the way. There was no doubt, this was edgework. It was not the kind we were used to.

\textsuperscript{37}See Glossary 1: Terms.

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either. Our actions were a desperate attempt to scramble through the debris and sliding rock to the top, continually fearful of the likeliness this situation had already become out of control.

Figure 3: In the couloir. Steeper than it looks, the rock and snow was also incredibly loose, making it almost impossible to protect. (Photo: Mitch, August 2012).

Once we were at this ridge, we prepared a bivouac. We were no longer in immediate peril. But importantly we had no choice but to repeat our actions and go back through this space in order to return from this point. Thus, our decision to attempt this route was dependent upon the idea that we could descend via the couloir we had come up. After finding just how loose and unstable it was, we decided that we needed to find a different descent line. The next morning we spent a few hours climbing towards our objective summit (which was moderately difficult climbing) before deciding that, with only another 24 hours-worth of supplies, we needed to begin looking for a retreat option. To reach this summit and return to the top of the couloir would be a long day, possibly over twenty hours. On top of this, since we would not return down the couloir, any descent option was

38 See Glossary 1: Terms.
going to be time consuming. As we saw it, we would make a retreat across the unclimbed northern summits in the cirque and find a descent from the final peak. It was possible to descend at earlier points than this. But we expected that these sections would be complex and possibly exposed to rock and ice fall from hanging glaciers.

The ridgeline was often loose and we would move between using roped techniques to removing the rope and soloing. The climbing was largely easy, but the situation would compound at points, where the rock was loose and brittle and offering no protection. On two occasions we had to rappel down from steep sections of the ridge. Both times the ropes became caught, which meant climbing back up to free them and repeating the rappel – though attempting to ensure that the ropes will fall free to the ground once the rappel was complete. By nightfall we had crossed three of the five summits. Here we bivvied, finding water pooled in a small depression of rock, left by snow melt – a great fortune, since we had run out. The next morning our breakfast was m&ms and a variety of

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39 See Glossary 1: Terms.
40 For an extended explanation see Glossary 2: Styles
41 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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nuts, the last of our supplies save a few snack bars that would last out part of the day. We crossed the final summits only to find the descent from this side was not going to be as easy as we thought. We ‘downclimbed’ a gully to try and reduce the number of rappels needed. My partner Mitch was hit by falling rocks, bruising his shoulder badly enough that it decreased arm movement. Meanwhile, when we were retrieving our ropes after a rappel a microwave oven-sized rock almost cut our ropes (not to mention smashing our ankles).

On one of the final rappels through this descent I inadvertently ran the rappel ropes across a pile of rocks, sending a fist sized rock, at speed, into the side of my helmet as I rappelled.

I was dazed, but pressed into the cliff in case more were coming. Convinced I was safe again, I continued descending. We finally made it back to the slopes below the mountains in the mid afternoon and back to camp by evening. We had barely eaten or drank anything all day (Fieldnotes, Cirque of the Invincibles Expedition, Remote North America, August 2012).

In these scenarios, ‘edgework’ occurs in explosive moments over a 48 hour timeframe. But for the majority of the time, critical necessity is present in that there is no choice but to continue moving with a sense of urgency throughout the entire multiday climb. This leads on to another point relevant to Bourdieu’s skhole:

The scholastic situation... is a site and a moment of social weightlessness where, defying the common opposition between playing and being serious, one can “play seriously”... take the stakes in games seriously, deal seriously with questions that “serious” people, occupied and preoccupied by the practical business of life, ignore (Bourdieu, 2000: 14).

As can be seen in the above example, the climbing field emerges in situ as a field of serious play, a leisure space free from social and economic necessities. To ‘play seriously’ is an interesting system of relationships. It is to use leisure, spaces that lack material necessity, to venture into circumstances of ‘critical necessity’. Or in other words, it is to ‘freely choose’ to engage in activity that will force the agent into situations where they have no choice but to do what needs to be done, presented as an authentically necessary task. And while these tasks may be presented with options for how to do it – allowing for skilful adaption, resourcefulness and innovation –
the task to be completed is a critical one. My use of the term critical necessity thus has a secondary purpose. It is that in the space of critical necessity the experience of the edge rests at the upward limit of the experience, at points where the broader timescales collapse into the urgency of the next few seconds. It is possible to sleep on the side of a mountain, with enough food to comfortably survive the next day (or uncomfortably survive the next few) without the edge being considered. But the time reserved for this space has strict boundaries, where transgression can be fatal. The vertical space then, is actively and carefully temporalised. The climber, particularly on long routes, does not climb, even where the moment pushes towards edgework, in a temporal implosion that precludes the need to act with urgency on a broader timescale. The unfolding of events at 4am in the morning can have very distinct repercussions on what happens at 9pm that night. The climb and the movement on the mountain must be approached with a sense that every second lost is a second that will be made up later – at times where that second may be worth a great deal more.

But this is precisely the satisfaction of the experience. Climbing practice continually urges the climber to make decisions that will deepen the struggle, rather than ease it. The contingencies of the terrain and the critical necessity and/or desire to overcome them is the primary focus. In no way do I suggest that all climbers are in an inexorable process of deepening commitment to the point of suicide. Rather, in the moments of action, the climber could retreat. The climber could do something easier, whether that be a shorter or less demanding route or something altogether more convenient in the leisure field. Instead the urge is to finish the climb and at the same time test one’s limits of human endurance and fear. But this is precisely the point at which autonomy is best felt. It is because the principles of the climbing field ostensibly defy ‘normal’ or even, from the vantage point of the climber, a perceptibly ‘normal’ desire that a clear demonstration of freedom of choice has been made. However, this is not the entirety of the experience. In the moment of action this process is in continuous interplay. As the climber becomes committed to the route, choice will become constrained as urgency to act becomes
critical. The climber is committed to a situation, tethered to a certain procedure required in order to return. The option that is ultimately presented while on a remote mountain is one of either living or dying. These moments do not have to be played out consciously. Rather, they are prereflexive in so much as they are, in a practical sense, guided by the habitus. Thus, even the genuine moment of edgework is temporally embedded in a past and future. The ‘moments that matter’ (Willis, 1977: 34) are created through an orchestration designed to make them appear just so. Internalised edgework fields, as a central ordering principle, generate practices that characterise not just the moment of edgework, but its relationship with individual endurance and autonomy as a combination that produces worthwhile engagement. As will be shown, an equal part of the process of climbing is the ironic interplay of social weightlessness and distinction.

The high risk nature of the activity, like other edgework activities, makes it difficult to commodify in the manner of other major sporting activities (for instance, the difficulty in creating spectatorship and fandom; see Moor, 2007). In particular, mountains, big-walls and frozen waterfalls are not conducive to the development of a ‘sporting venue’ that facilitates spectatorship and consumption. The sporting venue is increasingly being constructed entirely around consumption and advertising (Crawford, 2004: 78). While commercialisation does occur in extreme sports, these are its ‘made-for-media’ versions which are ‘short-lived imitations of risk, rather than serious sporting initiations into activities in which physical fitness and technical nous are of paramount importance’ (Palmer, 2004: 58). The notable exceptions to this are the skilled amateur climber who becomes a professional guide or the skilled amateur who becomes a sponsored climber (a still relatively new aspect of the sport and, in my experience, not a means of ‘making money’). 42 Summiteering is perhaps a singular exception, but this is viewed with

42 The sponsored climbers I have met have still needed to work part-time (often as a climbing guide) to subsidise their income. Those that live off of climbing typically must do paid work such as writing books and speaking tours.

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distain by other climbers as discussed earlier. The summiteer is locked into a dependence on mountain guides. This economy of the summiteer as a client of the professional mountain guide sees ‘inexperienced athletes, whose appetite for adventure far exceeds their skills and competence’ (Palmer, 2004: 64) embark into dangerous terrains on the basis of paying for somebody else’s skills, experience and labour. Climbers do not take an approach of making it to the top by all means – the process is a complicated procedure of styles, carefully learnt and practiced. The ascent of a single route may be approached in a number of styles (although most routes have a particular style practiced). Climbing is a powerful example of a field with a high degree of autonomy in that it has little function other than to serve its own purposes. Importantly, leisure operates as a space of meanings without economic or material necessity. The climber, far from the fundamentally contrived and arbitrary spaces of most leisure practices, exists in a struggle in a pre-existing and self-determining terrain: the only ‘arbitrary’ aspect of it is the approach that is taken (albeit, this is heavily misrecognised by illusio as the entirety of practices and styles of the climber constitute a pursuit as fundamentally arbitrary as any other). An example from my fieldnotes will illustrate both the contingency and improvisation that is associated with self-regulated climbing practice. In assessing this particular climb, the ‘light and fast’ approach to climbing seemed reasonable while preparing for the climb but in the urgency and heat of the moment this decision seemed questionable:

I’m strung out. I’m on a narrow (about two metres wide) technical rock ridge. We are almost one thousand metres into our ‘sufferfest’ with only a little further left to go. The climbing is not all that difficult, but there is very little for protection. My rope is a single half rope. Usually half ropes are used as a pair, as their thin diameter does not leave much room for error. But to save weight and to increase efficiency (not having to manage two ropes saves time) we only brought one. I would comfortably second a pitch like this on one half rope. But on lead, with all the possibilities of catastrophe in my mind, it now seems appallingly austere. I look down to assess my circumstances.
There is plenty of sharp rock below me and should I fall off from this point I would have every chance of cutting my rope and falling well over one hundred metres into the scree below. But this is unproductive thinking, especially useless given there is little I can do other than go up. I place a camming device that is so unlikely to catch a fall that I laugh to myself. I put it out of my mind and carry on without mishap.

A few days afterward while out on a morning trail run I tell my climbing partner of my reflections. I note how on the very same route, not long ago, I would have found it completely unacceptable to climb with such a meagre margin of safety. But because our objectives were bolder, it had become a plausible strategy. My partner, somewhat bolder than I, readily agrees. We discuss the danger that it entails with complete awareness. But there is no hint of a desire to change our practices. We are trying to push our limits so as to increase speed for an upcoming alpine trip. There is no need to slow down now (Fieldnotes Newcastle, Australia, May 2013).

This is a common approach to climbing routes quickly, though what this demonstrates is the difference between various temporal engagements with ‘critical necessity.’ That is, the ‘freedom’ to voluntarily choose to take risks quickly gives way to circumstances that force the climber to act until the situation is over. I am hence constructing climbing as a space of arbitrarily produced necessity. This downplays the notion of risk and danger as the conceptual emphasis and replaces them with the necessity that is produced within edgework spaces. The risks present within these spaces are thus peripheral objects, as opposed to the central interest. What they do is impose necessity upon the agent, forcing them to engage the environment with a sense of absolute urgency.
3.7 Conclusion
It has been the purpose of this chapter to clarify some of the dangers of climbing practice to generate a stronger conceptual framework for its explanation. What I refer to as critical necessity is aimed at demonstrating that risk, while central, gains relevance for the generation of a sense of necessity. A climber must act in order to be released from the dangers produced in vertical space. This thus extends the concept of edgework to consider both that edgework occurs during climbs, but also that a spectrum of urgency characterises the experience. Once a climber steps from the horizontal into the vertical they progressively deepen this experience, often generating situations whereby edgework will occur in explosive moments throughout but will not totally characterise the experience. Further to this, critical necessity relates itself to the tension of using leisure space to produce conditions of necessity. While leisure is often framed as a space of choice and freedom, it is used by climbers as a space to choose situations where choice is removed. But there is more to the space of critical necessity. This is the way that sophisticated systems of bodily ability and technique are learnt, stored and enacted in the agent.
4. Habitus and the Embodied Echo: Accounting for the Moment of Action

4.1 Introduction
One of the difficulties in producing a sociological discussion of climbing practice is devising a theoretical system that engages with the sociology of the lived body. Calls for bringing the flesh and blood body back into sociology have been most notably made by Crossley (1995; 2001a) and Wacquant (2004), indicating that the abstraction of the living body tends to obstruct insight into the social gearing of the body. What follows is the first stages of a theoretical construction of the body suitable for an exploration of climbing practice. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is a useful foundation and starting point for this exploration provided a number of problems with the concept of habitus are considered. In particular, habitus struggles to grasp the moment of action because the concept is used primarily as a means of understanding abstracted social groups, in particular class. As Frere observes ‘one cannot but notice that Bourdieu’s conception of habitus was deeply problematic, as it was largely constrained to class habitus. Indeed, the homological interpretation of habitus of members of the same class reappears in most parts of his writings’ (2011: 266). What I propose is a development of a concept of habitus in motion utilising an analysis that is targeted at the level of the individual. In order to do so this chapter offers critiques of studies utilising habitus to demonstrate the difficulty in using a theory of the unified agent (in many ways an already severely abstract concept) to address the lack of potentiality that the agent, in action is producing. That is, the dispositional configuration of the agent in any particular moment loses potential to become the actual. In order to access this insight, I propose the concept of the embodied echo. This will draw together a more fluid concept of disposition through the use of the notion of social gravity. I will begin with a discussion of the concept of habitus.
4.2 Habitus

Bourdieu’s theory of practice emerges out of a critique of structuralism, arguing for the need to have a theory of ‘human action’ that at once accounts for conformity and regularity and ‘its negotiated and strategic nature’ (Crossley, 2001a: 83). What is required is a theory that can account for the dialectical relationship that exists between ‘intellectual structures’ and ‘objective actions’:

The ontological synthesis of this dialectic is practice, a structured structuring process that proceeds, not according to rules as such, but to the needs of the moment. It follows that practice can never really be normatively bound or synoptically captured by a timeless theoretical model; indeed, as its problems are practical, as they cannot be plumbed beforehand, practice necessarily excludes the question of its own theoretical rule. Practice, then, describes a circular causality, in which social life is produced and reproduced by objective, material conditions as they are apprehended by agents through structures of perception, while the structures of perception are themselves informed by, in one manner or another, the objective conditions. (Dumont and Evens, 1999: 9).

This rather complex apprehension of the social world rules out a purely structuralist or phenomenological approach to its interpretation. The social is in a turbulent, negotiated state, where the objective works upon the subjective and vice versa. In order to resolve this problem, Bourdieu offers the notion of habitus to attempt to bridge these seemingly polarised components of the social. The habitus functions as a ‘structured structure’ whereby the dispositions relevant to a field of practice are ‘deposited’ within the individual in the ‘form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16). The generative component of the habitus is the ‘structuring structure’, whereby an agent works back upon the fields they are involved in, creating new manifestations of the field, or entirely new fields (Crossley, 2001a: 84). These dispositions that an individual acquires through this exchange inform the entirety of their practices. Many of these directly inform the body hexas: ‘a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements... a tone of voice, a style of speech and... a certain subjective experience’ (Bourdieu: 1977, 87). The learning of these practices is prereflective, as they speak ‘directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because [it is] linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools and charged
with a host of social meanings and values’ (Bourdieu: 1977, 87). Agents pursuing various trajectories by responding to the world in a predisposed manner do not necessarily act with any ‘explicit definition of ends’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 138). The habitus allows agents to immediately adapt themselves to each situation as it arises:

The schemes of habitus, very generally applicable principles of vision and division which, being the product of incorporation of the structures and tendencies of the world, are at least roughly adjusted to them, make it possible to adjust endlessly to partially modified contexts, and to construct the situation as a complex whole endowed with meaning (Bourdieu, 2000: 139).

Hence, an agent deploys ‘spontaneity without consciousness or will’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56). It insists on both a predisposed manner of responding to situations that are encountered by an agent, but simultaneously proposes that since each situation has its own nuances to greater or lesser degrees than those encountered previously, the agent will be able to modify and improvise upon their practices, while embedding the context into the strategies that they employ.

Even with these lucid and powerful conceptualisations of the ability of the habitus to consciously engage with and generate strategies for action, authors have found it necessary to emphasise the generative capacity of the habitus in the wake of critiques of Bourdieu for determinism (see Jenkins 1992). Sweetman (2003) forwards that the theory of habitus needs to be able to account for the routinisation of the disjuncture between habitus and relevant fields in current societal shifts. This position is developed out of the growing level of reflexivity that is being observed in actors during what Beck et al. (1994) refer to as ‘Reflexive Modernisation’, prompting development of the concept of habitus in order to incorporate a greater degree of reflexivity. Sweetman (2003) has adopted the notion of ‘reflexive habitus’ to demonstrate how individuals in reflexive modernity have come to exercise a greater level of reflexivity than in previous periods. He argues that through reflexive modernisation and the ensuing individualisation of society, agents have come to be in a perpetual state of crisis, where fields shift too rapidly for the habitus to remain properly adapted (Sweetman, 2003: 535-536). As a now normalised state,
this crisis has created a habitus where reflexivity becomes an unreflexive disposition. In light of the above discussion, it would be more accurate to suggest that an increasing level of reflexivity is incorporated into an unreflexive dispositional configuration. However, my main concern, outlined below, is whether habitus can account for engagement in action at all.

In order to revise the notion of habitus for its use as a study of the moment of action, I shall recount both critiques and other attempts at using the notion of habitus to engage with body-specific studies. Hilgers (2009) argues that the ‘successive modifications’ of the habitus through its state of permanent mutation mean that ‘one can only grasp this dynamic notion at a precise moment in the history of an agent through the recomposition of this history up to the present’ (2009: 731). Yet, Wacquant also suggests that habitus is a ‘multi-scalar concept’ that one can employ at several different levels of social activity’ (Wacquant, 2014: 120, emphasis in original). Together, it would seem that habitus can be used to account for a precise moment of the individual, or a collective habitus (such as class, gender and race). This suggests that there is an expansive, near limitless scope for habitus as an analytical tool, something that Bernard Lahire identifies as a problem:

By speaking indifferently of the “habitus” of groups or classes along with the “habitus” of singular individuals … Bourdieu did not take into account that the change of scale in observation and analysis modifies the degree of precision of the conceptual tool that he used. The somewhat caricatured illustration of “class habitus” … is comprehensible and scientifically legitimate. But when you want to understand how embodied dispositions actually operate, the way in which they are formed, the way in which they are transferred or not, are actualised, suspended or transformed as a function of the specific context of action, you come across a series of limits and problems that necessarily lead to reformulating the initial definitions (2011: xiv).

Or again:

In fact, the regime of generalised transferral, not discussed and not adequately tested, prevents us from conceiving (and therefore observing) the existence of schemata or disposition that are local (specific to social situations or areas of particular practices) modes of categorisation, perception or appreciation attached to specific objects and areas. It reduces the process of exteriorisation of complex inner nature to a simple unique function, that of assimilation/accommodation (correction) of previously established schemata to variations and changes of situation (Lahire, quoted in Frere, 2011: 254).

Lahire emphasises that habitus privileges abstract, structural phenomena while struggling to incorporate the phenomenological. My purpose, as Lahire notes in his critique of Bourdieu’s...
habitus, is to examine ‘how embodied dispositions actually operate’. But the problem, as will be deconstructed throughout this discussion, is its lack of a well-defined scope, particularly when dealing with the lived experience. Bourdieu’s account of habitus spends too much time removed from the temporally and spatially specific in favour of the temporally and spatially abstract. This abstraction places the agent in a number of places that are simultaneous should the temporality span an entire lifetime, or even a period of life (for instance, see Bourdieu, 1984: 171-172). This is not to criticise the function of the habitus in its explanatory power in broader contexts. But the body, as it is lived, in a particular situation is incessantly present in the social world. My argument is that in order to reach the body, it must be in a context bracketed from the tumultuous and contradictory world it inhabits in this spatial and temporal totality. To approach this, an isolatable dispositional set brought into creation through the agent’s possession of a relevant illusio is a starting point for examination. In this study, this is the climbing field.

While there are numerous ways in which the field of climbing interacts with other fields, it is nevertheless an autonomous, self-defining group of agents who generate and are generated by the practices of the field. This circular, insulated basis for the climbing field is entirely dependent upon illusio. I would therefore argue that my study isolates agents and their practices based upon this specific illusio without intent (for now) to link them back to a unified habitus (an entirety of an agent’s dispositions). I conceive of this approach as a broken or uni-dimensional agent, one that has been, for all intents and purposes, theoretically dissected in order to study a single organ, ignoring its complete social body. As Lahire notes above, habitus loses precision in this application. The difficulty in this approach arrives in finding a theoretically precise method of applying the habitus to discuss lived experience.

43 Bourdieu critiques static representations of class as a ‘synchronic cut’ that leaves out the experience of class positions as a component of a social trajectory by the agent (Hage, 2011). In this way, habitus is effective to overcome these discussions, temporalising class position as a part of trajectory.
This difficulty is evident in other studies of the body that have used the theory of habitus. The case I would like to build regards how an agent engages specifically within a particular modality of action. This has been addressed in other works through adding the name of the field as a sort of prefix to the habitus. These include Nick Crossley’s ‘circuit trainers habitus’ (2004), Loic Wacquant’s (2004) ‘pugilist habitus’ and even Hage’s (2013) conceptual ‘skiers habitus’ and ‘swimmers habitus’. For instance, while discussing the inexperienced circuit trainer, Crossley notes that ‘they will have the beginnings of a circuit trainer’s habitus and, as such, they will play an active role in reproducing circuit training as a social practice’ (2004: 47). However, later he remarks:

The learning curve of the newcomer should also alert us to the necessity of “breaking the circle” between habitus and practice by recognising the capacity of embodied agents to extend and thus transcend their existing repertoire of habits. The newcomer incorporates new practices and the practice and pre-reflective principles underlying them and does so simply by putting themselves in an unfamiliar situation and (after some time) “catching on” to “the game”. They modify their habitus (Crossley, 2004: 53).

In the first count, the new circuit trainer is building a ‘circuit trainer’s habitus,’ but in the second they are modifying a pre-existing habitus. In this case it would appear that in any given circumstance either: a) a particular field’s dispositions admits the possibility of foregrounding its generalised practice as a pre-fix to the habitus or; b) that each field has its own ‘mini-habitus’, working effectively as a bundle of dispositions distinct from the broader schemes of habitus.

Nevertheless, the conditions of these multiple methods of applying habitus are never elaborated upon. While it is possible to create imaginary lines around clusters of dispositions, this ultimate and total habitus never functions readily in simple categories. Indeed, Wacquant makes the same ambiguous application of habitus when he suggests that a ‘pugilistic habitus’ is the ‘specific set of bodily and mental schemata that define the competent boxer’ (Wacquant, 1992: 224).

This is borne of the field: ‘the strategy of the boxer, as product of the encounter of the pugilistic habitus with the very field that produced it, erases the scholastic distinction between the intentional and the habitual, the rational and the emotional, the corporeal and the mental’
This seems to be an account of a specific field building a specific habitus as an element of a wider habitus. But this conceptualisation, when subjected to scrutiny becomes incoherent, or at the very least, requires the reader to accept the closed system that habitus is being applied to without considering the broader theoretical picture. This same critique can be made of Spencer’s (2009) ‘mixed martial arts fighter habitus’. Kay and Laberge further water down the application of the concept when they note their study aims to explore ‘adventure racing’s distinct habitus (or embodied culture)’ (Kay and Laberge, 2002: 17). Firstly, this presentation of habitus seems to suggest that not only is there a field specific habitus, but the habitus is somehow possessed by the field. Further, the habitus is not reducible to embodied culture. The habitus, being distinct to each agent, never fully adopts any culture, but incorporates its own configuration of culture. This is more than a pedantic distinction, since the distinct versions of habitus provide the specific dynamic function within a field that makes it possible to play the game:

Positions and position-takings never have a mechanical or inevitable character. In a field... it is only established through the practical strategies of agents endowed with different habitus and quantities of specific capital, and therefore with unequal mastery of the specific forces of production bequeathed by all the previous generations and capable of perceiving the space of positions as more or less wide spaces of possibilities in which the things that offer themselves to them as ‘to be done’ present themselves more or less compellingly (Bourdieu, 2000: 151, my emphasis).

An agent’s position within a field is subject to change, but only based upon their holding of capital and their potential for the acquisition of capital. While a field has generalisable dispositions, these are not reducible to a ‘type’ of habitus. In the case of many of the sporting fields presented here, agents, while perhaps not pursuing economic advantage, may have their eye on gaining a specific position. For instance, the prestige of winning a race is certainly means for attaining greater cultural capital, but it must be also noted that there are a wide variety of styles in any given sporting practice that an agent could have chosen to pursue, as will be

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44 Lahire critiques this approach, as it is fuelled by the belief that ‘it is possible to “overcome” the classical philosophical antimonies by contenting themselves with verbally juxtaposing opposing terms, saying both one thing and (what is generally considered) its contrary, rather than seeking ways of saying and describing that avoid the use of these mortal dichotomies’ (2011: 159).

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demonstrated below. To engage with a particular style of a sport and to pursue particular objectives within that style is important to an understanding of sporting fields. It is therefore difficult to maintain that there is any clear homology within a field worth pre-fixing to the concept of habitus without losing a dimension of its explanatory power.

In Wacquant’s work on boxers these positions are expressed, but never elaborated. For instance, the ‘body capital’ (Wacquant, 1995) a boxer is endowed with will help define the fighting style taken up, between ‘thin and lanky pugilists [who] tend to become… “boxers”, that is, stylists who fight from a distance’ where in contrast ‘shorter, stubby fighters … will generally become “fighters”… who will have to walk inside – or through – the punches of their opponents to wear them down by means of repeated body attacks and short blows to the head from up close’ (Wacquant, 1995: 69). The fighter, who will take more blows than a boxer, will generally have a shorter career because of the extra wear and tear this produces. Thus, not only do the two styles require different amounts of various capitals, it will also affect the trajectory of the pugilist in the field. Furthermore, these trajectories are not the only possibilities, as there are many non-fighting positions within the pugilistic field. For instance the matchmaker, Jack, who ‘put on the gloves briefly… but without much success or consequence. No matter: his precocious and intensive exposure to the Sweet science enabled him to develop a deft pugilistic judgement’ (Wacquant, 2004: 198). Coupled with certain objective conditions in the field ‘Jack was well placed to launch himself into matchmaking’ and took to a successful position doing so (Wacquant, 2004: 198). His capital, while useless to the act of boxing, nevertheless allowed him to take up a specific position in the field. And again with DeeDee, the head coach of the gym, who, after a ‘brief and rather unglorious career in the ring… stepped to the other side of the ropes for good’ (Wacquant, 2004: 105). Yet he ‘unquestionably had the eye and touch required to teach the Sweet science… following in the footsteps of Joe Louis’ trainer, Jack Blackburn, who briefly took him under his wing before he died, DeeDee soon made a regional and then a national reputation for himself’ (Wacquant, 2004: 107). While these narratives demonstrate that the role
of pugilist is the most symbolically valuable position of the field, the pugilistic field holds more positions than the pugilistic habitus could account for. The dynamics of the pugilistic field are produced through the unique configurations of the habitus of agents immersed in the struggles of the field and its relationship with other fields.

To use the term ‘climbing habitus’ then is problematic. Firstly, the ‘climbing habitus’ is an abstraction that does not exist in social reality. Each climber possesses a distinct habitus, as they interact with a unique combination of fields. Secondly, in the climbing field there are competing styles of climbing, meaning that it would be possible to further consider the ‘big-wall climbing habitus’ or the ‘alpine ice habitus’. Thirdly, even within the particular styles there are competing dispositions that may relate to nuances of practice that ultimately may be informed by dispositions regarding risk (packing recklessly light to move fast vs. carrying emergency gear to be prepared for contingencies). In this case, it is worth exploring alternative methods of theorising the embodied agent for a more precise explanatory model. As I will soon argue, it is perhaps not the theoretical tool that is the issue. Rather, Bourdieu’s abstracted use of the habitus leaves it with no way of engaging with specific temporal and spatial moments. It is possible that the solution lay in redefining the scope of habitus.

To apply the term accurately would mean that habitus becomes meaningless in accounts of action, as it refers to a far more abstract human dispositional schemata than can be properly engaged with through a specific form of bodily modality. This is because the habitus refers to a totality of dispositions, the singular agent which is incompatible with a reduction to existentially limited states. These studies have only served to obscure the need to address the problem. Crossley shares this criticism: ‘The concept of the habitus hints at the possibility for a hermeneutic dimension to social analysis but sadly does no more than hint’ (2001b: 118).

In Lahire’s initial critique of Bourdieu, it is evident that one of the difficulties with the concept of habitus is the indifference regarding its scope. But seen clearly in the above discussion, efforts...
at deploying the concept of habitus to analyse the moment of action have ultimately been incoherent. This is because the scope is set, distinctly, by the potentiality to act (Bourdieu, 2000: 150) in contrast to actually act. As Lahire points out, Bourdieu theorises the habitus as ‘an active principle, irreducible to passive perceptions, the unification of practices and representations’ (Bourdieu, quoted in Lahire, 2011: 16, my emphasis). But we cannot act as a unification of all of our dispositions. In order for a habitus to be a collection of dispositions, we must assume that the agent can potentially act in a diverse number of fields that possess multiple and at times contradicting logics. Not only is the scope of habitus set towards generalizable dispositions created in broad social fields but it is also set towards a continual acknowledgement of the totality of potential – a singular agent. In this context, the habitus cannot account for action, as in order to account for a single body of action, the habitus must relinquish the potentiality of the totality of dispositions. It is possible to modify the scope of the habitus in order to allow it to do just this. In order to redefine the scope of habitus I argue for the notion of the embodied echo. While we may speak of the abstracted version of the habitus that seeks to explain the agent in multiple fields, in multiple temporalities at once, the embodied echo is the configuration of dispositions that is being deployed right now. It considers the extant agent, in action (in whatever of action’s plural logics) in the particular configuration of dispositions that are arranged for a particular role in social space. Indeed, is it not possible that rather than dispositions sitting ready in categories, or ‘sets’, they are assembled into sets for the purposes of urgency, imploded and reassembled into new sets in each and every moment of action, since action is the only observable moment of the disposition (Lahire, 2011: 50)?

If dispositional schemes inform our practice in specific ways in specific contexts then it would be appropriate to theorise the agent according to these specific contexts as they exist in the climbing moment. To do this I will draw from the notion of social gravity. Social gravity ‘denotes both a relation between how seriously one takes the social world (as when we say the “gravity of the situation”) and the way the social forces of the world pull us into this world (gravity in the
more Newtonian sense of the word’ (Hage, 2011: 84). The importance of this conceptualisation of gravity can be seen in its negative, whereby ‘without social gravity, not only do people lose a sense of the meaning of their lives, but the world itself loses its material consistency: time and space dissolve and we come closer to an experience of nothingness’ (Hage 2011: 89). My argument, then, is that even though the agent inhabits a multitude of spaces in the social cosmos, any given point in this space has a social gravity that draws together relevant dispositions in order to inform the practices of the particular agent they are in this space. These moments, upon moving from one position to another (i.e. moving from climbing to work, from work to being a mother etc.) implode the current function of dispositions and reassembles them under the appropriate logic assigned to the position. For example, the ability to use the internet for academic study is reassigned when used to research objectives for the purposes of climbing, as it has been reassembled in a group of dispositions for the purposes of a different form of practice. To a reasonable level of depth, these dispositions are identical, since they make use of the same sense of virtual spatiality: researching journals (climber journals or magazines); digging through specific accounts relevant to an area (sociology on the one and the European Alps on the other); communicating via email with a vast network of knowledgeable and experienced people in order to bring a project into reality. The difference in the action is that the disposition has been appropriated to operate as a part of a particular cluster of dispositions and given urgency by the gravity of illusio. Because of this, it is necessary to suggest that dispositions are not only flexible, but mutable.

To further an account of the embodied echo it is also necessary to consider the role of history. Since disposition is explicitly linked to a history of practice, would disposition be too disproportionately linked to the past to be considered existentially? My argument is that the disposition is informed by the past but is not the past. Like an echo, the disposition carries a message that speaks to the present. But in this way it is the present. The echo resounds now. Like habitus, the embodied echo is an embodiment of history (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56). Or again,
‘the “unconscious”, which enables one to dispense with this interrelating [of social conditions of production and implementation of dispositions] is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by realising the objective structures that it generates in the quasi natures of habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 56). Therefore, I would argue that to suggest that the echo, as with the disposition, is informed by the past is to make a reflexive deduction: that it came from the past, and what we are witnessing is a history. But the disposition still only exists in the present. This reflexive deduction is evident by the fact that we cannot observe dispositions, only actions. From this we deduce the presence of dispositions through the observation, time and again, of an agent acting in similar ways in similar circumstances. The act, we may further note, has altered and/or improved for the purposes of pursuing a given objective: an academic broadens their knowledge; a climber steels against fear. In this formulation of disposition, therefore, the improvement of an act is something like an embodied echo. As it transmits from the past it is modified by the present, thereby continually modifying the message that will be transmitted into the future. When a certain practice, an embodied echo, is then utilised in the present, it is retransmitted from these coordinates, with a more or less altered message, in order to be again apprehended (embodied) in the future when the same social space is inhabited by the agent (or a space with similarities to the moment). This gives us the opportunity to consider the embodied echo as a radically dynamic process of coordination of dispositions. This, arguably, is observable through moments where an agent ceases using particular dispositions. The disposition, along with its ensuing propensity to practice, atrophies and the skill erodes. Or in other words, the echo fades into the background cacophony.

This is an appropriate time to raise a question that Lahire asks: ‘do dispositions gradually tone down, or even completely disappear, because they are not actualised’ (Lahire, 2003: 335-336)? One answer Lahire provides to this question is that ‘our dispositional baggage is composed of a set of schemata, some of which can be inhibited or which may become dormant to leave room for the development or activation of others’ (Frere, 2011: 254). While I agree with the general
point of this statement, the notion that dispositions, or even schemata become ‘dormant’ risks the suggestion that in their reactivation they are restored as if unaffected by the passage of time. My argument is that throughout the time of actualising one group of dispositions, the totality of dispositions are indeed doing something; it is not that the embodied echo has operationalised a particular group of dispositions while the entire body of dispositions are simply suspended. Rather, dispositions begin into a process of decay at the moment they fall out of use. This is a critical point for considering dispositions that have been carefully honed and refined, as these are the most subject to deterioration. For instance, a climber who, through other priorities stops climbing for a period of time will not merely actualise the same dispositional quality as the last time they were in use. They will have deteriorated, in particular losing their sharpness and depth of refinement. This means that through using one set of dispositions an impact is being had on others. Hence the disposition itself cannot be thought of as being static in its deactivated state, ready to spring back to life at a moment’s notice. It is continually in a state of modification. Through a disposition being inactive it immediately begins in a process of what I refer to as ‘dispositional decay’. This means that the urgency to act is also for the sake of maintaining particular abilities, or a need for ‘dispositional enrichment’. I argue that a practical sense of the erosion of dispositions (as embodied cultural capital) orientates a sense of urgency toward development and maintenance of those relative to a greater or lesser immersion in a given field (illusio) and the probability the agent perceives of realising objectives. As embodied cultural capital, the urgency to act to maintain these dispositions is because the greater their development, the higher the position attained in the field and the more work demanded to maintain and enhance them. A climber who is busy in their work and family aspects of their life may not be able to free enough time to enhance their position as a climber. Unlike institutionalised practices, the recreational climber must ‘find the time’. But this may emphasise an urgency to climb whenever possible in order to enrich dispositions so that they do not atrophy so far that in an anticipated future where climbing can be undertaken more
liberally the retraining of dispositions is not going to demand a considerable investment of time. The maintaining of dispositions in the temporal struggle of competing illusions will mean that the objectives pursued in the climbing field will be more quickly realised.

Wacquant’s (1995, 2004) study shows the temporalisation of embodied cultural capital. This characterises the pugilistic experience – fast, but not too fast. Trainers and managers assume a responsibility over the development of the body and its careful maintenance, to arrange the schedule of opponents in terms of whom to fight and at what stage of their career. Don’t rush, as injuries may disrupt progress or could finish your career – but not too slow either. A boxer will be trained and managed to peak during their twenties. A boxer would not even have the opportunity, whether by physiological or institutional demands, to peak during their fifties. But importantly, the knowledge of the deterioration of embodied cultural capital, while partially experiential, is fundamentally social. It would be hard to ‘know’ that your body will be incapable of fighting strongly after a forty year period. But through social knowledge and observations to confirm this, it is possible to develop a dispositional orientation, a practical sense that will guide the ageing body and a practical knowledge of human temporality into an appropriate scheme of conditioning.

At this stage, the role of illusio needs to be deepened. The climber does not look in a different direction in the process of atrophy. With illusio, the direction of attention remains towards the objectives of the field even during dispositional decay. That is, gravity pulls inward. While very specific objectives can be pursued in climbing, which denote both vertical and horizontal differentiation, illusio assigns urgency, gravity, which in turn gives temporality to the given pursuit. It must be done according to a timeframe that is negotiated between embodied capacity and the objective conditions of the field. One cannot deconstruct dispositions with intentional fury. Rather, they must be succeeded by turning to other practices. It is therefore impossible to dismantle climbing competence directly as an ‘anti-skill’. This is a critical component of the
notion of gravity – to lose gravity is not to damage the gravity of the social space but instead drift away, or break from the gravity. In this way, illusio functions as a continually inward orientation towards the field. Even if one steps back or assumes a position with weak gravity, they remain fixed in a general direction of focus. This, therefore, is a continual *making of time* (Bourdieu, 2000: 206-207; Adkins, 2009). Through this pull, the sense of urgency functions as a way of assigning temporality to social space. Illusio functions to orient agents to time in a specifically doxic manner, particularly since the urgency to fulfil one’s obligations in order to maintain position within a field is not created through objective conditions, but through the arbitrary nature of the objectives of the field. This conceptualisation of illusio as the production of social gravity thus encompasses both the agent’s occupation of the world, and the world’s occupation of the agent.

4.3 Reflexivity

One of the major difficulties with Bourdieu’s argument is that reflexivity is theorised as a state that occurs outside of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a: 108). As Crossley suggests ‘the implication, apparently, is that we are one-quarter transcendental’ (Crossley, 2013: 151). In the event of a crisis, where a disruption between the habitus and field has occurred, the agent can resort to ‘rational and conscious computation’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 108). But this effectively restarts a position based in dualism – that properly reflexive behaviour is not a component of the habitus. Therefore, it is necessary to give thought to the operation of reflexivity. My argument is that reflexivity, at least for any conventional discussion of human behaviour, is entirely based in the habitus. This is to say that even in the event of a crisis (in a moment of *hysteresis*) the agent does not become transcendental but instead engages with a broader, perhaps trans-field reflexivity. There are two important components of this. Firstly, the agent will function like a fish out of water: its main goal is to return to a state of normalcy, in water.\textsuperscript{45} It is an orientation not out of

\textsuperscript{45} A good example of this is Bourdieu’s (1988) own account of moving from a professor of philosophy to the social sciences while a radical restructuring of the academic field took place in France.

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the social, but towards a rapid re-embedding in some sort of social state. This is going to be more or less radical based upon the particular field’s proximity to the field of necessity. Secondly, in this process the agent is likely to develop conscious, intelligent strategies, but will invariably cobble together dispositions from other fields that they are still embedded in. In a survey of Dewey’s account of habit, Crossley notes that Dewey:

recognises that the intellectual functions which allow us to deal with crises... are themselves learned and belong to the habitual structures of our everyday life and activity, working alongside them in much of our day-to-day activity. Reform of one habit or set of habits, for Dewey, necessarily mobilises other habits (Crossley, 2013: 151).

This aspect of reflexivity is grasped within Bourdieu’s sociology. Although there are critiques of determinism that are still invoked toward Bourdieu,46 his work remains compellingly engaged with the integration of conscious strategies that are embedded in practical embodiment which is often overlooked in competing accounts of reflexivity:

A weakness of alternative theories of reflexive transformation is that the emphasis on strategic and conscious processes of self-monitoring overlook certain more enduring, reactive aspects of identity. Other theories of reflexive transformation place much weight on “biographically significant life choices” while ignoring the “unconsidered and automatic, habitual routine of conduct (McNay, 1999: 103).

This argument can be taken further with a consideration of the implications of the generative and improvisational aspects of habitus and embodied echoes in the everyday crisis. Not only do we continually orientate and re-orientate ourselves to a shifting position within social space, but we are also continually adjusting to abrupt, sudden and unexpected events that take place in our embodied engagement on a day-to-day basis. In this, the habitus is not only devising and renewing strategies, informed by history to anticipate a future, but the habitus is also accounting for sudden circumstances that may entirely derail a strategy at any temporal level: an ongoing, everyday crisis. In these circumstances it would be reasonable to assert that the embodied echo is flexible and rapid in its readiness for adjustment in this continual ontological state. This is a routinising of the un-routinised. The habitus must be prepared to overhaul a strategy as a matter

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46 One of the most cited accounts of determinism is that of Jenkins (1992). Hage’s (1994) response to Jenkins’ book is scathing, to say the least. It demonstrates the poor reading that Bourdieu sometimes receives.

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of course. This brings us to another use of illusio as gravity that can be applied not only to social time but also to social and physical space. In each position that the agent inhabits, the gravity of a social space is generated by the illusio, reorientating the habitus and therefore assembling and reassembling dispositional configurations relevant to the context.\footnote{This approach bears some parallels with psychological research on memory (DiMaggio, 1997: 267). However, DiMaggio suggests that schemata and environment are two separate spheres. Here I am suggesting that illusio and the embodied echo function as a fusion of the two.} Dispositions that are more regularly utilised in this context pull closer and those unlikely used remain further away. This explanation would allow for dispositions to be accounted for that do not conform to a routine or ordinary scenario. In my research I have regularly encountered ongoing circumstances that highlight this point. I will give an example from my fieldnotes of a situation I faced on a climb:

*The day had been emotionally exhausting. I had led a two pitch route on an eighty metre cliff that was difficult and poorly protected. I had fallen on bad gear, thankful that it did not rip out, but still unnerved. To settle from this we went to climb a slightly easier route as our second and final climb of the day, on the same cliff line. Even though the grade was easier, the climb was engaging and at times poorly protected – not really what I had envisaged as a ‘calming down’ route. After leading another two pitches of climbing I was perched in a small sandstone cave. The rock quality was poor and my protection was dubious. Once my partner arrived I would only have to lead one easy pitch out from the cave, around the corner, traversing the wall until the difficulties were low enough that I could climb upwards to the very top of the cliff. I rounded the corner traversing along a small ‘rail’ sticking out of the rock, with a small horizontal crack leading shallowly into the cliff (these moments always make me think of scenes in Hollywood movies where the lead actor or actress is escaping their pursuers by stepping out onto a narrow rail on a skyscraper...). As I did so, I noticed that there was a snake in the crack, its body barely fitting inside, still partially exposed out along the rail. I processed the situation. I had had a reasonable amount of experience with snakes, having (stupidly) caught (by hand) a number of them over the time. This one was easily identifiable. It was a red-bellied black snake, only dangerous if backed into a corner, usually preferring to flee than fight.\footnote{Red-bellied black snakes (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) are found in all eastern non-arid areas of Australia. They are dangerously venomous, though generally will try and escape from threats where possible (Beatson, 2013).} But it was also May and a cold day in the Blue Mountains, not to mention that its position had*
In this example it would be hardly accurate to suggest that I typically act in the climbing field with a need to respond to dangerous snakes. There is no codified system of practice for dealing with these situations. But in the moment I instantly brought out a rehearsed understanding and perception to inform an improvised course of action within the more usual dispositions utilised in making an ascent. While I was surprised to find a snake, it was not unsurprising that one could be found here. I was in an *objective environment* that could potentially be co-inhabited with such creatures. But I had had no other encounters with snakes on cliffs in this way.

In order to interpret this particular event it is necessary to draw upon a far more fluid account of the dispositional layout of an agent. The interaction with this particular objective environment instantly and easily brought dispositions forward to navigate the situation. Or, in other words, my position in social space was one that included an environmental awareness, giving this a greater gravity and pulling these dispositions closer to the task at hand. Had I found a snake in my coffee cup, or had traversed around the corner to discover a great white shark, my ability to adjust to the circumstances would have been entirely different, as neither of these are likely encounters and there is no gravity to readily draw relevant dispositions forward to complete an action. Further, through this engagement the gravity of the position in social space, for me, has altered, if only slightly, as a disposition has become critically useful to engage with the situation. It is therefore possible that in the future I would be more cautious on this route, or even the particular climbing area. Or perhaps simply I would be less surprised should it happen again. Moreover, the longer I repeat climbs on these cliffs without encountering a snake, the less likely
that I am going to remain prepared for it. I would argue that this theorisation of the habitus also adds a deeper account to a criticism that Crossley makes:

Fields of practice are, as Merleau-Ponty says of both language and the traditions of painting, a ‘moving equilibrium’. They are subject to ‘coherent deformations’ which modify and transform their structure. This is possible because some actions deform and thereby transcend their own habitual root, modifying that root and, on occasion, giving rise to new habits. Just as habits generate practice, so too creative and innovative praxes generate and moderate habits (Crossley, 2001b: 116).

As opposed to considering the snake as a ‘crisis’ whereby my ‘usual’ dispositional routine is disrupted in order to incorporate other dispositions to negotiate the situation, I would argue that the agent, is dealing with the ‘usual unusualness’ that must be accompanied with an accessibility of dispositions that may not be immediately related to the task at hand. In other words, moments that upset the normal way of doing things are themselves fairly normal. It therefore lends itself to the consideration that an improvised dispositional set is routine for climbing and in any given moment ready to incorporate moments of irregularity into a new method of action.

Importantly, this allows for the consideration not only of the agent acting upon the environment, but the environment acting back. As Hennion suggests, sociology becomes far too embedded in a constructionist position that results in a ‘zero sum equation where everything that can be ripped from nature is given to culture and the actions of humans; and inversely, everything that is torn from human beings is given unto nature’ (2007: 100). However, rather than abandoning a theory of action, the approach outlined is an attempt at incorporating the environment into an analysis.\(^{49}\) The embodied echo is a fusion of field based logic and what I would call \textit{tactical improvisation} as a mode of grappling with variables that cannot be or are poorly integrated into the codified knowledge and logic of the field. Moreover, these new syntheses convert unassigned dispositions into a form of usable cultural capital within a new field. The calm

\(^{49}\) The need to bring ‘materials and objects’ into the field is also dealt with by Rubio and Silva (2013).

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assessment of a snake on a cliff and the successful negotiation of the situation goes hand-in-hand with the successful pursuit of the goals of the field.

It should be cautioned that there is no reflexivity in the disposition. The disposition is ‘flexible’ in that it can be bent, moulded, adapted and developed in order to better suit the demands of the field. As Bourdieu suggests, ‘the most effective strategies... are those which, being the product of dispositions shaped by the immanent necessity of the field, tend to adjust themselves spontaneously to that necessity, without express intention or calculation’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 138-139). Because dispositions will continually meet circumstances that cannot be properly predicted, or never fully repeat a past encounter, they must be continually adapted to the nuances that the field presents. But here Bourdieu is not excluding conscious engagement when he considers that prereflexive dispositions ‘find their way into the seemingly most lucid intentions’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 138-139). Rather, he is suggesting that even in moments of action motivated by choice and conscious deliberation, we are always simultaneously being informed by the dispositional imperative of our social coordinates. A climber may choose to retreat from a route in an oncoming storm after conscious consideration of the possibilities of remaining on the mountain. But in the decision is the echo of a deep history of dispositional acquisition from the field and the practice – experience – that has at least partially informed the choice that is being made without ever being required to rise to the conscious level. In these moments of swift decision making, if a climber were to apply a cognitive version of reflexivity, they would probably be swept up in the storm well before action could be taken. Climbers are in an active process of interpreting, negotiating and improvising through the dense and at times contradictory objectives of high-risk climbing. This is an ongoing process that can be summed up in the ideas of immersion and alignment. But the day-to-day struggle should not be forgotten. Agents are in the tumultuous, passionate and embodied process of change; while continually working to grasp the conditions of a field in which they are immersed as the rules of the game, along with the position in the field of the agent are endlessly modified.

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4.4 Conclusion
Bruno Frere (2011: 259) reminds us that Bourdieu’s conception of habitus was not designed along positivist lines, whereby it could be located in empirically specific locations within the individual (for instance through ‘mental and cognitive structures’). Habitus ‘is not a box materially incorporated within the individual or a mechanically driven set of thoughts and actions. Rather, it is an intellectual abstraction, a sociological fiction which allows us to understand the individuation of collective schemata in the form of individually embodied dispositions’ (Frere, 2011: 259-260). Through this chapter I have shown a number of critiques and examples of where this fiction falls short but offer a development of this fiction, the *embodied echo* as a means of overcoming some of these problems. This is intended to provide an account of dispositional configurations in the climbing field as a sort of habitus in motion. This is primarily through the conceptualisation of dispositions functioning in a similar way to an echo, in the body, that is warped, altered, eroded, improved and maintained through both its activated and idle states. Further, it is argued that dispositions are configured by contextual social gravities that pull in systems of disposition relevant to the practice being engaged in. This allows for a more accurate account of the ‘usual unusualness’ of the climbing experience.
5. Constructing the Field

5.1 Introduction
This chapter aims to draw out some of the historically significant and defining practices of climbing. Its aim, by looking at the trajectory of climbing through these practices is to simultaneously define what is meant by the concept of field and how this constitutes a revealing means of examining the practice of climbing. It will introduce some of the key logics, the arcs and trajectories that are produced through the agent who is compelled to enter the vertical space, simultaneously immersed in a particular group of social forces operating within this field. It shall thus begin with a discussion of some of the primary aspects of the concept of field before these begin to be entwined with the historically defining practices of climbing.

Perhaps the most important mechanism of the climbing field is the first ascent. Put briefly, the first ascent refers to the pioneering of a particular climbing route. Through this some of the fundamental elements of climbing ‘style and ethics’ are first imprinted on the vertical space. These include the tactics used in the ascent, the size of the climbing party, the speed of the ascent, the climbing ‘features’ and the particular reading of the ascent, a particular climbing space is produced. Through this history, the contemporary climbing scene can be imagined to sit on top of these earlier manifestations – a blend of physical exertion, psychological demand and technological availability and innovation. These will be used to draw out a discussion of the core components of the practice of climbing and give definition to the field through an understanding of where its boundaries lie.

The concept of field ‘makes the exciting, nontrivial, and generative claim that action can be explained by close attention to field position as every position in the field induces a set of motivations that are subjectively experienced as “what should be done”’ (Martin, 2003: 42). The purpose, in many regards, of this thesis is to be able to demonstrate how people develop and

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50 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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orientate towards positions within the climbing field. It seeks to shed light on the processes whereby risky leisure pursuits start to make sense and become, for the agent, what should be done. Martin continues: ‘field theory disappoints us in remaining vague as to precisely how this occurs and we hope that it can be eventually surpassed in this regard. Yet it promises the chance of combining rigorous analytic insight with attention to the concrete’ (2003: 42). With this keenly in mind, the purpose of the analysis here is to demonstrate, somewhat broadly, many of the aspects of the way that change in agents occurs in the climbing field. This in turn orientates them with a particular sense of gravity. Field theory hence works as a strong basis for a limited social sphere to discuss and interpret the way that actions come to make sense. Presently, it is important to consider some of the ways field has been utilised to examine sporting and leisure fields.

5.2 Defining the Field
Rather than viewing society as an integrated web of ‘systematic functions’, the concept of field considers that social space is instead organised into autonomous areas with specific systems of value and logic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 17). Fields function like a prism, refracting ‘external forces according to its internal structure’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18). That is, they create systems of perception and apprehension that look at objective conditions through their own internal principles. Bourdieu was fond of explaining fields by comparing them to the functions of a ‘game’. The game ‘is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy – explicit and specific rules, strictly delimited and extra-ordinary time and space’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 67). Players retain a belief in the game, doxa; they give themselves to the game, illusio. By playing the game, they tacitly accept the terms of the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98). Their ability to play the game is based upon the amount and types of capital that the player possesses. Through competing within a field, the specific capitals applied are given values, and are legitimated through the struggle between agents (Warde, 2004: 12).
An agent occupies a certain position within the field depending upon their current capital. Throughout this process agents are developing and maintaining dispositions that are relevant to these positions and to struggling within the field. Thus, it is possible to observe that fields remain in a process of change, as the struggling of the actors in the field continue to shift the positions within the field and modify the rules of the game through playing the game. While the concept of climbing as a game might seem difficult to accept given the seriousness of the pursuit, Lito Tejada-Flores’ essay ‘the games climber’s play’ speaks remarkably well to this conceptualisation:

The word game seems to imply a sort of artificiality which is foreign to what we actually feel on a climb. The attraction of the great walls, above all, is surely that when one is climbing them he [sic] is playing ‘for keeps’. Unlike the player in a bridge game, the climber cannot simply lay down his cards and go home. But this does not mean that climbing is any less a game. Although the player’s actions have real and lasting consequences, the decision to start playing is just as gratuitous and unnecessary as the decision to start a game of chess. In fact, it is precisely because there is no necessity to climb that we can describe climbing as a game activity (Tejeda-Flores, 2006[1978]).

But there are problems with conceptualising fields as games. For instance, Martin notes that:

A potential weakness in the game metaphor, [is] that it simplifies our understanding of the differentiation in persons induced by a field effect. We may consider a “game” to be an intersubjectively valid set of restrictions on interaction that leads to vertical social differentiation among persons. Most simply, this differentiation is into winner(s) and loser(s), although there can be a continuous differentiation as well. However, it is not necessarily clear that fields can only induce such vertical differentiation, and it may be a problem that Bourdieu’s analysis has tended to neglect horizontal differentiation that remains within the field. (2003: 34).

In Bourdieu’s conception of fields there is a tendency toward always emphasising the vertical differentiation of fields while paying less or instrumental attention to the horizontal aspects of this differentiation (Martin, 2003: 34). Field analysis tends to accord positions that are largely hierarchical. This is a problem for utilising the concept of field for climbing practices. While there is vertical differentiation in climbing practice (bolder vs. more conservative, stronger vs. weaker, faster vs. slower, longer vs. shorter as examples) there are a great variety of positions within the field that are horizontally differentiated (bold\textsuperscript{51} and difficult low altitude climbing in comparison vs. the commitment of expeditionary/ high altitude ascents for example) which constitute an

\textsuperscript{51} See Glossary 1: Terms.
array of skills that do not necessarily fall into specifically defined ranking of abilities. But importantly the practice of climbing itself is not directly against another person: the climber competes not on a field, but on a terrain that itself poses the competition. The challenges presented in these terrains have become vertically ranked through social struggle:

The personal satisfaction of the climber upon having solved each of these problems could hardly be the same. As a result, a handicap system has evolved to equalize the inherent challenge and maintain the climber's feeling of achievement at a high level in each of these different situations. This handicap system is expressed through the rules of the various climbing-games (Tejeda-Flores, 2006[1978]).

In this sense, the ‘various climbing games’ constitute an array of positions, position takings and ways that constitute climbing practice.

Defrance (2013) follows Bourdieu’s methodology for ‘construction of a field analysis’ in order to examine the emergence of France’s ‘sports field’ (2013: 303). In France the sporting field emerged at the point where multiple versions of physical activity began looking for integrative and universalistic logics between one another (Defrance, 2013: 308). Of equal importance was the simultaneous dissociation that sports had from each other and the struggle over the classification of the term ‘sport’. In the case of this thesis, I include climbing as a sporting field firstly because it can be found within the integrative components of sport (recognised as a sport, even to the point of incorporation of organised competitions) and secondly of its dissociative aspects, whereby it tries to distinguish itself from other sports and physical activities. Sports are assigned roles in the field based upon their ‘practical domains of logic’ which could be radically different from one another. These can be quite diverse, including team orientated, individualistic or purely for the pursuit of health (Defrance 2013: 304). But then, in a review of Nettleton’s fell running field, fell running becomes a sporting field as it becomes more formally organised (for competition), particularly once it moves towards organised races and formal governing bodies (2013: 199). Here we reach one of the difficulties in the heuristic benefit of the concept of field. For instance, is there a separation between professional and amateur or entirely leisure based sports? It may be useful to note Thompson’s discussion of field, which

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considers Bourdieu’s tendency to consider fields operating at four ‘semiautonomous levels: the field of power, the broad field under consideration, the specific field and social agents in the field as a field in themselves’ (2008: 79). She recognises this as presenting the problem of ‘too many fields’. Nevertheless, in order to sustain the coherence of field theory for the purposes of the current study, along with making sense of the particular levels of sport and sporting fields discussed here, this may be a necessary step in the conceptualisation of field.

One of the most interesting elements of examining climbing utilising field theory is the lack of formal organisation of the sport, yet a coherence and shared understanding of style, ethics and objectives. This is recognised in other studies of rock climbing and mountaineering cultures (for instance, see Robinson, 2008; Simon, 2002). As Bogardus notes in her study that traditional rock climbing is ‘one of few older alternative sports that remain self-governed and uninstitutionalised, despite its increased popularity, commercialisation, and practices that reduce risk’ (2012: 284). Despite the formalisation of the first climbing organisations such as the Alpine Club (London) in 1854 (Thompson, 2010: 31), there have never been fully encompassing institutions governing the climbing field.

Bourdieu continued to articulate that his theoretical work was not useful as a theory of its own, where theory tends to becomes self-referential and self-enclosed (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 30). Rather, it is through the application of a concept to an empirical problem that the theory finds its meaning. The concept of field will be deployed here as a heuristic that is helpful for defining the homologies, margins and extensions of climbing practice. Perhaps taken too broadly, Bourdieu notes that ‘in highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e., spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97, emphasis in original). They are ‘familiar divisions of action into self-contained realms of endeavour’ (Martin, 2003: 23). Or again put
another way: ‘we may think of a field as a space within which an effect of field is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question. The limits of the field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 100). Here the well-known analogy of the game to articulate field is replaced by a consideration of social physics. That is, a social space that generates a particular gravity, a similar orientation of agents that occupy the space (Hage, 2011: 89). And while it would be possible to conceive of climbing belonging to broader social fields, it would be difficult to complete a study of climbing without limiting the object of study precisely to the unique elements of the practice of climbing.\textsuperscript{32} Crucially, I argue that the difficulty in focusing on fields too broadly leaves the risk of over generalising social space based upon the narrow experiences garnished from narrow areas of research within it.

This leads towards the problem of creating theories that are intended to answer central tenants of logic even though no empirical data has been gathered. This is a critique shared by Lahire:

One of the main defects of theoretical discourses, in both philosophy and the social sciences, is to generalise unwarrantedly from a particular case of the real. Like those specialists in “games” who present “the rules of basketball” as “universal rules of the game”, valid for every kind of game that exists... theorists of action – even the most lucid in their number – quite seriously defend partial theories as if they were general ones (Lahire, 2011: 212).

Thus in using field theory for a study of climbing, the intention is to identify a particular logic that may or may not be applicable more broadly to other sporting, edgework or leisure fields. The difficulty in fitting climbing (as with a number of related practices) into a broader heuristic field is that it does not entirely fit within these categories. Lahire again raises this point for the examination and definition of a field. He argues that there are substantial numbers of areas that do not effectively correspond with a particular field:

The family universe, for example, does not in the strict sense form a field, any more than do the sporadic meetings of a friends in a bar; the meetings of lovers of the holiday practices of windsurfing or climbing are not situations that can be assigned to a particular social field. Contrary to what the most general formulations may lead one to believe, not every social interaction or social situation can be classified in this way. Fields are essentially the domain

\textsuperscript{32} This section has not made significant discussion of the field of power. One example of the relationship between the field of power and specific field of practice is given in Bourdieu (1993).
While ‘holiday practices’ is about the furthest from a definition I would assign to climbing,\textsuperscript{53} this point emphasises that the heuristic nature of field theory presents a great deal of social action as difficult to assign to any particular field. However, his assertion that professional categories are the exclusive domain of fields is seemingly myopic. While Bourdieu is concerned with fields incorporating institutions (see Swartz 1997: 120-121) he also admits that fields exist within fields (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 4; Thompson, 2008); that there are as many as there are ‘stylistic possibilities’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 226); and that each of these fields possesses its own illusio (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 117). For instance, a highly trained and certified mountain guide is struggling within a field (since she is a part of an essentially economically driven and professional domain), but not while she pursues the same activity in her spare time (most guides I have met became guides to spend more time doing what they love – indeed, most of the guides I have met have been out climbing as ‘amateurs’ at the time). The development of their capacity as climbers came through their time spent as amateurs, which was then ‘converted’ to ‘professional capital’. In the field I had a discussion with an alpine guide complaining about the amount of money hunting guides make in comparison to alpine guides, especially because of the substantially higher fatality rates of alpine guides. But it is because of a more generally possessed climbing illusio that the decision to become professional existed in the first place. A sponsored climber does not become a ‘professional’ because it is a lucrative career. Professionalism in climbing grows from a deep commitment to its pursuit. But is this to say that the practices in the professional realm constitute a field and those in the amateur do not? Would a study of guides position them in a ‘guiding/economic field’ with ignorance towards specific modes of practice, in order to demonstrate the shared capacities of guides? Again, I challenge this means of defining fields. It suggests that the deep level of commitment and the clearly

\textsuperscript{53} Any activity that possesses its own version of illusio should not be written about so dismissively. Given that a person may go as far as to sacrifice their life on a mountain, it is hard to consider climbing as simply a casual bohemian engagement.
defined configuration of dispositions holds in itself no capacity to assign very particular trajectories to agents. As this thesis progressively demonstrates, the demarcations of the logics of climbing correspond with a particular social gravity. A field operates by its own logic and rules, essentially as its own ‘separate universe’ (Bourdieu, quoted in Thompson, 2008: 70). While fields exist separately from other fields, they also have a degree of dependence upon relationships with other fields. But the capital of other fields must first be translated into something coherent within the field’s own logic (Martin, 2003: 23).

Climbing constitutes a field in so much as it exists with both autonomous and heteronomous principles (Bourdieu, 1993: 38-39). Climbing adheres to its own tautological (climbing for climbing’s sake) principles of structuring. The function of climbing as a means of capital transferable to the economic field would be difficult. Efforts at unashamed self-aggrandizing, like in many other similar fields, would be tantamount to ‘selling out’. Bourdieu recognises this in the literary field:

In the most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers... the economy of practices is based, as in a generalised game of “loser wins”, on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies: that of business (it excludes the pursuit of profit and does not guarantee any sort of correspondence between investments and monetary gains), and even that of institutionalised cultural authority (the absence of any academic training or consecration may be considered a virtue) (Bourdieu, 1993: 39).

This is a remarkably accurate discussion of the most common practice of climbing, where the act itself is opposed to ‘productive’ time. In its most radical format the ‘dirtbag’ climber lives by driving a cheap car (or hitchhiking) from place to place, living out of a tent or even, quite literally, under a rock. There is little to be gained in terms of economic capital in any practical sense. Likewise, as it has no ‘institutionalised cultural authority’ climbing cannot laud over other sporting or leisure fields while similarly not being lauded over, as there is no clearly laid out

54 See Glossary 1: Terms.
55 While Brown (2009) notes that early Scottish mountaineering was dominated by the ‘grand bourgeoisie’, he notes that there were no ‘cultural gate-keepers’ to prevent the working class from entering mountains. Furthermore, it was not an overly expensive pursuit and inventive methods, such as hitchhiking, could be used to travel to the mountains from the city. Hence, it was entirely possible for the working-class to begin moving into these earlier versions of the climbing field.
institutional hierarchy relating it to other sporting practices. Climbers are more likely to pursue disinterested, ‘pure’ objectives. Where in the public eye, recognition can be gained from climbing well known mountains (Everest being the most notable, see Simon, 2002), the great objectives of the climber are often obscure outside of the climbing field. With some of these critical aspects of the definition of both the use and limitations of the concept of field for analysing climbing practice, it is now possible to historicise important mechanisms of climbing.

5.3 Ethics
Climbing style, as can be seen through the above discussion, has been struggled over throughout the development of the climbing field. Entwined within this is the battle of what climber’s refer to as ‘climbing ethics’: Traditional climbing is self-governed or “anarchic”. It has no rulebooks, no national governing body that sets policy and no organised competitions. Traditional climbers have socially constructed an evolving moral code of “ethics” and “style,” to which compliance is voluntary (Bogardus, 2012: 288).

While this encompasses first ascent style (especially given that the first ascent styles in a particular climbing area come to define the general ethics for subsequent first ascents) the greatest controversy and debate in the climbing community is regarding the use of permanently placed bolts as a means of protecting ascents. Bogardus (2012) gives this issue sustained attention, examining the historical process leading to this controversy. She argues that the increase in technological advancements for protecting climbs and the ‘intermingling’ of localised climbing communities ‘brought to the fore ideological differences over the meaning of risk that ultimately lead to the segmentation of rock climbing into subworlds of traditional climbing and sport climbing’ (2012: 303). The basic differences between the two perspectives can be neatly summarised, where ‘sport climbers continued to view bolts as advancing standards, especially on face climbs where traditional protection was unavailable,

56 Competitive climbing is a growing aspect of the climbing field but is stylistically distinct from traditional climbing styles.

57 Traditional climbing, with its reliance on weaknesses in the rock in order to protect an ascent, can only ascend where this form of protection is afforded. Face climbing does not generally consist of these weaknesses and can thus only be protected using bolts.

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while traditionalists continued to see bolts as the root of all evil’ (Taylor, 2010: 270). As Kiewa (2002), Bodardus (2012) and Heywood (1994) suggest, traditional climbers have not simply stepped back and allowed these changes to happen unopposed. Even in my own research and experience I have witnessed moments where bolts have been placed on routes that have been traditionally protected for decades, only to see them swiftly removed.

These debates are generally referred to as climbing ‘ethics’ and are a part of the character of all climbing areas. For instance, in an interview Derrick is talking about a climbing area in the deserts of south western USA:

Derrick: like the most strict ethics of any place I’ve ever been in my life. Like I say, there’s not one fixed anchor in the entire park.

Interviewer: Wow.

Derrick: Somebody bolted a route and it got chopped like the next day. Like it was very...and the guys there...you'd go there and, you know, you'd think you knew all the climbers in town from going to the sport climbing area and then you'd go to this place, and these guys, you know, if they knew that you'd been to the sport climbing area...

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Derrick: ...they even, look kinda...they would never say anything to you, but they'd definitely give you the stink eye.

Interviewer: Really?

Derrick: You know, like, this is, you know...this is...'sport climbing's neither', you know? It's not a sport, it's not climbing – fuck off! Pretty much.

There is no illusion that the ethics of this claiming area are of a strict and distinct character. But importantly, the area does not simply enforce its own rules, nor are there posted guides. This is a contested domain by climbers. In particular, it is the local community that establishes, maintains and enforces the ethics of the area. Even in events where a climber was known to climb in sport climbing areas they would be treated with indirect hostility. For Derrick, the ethics presented no issue. But he was an outsider in the group and was perceived negatively:

Interviewer: how did you feel about them treating you like that there?

Derrick: Oh, I...yeah, I thought they were a bunch of dicks, actually. A bunch of assholes, you know? And, you know...I...you know, I know I climb for the right reasons, so, fuck you! You know?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah yeah.

Derrick: It doesn't matter...it doesn't matter where I'm climbing, you know, I'm...I'm into it, I'm gonna do it right, I'm not gonna come and wreck your place, so, you know?

Climbers generally understand their position in the climbing field, along with their ethics. While climbing in the Forks, Derrick had every intention of respecting the local ethics. Interestingly
though, this demonstrates an aspect of vertical differentiation between climbing styles through practices in ‘local’ areas, of which a climber entering must conform to. This enforcement by the local climbers was created through a strict sense of ethics and hostility towards variations. Kiewa (2002) notes this behaviour in a strictly traditional climbing area in south-east Queensland, Australia, where those who move between sport and traditional climbing are regarded with distrust and placed on the outside of the community. This is not only present in traditional climbing areas.\(^{58}\) In sport climbing areas this account also holds. In France, Leseleuc et. al. observe that when a newcomer to the Claret sport climbing area asks a local ‘elder’ for advice on which routes to climb the elder will encourage them ‘towards specific routes where safety intervals are farthest apart… in addition [fake protection] is sometimes placed on some routes, causing confusion among the newcomers’ (Leseleuc et. al., 2002: 76). Should the newcomer take this in good humour they will be accepted into the local climbing space, whereas a poor response could see them ‘sanctioned’. This territorialisation of public spaces extends beyond the sport and serves as a form of political expression by reviving a sense of community that simultaneously acts through a ‘symbolic violence’ and exclusion of ‘the other’ (Leseleuc et. al., 2002: 86).

Local climbing areas become dominated by distinct local ethics that are formed through the peculiar interaction of history and material climbing conditions. The particular qualities of the rock and the doxic enforcement of style in the area that extends from the first ascents into faithful locals tend to integrate to shape the ethics of a climbing area. It can therefore range across a broad spectrum of practices, methods of enforcement and the possibility of transgression or modification. This becomes evident in another example, whereby the climbing area is popular and maintains a much broader climbing ethics. It has an extensive history of traditional climbing practices that have been interwoven with a more rapid rationalising affect

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\(^{58}\) The defence of local areas and their associated practices is not uncommon in ‘lifestyle’ sports (Wheaton, 2004). For instance, in surfing Booth notes that locals ‘jealously protect their territory from outsiders and “kooks” (beginners)” (2004: 99).
In this area one of my respondents, Paul, established new routes that required extensive ‘cleaning’ – vegetation and soil removal, pulling off loose rocks, scrubbing lichen from rock – in order to establish new bolted lines. Through the development of a higher number of introductory rock routes in the climbing area, more novice climbers could safely learn skills. But, the practices that he utilised, in an area such as the one discussed by Derrick above, would have had extraordinary consequences. Yet in this particular area, it scarcely even stirred debate:

Interviewer: has there ever been like controversy around those routes for you, or...?  
Paul: [they] have been remarkably uncontroversial.  
Interviewer: Yeah.  
Paul: So, I would say, actually remarkably uncontroversial, because I think I did some things that were unprecedented, and could have very well upset some people, and I got not a peep.  
Interviewer: Yeah.  
Paul: I didn't expect controversy. I wouldn't say that. I was hoping there wasn't any, and I was actively avoiding it. I was making...I learned what causes controversy and was making a point of, um, wherever possible avoiding those issues, and, uh, focusing on something that was a bit more consensually desired in... than something that was controversially desired. 
Interviewer: Yeah, right right.  
Paul: And so, you know, like, for example [one of the routes]...it's well bolted, even for like a [novice] leader, and, um, I wanted to find a place where it was going to be well protected for a [novice] leader, but not offensive to someone whose, you know...so well bolted that it would be offensive to some people. And some people I know find offence in that, so, I tried to find that balance, and I feel like I did. I don't get any complaints about the bolts on [it], basically.59  
Interviewer: Right.  
Paul: Um, they say there's a few too many here and there, but they're not like upset about it. It's more just like, 'well, I probably wouldn't have put as many, but I understand why you did', kinda thing.

What occurred here shows a high level of awareness of the way that the local community operated. Paul knew that his actions were possibly transgressive and hence acted in a way to reduce controversy. Indeed, Paul did something ‘unprecedented’ by establishing routes through such dramatic cliff modification, along with a high number of bolts that were put in. But this

59 This corresponds with Bogardus’ (2012) discussion of ‘retrobolting’, the practice of putting in bolts on climbs that did not previously have them (or less of them), as a form of ‘community service that both gives beginners a place to climb and allows for it to become more popular because of the reduction of risk. This is generally responded to poorly by bolder climbers as it affects their access to dangerous climbs through the addition of bolts. In the case presented here the routes were done as first ascents in this style, which is less controversial than retro-bolting. However, first ascents in such a style in more strictly traditional climbing areas would likely meet with hostility.

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went by with very little consequence. This demonstrates the difficulty of ascertaining clear expectations through the unspoken ethics of a climbing area. In this case, there was far more ambivalence in the local community than Paul expected. Thus, one of the important aspects of defining the climbing field is the recognition of the ‘ethics’ and styles that have been built in each climbing area. Since this study has been conducted across heavily popular and accessible climbing areas through to extremely remote expeditionary alpine climbing, it makes no attempt at defining one particular system. Since climbers, while often having their ‘local’ climbing haunts, tend to travel regularly to different areas that have similar though nuanced climbing ethics. In this, the climber becomes sensitised to a continual adjustment of appropriate practice relevant to the geographical space that they currently occupy and its history. These meanings are struggled over and each geographically enclosed climbing area becomes a microcosm of struggle with its own configuration of the possible climbing ethics – more or less bolts, appropriate first ascent styles and so forth.

5.4 First Ascents
One of the critical aspects of mapping the vertical-social terrain of climbing is through the accomplishment of first ascents. The vertical topology of climbing is important as the space never exists completely as an objective universe. The mountain is not simply a space ‘in itself’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 169) that the climber moves through as it pre-existed, but rather, through the ‘occupation’ of this space the space itself is produced and defined. The climber firstly climbs (the first ascent). Through this act the climber both pioneers and produces social space. That is, the climber does not come back with a discussion of spatial characteristics of a generic space, or a representational or visual space. Rather, they return with an echo of a body in space. This is the motility of the body producing a very particular vertical space. Through this is a deepening of the social space of the mountain. The mountain is no longer a naked, aesthetic terrain. Rather, it is dissected, known by its features and routes, the perils it presents to the body, the quality of its surfaces. However, it is important to recognise that this is an interaction between material
and agent. The vertical environment changes itself *without human presence*; it follows its own rhythms regardless of the interaction of climbers in the space. This environment is one regularly set on the edges of the social world, where the interventions of humanity have been slower and indeed at times, entirely absent. This draws out an important component of constituting climbing as a field:

Fields... develop and unfold within specific physical environments and through very specific materials. These materials actively shape how fields are constituted and how they operate, how struggles take place, how positions are defined, and how relations and boundaries acquire their reality and power (Rubio and Silva, 2013: 162).

Cliffs and mountains pose particular problems for both navigation and peril and these challenges constitute specific techniques for their ascent that has had a powerful influence on the shape and character of the climbing field. Martin brings brief note of this in his discussion of field theory: “‘A cliff looks dangerous – and it is!’ writes Gibson. It looks – and feels – more and more dangerous the closer one is to it. In other words, we directly retrieve from the environment an imperative for action’ (2003: 39). Where Martin considers that the imperative is to ‘get away’ from the cliff, the climbers feels a magnetic pull closer. It hence is not only that the field interacts with the objective and materially determined environments of climbing, but the gravity of the field constitutes a dangerous environment as its foundational element. It is only from this material that social aspects – movement of body, technologies and techniques are devised. This is not to suggest a naive interaction of a climber with cliff that innocently returns with knowledge for the benefit of other climbers. First ascents produce climbing *doxa* that becomes constituted embodied ethics and styles. Doxa then, ‘is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view’ (Bourdieu, 1998, 56-57). First ascents both generate and perpetuate climbing doxa. The first ascensionist incorporates particular views of climbing style into the embodied echo and redeploy them in modified versions so as to fit the conditions of practice. It is thus useful to turn to a discussion of the historical development of climbing practice.
In The historical process of producing climbing space routes were picked because of obvious weaknesses and features. In 1929, a first ascent and second established route on New Hampshire’s Cannon Cliff was made. This was one of the eras’ breakthrough routes. In 1928, after establishing the first ascent of the cliff, Robert Underhill, a ‘Harvard philosopher and mathematician’, declared that his route ‘appears, from all examination to date, to be the only possible route up the cliff’ (Underhill, quoted in Jones, 1997: 112). An oft repeated assertion, it has been ‘repeated about countless cliffs by generations of climbers, and it is always wrong’ (Jones, 1997: 112). It was only the following year that this claim would be proved incorrect with the establishing of the Whitney-Gilman route. Soaring on a 300 metre knife-edge arête, it was graded (retrospectively) as a 5.6, though has now been increased to 5.7 after rock fall from the route made it more difficult (Waterman and Waterman, 1993: 35-37).

Throughout this period in New England ‘with the discovery of new areas, encouragement of beginners, and dissemination of ideas, abilities improved rapidly. The unthinkable came to be openly considered, and last year’s horror climbs became commonplace’ (Jones, 1997: 113). This process has been characteristic of the ongoing exploration and pioneering of climbing space. Climbers often refer to this as breaking not the physical but the ‘psychological barrier’. While this affects not only individual climbers, it can also impact the field as a whole. Thus, at many points in history a particular first ascent not only represents a new route, but also the beginning of a revolution of climbing standards. With a barrier broken, more climbers will move into this new realm of possibility, normalising it, until eventually the standard becomes an accepted, if not minimum standard of ability. These ‘breakthroughs’ are gradually incorporated into the field, developing doxic practices so as to increasingly create new norms. An important and famous example of this was the first ascent of El Capitan (El Cap) in 1958. A golden granite wall

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60 These are relatively easy climbing grades in the American ‘Yosemite Decimal System’ (YDS). Climbing grades are rarely given below 5.4 and moderate grades in contemporary climbing considered to be around 5.8-5.10. Climbing grades in the YDS now extend to 5.15.

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shooting a full kilometre skyward, El Cap in the Yosemite Valley represented a major challenge within the climbing field. Little known at the time, ‘a climbing revolution [was] about to take place in Yosemite, a revolution that in less than ten years [would] put American climbers at the forefront of the sport and influence mountaineering all over the world’ (Jones, 1997: 251).

The first ascent of El Cap marked a movement into not just El Cap’s particular verticality, but a whole realm of climbing territories that had yet to have an ascent team that had the right mix of determination and willingness to do what was necessary to make the first ascent. Indeed, the ascent had been considered for climbing for two decades prior to it finally being undertaken. But one of the major criticisms and deterrents of the method required was that it was a form of ‘vertical engineering’ since it would require extensive use of bolts for protection and fixed lines in order to get supplies up the wall while the climbing team inched upwards and for these climbers to be able to return to ledges for rests. At the time of the first ascent of El Cap, one of the leading climbers of Yosemite Valley, Royal Robbins, refused to take part in the ascent because of the ‘siege-style’ tactics (as discussed below, also see glossary 1) that would need to be applied (Taylor, 2010). This is an important point for the conceptualisation of climbing as a field. It is a discernible moment where a loosely organised group approached the same vertical space in a struggle over meanings. Gaining the first ascent of El Cap was highly valued by those involved but the techniques deployed – the value of style – was being disputed. In this case, the climbers considering the ascent largely agreed that it would require a heavy handed siege-style approach – that is, the climbers were limited by the current level of technique and technology and had one foreseeable method available. What it came down to then, was whether this approach was appropriate or not. In the case of Robbins, the style of climbing was met with a refusal to be involved in the ascent. Indeed, Warren Harding’s eventual first ascent of El Cap testified to the points that had been raised. In total it required a number of attempts that

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constituted ‘45 days over 18 months, with 675 pitons, 125 bolts, and 2000 feet of rope’ that culminated in a ‘marathon twelve-day push’ (Taylor, 2010: 154-157). These disputes were, on one hand, between elite climbers and hence operating within the higher positions of the field. Yet the debate demonstrates the earlier privileging of the free ascent. Nevertheless, once completed, this represented a shift in the possibilities that could be considered by Yosemite Valley climbers:

The problem was how The Nose [of El Capitan] contributed to the erasure of risk. [Royal] Robbins [an elite climber of that time] noted that [Warren] Harding was “the first to break that fear” of El Capitan. He pierced a psychic barrier by proving that even the most intimidating faces could fall. Climbers remained wary, but now they knew they could succeed (2010: 157).

Through achieving this first ascent, the new generation of dedicated climbers had been shown that these possibilities exist. These routes become subdued through popularity. Through the advance of climbing technologies and styles towards lighter and faster methods, The Nose of El Capitan would again be reimagined. In 1975 three young climbers of the Yosemite Valley scene had made the first one-day ascent (Taylor, 2010: 210-212). This could be improved even further, as this trio had still had to resort to ‘aid’ techniques in order to move through sections of rock that had yet to see a free ascent. Through techniques introduced with the rise of sport climbing, it was possible to imagine the route being climbed completely free of artificial aid. In 1992, Lynn Hill began ‘working’ the route, rehearsing each pitch until she could climb it with only her hands and feet without falling off. Then in 1993, with another female climber, she made the first ‘free’ ascent over the course of four days (Taylor, 2010: 257-258). “The next obvious challenge”, she remarked, was to repeat it “faster or in better style,” so in 1994, Hill freed The Nose in one day, leading all the pitches herself’ (Taylor, 2010: 258). Similar progressions have taken place in ice

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61 See Glossary 1: Terms.
62 While free ascents become the dominant style of climbing, this also creates status for aid ascents because of the rarer technical skills of the climbers involved (and hence engaged in by a very small climbing population (in particular, one of the rarest though most elite climbing categories is to rope solo aid climbs). See Glossary 2: Styles.

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and alpine climbing. These demonstrate an aspect of stylistic doxa within climbing – that the superior mode of climbing is to eliminate the dependency on technologies and to complete an ascent by only using the bodies innate capacities. This is effectively the creation of a hierarchy of preferred styles that are considered more ‘natural’ and demanding.

As elite climbers have broken through these barriers the capacities of the committed amateur have made relative advances. The Nose of El Capitan has become a popular classic, often being pursued as intermediate climbers first ‘wall route’. Thus, as these barriers break down and the elite push towards greater challenges, climbing standards have become greater for less experienced climbers. While a discussion will be had of some of the specific technological and knowledge based elements of this process, it will suffice here to examine the struggle of earlier climbers to obtain the grades that are taken for granted in the contemporary climbing field.

Yosemite Valley remained a catalyst for climbing progressions. Where technique and style was being tested and revolutionised, the technologies of climbing were also being pushed further. This brought about new possibilities, as the following excerpt develops:

In 1959, Chouinard and [Tom] Frost attempt a new route on isolated Kat Pinnacle. After he had gained fifty feet on the overhanging rock, Chouinard came to hairline cracks where his smallest knife-blade pitons buckled. He yelled down to Frost that they needed a short, solid piton that would chop its way into the rock. Back on the ground, they worked on the design of a new piton. Frost came up with a basic hatchet-like shape, and Chouinard refined the details. It was about the size of a postage stamp. The business end was the thickness of a [coin] and penetrated only a quarter-inch into the rock. With several of these Realised Ultimate Reality Pitons, or RURPS, Chouinard and Frost made the crux pitch on Kat Pinnacle... It was the most difficult aid climb in North America. The tiny RURP played a key role in ushering in a new standard of aid climbing in Yosemite. It enabled the use of previously hopeless cracks, where before bolts had to be placed (Jones, 1997: 257).

In this excerpt, a standard climbing technology (the knife-blade piton) was inadequate for the challenges presented within the new climbing area. In this event, the climb either had to be abandoned, the ethic of the ascent changed or improvisation had to occur. Here Wacquant’s (2004) pugilist, or Wainwright, Williams and Turner’s (2006) ballet dancers provide an important

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63 Perhaps the most notable alpine route is the North face of the Eiger. One of the famous stories of climbing, the first attempts at the North face of the Eiger were fatal. Now, it is being solo speed climbed.

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contrast to the climbing field. This is because each of these respective fields does not offer the chance for the trained athlete to simultaneously define the rules of the game. But in this swift motion, Chouinard and Frost made a practical statement of their position. By innovating a new climbing technology a relatively autonomous expression of climbing style was mobilised. By coming up with and deploying the RURP, Chouinard and Frost maintained risk in order to preserve the growing doxic practices of ‘good style’. It would have been entirely possible to have placed bolts to pass these areas. The environment hosted problems not yet encountered within the larger climbing field. By designing and creating a new device, new techniques and possibilities were added to the climbing field (a generative moment of the habitus). These kinds of technologies are thus gradually utilised in the larger climbing field, and become part of normative practices. But note that Chouinard and Frost did not extend into a radically new form of protection. The cultural capital of the climbing field that they already possessed was the basis of their innovation, particularly the symbolic attributes that were assigned to maintaining risk within technological innovations. The particular mix of habitus of the ascensionists (Frost was an aeronautical engineer and Chouinard had a portable forge\textsuperscript{64} in his van making pitons for his own ascents and for sale) played an important role in the improvisation. Further, the fluidity of the field was not that there was a ‘rule’ within the climbing field that one must climb with pitons, rather that this was a regularity of the particular form of climbing (Maton, 2008: 54). The broader climbing field influencing first ascensionists within Yosemite Valley had no strict formula for climbing, but rather a series of accepted and working practices. But importantly, the climbers involved in these ascents were struggling over the dominant styles concerned, particularly as noted in the differences between Harding and Robbins. This allowed climbers the freedom to creatively develop practices as new challenges presented themselves. Further, the objects of

\textsuperscript{64} This also demonstrates the lack of commercial/economic dominance in the field at this time. However, this innovative streak of Chouinard became entrepreneurial. He consequently built one of the largest climbing equipment companies in the world (Black Diamond). For a discussion see Taylor, 2010: 175.

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the field such as devices used for protection and performance both exist with certain properties adapted partially to the terrain but without any perfect formula for their function. This gap is one that allows for creative and improvisational tactics to be deployed based on pre-existing cultural capital. Whether this is because of the imperfect conditions between the technology and the terrain (that is, the terrain exceeds technological restrictions) or because the weight and dimensions of an object demands consideration by the climber as to whether it is worth having, or worth risking leaving behind.

These innovations in climbing practice and style allowed for a greater creative input for some of the climbers in Yosemite Valley. These – the elites – policed this style and thus dominated these changes. While some had great power to determine style and practice, this also came at the expense of restricting acceptance into the dominant group. As Yvon Chouinard proclaimed in 1963: an ‘outsider is not welcomed and accepted until he [sic] proves that he is equal to the better climbs and climbers’ (Chouinard, quoted in Taylor, 2010: 140). This extends to both being able to do the climbs but crucially, in the correct style. Nevertheless, the argument above establishes that through being at the forefront of climbing within a new and powerful topographical area, the generative capacities of the climbers had been heightened. Thus, this is not only the ‘psychological’ barrier but also the ‘sociological’ barrier. Importantly the earlier uncertainties of the field become increasingly known and rationalised and incorporated into the general scheme of possibilities. This led to a broader and more sophisticated array of positions that are possible to hold within the field. But importantly, the contemporary field of climbing is built upon struggling to deepen difficulties, of extending past physical, psychological and technological barriers. Therefore, edgework and the relational ‘edge’ is not just experienced by the individual, but is also relative to the field as a whole. While an individual struggles with their

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65 In later times even this may be a more liberal attitude than was recognised. In private conversations with strong climbers who had climbed in Yosemite during this time, being an ‘outsider’ and making impressive ascents could be cause for hostility from the insider groups.

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own capacities for edgework, so too does the field at large. ‘Standards’, that is, acceptable levels of competency continue to rise precisely through the work of earlier generations. This becomes incorporated as historically guided ‘practical sense’ for a current generation. In this, it is now relevant to turn to a discussion of some of the historical and contemporary concerns regarding style in the climbing community.

5.5 Guidebooks and Rationalisation
Before a first ascent, a route does not exist. It may have been conceived, discussed and imagined, but it nevertheless held no historical relationship with the field that suggested a specific means of ascent. An attempt to climb a potential new route maintains uncertainties about its difficulty, the time it would take and what equipment would be required. Hard new routes are continuing to be established and that these, such as those of earlier generations, are often cutting edge and established by the contemporary elite. But what each generation leaves is a body of routes that contribute to an expanding catalogue of possible climbs. These are recorded in climbing guidebooks.

A climbing guidebook is typically written by a climber who has extensive local experience while drawing heavily on interviews, accounts and maps of other experienced locals. An example of this is the guidebook Alaska: A Climbing Guide where the authors ‘relied heavily on a core group of committed Alaskan mountaineers to provide first ascent photos and route descriptions. All descriptions have been edited or rewritten by climbers who know the routes first-hand, a monumental task due to the intricacies of alpine routes’ (Wood and Coombs, 2001: 13). In the guidebook Baffin Island67 (Synnott, 2008), there are no locals and those consulted are expeditionary climbers and skiers who have regularly visited the area. The climbing guidebook hence does not rely on formal organisations that monitor and manage this information. These systems cannot be validated outside of the word of experienced participants. Rather the

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authority of both first ascensionists and experienced climbers are brought together informally. These accounts can thus be deepened through numerous repeats of climbs over time. This is testified to in the broad variety of detail that is given for routes. In popular areas these descriptions can be extensive, even to the point of being pedantic, while the details for climbing in more remote/less travelled can be scarce.

Generations confront a deepening rationalisation of possibilities. They are first ascended, then recorded in broader strokes, repeated by a strengthening cohort of climbers and ever more refined details brought to bear in accounts and descriptions. Moreover, while first ascensionists may have talked to knowledgeable people and studied photos of a particular route before attempting a climb, the contemporary repeater of these routes can follow detailed information as to what they need to bring, what they need to do, when they need to start and how long it will take. Heywood also draws attention to this process, noting that:

Guidebooks contain enormous amounts of information, much of it in a codified, convention-governed form; with these descriptions the competent interpreter approaches the climb with a considerable amount of reliable, intersubjectively verified knowledge. Unpredictability is significantly reduced, while the climber’s ability to objectify and control the climbing environment increases (1994: 186).

These changes to the field do not lend themselves to an adventure filled with uncertainty, and is often a shift apprehended by climbers. Twenty years on from the first ascent of Half Dome in Yosemite Valley the climbs were no longer new adventures, as that ‘the way was marked with fixed pitons and bolts, and the rock bears the scars of the passage of hundreds of climbers’ (O’Brien, quoted in Mitchell, 1983: 113). On any given weekend ‘classic’ climbs in many climbing areas may have line-ups of people waiting their turn. These climbs are often ‘polished’ where the rock becomes smooth and slippery, or the ice becomes ‘kicked out’, creating a ladder-like series of pre-prepared placements for axes and crampons. Many routes can also be determined by looking for the ‘clean’ section on rock, where lichen, moss and other vegetation has been gradually scrubbed away underneath hands and feet. This is important, as it is a physical history of climbing inscribed on the rock and its ecology.

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5.6 Conclusion
A field is a ‘relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity’ which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter into it’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 17). This gravity involves a vertical pull on agents and a vertical dispersion (in various refined formats) of collective practices. In a climbing sense it is possible to see that through the first ascent a highly organised and differentiated approach to climbing practice is been developed. In particular, the first ascent typically represents an establishing, improvisation or transgression of climbing styles. Through this, the horizons of the climbing field are expanded. Simultaneously sedimentation of social practices in social space is created through the repetition of a particular style in a given climbing area. These are at times contested, as seen through the at times violent ‘bolt wars’ (Bogardus, 2012). They represent moments where agents are struggling within the same field as they approach the same basic objectives/environment but with different views as to how this is made meaningful in climbing practice. The urge to ascend remains consistent. Climbing operates without formal regulation to rule on, or even facilitate matters of style and ethics. In this climbing is a remarkably decentralised field. Yet there is a great degree of stabilised and clear ‘regularities’ that inform practice. These largely flow on after the primary and most generative phase of the field, whereby first ascents determine many aspects of the initial practices in a given vertical space. In establishing this preliminary history of some of the basic logics of the climbing field, it is possible to consider how agents discover the climbing field and how this becomes meaningful before turning to a discussion of the development of climbing-specific dispositions.
6. Entering the Field

6.1 Introduction

Every field is the institutionalisation of a point of view in things and in habitus. The specific habitus, which is demanded of the new entrants as a condition of entry, is nothing other than a specific mode of thought... the principle of a specific construction of reality, ground in a prereflexive belief in the undisputed value of the instruments of construction and of the objects thus constructed (an ethos). (In reality, what the new entrant must bring into the game is not the habitus that is tacitly or explicitly demanded there, but a habitus that is practically compatible, or sufficiently close, and above all malleable and capable of being converted into the required habitus, in short, congruent and docile, amenable to restructuring. That is why operations of co-option, whether in the recruitment of a rugby player, a professor, a civil servant or a policeman, are so attentive not only to the signs of competence but also to the barely perceptible indices, generally corporeal ones – dress, bearing, manners – of dispositions to be, and above all to become, “one of us”) (Bourdieu, 2000: 100).

Bourdieu’s rather lengthy discussion cited above is an appropriate method of framing this chapter. What is required to be a climber is not to have an entirely amenable composition of habit, where one is already ‘naturally’ gifted at moving in vertical space, in subduing fear, in taking risk. What is required of the agent is to be ‘practically compatible’, to not only have an appreciation of some of the basic objectives of the field, but to also be sufficiently malleable for embodying the practical sense of climbing. They possess dispositions that are ready for conversion and oriented towards climbing. In order to ascertain these origins, it is therefore important to consider how people enter the climbing field. Individuals are rarely introduced to climbing in its more extreme formats. Rather, this introduction takes place in its gentler environments, where an individual can come to terms with safety equipment and the initial experience of heights. Even prior to this many agents will have had an opportunity to engage with an appreciation of mountains and cliffs before having to be moving on them. This is a space to gain an appreciation of what it would be like to be a body ‘up there’. In this chapter, I will look at moments from field notes and interviews where an individual engages with moments of appreciation of the logic of climbing and of risks and safety in the climbing field. This first step towards engagement in climbing is the involvement in ‘overlapping fields’. In a substantial amount of interviews and meetings with climbers, entry into climbing came through...
Involvement in other outdoor sports. Many of the outdoor sports share certain basic dispositional qualities. These are what give the agent a malleability conducive to being adapted towards the goals of climbing. But this is not simply a doxic characteristic. The illusio, if only in a bare format, is shared. In almost all of my interviews climbers reported that they transitioned into climbing from other outdoor fields. But before proceeding, further attention must be given to the concept of illusio.

6.2 Illusio
The body exists in a definite space and time within the world. We may speak of abstract structures affecting the dispositions of an agent, but these may only come into being through the actions of the body. It is the illusio that defines this being, a ‘being in the world, of being occupied by the world’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 135, emphasis in original). The illusio connects the agent to the field:

A field can function only if it can find individuals who are socially predisposed to behave as responsible agents, to risk their money, their time, and sometimes their honour or their life, to pursue the objectives and obtain the profits which the field offers and which, seen from another point of view, may appear illusory, as indeed they always are because they rest on that relation of ontological complicity between the habitus and the field which is the basis of entry into the game and commitment to the game, that is, illusio (Bourdieu, 1990b: 194).

In order to pursue the objectives of a field, an agent must feel that these objectives have worth. Hence, the field generates meanings that become dispositions of agents and in a sense is the agent ‘becoming the field’ (Hage, 2011, 86-87). Agents are not required to go through an explicit process of indoctrination. Gradually the habitus becomes orientated towards the goals of the field and the agent becomes more or less willing to sacrifice for it and the entire process may never enter reflexive awareness. As can be imagined, in the current context the discussion of illusio is crucial: the physical risks that climbers undertake range between injury and death, along with a myriad of personal and social sacrifices. In order to understand this devotion, the climbing illusio has the potential to illuminate many of the processes they undergo to reach the level of devotion required to climb life-threatening routes on mountains.

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6.3 Overlapping Fields

Garrigou (2006) identifies a ‘sporting illusio’ that particularly concerns the way in which sports come to be taken seriously, even though they are perhaps one of the most sharply arbitrary pursuits. In this regard, there is a shared illusio between sporting or leisure based practices that take the pursuit seriously, even to the point of a sacrifice of jobs, relationships, pain or even risking life itself. Climbing shares illusio with broader sporting fields, but becomes increasingly specific in its relationship with other outdoor fields. While a number of interviewees reported skiing as one of their earlier interests, hiking was the most uniform response. As one interviewee suggested ‘I grew up hiking, and then I just wanted to be on more adventurous trips’ (Mitch). But this adventure also represents a deployment of the skills being learnt in these fields. Climbing often requires substantial amounts of knowledge pertaining to the hiking field, and may include things from other areas such as skiing. As Mary notes:

Well I actually have a bushwalking background, skiing. Bushwalking/backcountry skiing. I white-water paddle too. But, you know, you start going bushwalking and skiing and then you’re like, well the next step is really mountaineering to bring all that together [Mary].

In many ways climbing represents ‘the next level’ where an agent can move into increasingly more challenging environments. This is the gradual conversion towards the rules of the climbing game:

The specific logic of the field is established in the incorporated state in the form of a specific habitus, or, more precisely, a sense of the game... Which is practically never set out or imposed in an explicit way... because it takes place insensibly... the conversion of the original habitus, a more or less radical process... which is required by entry into the game and acquisition of the specific habitus, passes for the most part unnoticed (Bourdieu, 2000: 11, my emphasis).

While the notion of a field specific habitus is problematic, Bourdieu’s point remains valid. The process of moving from a more general dispositional configuration relevant to outdoor sports to one specifically honed to climbing remains largely naturalised. In such a way it is possible to observe the relationships between these somewhat autonomous fields of practice through the notion of an outdoor (or edgework) sports field. Climbing is not the only possibility that a committed outdoor sports person may decide to pursue. Skydiving (Lyng, 1990), BASE jumping...
and kayaking (Fletcher, 2008) are just a few examples where limits are being pushed in adventurous environments, where space is transformed, a sense of autonomy and control is experienced. In another consideration, across a broader temporal state of an agent’s life, climbing may represent a smaller component of a broader outdoor field. Ultimately, agents may go through a substantial movement between these fields depending upon their given amounts of capital at various stages in life. Regardless, the dispositional requirements of these fields bring agents into the peripheral aspects of the doxa of climbing. It is within these spaces where the specific gravities of the climbing field begin to imperceptibly exert force.

The initial experiences of the climbing illusio can of course range across broad levels of depth of intention and passion. But perhaps the fundamental component of this encounter is the realisation of the field as something worth pursuing. It is when the ‘illusio’ begins, when the agent begins ‘progressively and imperceptibly’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 11) incorporating the arbitrary rules and reasons native to the field into the habitus. As noted above, in most cases in interviews the development of the climbing illusio begins through the build-up of overlapping dispositions in various other outdoor fields. Climbers have a very clear sense of a linear path through outdoor activities that lead into climbing. In Derrick’s case, this began quite young:

Derrick: Uh, yeah, I grew up skiing, and, um, like my family was real into taking us camping and that kinda thing. I went to summer camp and we always went and climbed a couple of 14-ers during summer camp, and I would actually go and do that with my friends and stuff. So then, it was kind of a natural progression for me to get into more technical climbing.

Here, Derrick reflects on his experience and notes that the development of interest in climbing was a ‘natural progression’. Through doing more basic hiking, but nevertheless having a ‘feel’ for exposure and mountains, he already shared many of the basic dispositions of the climbing field. In this way, when he saw climbers for the first time at the age of seven, it is no wonder that he felt a powerful ‘pull’ towards the field:

Derrick: That’s where I first was exposed to climbing, was walking through that park and, uh, just looking up in that canyon and seeing little dots...
Interviewer: Oh, really?
Derrick: ...I was probably 7 years old, and seeing little dots on the wall that were people, that were climbers, and some...A climber walked past me with all of his gear on, and his
whole rack hanging off him, and I was on a school field trip, and I was...I was...it was probably six years, seven years before I ever went climbing, but I was hooked at that...

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Derrick:** ...with the first sight of that dude, I was like, *I wanna do that!*

**Interviewer:** So it made a big impact?

**Derrick:** Yeah, it was huge. Huge impact on me.

Even with such a long period of time between this initial encounter with climbing and his first actual engagement with it, Derrick tracks his passion back to this single encounter as a child. He had the opportunity to see a climber, to see the equipment hanging from his harness, and relate it to the small ‘dots’ he could see upon the cliffs above. This represents a very powerful corporeal connection to the body of the climber, both in its distinctive difference in dress but also to be able to draw this connection between the climbers high above. Hence, while not yet embedded in the requisite technical dispositions, Derrick had already been taken with the game.

When an agent begins in their engagement with the climbing field, they are ill-equipped for any major undertakings of risk. But in the contemporary context the basic movements and safety systems can be learnt in reasonably safe environments. Climbers will gradually accumulate the basic dispositional requisites of the field through this process, where they can first learn an awareness of their edge and the mechanics of safety systems. Most climbers will begin to climb through the process of top-roping. This is the safest roped climbing format. However, the first experience of climbing even ten metres off the ground can be an exceptional and powerful experience. But while clinging to the rock, or the artificial holds of a climbing gym, it is still possible to delay the need to trust the safety system of ropes, anchors and a belayer. Once the top of a climb is reached on a top rope the climber must sit back on to the rope and allow their belayer to lower them back to the ground. In the next excerpt, Anna demonstrates the difficulty in accepting that this safety system is going to work. In this instance, she had had no prior interest in climbing, but went to an indoor venue with some friends who had invited her:

**Anna:** I got introduced to it in the gym, um...a friend of mine was like...he had a crush on my friend, and he was like, “Hey, you guys should come meet us at Chelsea Piers, we’re rock climbing.” And I was like, “You’re what?” And he was like, “Yeah, come rock climbing.” And I was just like, he might as well have said, like, ‘come learn French’, ‘cause I was just like, *What are you talking about?*

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Interviewer: [Laughs] Yeah.
Anna: And we go there, and like I got to top rope on like, you know, some [really easy route], and was going up, and I was like, *This is the most awesome thing I’ve ever done!* And when I got to the top, it just felt so amazing. And then I was like, how do I get down, and they were...he...the guy that he was with, he was like, “Just sit back, lean back.” And I was like, I go, “Fuck you!”
Interviewer: [Laughs]
Anna: And then he got real quiet and I was like, “Wait, really?”
Interviewer: Yeah.
Anna: “Just sit back...let go? Like, can I hold the rope?” And they were like, “Just sit back, and walk your feet down.” Blah blah blah. You know, and I did it, and I was like, I think I had probably the biggest grin on my face. I was like, I’m gonna do this over and over and over forever!

In many ways Anna’s experience is an exceptional one, since she is the only interviewee who simply stumbled upon the climbing field and as such had never even been exposed to the logic of the field. Nevertheless her experience is instructive in one of the first major steps to an agent becoming invested. Her experience gave her no basis for an understanding or appreciation of the ways that the safety system of a top rope operated. She could not rely on social or cultural capital to even fill in some of the lack of understanding with a basic trust in this general format of practice. Thus, when she was asked to lean onto the rope, she was confronted with a situation that demanded her trust. But she rapidly transitioned in the moment of weighting the rope, as the logic of the field had been properly encountered – that climbing could be practiced in safety. Quickly was she to experience her first moment of the climbing illusio.

Even in closely overlapping fields, important adjustments in the approach to the climbing field will be necessary for the conversion of the habitus. In the next example, Paul struggled with the possibility of leading on rock routes. His experience had been in mountaineering, which utilises a different logic in the case of falling.68 Because of the often lower angled terrain, poorer protection and greater distances for a fall, mountaineering is generally a place where falling is unacceptable and likely to see a climber severely hurt, if not killed. However, this idea transitions in the steeper terrain of rock climbing. Climbs are often better protected, which means falls are

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68 This raises an important point about the difficulties of the heuristic value of the concept of a field. It would be worth noting that in this discussion I consider that mountaineering and climbing are a part of the same field but represent different positions within it.

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shorter. The terrain is steeper and falling climbers are less likely to hit objects before being arrested. Because of this ‘safer’ format for climbing, rock climbers generally are able to push closer to their physical capacity, even over it, because the perils of falling have been removed and/or reduced:

Paul: I think I also was really afraid of it at first. I found rock climbing really scary for the first long while, and I think that over time with the exposure, it became less scary, but it took a lot of exposure.

Interviewer: Was that because mountaineering has kind of less of that kind of direct exposure, or..?

Paul: It wasn’t exposure, it was the feeling of not being able to hold on.

Interviewer: Okay, right.

Paul: And I think I somehow got it in my head that a leader must not fall...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Paul: ...which is sort of the mountaineering tradition, because I started in mountaineering, maybe that’s where it came from. Like, all the places I had been, there really was no room for falling, so any time I developed...like I was on the brink of falling, it was time to quickly reverse.

Interviewer: Right

Paul: Whereas, ah, you know rock climbing, you know, part of the game is to get to that edge and to see if you can still hang on or not.

Interviewer: Yeah, and so, but...and it took a while until you actually felt that you kind of surmounted that?

Paul: I think it was just a matter of exposure.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Paul: Just little bit by bit. I don’t think it was anything dramatic that happened, I just became more and more comfortable with it, and over time got better at placing gear and trusting it, and eventually it didn’t feel scary anymore, and I could really enjoy rock climbing. 69

In Paul’s case, the logic of mountaineering, through years of practice, had impeded his ability to accept the format of rock climbing. However because he had invested in the climbing illusion Paul was compelled to relearn his sense of the dangers of vertical spaces. But there was no distinct moment where this shift occurred. Instead, through continual exposure to the logic and practice of rock climbing, the fear of falling was transformed into a practical sense of the acceptability in some circumstances of falling off. This brings the discussion towards one of the dimensions of accepting risk in climbing. Bourdieu points out that it is not possible to use reasoned decision making to create a ‘foundational belief’ without it necessitating that it must ‘also obliterate itself from the memory of the believer’ in the process: ‘to move from the decision to believe, which

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69 There is a difficulty in this excerpt with the term exposure. To begin with I think he is talking about exposure as in ‘feeling exposed’ on a mountain but he is referring to ‘exposure’ in the sense of repetition.

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reason can induce, to a *durable* belief that can withstand the intermittences of consciousness and will, one has to invoke other powers than those of reason. This is because reason... can in no way durably sustain belief’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 48, my emphasis). Or as Hilgers puts it ‘one cannot simultaneously believe x and believe that x is the fruit of one’s will to believe x’ (2009: 740). Paul makes a remarkably sharp observation of the logic of the field, where he notes that the game is to push to the edge of his physical capacity, where, since the safety systems allow, it is possible to fall off in order to expand this capacity. But, in particular since he already had an established orientation toward falling, it took time to both acknowledge a new logic of falling and to subsequently transform this into a more sustainable dispositional orientation toward falling. Here, it is possible to extend this discussion. It is that before the belief (in this case represented by climbing illusio) has even been considered, durable dispositions have already developed in the agent that are supportive of an enduring commitment to the climbing field. Thus, when the agent decides to believe that climbing is worthwhile they are already well prepared for this acceptance. This exemplifies Bourdieu’s statement that ‘the original investment has no origin, because it always precedes itself and, when we deliberate on entry into the game, the die is already more or less cast’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 11). Once the founding belief, the illusio of the field has begun, reason, continuing ‘proofs’ of the meanings of climbing, will not be enough to create durable engagement. Rather, what will now be needed is *habit*.

6.4 Conclusion
One of the objectives of this chapter has been to demonstrate that a climber is not merely predisposed by nature or biology towards the pursuit of risk. This gradual movement toward risk-taking casts doubt ‘on the claims by psychologists that the attraction to risk taking reflects an individual’s predisposition to take risks’ (Lyng, 2009: 114). Rather, my argument is that through a gradual process often associated with overlapping outdoor fields agents come to share some of the same physical and social spaces of climbing. These are opportunities for the gradual and imperceptible process of gaining an understanding of the specific logics of the
vertical world without ever making a conscious decision to pursue this space sheery out of the desire to take risks. In many ways the climber-to-be is taking opportunities from the conditions that they are faced with:

Not only is it mistaken to assume that people choose their allies and tactics, in many cases there is no reason to assume that they choose their goals. This is not because, as critics of Bourdieu have sometimes assumed, field theory implies that people are cognitively limited in their vision of what they want. It is because the only way to reach conditions that we cognize and wish for is to make use of those conditions that we have not wished for (Martin, 2003: 44).

This discussion of becoming taken in the climbing field demonstrates many aspects of how social fields and their overlap and proximity to one another facilitate the possibility of moving in the direction of riskier practices through the gradual incorporation of an understanding not only of the risks but also, as West and Allin (2010) note, the sense that these risks can be controlled. Importantly, as Martin’s discussion reflects, climbing is pursued because of an opportunity to immerse oneself that is derived through conditions that are outside of the agent’s control. The discussion above shows a certain degree of immersion in other outdoor fields without any specific intention of moving toward climbing, but having climbing become compelling due to an accidental proximity. In this way, risk-taking very gradually becomes perceived in the positive light that edgework theories emphasise (Lyng, 2005, 2009). Risk-taking is not necessarily the initial attraction but rather one that is fostered through the development of illusio.

It is now possible to move on to considering how people begin incorporating the specific dispositions, and requirements of climbing into the habitus. That is, people will work not on the reasons that they want to go climbing, but will begin working upon themselves to build the capacity to more efficiently align themselves with the field and its objectives. This embodied sense does not require plunging into a conscious pursuit of meaning, but will instead become an absorption into the practical sense of climbing. Through the initial development of the climbing illusio agents will begin a new relationship with themselves. Agents will work on skills that will enhance their capacities in areas they are sufficiently capable to operate within and to exclude, or minimise, the situations that they will be unprepared for. This typically requires that
the growing awareness of the agent will fit them into objectives based upon their current self-understood capacity. This operates as a restriction on getting in ‘over their head’ through a feel for the game, carefully matching their objectives to their skills.
7. Capital, Climbing Bodies and Emotional Callusing

7.1 Introduction
With entry into the climbing field agents must begin to take on the specific skills and abilities necessary to negotiate the vertical world. Here, we turn to the concept of capital, as it becomes the means of navigating social space within the logic of a particular field (Grenfell, 2010: 22). Once an agent finds the urgency for action in the objectives of climbing, they will embark on the process of acquiring the specific abilities required for vertical practice. It becomes useful to consider Bourdieu’s well-known concepts of symbolic and cultural capital. However it is argued that these concepts cannot extend fully enough to capture such a dynamic interaction of embodied echo and field. Cultural capital is hence redeveloped to consider more of the lived experiences that capital is deduced from.

As the process of capital accumulation unfolds the agent can increasingly rely on prereflexive dispositions to inform their strategies of further capital accumulation. Doxa – the embedded logic of the field – can steer a broader process of development that appears as a form of conscious, logical progression based upon ‘sensible’ or ‘common sense’ approaches. But it will never be properly apprehended by the agent – it will go without saying. In a field such as climbing this is a difficult point: conceptions of individual development could be considered dangerously reckless. While climbers may train the body or learn different systems in the horizontal, many of the embodied lessons of climbing occur while clinging to high places. Climbing is a fusion between the high level of knowledge and skill required before one can leave the ground and the in situ development that is only gained through long periods spent in ascent (and descent). A lead climber high above their protection, testing a suspicious piece of rock to see if it will crumble all the while trying to restrain the urge to panic is working in a moment that will build ability and experience that could have never been learnt in a gym or from a textbook. So too are many of
the knowledge systems and perceptions that are fused into these circumstances learnt ‘down there’ where the risks and perils had yet to emerge.

This fusion of skills is the representation of a game being played by particular rules. Ascents must be made in ‘good style’ – adhering to the doxic principles of the field. Nevertheless, development does not necessarily proceed along a line of development that simply maximises safety. The climber with a feel for the game will carefully navigate on the one side recklessness and danger and on the other ‘too much safety’. In the field I have observed many discussions with climbers about the practice of other climbers that were deemed unnecessarily reckless and seemed to be pushing too close to danger. But, importantly, the ‘oversafe’ climber was likely to suffer more criticism. While climbers and their inculcation into a broad array of dispositions will result in a variety of practices across a spectrum of possibility, the definition of this spectrum will be continually discussed and contested to in turn generate ‘common’ or acceptable practices. It is thus useful to turn to a discussion of cultural capital.

7.2 Capital
The concept of capital is a critical component of Bourdieu’s theory, as it refers to the specific assignment of value and quality within a field. As Bourdieu suggests: ‘a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101, emphasis in original). In the climbing field the value of making particular ascents will be valued more highly than others; a recognition of a hierarchical ordering that has been assigned to them. This is made so through the embodiment of the dispositions, perceptions and tastes of the field. The field determines the quantity and species of capital that holds these values and hence what is necessary for membership. For Bourdieu, ‘most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment’ (1986: 244). Cultural capital is often misrecognised as an effect of ‘natural aptitudes’ becoming symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 245). And, in its reverse ‘symbolic capital
is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognised’ (Bourdieu, 1989: 21). Rather than associating these symbols with an agent’s position in relation to the field of power, they apprehend it as a reflection of individualistic success in the form of symbolic capital: ‘The habitus recognises symbols as markers of social position, but also misrecognises them as reflections of a fictional inner personal essence. When symbols are misrecognised in this way, they become what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital’ (Farrugia, 2011: 74-75, my emphasis). For climbers, this accumulation of symbolic capital is primarily around embodied capacities. Thus, within the climbing field symbolic capital functions as a misrecognition of the competencies and experience of a climber as a component of their inherent ‘personal essence’.

However it is also possible to distinguish two modes of objectified cultural capital: one that can be appropriated through ‘legal ownership’ (such as a car, a piece of land or art etc.) that ‘presupposes economic capital’ and the other the embodied dispositions required to produce cultural capital (for instance, the ability to drive a car or to knowledgeably consume art):

The owner of the means of production must find a way of appropriating either the embodied capital which is the precondition of specific appropriation or the services of the holders of this capital. To possess the machines, he [sic] only needs economic capital; to appropriate them and use them in accordance with their specific purpose... he must have access to embodied cultural capital, either in person or by proxy (Bourdieu, 1986: 247).

While there is an obvious need in climbing to possess economic capital (for equipment and travel) the more critical aspect of objectified cultural capital is the embodied capacity to function within these competences – to know and consume climbing appropriately. Where an agent may inherit economic capital and its acquisition is without a temporal or bodily dimension, cultural capital exists in the body and ‘declines and dies with its bearer’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 245). It should be noted that the specific work of acquisition and maintenance and even the intentional and non-intentional functions of dispositional decay will require continual engagement by the agent. Further, the acquisition of cultural capital may require no conscious effort on behalf of the agent. If one assumes it ‘natural’ to have certain competencies then the act of accumulating them may go largely or entirely unnoticed, because ‘it cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating
capacities of the individual agent’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 245) and, hence, its predisposition to function as symbolic capital.

It may seem out of place to attempt to use Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital for a study focused on the internal workings of the climbing field. This is because it is generally applied to looking at relationships of agents within fields to gain advantage in a more general economy of capitals (Bennett et. al, 2009: 258). For instance, the concept would be better applied to examining the class positions of climbers and how climbing is a taste of people in particular class positions. In this way, capital can help us explore problems of inequality between positions in social space, but not necessarily the struggles of people who are more or less horizontally differentiated. This differentiation is an exciting realm to explore the variety of forms of dispositional acquisition, but may not be facilitated very well in positioning it in a conceptual framework based on a struggle for advantage. As is noted of Sarah Thornton’s (1995) work on the concept of ‘subcultural capital’ inside of the dance scene: ‘cultivation promises esteem and reputation within relatively small social enclaves… those engaged in the dance scene gain kudos among themselves, but that has no value after the weekend when they return to work’ (Bennett et. al. 2009: 259). Sarah Nettleton’s critique of Bourdieu’s use of the concept of capital (particularly in his ‘Sport and Social Class’, 1978) runs from a similar point. She argues that Bourdieu tends to instrumentalise experiences within sporting fields, presuming that:

’Socio-structural patterning shapes these experiential practices and the intrinsic profits for those engaged in them. This is assumed, one could argue, because Bourdieu’s analysis attends to context and objective relations between social positions at the cost of paying sufficient attention to what the body actually does, and how the body-subject is really lived within the field’ (Nettleton, 2011: 199).

70 This topic is addressed more fully in Chapter 9: Distinctive Space.
71 Thornton’s account is difficult to incorporate into a study of climbing that maintains its interest inside of the field because ‘For Thornton, the construction of the other, the hegemonic, the mainstream, is integral to the social logic of subcultural capital. The operation of subcultural capital is expressive of difference in relation to an outside culture’ (Bullen & Kenway, 2005: 54). This also begs the question: if subcultural capital is only field specific, why does it require relationship to the world external to the subculture? In this view, subcultural capital becomes meaningful only because of the scarcity of those who possess it – hence functioning as a form of distinction.
It is at this point that it seems relevant to wonder why the concept of capital is maintained, especially in works focused on the body. Perhaps part of the reason these attempts to reinvigorate or reconceptualise capital – whether through different species or different scopes – comes from the general appeal of Bourdieu’s larger framework. Further, capital is a flexible concept that allows us to consider the acts of agents without necessarily being embedded in studies of exploitation:

There can be more or less (volume), and more or less of different types (composition), which works in different ways in various fields, and which has varying potential for accumulation and convertibility. The various types of capital have different properties – flexibility, fungibility, contextual dependence and alienability characterize the four types. However, unlike exploitation, exclusion, domination or expropriation, it does not specify a social relation between agents, and hence sidesteps the game theorists pre-occupation with exploitation of actor A by B (Savage, Warde and Devine, 2005: 40).

If the diversity of ways in which capital can be applied means it should not be jettisoned just yet from an account of practice, then, as Bennett et. al. (2009: 257-259) suggest, we should begin accounting for a wider variety of capitals. Relevant to this study is Nettleton’s (2011) ‘existential capital’. She offers the concept of existential capital as a means of trying to draw focus back towards the body. It is comprised of ‘visceral pleasures, corporeal resources and a novel form of sociality’ (2011: 209). In her study of fell runners, she finds that people engage with fell running for the shared experience and identity that constitutes and perpetuates the field itself. Existential capital more or less emphasises what symbolic capital trivialises. Symbolic capital identifies living experience as a form of misrecognition, where agents capitalise on their cultural and economic advantages that are concealed through a tendency to promote their experience as a natural aptitude. Existential capital therefore functions within what Bourdieu would consider to be the symbolic.

Nettleton’s account of ‘existential capital’ provides a useful position to consider the concept of capital and how it relates to the embodied echo. Once again, we are confronted by a situation where the habitus functions well in the more ‘instrumental’ realms of specific forms of cultural capital, but it does little to talk to the living experience of dispositional acquisition, modification

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and decay. Nettleton hints at the idea the people have a form of experiential capital, one that cannot be pulled away from its context but helps to situate the agent in the field. It suggests a depth of immersion, an intimacy with the field that needs to be explained in its own right. In this regard, existential capital seems compatible with the embodied echo. The embodied echo functions as a swelling tide of dispositions ontologically grounding the agent in their position. Existential capital would similarly constitute the living capital that firms up this ontology - a sense of experience and competence that pervades the body.

But are fell runners truly swept up in their experience of fell running for the absolute pleasure of fell running? Can the lust for these positions truly be explained by the positions themselves? While the embodied echo treads across a very similar territory the notion of cacophony in the embodied echo tries to convey that dispositions are continually active, even if this is the process of dispositional decay. In effect, the agent is continually flanked by other options for action, by potentiality. It is this inundation that drives the idea that people cannot fully know the reasons of their actions. The agent swims in their experiences and tries to sort them out as best as they can for the purposes of meaning and action. Existential capital, then, provides too clean a break from the agent’s experiences outside of the act of fell running. The need to act in fields such as fell running or climbing are constituted through their interaction with other fields as well. Here, my study does poorly at capturing this dynamic, as it emphasises only the experience from inside the field. But the movement between climbing and broader social fields should be continually left ready to be explored. Existential capital swings too heavily away from the instrumental aspects of cultural capital.

Before continuing it is important to first ask whether or not the concept of cultural capital can be reorientated to answer the problem existential capital addresses. For instance, in order to make a claim for being a practitioner of any culture it is necessary to make a claim to experience: experience being moments from the past forming the basis of the potential to act now. All
cultures embody, as a part of culture, an idea of experiential solidarity. Would it not therefore be better to assert this characteristic of ‘existential’ engagement as an aspect of culture rather than a distinct mode of capital? To quote Nettleton’s position:

From the data in hand, we can see that there is something inherent to fell running, in and of itself, that serves to precipitate shifts in the relations between different socio-economic and cultural groups. The attractor is the *existential capital* derived from the intensity of a sentient bodily awareness associated with running on topographically tricky ground, in spectacular landscapes, and in adverse or conducive weather conditions. Because the experience is so deeply personal, it can only be shared and appreciated by others who have done it... Desire is not, however, as Crossley would suggest, a desire for recognition, or to accumulate any kind of exchange value. It is a desire for something more carnal than that. (Nettleton, 2013: 206).

Why could this same scenario not be discussed using illusio and doxa rather than a modified version of capital? In this case, doxa is the appreciation of the act of fell running, as this is the central principle of the logic of the given field of practice. As has been discussed earlier, the illusio is what allows the agent to consider a pursuit worthwhile. By engaging with the ‘intrinsic’ joy in the act of running the agent is acting through the illusio as a means of embodying a specific perception and bodily engagement relevant to the doxic modalities of running. This incorporates the existential moments of engagement. In a Bourdieusian framework, the desire to act cannot escape the complex, prereflexive conditioning that informs the agent. Indeed, I would still retain that the end consequence, even if misrecognised, is an accumulation of cultural capital. After all, the culture of running revolves around a logic of ‘you have to run to know what it feels like to run’ (the tautological definition of the meaning of a field associated with all fields, see Bourdieu, 2000: 96; also see 9.2 of this thesis). But to even reach the outskirts of a sporting field such as fell running, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, is dependent on a ‘leaning of the habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 223) being already well prepared to orientate the agent to a specific field of practice.

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72 By the use of the term ‘carnal’ Nettleton is making reference to Crossley’s (1995) call for a ‘carnal sociology’. He argues that in contrast to the standing emphasis in studies of the body being ‘what is done to the body’ carnal sociology is concerned with ‘what the body does’ (1995: 43). In the use in question, it would seem the use of the term is to emphasise that the agent is more concerned with the existential doing of the body than the context outside of this.

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Cultural capital is embodied, it is experience, in its very definition. But it is not through a mere acknowledgement of potentiality that cultural capital is accrued. Cultural capital comes to be through moments of action, action that demonstrates the capacities of the agent. The moment of action is therefore a realisation and an objectification of capital that may lead to decline or accumulation of cultural capital and will also set and reset trajectories for its further accumulation or erosion. It is not enough for a climber to say to others that they had made this or that ascent but never be seen climbing. They must legitimately act, gain experience and knowledge in order to properly acquire cultural capital. It is therefore reasonable to assert that embodied cultural capital appears existential as it is only made relevant through moments of action, through the moment of action, while actually being the embodied echo of dispositional enrichment and decay. On a mountain, in the dark, out of food and water and no bivy⁷³ equipment a climber will make strategic decisions. But these are not about accumulating cultural capital. I would argue that the major consideration under discussion is a primal and simple one: ‘we have to get down’. This is the lived experience of a desperate and urgent situation. To set an abseil anchor while becoming reckless, in a completely embodied (mental, emotional and physical) exhaustion has no continuity other than the possibility of reaching the safety of the ground. When lurching slowly onto a questionable abseil anchor in this state, near to overwhelmed by anxiety at the possibility of the anchor’s failure, the gravity of the moment, a moment that matters, has little continuity outside of the hope to be alive at the end of that moment. But a number of things should also be recognised. Firstly, the climber does not transcend their accumulated cultural capital. They do not, through the magnitude of this situation, gain the spontaneous ability to levitate or ‘downclimb’ over terrain they would be fearful to climb up. They draw on their embodied cultural capital, their experience as a climber in order to devise a method to deal with the situation. It will be a moment utilising an accumulated endurance, the need to focus, to stay calm and test each anchor as carefully as

⁷³ Another word for ‘bivouac’. See Glossary 1: Terms.

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possible. But when (or if) they return to the ground, what they have accumulated is experience that will be interpreted as symbolic capital for both their reengagement with the social space of climbers and cultural capital for their reengagement with the mountains.

At different points in time this capital is functioning differently. In the heat and urgency of the climb, capital is something that functions more fully for the realisation of the act itself. This point is deepened by recognising that the cultural economy of climbing fundamentally revolves on experience. Experience represents the fulfilment of the objectives of the field. To have climbed many routes, to have many stories, to be known by reputation – these are the signals of an agent’s investment in inculcation and assimilation. In a discussion of symbolic capital Bourdieu reminds us that ‘there is a happiness in activity which exceeds the visible profits – wage, prize or reward – and which consists in the fact of emerging from indifference (or depression), being occupied, projected towards goals, and feeling oneself objectively, and therefore subjectively, endowed with a social mission’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 240). Climber’s place little value in economic outlay, in who has the most equipment or the newest. Owning a new piece of equipment will bring little symbolic capital. Indeed, I have had many conversations with climbers about the costs of being guided on Mt. Everest that bemoan that these summiteers, to borrow Simon’s (2002) expression, have more money than skill. But the worn out boots and beaten protection state a powerful investment of time in the vertical plane. Wear and damage is the representation of use, found only in the development of experience. A climber will be looked upon with suspicion should they be climbing on entirely new equipment. No experienced climber would have such a large amount of new gear.74 I have on times borrowed new pieces of gear from climbing friends.

74 An aspect of distinction that I am not analysing in this thesis is a climber’s sense of distinction outside of climbing field. Climbers will talk disparagingly of non-climbers interests, but will do so typically among climbers. Many experienced climbers within this study have commented that they don’t talk to outsiders about climbing as they don’t understand the experience. While it is obvious that climbers will maintain a sense of distinction based on the novel and extreme nature of their activities, my position as an insider in the field and a lack of specifically relevant data mean that this thesis will bracket this out of the analysis presented.
for various trips, only to have them announce that ‘it would be good to have it scuffed up’. This bears similarities with the reverse logic of the field of art: ‘the game of art is, from the point of view of business, a game of ‘loser takes all’. In this economic world turned upside down, one cannot conquer money... [and] all the symbols of worldly success... without compromising one’s salvation in the hereafter’ (Bourdieu, 1992a: 21). The climber must play a ‘paradoxical game’ where the chief symbols of attainment are based on rejection of economic logics and an ‘interest in disinterestedness’ (Bourdieu, 1992a: 21).

The acquisition of embodied cultural capital will be explored in its various aspects throughout this chapter. I aim to deconstruct, explain, and reassemble aspects of the embodied echoes crucial in the constitution of climbing practice. Firstly, I want to more broadly account for various dispositional sets. I am grouping these as emotional, bodily and intellectual (or skill-based). These are inter-related and in the moment of action I argue that they are indistinguishable. Indeed, in order to properly make this account, each dispositional group will, to a point, overlap the analysis of the others. For instance, the fearful climber whose legs begin to shake is not experiencing a distinct emotional state on the one hand and a distinct bodily state on the other. Fear is in the body, and the body is in fear. Nevertheless, in order to deepen the accounts of each group I will discuss specific dispositions. These will help to demonstrate the overall constitution of the dispositional set to show the various primary ways in which it is enacted. In the following chapters these will then be reassembled in order to show how they are constituted in the movement and being of the experienced climber. Here, the climber has shifted towards new forms of intentionality in the realm of practice. The earlier method of being in the vertical environment has been radically altered in order to reflect a deepening efficiency produced specifically for the vertical environment.
7.3 The Forging of New Dispositions
As the illusio deepens, new areas of skill and knowledge must be taken on. At times, this is a premeditated event. For instance, a climber preparing for their first trip into a glaciated alpine range will choose a strategy for learning how to glacier travel before they confront the new terrain. But in other situations, climbers may abruptly discover that their skill set is not up to the task and that new skills will be required either immediately or in the future (retreating from a route with the intention of return). In other words, these cases demand that the agent develop new dispositions in order to properly engage with a given situation. In the following case, Jess is attempting to establish new routes on an unclimbed boulder. But she had never established routes before and had to learn new techniques in order to proceed. I use my own experience learning how to establish new alpine routes to relate to her experience:

Interviewer: I mean for me, [prior to] Greenland... I hadn't really done much in the way of first ascents and stuff.
Jess: Yeah.
Interviewer: I was just kinda winging it really, and...
Jess: Yeah. [Laughs] No, I was totally winging it! I was like... I mean I've never even... had to set up any kind of rope systems to clean a boulder. And I mean, that's super simple, but that's just not something I do. So it was like, I had to have the guys help me, like, Okay, how do I like...how do I even get on top of this boulder to clean it? You know? Like everything was different. [Laughs]

In situations such as this dispositions are developed in order to pursue new objectives. Jess’s climbing experience had been in repeating routes others had established, which cleared the way for a straightforward approach to climbing. But establishing new routes means that a climber must develop an eye for what will be an engaging route, where it should begin, where it will end. In the case of a boulder, it requires the likely holds to be scrubbed of moss and lichen, which is most easily achieved by getting to the top of the boulder by the easiest method and setting a rappel (requiring an anchor to be built to support the rappel) in order to hang in convenient positions to scrub holds. In order to begin the acquisition of these new abilities, Jess required the help of more experienced climbers. But through this process she can again reach a new point

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75 While bouldering has not been typically included in this thesis, this example was included as it was in a remote expeditionary environment, where getting injured could become a serious affair.
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of autonomy, allowing her to actively seek new routes without dependence upon more experienced climbers.

The development of bodily skill can be a difficult site of discussion. Bourdieu considered this difficulty but noted the importance of the social sciences to gain insight into this learning:

The problems raised by the teaching of a bodily practice seem to me to involve a set of theoretical questions of the greatest importance, in so far as the social sciences endeavour to theorise the behaviour that occurs, in the greatest degree, outside of the field of conscious awareness, that is learnt by a silent and practical communication, from body to body one might say (1990b:166).

In climbing, the body is used in experimental, testing ways. There is a need to consider how this body puts these lessons to work, as high risk climbing rarely concedes the opportunity to rehearse in situ. Similar to the boxer tirelessly training in the gym, preparing each element of their body carefully before a fight, the skills of climbing are learnt in safer environments. But the climber trying to push the body into new terrains of physical difficulty will rarely do so in an environment when failing is tantamount to death. The climber on a serious route, like the boxer stepping into the ring, has practiced and trained themselves so as to be prepared for the undertaking. They have learnt the moves and techniques that will form the foundation of their movement.

While procedures regarding specific climbing technologies can be narrowly defined, approaching vertical space relies on an expectation that the body will know what to do when it is time to do it. Nowhere could this be said to be more accurate than in the objectives of alpine climbing (especially regarding first ascents). While of course the habitus draws on history and anticipates based upon sensory stimuli/schemata the things that will need to be done, it nevertheless may only roughly sense itself in these circumstances. That is, a climbing route functions in a dual manner. Firstly, the route will typically have a degree of rationalised knowledge, a ‘known’ dimension that will come through guidebooks, social interactions etc. But simultaneously, climbing is a body-centric activity that deploys the body in spaces that are unknown. That is, it is not just uncertainty and risk, but also the unknown aspects of the climb,
the urge to travel through terrains that will demand improvisational technique in order to successfully ascend. A basis of the confidence of a climber therefore comes through the embodiment and understanding that it is possible to ‘figure out’ and to feel a way through a terrain.

Climbers learn techniques through improvisation. Techniques such as crack climbing are not learnt through merciless drills where one breaks the technique down in order to advance their technique for the climb. Rather, in order to become a proficient crack climber, the best technique is to spend large amounts of time actually climbing cracks. Touch and tactile feel guides the way that the hand fits, cams and contorts in different widths and angles. A crack is measured by the appendage required to utilise it. It might be a ‘finger crack,’ ‘loose fingers,’ hands or ‘off-hands,’ then ‘fists’ and on into the painful world of ‘off-widths’ (a painful negotiation requiring arms up to the shoulders, or knees and thighs) that eventually widen to ‘chimneys’ which may require again a variety of physical techniques to approach. The crack may ‘flare’ in or outwards, it may expand, contract or be filled with debris. And of course the rock type and quality will require different approaches, given its surface may have good friction or may be slick, loose or solid. And while negotiating the body through this space, the climber must remain aware of the difficulty of protecting the pitch, weather, the length of the climb and how close it is to the climber’s absolute ability. The body is therefore adjusting technique, speed, and style in order to match the ‘gravity’ of the situation. This represents a permanent mutation (Hilgers, 2009) of dispositions and habitus that remains firmly in the prereflexive. These variations are further emphasised by ‘bodily capital’ (Wacquant, 1995). The specific proportions, reach, weight and overall bodily capacity of a climber will require adaptations of styles. Chisholm (2008) considers this from a gendered perspective in an article exploring the embodied style of the elite female climber Lynn Hill. She would climb with John Long, an elite male climber who

76 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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was ‘almost twice her size’ and who adopted a much different style of ascent then the one available to her:

The big lesson for me here was to realize that despite what appeared to be a limitation due to my small stature, I could create my own method of getting past a difficult section of rock. John’s size and power enabled him to make long reaches and explosive lunge moves that were completely out of my range. I, on the other hand, often found small intermediate holds that John couldn’t even imagine gripping. But more importantly, I realized that no matter what our physical differences, with the right combination of vision, desire, and effort, just about any climb was possible (Hill, quoted in Chisholm, 2008: 22).

In this case, the body of each climber is given advantage and restriction by its dimensions and must adapt an appropriate hexis – a way of the body engaging with and moving in the terrain.

Here, where Long can avoid the need to use smaller holds by reaching further for larger ones, he would also find it more difficult to use these smaller holds because of his extra weight, hand size, and body positions. Hill does not have the selection at any given point of the same variety of positions or holds and must improvise more greatly. However, given her smaller stature, she is also less impeded by weight in order to utilise these holds.

The development of the climbing body will vary depending upon the climbing style. A climber will require different methods of training in order to adapt. For shorter routes with easy access that are technically more difficult, the body will need more power, more ultimate strength and a greater degree of gymnastic technique. In the alpine the emphasis will move towards endurance and stamina. However, the climber in training cannot hope to achieve very much without being engaged in climbing. As Lewis remarks:

The practice of rock-climbing trains or cultivates the body towards a better configuration for climbing. The phrase ‘the best training for climbing is climbing’, a well-rehearsed truism within climbing culture, indicates the centrality of the actual practice of climbing for the formation of climbing bodies – as opposed, for example, to developing a climbing body by pulling weights in a gymnasium (Lewis, 2000: 74).

While this is an important gendered aspect of body development, it is not strictly gendered. Short men, along with tall women are likely to adapt styles more akin to the traditional ‘gendered’ methods discussed here.

While climbing is still the most potent format for building experience and fitness as a climber, contemporary climbing can include all manner of gym workouts and ‘cross training’. For instance, see Soles, 2008.

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A beginners climbing route in an indoor gym will consist of large, easy to use holds. But more importantly, the movement will be simple, even intuitive. The body retains a position that, to a degree, mimics the movement of the walking body. But as difficulties increase, the climber needs to experiment with new bodily positions. These can be learnt in a number of ways. When a climber moves into more advanced climbing methods and styles, the body must go through a process of training for what can be difficult, if not counter-intuitive methods. The climber must test positioning the body in certain ways with the available holds. A stance may feel awkward, but possible. Even when one hand latches onto a great hold, there may be nowhere to place the feet. As interviewee Sol notes:

I think it’s more of a learning the movements and what, I guess, what body positions and how small [the] holds [you can hold on to] and how delicate the moves [that] you can do. You know, like, how steep an angle you can smear\(^79\) on or how small a crimp\(^80\) you can crimp on. Those kind of things that, you can’t really learn that stuff without trying it, or trying hard as you can. And again, it’s pretty irrelevant to the number grade you can be on a climb that has this tiny crimper on it. You either know you can or cannot pull off that hold (Sol).

Learning the movements of climbing requires climbing – experimenting with the way to position the body in order to gain vertical ground. But importantly, the habitus gains this history and the climber begins to adjust with knowledge of what they can and cannot do. This never properly sees a distinction between mind and body, but maintains these understandings as an integrated schemata. A case of this experience that I frequently observed throughout my fieldwork is that of ‘arm pump’:

*The forearms represent a consistently difficult component of the body in climbing. They are usually the point at which the warning of the failure of the hands and arms are first experienced. This is what climbers call ‘getting pumped’. Ice climbers and rock climbers alike cannot escape it. Lactic acid builds in the muscles, the muscles become bulging and

\(^{79}\) See Glossary 1: Terms.
\(^{80}\) See Glossary 1: Terms.

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stiff, a feeling like they are about to explode. And then, the horrible realisation that the ability to hang on is rapidly eroding.

Techniques exist to prevent the inevitability of getting pumped. Climbers will ‘shake out’. This entails hanging on by one arm and dropping the other. It is allowed to hang limp but shaken from the wrist. This relieves the arm, allowing strength to be maintained. The climber will shake one, then the other. This is often a process that can be engaged in order to retain a certain ‘sustainability’, where each time the arms become pumped the climber can shake out in order to avoid reaching a point where the arms become irreversibly ‘pumped’. But there will be plenty of instances where the option to shake out is not available, whether the ‘pump clock’ is ticking down (that is, it is only a matter of time until the climber completely loses strength), or whether a sequence of moves must be completed before a sufficient position to rest can be gained. This presents a variety of problems. If the climber is pumped, it is unlikely they will have the strength left to place a piece of protection. Likewise, it would be a dramatic scenario to experience arm pump in the case of a runout.\(^81\)

What is being slowly accumulated is the capacity to know the body as it moves in the vertical terrain without knowledge being divorced from praxis. Indeed, learning the initial movements of climbing can be difficult, if not exhausting. A revealing example of this process is the development of the technique of ‘crack climbing’. In most crack climbing situations a climber will ‘jam’ their appendages inside the crack. This is typically completed either by constriction or by camming (torqueing) the hand or foot in some way in order to lock an appendage into position. But this ability does not come easy: beginner crack climbers will regularly complain of how painful it is, especially on the feet.\(^82\) Further, since the new climber is uncomfortable, they

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\(^81\) See Glossary 1: Terms.
\(^82\) This bears similarities to what Spencer refers to in his ethnography (2009, 2012) of mixed martial arts fighters as ‘body callusing’. This is a social process of training the body to withstand larger pain thresholds in order to deepen involvement within the sport.
will panic and over exert the amount of pressure needed to maintain the position. This is also because the climber has very little awareness in this terrain, uncertain of the technique, without the ‘feel’ for how close to the edge they actually are.

In one instance I was climbing a crack with a relatively inexperienced climber. This was her first ‘crack climb’. She continued to attempt to position her feet in the crack, jamming and torqueing them into constrictions. But she found this position too painful to be maintained. She thus began to modify her technique to what is called ‘laybacking’. This technique is physically demanding and far less efficient on a crack such as this. Because she was on a ‘top-rope’ it was possible for her to experiment with laybacking without concern of injury.

Earlier in the route, as I watched from above, I attempted to instruct her on how to crack climb. But as the climb went on it was clear that she was unprepared to try and develop this technique and fell into a focused attempt at laybacking her way up the crack. After multiple rests and falls (safely sagging onto the rope) she eventually arrived at the top of the climb (Fieldnotes, Blue Mountains, May 2012).

In these accounts, the body is called on to experiment. But with a relatively high level of safety in this example the climber can fall off. Through this process the climber can attempt a variety of techniques that will build an increasingly broad repertoire of dispositions to draw upon as the circumstances demand. In another example, once again of crack climbing, an experienced climber on lead must confront his inexperience crack climbing through drawing on this broader repertoire:

While climbing a long alpine rock route, my partner Mitch and I were leading two pitches each before changing leader. I finished my first ‘block’ and swapped with Mitch. I was envious of the next lead: a corner crack that looked like it would perfectly accept my hands using a jamming technique. This is my favourite kind of rock climbing and one that I have spent more time practicing than any other. Mitch on the other hand had spent more time
‘face’ climbing. He regarded the crack with nervousness but set out with resolve to take his turn on lead. From my position I could not watch him climb, as the belay was hidden around a corner in case of the leader pulling off loose rock. After a long time, he had only climbed half of a rope length and was building an anchor. I was frustrated at how long it was taking. Soon enough it was my turn to second. I noticed that he had placed lots of protection. The crack was not very difficult and I quickly jammed my way up to the belay, smiling at the rhythmic movement. When I reached Mitch’s belay he commented that ‘I had made it look easy’. He went on to note, that since he had done little crack climbing, he could not quite work out a useful technique to efficiently climb using the crack. He instead resorted to using face holds and stemming through the corner. This would have made the climb substantially harder, as the face offered small, thin positions for hands and feet. In turn, my stronger experience in this style of climbing meant that I could put my hands and feet in and effectively ‘walk’ up the crack (Fieldnotes, Cirque of the Invincibles Expedition, Remote North America, August 2012).

Because of Mitch’s lack of experience with cracks, he relied on using techniques that were less efficient in the terrain and increased the difficulty. This also meant that he felt less secure, which led to him placing more protection. But especially on a long route, placing protection and climbing shorter pitches equates to taking more time on route. Nevertheless, through his experience with other climbing styles, Mitch managed to improvise and cobble together a method of ascending through the section. Mitch did so without stopping and creating a theoretical scheme to ascend. The body was launched into the terrain, which could devise a method, inching slowly up, through the features that were presented. This is a body that is adapted broadly to the practice but must ultimately rely on skilful improvisation in the

84 Climbers will often comment on other climber’s ascents as ‘looking easy’ when they demonstrate a mastery of technique. The ascent will look effortless, even graceful. This is something that the trained eye of a climber will learn to distinguish.

85 See Glossary 1: Terms.
circumstances it confronts. It is not, as Crossley (2004, 2005, 2006) might suggest, reflexive for
the high-risk climber.\footnote{More choreographed climbing styles may rely more on something like a reflexive body technique, where each movement becomes carefully known – rather than the continually renewed negotiation that occurs between the agent and space in high risk climbing.}
Rather, throughout time spent climbing the body itself is modified through a dispositional orientation toward inventive practice. These are not static, but transformed through putting the body to work. They may decay in some instances and in others are ill-suited. These are embodied echoes of action, ones that inform \textit{as they are enacted}.

7.4 Emotional Callusing
In Mitchell’s ethnography of mountain climbers he considers that fear is not an experience likely to be experienced while in a state of ‘flow’:

Climbers may be acutely aware of kinaesthetic sensations, of small, usually unnoticed motor functions. They attend to each movement at every moment with intense concentration, yet other parts of experience may be obliterated. As an example, climbers in flow are seldom afraid. Fear is the luxury or the burden of those without urgent things to do. In the midst of the climb the mountain may pose precarious and problematic circumstances but the climber does not perceive them as such, only as challenges to be met’ (Mitchell, 1983: 166).

My data and experience leads me to disagree with Mitchell. While climbers understand the value of clear and focused actions more or less uniformly, it would be inaccurate to suggest that during states of ‘flow’ fear is not present. It would be an oversimplification to argue that climbers are ‘seldom afraid’. Climbers use a broad vocabulary of terms for fear including being ‘gripped’, ‘sketched out’ or a situation as being ‘desperate’, among others. Climbers must diligently apply themselves, especially in earlier periods of development, to alter their response to fear in a process I am calling ‘emotional callusing’. This borrows from Spencer’s (2009) discussion of ‘body callusing’ towards pain for fighters. Body callusing considers that the body of the mixed martial artists becomes a reflexive site of action. They work directly upon the body with the intention of hardening it for the purposes of fighting. In ‘emotional callusing’ the agent hardens their response, specifically, to fear and panic. While emotional callusing eventually increases the
ability of the climber to meet dangerous situations as merely problems to be surmounted, a
taxing, dynamic process is required to gain this ability.87

Even through vigilant development of the ability to respond in this way, climbers may experience
fear at any point in their career. Perhaps one of the best indications of this is a climber who
discovers that they have the ‘luxury’ to hesitate. While belaying an experienced climber, Dena
notes in an interview the struggle that her partner underwent to overcome a challenging, poorly
protected move:

Dena: There was just one move that he didn’t want to fall on because he had [poor quality
protection]... like it was something he didn’t want to fall on, and he literally went up and
down and up and down and up and down to his rest spot, try it again, back to his rest spot,
go up, back to rest spot. So like I was literally belaying him for about two hours.
Interviewer: Uhhah.
Dena: Eventually he had a fall and his [protection] held, and then he did it easily.

This is a frequently observable behaviour of climbers, particularly on shorter climbs. It would be
hard to suggest that this climber was not experiencing fear, as he had the physical ability to
climb the route (indicated by the climber moving through the section after falling). The
apprehension, therefore, was because it was pushing close enough to his physical abilities that
the questionable protection was not a satisfactory safety-barrier between himself and the
ground. He continued to return to his rest spot after attempting the moves out of fear, on route,
in action. But in this case, it is a sort of twilight of fear. On the one hand the climber understands
that the route is within their ability, albeit marginally so. But with the remaining uncertainty the
ability to suppress or overcome fear is not entirely being reached. In the heat of action, while
pushing through the sequence of moves the climber continues to retreat. Finally after falling off
the section and being caught by the suspicious protection, the fear, embedded in darker
imaginings of the fall has been lost, allowing him to easily ascend. Thus, fear is not a luxury, but

87 I have met climbers that do not neatly fit into this category either. Some climbers approach dangerous
situations with wilfulness at times bordering on the reckless, seemingly oblivious to risks. With this said,
it is worth making two points: firstly, this would be an exceptional case and secondly; many of these
climbers do so in their youth and have on occasion reported to me that they were not really aware of
the risks they were taking at the time. Many of these climbers ease back as they learn more about the
dangers they face.

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hesitation is. This extends across edgework fields. For Lois (2003), search and rescue workers ‘paralysing fear’ only worsens a situation during a difficult rescue for both the casualty and the rescue team. A rescuer hesitating in the moment of fear could cost the victim or even their team mates their lives. Rescuers must therefore suppress fear in order to focus on the task at hand – at times so much so that the victims in need of rescue can become peripheral (Lois, 2003: 93:97). These are situations where hesitation – the possibility of stepping back to give time to considering the optimal approach – would be a luxury and the urgency of the situation demands continuing engagement.

While the body grows a deeper sensitivity to the intricate details of the vertical environment, the climber is also becoming more emotionally adjusted. This is because emotions are a response to dispositions informed by a specific embodied context within the social world. Further, ‘the function of emotion language is to render such states and activities intelligible by locating them within the contexts which occasion them and to which they constitute a purposive response’ (Crossley, 2001b: 45). Fear, anxiety and panic represent a response to the vertical environment based upon a certain configuration of dispositions for the agent. But my purpose here is to temporalise these dispositional sets. Through an ‘emotional callusing’ climbers continually alter their response to fear and suffering. This is because the climber is experiencing an extreme emotional state but working to respond to redouble focus on the task at hand and ignore the fear. A climber, through repeated exposure to the experience, will learn to engage not with the emotion, but soberly with the conditions that make up the situation. The response, then, is to become callused to the experience of fear in order to retain focus on avoiding the perils that generated the emotional response. While needing to retain vigilance in this process, climbers will generate a response to fear that numbs them to it, allowing rational thought and concentration to become their dispositional response to danger. The climber becomes increasingly callused towards all emotions that could potentially unravel an ascent. This does not just concern fear and anxiety, but even at times joy and excitement. Through the hardening
necessary to become a committed high-risk climber, fear is pleasure and suffering is joy. A similar point is made in Mitchell’s mountaineering ethnography where he notes that ‘strenuous effort becomes fun, necessity offers opportunity, labour is leisure’ (1983: 207). The process of and resultant developing of emotional callusing is a durable form of cultural capital in the climbing field.

One of the most distinct components of emotional callusing in climbing is the way in which it is encountered. A climber cannot learn to manage fear through standing on the ground. It is both experienced and managed in situ. There are no institutional frameworks and no training seminars. Climbers will discuss fear and likewise develop procedures through mimetic appropriation of behaviours seen in others. But fear occurs in response to a very particular circumstance and therefore must be interpreted and reinterpreted through the brief explosions of stimuli that produce it. Or in other words, fear must be managed through being afraid.

In a discussion of Merleau-Ponty, Crossley notes that ‘we do not have different ways of expressing being angry or in love. We have different ways of being angry or in love… we have different ways of taking up a relationship to our environment’ (Crossley, 1995: 53). Emotional states are not just expressions coming from a stable and consistent self, but rather, in the moment of action constitute the complete embodiment of the individual. In the case of fear, it is not merely that the climber modifies their responses to fear, but comes to embody an entirely different experience of fear. This ongoing result of emotional callusing is a climber that embodies not only new responses to fear, but a shifting way of being afraid. The need to keep calm under pressure is repeated whenever fear and danger are presented. Throughout the process, the climber deepens the engagement, climbing longer, harder or more dangerous routes, where being afraid is dynamically adjusted. This conditioning continues to align the agent with a deepening immersion in the field. Over time, this normalises the emotional demands of being in the vertical environment. Climbers will hence come to treat the vertical – once terrifying and
difficult places – as an ordinary place to be. To articulate this process I will first consider typical examples of the inexperienced and experienced climber and how these represent different ways of perceiving and being in danger. The various components of these examples will then be deconstructed in order to more fully describe dispositional modification.

The inexperienced climber when first confronting exposure may think ‘there is too much slack in the rope’, ‘I will swing across the wall’, ‘the rope will cut’, ‘I am going to die!’ The palms sweat, the legs shake, bouncing from the ankle but vibrating into the thigh (climbers refer to this as ‘Elvis legs’ or ‘sewing machine legs’). The fear becomes perpetual, the thoughts of catastrophic failure escalate and the climber soon is swallowed by an inescapable panic. They may simply fall off, sagging onto the rope anticlimactically. Or instead, manage to climb through this experience. But the embodied reaction is to ‘overgrip’ holds (wasting energy when a relaxed adjustment of the hand would be equally as effective) or to climb without elegance, scraping and bashing flesh across the rock. I have witnessed savage bruises, cuts and scrapes caused by nothing other than panic. This is a way of being afraid; and it is a way of being afraid that is unconducive to being a climber. The dispositions of the climbing field are impeded by untamed fear. Fear must therefore be incorporated into an embodied way of being that continues to work to the advantage of the climber.

In the below interview excerpt, the process of emotional callusing is expressed through rationally calculating the odds of hitting the ground:

That’s what happens when you’re freaking out. You’re like, okay, ‘I’m feeling a bit freaked, but there are four pieces of good gear below me, I’m certain at least three of them are good... I’ve only got a few... if the [top] one pops I’ve still got heaps of space between me and the ground... my belayer’s not tiny so I’m not going to pull him off the ground (Dena).”

Dena is a novice traditional rock climber who has recently completed her first leads. Nevertheless, she redoubles her focus on the task at hand as a means to assuage her fears. Here,
she describes the process that she goes through in order not only to calm herself while on lead but also to try and convince herself of a more reasonable evaluation of her circumstances. Importantly, she notes this process as a normal part of settling down while climbing on lead. Even though it may sound extreme to be making assessments about the chances of hitting the ground while leading, fear may not be eliminated but may be at least reduced to a sustainable level (not panicking). It follows that the control of fear is not something that is forcefully trained in the first few years in order to be relegated to a normal, unreflexive posture. Fear requires constant vigilance as it may occur at unexpected times, or when a climber overestimates their abilities and selects a route that is too demanding. In another interview one of the team on an expeditionary big wall climb begins to lose his composure. It is his partner who maintains the doxic appreciation of how to manage fear on a big wall and the consequences of panic:

I remember this one route, you know, there was a guy, he’s just like, ‘we’re gonna die!’ You know? ‘We’re gonna die!’ And he’s just... I’m just like, ‘whoa, man. If we freak out and we stress and we don’t focus on what’s in front of us, we will die... if we start losing it here – yeah – we’re gonna make a mistake and we’re gonna be too hasty and we’re gonna do something dumb! Just chill, and just figure it out, and let’s focus!’ (Ben)

In this example, even experienced climbers can at times meet a situation that exceeds their ability to maintain control and remain callus ed to the horrible consequences of failure. But as Ben emphasises, ‘freaking out’ is the likely cause of such an outcome. Even when the situation becomes dire, the climber, appropriately emotionally callused, will hold back panic in order to exercise the self-control and ‘focus’ required to make the right decisions and maintain the right practices. The cultural capital that Ben shows in this statement is presented doxically. The danger presented by fear is best dealt with by an emotionally callused response.

The experienced climber will embody a particular level or tolerance of fear, but also importantly, a method derived from doxic principles that inform the manner that fear is embodied. Through repetition, the climber develops their perceptual schema to focus on the logic of climbing

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89 Sometimes to ‘exceed one’s ability’ could also be based on a range of unconsidered factors such as their mood. This aspect of experience is hard to properly discuss, given the range of possible effects on one’s emotional state.

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practice in order to remain calm in difficult situations. The climber will not entertain thoughts of falling 500 metres, instead considering where their last point of protection is. When the situation is desperate and the danger very real, they will attempt to stay calm, to ignore the voice in their head looking at all the ways that this situation could go horribly wrong. Even if it has changed over time, struggling to remain sober and focused in order to make an honest appraisal of the situation. As John, an experienced climber notes in an interview ‘what we’re trying to do is overcome, is to ignore that little voice in your head that’s saying ‘this isn’t safe, don’t do it’. You try and sort of shout it down and ignore it to climb through something’ (John). With full awareness John notes that fear is actively engaged with throughout a climb. This is not therefore a process of ‘learning by rote’, merely repeating the exercise in an unreflexive state. Throughout the engagement with climbing, a climber must actively seek to modify dispositional configurations in order to align them with a deepening engagement with the doxic modalities of the field. In this way, the embodied echo is continually but roughly adjusted, yet never entirely synchronised:

The relationship of immediate adaptation is suspended, in an instant of hesitation into which there may slip a form of reflection which has nothing in common with that of the scholastic thinker and which, through the sketched movements of the body... remains turned towards practice and not towards the agent who performs it (Bourdieu, 2000: 162).

What this suggests is that emotional callusing is an effort by the climber to act back upon the field, to change their relationship with fear as an important form of embodied capital. This alteration may or may not come with a conscious or wilful desire to overcome fear back on the ground. Rather, my argument is that the agent need only begin the climb and the field – the climb – will do the work for them. They will be exposed to fear and through the practical necessity of moving through this the agent will diligently work to keep themselves as best adjusted to moving through the situation. As an affirmation of their skill it is possible for the climber to thus select routes that will test this once again.

Emotional callusing functions most accurately to account for the ‘hardening’ that climbers must undergo. Many routes will require a climber learn to tolerate not only fear and anxiousness, but
also discomforts that can range from mild to excruciating. This may be the pain of a tight rock shoe or the brief but tremendous agony of blood returning to cold hands while ice climbing (known as the ‘screaming-barfies’, since the pain urges a climber to simultaneously scream and vomit). It could be thirst, hunger or exhaustion. Alternatively it could be nights spent sitting on tiny ledges, shivering, since there is nowhere big enough to lie down. As one highly experienced ‘sufferer’ notes:

Shivering and suffering and freezing... that’s a sense of, you know... that equals joy, that equals your success. So, you may be hating it at that moment, but I mean like, if you’re really bummmed, like and you hate it... you know the suffering part is fun... maybe not at the moment, but you know it’s gonna pass. You know you’ve got to endure, you know? (Ben).

Many styles of climbing require a preparation to suffer, at times, into the extreme. But regardless of level, many of the displeasures that accompany ascents of cliffs and mountains must be re-interpreted as acquisitions of worthwhile experiences that function as cultural capital. Sometimes this is recognisable while it is taking place; at others, it may become enjoyable, later.91

With this discussion of fear it is important to briefly consider other emotional aspects that may become calloused in the process. One example that is particularly relevant here is the experience of excitement. On many occasions I have observed (and participated in) the deliberate suppression of excitement or outbursts of joy when reaching the summits of mountains. This is a deliberate strategy that climbers employ in order to maintain a sober appreciation of the circumstances of the achievement: they are truly only half-way through the climb, as the descent is still to come. Indeed, the descent is often the riskiest undertaking of a climb. Climbers thus worry about ‘switching off’ while in descent, making an error and condemning their team to a

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90 In order to prevent a rock shoe from rolling around on the foot, it is fitted very tightly. This increases sensitivity and the ability of the climber to stand on smaller edges. See Barratt (2011) for a greater discussion, in particular of the way in which the climbing shoe creates a technological mediation of the terrain.

91 Climbers will often refer to the ‘three types of fun’ in order to draw out an explanation of the joy in suffering. There is type one fun, which is fun while you are climbing. Type two fun is a climb that becomes fun once it is over. Finally, type three fun is when it is not fun when you are climbing nor afterwards (but the climber is going to go off and do it again). 

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grave predicament. This is not to say that climbing becomes a joyless experience. But the process becomes measured and carefully expressed at the right time for the right amount of time.\footnote{I should add that it is not uncommon to be exhausted by making a summit, barely paying attention in the greater desire to be finished. Likewise, the experience can be plagued by an anxiety at the perils of the descent or possible objective hazards. I once watched some climbers rapidly begin descending off a 500 metre granite peak in the wake of an oncoming storm. Only thirty minutes after leaving the summit it was struck by lightning while they were still in mid-descent.}

7.5 Conclusion
The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the process of deepening involvement in an edgework pursuit. Climbers work incrementally through embodying skills in the form of a capital that is recognised by the field. These do not have to be actively deliberated upon: once an agent possesses the climbing illusio their orientation towards action will shift towards the specific varieties of capital required. This chapter has only scratched the surface of this process, examining both the capacity of the body to learn the movement of climbing and the way in which the agent becomes callused to the experience of fear in vertical space. Nevertheless this forms the basis of the way in which the habitus becomes both limited in its perception of the climbing environment while simultaneously learning the broad capacities that will be adaptable to situations where improvisation is critical: ‘through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus’s operations of invention’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 95). It is now useful to turn to a discussion of how climber’s put into action improvisational strategies based upon their own awareness of their capacities and limits as a climber.
8. Echoing Improvisation

The schemes of thought and expression he [sic] has acquired are the basis for the intentionless invention of regulated improvisation (Bourdieu, 1977: 79).

8.1 Introduction
The previous chapter dissected the process whereby climbers begin accumulating the appropriate capital for being competent. The purpose of this chapter then is to demonstrate how these dispositions are not organised into rigid systems of repetition but rather how the ‘partiality’ of both context and appropriation of disposition creates the need for improvisation. It is argued throughout this chapter that the climbing field is an example of this process par excellence. This is because climbing lacks strong organisational frameworks for both the accumulation of skills and their methods of deployment while simultaneously being applied in serious, even grave, circumstances. The climber is called upon to exhibit large degrees of improvisation and self-assessment. For a climber to know what is appropriate for them given their skill level they must learn an underlying capacity to reflect on their own abilities and their past experiences in order to position themselves within climbing space. Therefore, the climber must match their ability to a given objective, but they must also run through the intricate details of preparation and engagement, as even the ‘appropriate’ objective can be approached through multiple means. In each event the climber perpetuates old dispositions and creates new ones, forging greater repertoires that can be accessed in the future. It will be shown here that even the way in which these dispositions are socially transmitted can vary widely. Finally, I will examine the way that these plans shift based upon the contingencies that the climber encounters. In this sense a climbing strategy is never entirely concrete – a simple map for the body to follow – but will be developed and modified. Most importantly, even in the moment of action, climbers are constantly modifying strategies and practices in order to better accommodate unexpected events. As Bourdieu notes (2000), these are the ‘endlessly renewed strategies’ of the habitus. In every stage of the execution of a strategy the agent is ready to make
modifications of a more or less radical nature. Even when the strategy remains stable, it is being evaluated and the possibility of alteration remains. The radical nature of climbing and other related fields of extreme body-centric action frames a constant necessity for improvisation.

8.2 Self-Regulated

Habitus as a generated principle is the embodiment of structures in the shape of dispositions. But it is not as if agents absorb these structures in a perfect way, representing a singular, unified image of the social, or at least a given social field. Embodiment is always partial. Indeed, the schemes of perception are limited by the position and the capital of the agent. This creates a variety of adjustments to changing structures that in turn echo changes to structures. Change to structures is ongoing while retaining homologous aspects of the field. This, as Hilgers (2009) notes, is the permanent mutation that characterises habitus. Indeed, Bourdieu, in a discussion seemingly overlooked by critics, notes the ‘partialness’ of the appropriations of ‘generative schemes’:

It is a question of reconstituting the “fuzzy”, flexible, partial logic of this *partially integrated* system of generative schemes which, being *partially mobilised* in relation to each particular situation, produces, in each case, below the level of the discourse and the logical control that it makes possible, a “practical” definition of the situations and the functions of the action... and which, with the aid of a simple yet inexhaustible combinatory, generates the actions best suited to fulfil these functions within the limits of the available means (1990a: 267, emphasis in original).

Bourdieu is emphasising the combinatory and improvisational aspects of habitus, expressly rejecting those critics of habitus as being too determinist (see Jenkins, 1992). Hilgers (2009) questions how habitus could function in a deterministic way. Rather, he insists that because of the impossibility of a complete harmony between objective circumstance and dispositional appropriation, improvisational adjustment, to greater or lesser degrees, is a fundamental condition of habitus in all situations. However, certain cautions need to be taken in this application. Improvisation is not about ‘best suited’ actions as Hilgers claims. Rather, the agent improvises through circumstances in a way that are never perfected but rather ways that ‘will do the job’. One of the difficulties here is that while deliberate strategies are continually being
made and re-made, there is a continuing aspect of practical adjustment that never properly rises to the level of conscious control.

When discussing the way ‘freedom’ is central to the notion of habitus, Hilgers notes that ‘the degree of freedom varies, in fact, with the social position of the individual and the degree of officialisation, institutionalisation and ritualisation of the context’ (2009: 741). In most cases it is possible to identify a number of formal or organisational processes that create a more rigid development of habitus, where structures are clearly delineated and more rigidly maintained and enforced. In Wacquant (2004), Spencer (2012) and Garcia and Spencer (2013), fighters must carefully embody rules and techniques that are formally developed and enforced. Likewise, in a study of ballet dancers by Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2006) goes so far as to identify an ‘institutional habitus’, whereby dancers develop a particular dancing style based upon the dance schools/companies where they were trained. Arguably, the latter system of classifications of habitus could be applied to the studies of fighting.

In contrast, one of the critical aspects of the climbing field is just how much of the decision making falls to the climber. There is little in the way of a formal organisational component governing the climber’s choice of routes, for example, when to climb and what techniques should be deployed. The ground rules, so to speak, occur in the field and in terms of the terrain as it is observed and encountered. The act of climbing can be understood through the informal, self-regulating nature of the pursuit. There is little in the way of formal rules in the climbing field. Even though small to national size clubs exist, it would be hard to gauge the participation within these. As Donnelly aptly summarises:

>The system of rules and conventions that exist in climbing (termed “ethics” by climbers) is socially constructed and socially sanctioned. That is, the rules are created by a form of consensus among climbers – both verbally and through climbing journals – transmitted by the same means of communication, and enforced by self-discipline and social pressure.

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93 Climbing has not always existed in this state, particularly in high-altitude climbing. Military parallels were often present in climbing styles and expeditions were government funded and nationalistic. For examples see Ortner (1999) and Bayers (2003). For a comparative example of Soviet alpinism see Maurer (2009).

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Ethics are based on the premise that given enough time and enough resources (human, financial, technical), anything can be climbed... Ethics also permit an informal level of competition by ensuring that climbers attempting similar types of ascent employ similar means (Donnelly, 2003: 294-295).

This informal regulation has a direct impact on the organisation of the logic of climbing. Indeed, climbing bears some of the relationships to activities such as skateboarding: ‘Skate moves are rarely taught or disseminated through codified means; few skaters use books or such things...relying instead on constant learning from other skateboarders, either directly by copying or by communication over internet and magazine pages’ (Borden, 2001: 127, emphasis in original).

While climbers might do courses or use textbooks to learn basic skills, they are in no way normative practices. Borden notes that skaters can exist on the essentials of any terrain out there – the city is the hardware on their trip (2001: 179). Skaters, in effect, re-imagine the city as a continuous engagement of body-centric encounters. Walls, streets, curbs, steps, hand rails and window ledges are the focal point of skateboarding. Creativity and improvisation rests with the appropriation of the architectural structures of the city for their own uses. As one skater notes ‘I glide over a patch of textured concrete. The little groves running perpendicular to my flight pluck a note from my board that I can feel in my body. The noise echoes down the ramp then stops abruptly as I return to porcelain smooth concrete’ (Borden, 2001: 200). Like skaters, the climber’s experience is a continuous encounter with different landscape features and one that entangles risk with intensity of experience. Borden’s characterisation shares striking parallels with what is demanded of a climber. In this way, institutionalised learning and qualification merely represent a path to experience. As stated in the previous chapter, a climber

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94 Robinson (2008) acknowledges, climbers in the UK themselves tend to see climbing operating as a ‘scene’ (p.30). However, she also notes that ‘while climbers were happy to be a part of and contribute to the “climbing scene” by living, working and/or socialising with other climbers, others rejected wanting to be part of something that some climbers saw as exclusive or “cliquey”’ (Robinson, 2008: 30). This is confirmed in my own research, where many climbers gravitate into small groups based around their climbing interests, though others were equally happy to associate with climbers predominantly for the purpose of climbing.

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who tried to claim expertise through the number of courses completed or from expertise gained solely in rock climbing gym would be regarded with suspicion, to say the least.  

Thus my purpose here is to consider what habitus means for the climbing field where structures are more informal, negotiated and in many regards lifted, to an extent, to conscious action. Thus, I would go further than the partiality of appropriation of dispositions. It is that climbing demands that an agent’s dispositions remain knowingly partial and that the agent must self-assess – to know what abilities one has, what needs to be improved and what are the appropriate climbing objectives – both now and in various stages of the future. The mountain terrain is, in effect, the hardware of the trip. Climbers must be able to align themselves with what they know, what they can do, who they can do it with and how to develop without the aid of explicit formal or institutional instruction. As Joseph Taylor notes in a history of Yosemite climbers, ‘to climb well meant disciplining oneself to rules that, while unwritten, were clear to participants’ (Taylor, 2010: 4). That is, the agent must have a practical sense of the partialness of their own acquisition of dispositions in the climbing field while retaining a sense of the underlying logic of the pursuit. This is not to suggest that formalised systems of rule and technique do not exist (for instance, route grading systems are more or less universally accepted guides to the difficulty of routes). But it is that these systems do not have to be followed and do not inform the climber of what to do and when to do it.  

There are very few regulatory schemes in the climbing field. Climbers learn their skills through predominantly informal and piecemeal approaches in action. With this

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95 For instance, why could the climber not find a group of climbers to teach them these skills? Since climbing functions around an informal network, qualifications demonstrating educational capital possessed by a climber may suggest to other climbers a lack of social capital.  

96 It is not uncommon, particularly at sport climbing areas, to witness people climbing who have very little training in climbing systems. Indeed, many accidents occur in these ways.  

97 Depending upon the climbing area a number of possible regulatory systems may be imposed. In National Parks a varying degree of rules around what can be climbed (for instance route closures due to bird nesting, threats to particular wildlife or the possibility of harm to hikers below), human waste, areas to camp and so forth may be enforced. Further, some areas may be restricted because they are either on private property or require crossing private property to reach the area.  

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established, it is now possible to give examination to methods of balancing risks in alpine climbing.

8.3 Increasing One Risk to Reduce Another: Speed and Safety
A powerful example of improvisational strategies in climbing comes through the balancing of risks on alpine routes. In longer routes, usually full day to multi-day, a new equation enters the assessment of risk. This is the need to climb ‘efficiently’, or in other words, balance the immediate safety from falling with the long term safety of getting off a mountain. As is discussed in the climbing textbook *The Freedom of the Hills*:

> Speed is often an important part of safety on an alpine climb. Less time climbing means less time exposed to rockfall and changing weather, and *more time* to solve route-finding problems, deal with injury, get off the mountain before dark, or handle any number of possible risks inherent in the alpine environment (Coxs and Fulsaas, 2003: 211-212, my emphasis).

Thus, the immediate concern of protecting oneself from falling off and the ever present route-finding problems is no longer paramount, but must be balanced against other contingencies that also exist in the alpine. If a climber is too preoccupied with fall potential, they may find themselves in the dark with a storm approaching – a scenario that presents its own dangers. Virilio’s comment about soldiers at war is not out of place in this physically hostile environment: ‘Speed is Time saved in the most absolute sense of the word, since it becomes human Time directly torn from Death’ (Virilio, 1986: 22). Importantly, this aspect of climbing is that it cannot be prereflexively adapted – consumed – and repeated by climber after climber. Instead, the climber must be able to grasp their abilities, the conditions of the route and the experience of the team in order to adopt a strategy for how to approach a particular route. This will require that for every climb a new strategy will have to be developed. This calculation poses an interesting concern: when entering the alpine a climber’s control over risks changes form. The climber must instead balance one risk with the other. This is what Lash has called ‘probabilistic calculation’ associated with modes of conduct centred on risk (1994:141). A major factor is the minimisation of weight, as extra weight is equated directly with *slowing down*. The body-centric
activities of climbing are highlighted here in ‘more time’, as apart from the contingencies of routes solving problems *in situ*, bodily stamina and endurance capacities are essential to making a probabilistic calculation. This comes down to the same ratio: increasing the certainty of safety through carrying more food, water, and equipment for protection will have the negative consequence of keeping the party in a dangerous setting for a longer period of time. Thus the balancing act between the two forms of risk is not only climbing method, but also equipment and supplies carried. A hefty first aid kit may be very useful in the event of an accident, but it may also be part of the reason, however indirectly, that the accident occurred in the first place.

8.4 The Northeast Ridge of Bugaboo Spire
In order to demonstrate the critical relationship between time and climbing strategies an example will be made using multiple ascents of the north-east ridge of the Bugaboo Spire. I will outline how several different climbing teams approach the same climbing objective using a variety of different strategies. As will be seen, preparation for the route was made in self-awareness of each climbing team’s capacity. But in each scenario the climbing ability was different and this altered the climbing strategy that was applied.

Before starting into a route climbers will develop a plan of approach. In most cases this will be framed around a guidebook. In this case the route description begins with: ‘Northeast Ridge *** D- 5.8 (8-16h) 12p’ (Atkinson and Piche, 2003: 166). At the first level, the climber can assess a number of things. Firstly, the three stars indicate a ‘quality’ route. The ‘D-’ is an alpine grade that suggests that the route, overall (including remoteness, technical difficulty, length etc.) is moderately serious. The route typically takes between eight and sixteen hours and roped climbing is usually done in twelve rope lengths (pitches). The time taken in this sense is not simply a measure of exposure on the mountain, but a reflection of one’s experience, knowledge and skill.

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98 Refer to discussion in Chapter 3.3 ‘A Serious Undertaking’

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Importantly, the technical climbing of the route is only moderate in short sections and predominantly easy (based on general climbing standards). The length and complexity of the route gives it a reasonable amount of ‘seriousness’. Yet, as the guidebook notes, roughly fifty per cent of climbers get benighted (still on route when the sun sets) on this Bugaboo route (Atkinson and Piche, 2003: 166). This is usually because climbers underestimate the technical nature of the descent (discussed below). Timing – being caught in the dark – is therefore one of the greatest concerns on this route. Situations like these tend to become exacerbated. The climbers are becoming increasingly tired while slowing down because of the tiredness, compounded by the slower speed of moving at night. The route does not have much danger from rock or ice fall, which is considered in its moderately serious classification. The major objective hazard possible would be to get caught in a storm, which becomes more likely in the
afternoon (depending upon current forecasts). This was an unlikely scenario given the forecast during the time that these ascents were made.

The first climbers I talked to about this route decided not to climb because of the conditions on route. The NE ridge had been one of the major objectives for their trip to the Bugaboos. However, the snow conditions had been fairly poor. It was assessed that it was not well bonded and would slide when stood on, especially later in the day in full sun. Furthermore, an assessment from the more experienced climber of the team was that the snow conditions were poor and that the snow ramp (on the far right hand side of the ridge in the above picture) was substantially larger than normal for this early in the season. This meant that more time would have to be spent travelling across it, exposing them to its perils for longer. Further, while never explicitly discussed, no one else in camp had yet climbed the route, leaving the full extent of problems to be encountered uncertain. This was enough for the first team to decide against doing the route.

A second pair of climbers chose to climb the route. They spent the day preparing and walking to the ridge to assess the conditions. Once they decided the snow was stable enough and the climb possible they decided to do the route the next day. They woke and prepared at 3am and left camp at 4am, giving themselves the longest window of daylight possible. Because one of the climbers in particular was nervous about using simulclimbing,99 or soloing techniques, they pitched the length of the route. In other words, they climbed the NE ridge through twelve pitches (the full length of the ridge), which took approximately six hours. They then pitched the summit traverse before beginning the rappels and downclimbing.100 This made the climbing far safer because they were never vulnerable to falling more than a short distance given the leading/seconding technique they used. But this safety came at the expense of speed. In total

99 See Glossary 1: Terms.
100 See Glossary 1: Terms.
the route took them about seventeen hours camp to camp, making it back to camp in the twilight.

My partner and I climbed the route the next day. We talked to the second team about the approach, the conditions of the ridge and summit traverse and, in particular, the difficulty in finding abseil points in the descent of the south ridge. This gave us enough foreknowledge of the route that we did not feel any need to further reconnoitre the ridge. In addition, it gave us a substantial edge of confidence that an ascent was possible in current conditions as both my partner and I saw ourselves as being of a similar level of ability to the second climbing team. We arose at 3:30am and had left camp at 4:30am. Our methods on route were different because of our confidence on easy terrain. We did five pitches of climbing (the bottom third of the ridge). These pitches, as acknowledged in the climbing guidebook, were more consistently difficult than the upper two-thirds of the route. Thus, once finishing with this section of the climbing we opted to simulclimb the easier pitches above this all the way to the summit. Our total climbing time on the ridge was approximately four and a half hours. We then soloed the summit traverse, feeling confident on the easy, yet exposed terrain. Our camp to camp time was just under eleven hours.

It should be noted that another team climbed the route on the same day as us, and after talking to them I found they had used almost the same methods (only they continued simulclimbing along the summit traverse). They had begun climbing a few hours later in the morning. One of them, an accomplished expeditionary climber, had climbed the route before and knew that they could start later in the morning and still be finished before dark. In retrospect we could have started later, though neither my partner nor I were sure about what we would find.
A team of strong, experienced climbers also climbed the route while I was in camp. They left camp a little after 9am, far later than any of the other teams. They simulclimbed the entire ridgeline. This team finished the route in approximately six hours. A friend of this team opted to solo the route. He chose to solo the route behind his friends. While he felt that he could solo at this grade he had the added security that if he did get uncomfortable he could join his friends on their rope. He finished at the same time as the fourth team.

Thus, the very same objective circumstance (mountain, route on the mountain, route conditions and weather) were encountered by each party, yet the approach to the climb changed dramatically. Each team drew upon their own knowledge of their combined skills and experience to approach the route and deploy techniques and methods that matched what they considered to be appropriate for their abilities. Thus, the field of action, *in situ*, could not be depended upon to simply ‘reproduce’ paths of actions. Crucially, time and exposure on the mountain was a
critical factor in the modification of the techniques used. Nevertheless, the techniques all fall into the doxic principles of the climbing field, playing the climbing game, by its rules. No one helicoptered to the summit, for instance. Each team assessed the route by the logic of the rules of the climbing game. In particular, it is possible to see the basic logic of safety from falling and safety from moving quickly being played out in a variety of ways. It is that within the schemes pertaining to climbing, each climber, embodying the dispositions relevant to the field in configurations of greater or lesser degrees of capital, meant that they needed to make their own adjustments to their approach that remained in the logic of the field. But this example only gives a snapshot of a number of different climbers approach to a particular route. This is not a static process, but rather somewhere along a spectrum of skills and experience that have been acquired and maintained. Indeed, this example has only narrowly engaged with broad information climbers acquired from the ascents. It does not engage with the various improvised methods that would have occurred during the climb, such as the body finding its way along the route (or perhaps getting off route) or the decisions on route to commit to various methods of climbing. For instance, while my partner and I only carried small amounts of water, there was plenty of snow melting in the sun and dripping down the rock that could be used for additional hydration during the descent. Furthermore, because this is an active process, this only represents a moment in the career of the climbers in question. All of the climbers in this example had climbed routes prior and have likely used the experience gained from the ascent in question in subsequent ascents. Hence, it is important to give some consideration to the way in which this process remains in motion.

8.5 A Dynamic Process: Finding the Balance
Climbers continually engage with the process of self-assessment of past climbs in order to progress in their capacities on future routes. This is because through both success and failure (i.e. retreating or moving too slow) climbers can hone their expectations and techniques. In an example from my fieldnotes I had partnered with Chris, an experienced alpine and rock climber,
to complete a reasonably demanding four day alpine route. The route was at low altitude along a group of coastal mountains in British Columbia, Canada. While descending from the mountain we stopped at an alpine hut,\textsuperscript{101} where we brewed coffee and discussed the climbing we had just completed. We were analysing our selection of protection to figure out what we could have gone without. While preparing for the route, this selection of protection seemed sparse. Yet, while on route roughly half of the protection we carried was frequently used, and, the other half, typically mainstays of a climbing rack, were used only occasionally adding more weight than needed hanging from our harnesses:

Interviewer: What seemed like a fairly radical [equipment selection prior to beginning the route] has now seemed conservative.
Chris: which will inform the way we select gear for both of our next objectives...next time I wander into the unknown I’ll be bringing less gear.

In these post hoc discussions climbers continually reassess not only during or prior to a climb, but also reflect on usage of equipment and decisions made in an effort to enhance their capacities in the future. In this example it is possible to see that the risks being guarded against are being replaced by confidence that having less equipment in the future will create balanced situations. In this case, dispositions (climbing skilfully with little protection, emotional callusing and \textit{in situ} confidence in ability) are now returning into decay. In the future, the echoes of this event will be apprehended more quickly, suggesting strategies of greater austerity in protection.

One of the critical aspects of Chris’ comment is that when departing for a climbing route that is ‘unknown’ the equipment selection cannot be undone or modified. Here he will retain the confidence that he can travel lighter as \textit{he has already deployed these skills effectively} with an overabundance of equipment in similar, but not \textit{identical}, circumstances. It must be noted that there is a particular temporality to dispositional decay of these embodied lessons. Where the interval between climbs is too great it is possible that the embodied competence will erode into

\textsuperscript{101} Alpine huts such as this one are administered by alpine clubs.

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intellectual knowledge.\textsuperscript{102} Recourse to action as knowledge, rather than intellectual knowledge, is a constant theme in both post-hoc assessments (what you assess before is never a completely accurate assessment). With erosion of these dispositions desire to climb efficiently becomes increasingly ambivalent, increasing the need for conservative judgement.

8.6 A Commitment to Suffering – Speed at the Expense of Comfort and Safety

There is also a logic that fulfils the body-centric orientation of climbing, where pushing the limits of individual endurance and fear become a valued part of a climber’s progression. When pursuing the deeper objectives of the fields (towards the fields ‘autonomous pole’) (Bourdieu, 1993: 38-39), it becomes more and more attractive to shed weight in order to increase speed. But at a certain point the probabilistic calculation between the risks of falling and being exposed to the dangers of the mountain gives way to the sheer desire to increase speed for speed’s sake. In this equation, the climber is likely to gain far more symbolic capital through speed gained by light and perhaps underprepared protection racks. This method is about going so light that it is likely that the climbers will go without in a somewhat dramatic way. Climbers will intentionally bring too little water, too little food, too little equipment, no communication devices (as in, for rescue), no warm clothes etc. This practice is important to understand not only because of the symbolic capital one might attain, but also because climbers become increasingly accustomed to this as being a part of the dispositional requirements of the pursuit. In this next section of fieldnotes, I recount an experience with this logic:

\textit{My climbing partner, Mitch, and I were looking to do a new route on a very remote mountain in North America. We had examined the mountain and decided on a route that would hopefully take us onto the summit. We had found a comfortable position on a small, flat grassy slope below the glacier. We had tried to quickly race to this bivouac site from

\textsuperscript{102} The regular ‘over-anticipation’ of skills and expertise is often wound back at the last moment, for instance, when intending on completing a demanding route only to choose something easier in the heated moments when the ‘gravity’ of the undertaking becomes ‘real’.

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our last site as another climber, Tom, had possibly just made the first ascent of the mountain (solo) via an easy ridge. He was very experienced, having taken part in numerous climbing expeditions. It occurred to us that he would have equipped a descent line, meaning that we would have to leave (and carry) less equipment while saving time not having to equip a descent ourselves.

As we sat waiting with the hope we would catch him on his way down we nervously examined the route we had decided on. It sat out in the distance, towards the west a few kilometres away. We estimated the climbing distance to the summit at perhaps 1000 metres. It was a bigger route than either of us had ever tried and it would be while making its first ascent. But both of us were experienced with long routes. We looked at ways of breaking down the process so as to make it seem more reasonable while building a backup retreat strategy should we move too slow or encounter impassable difficulties. We began talking about the possibility of a ‘forced bivy’. A forced bivy is similar to a usual bivouac, only that you have no equipment for it. No sleeping bag, no mat, no tent, no stove, no food, no water. This is something to be nervous about. And yet, often nervousness before a committing climb is because of the uncertainties that could be encountered. Perhaps something like being afraid of the dark (only sometimes on mountains the monsters are real). But to break down the process allows the realities to sink in. Yes, we will probably be tired. Yes, we will probably be hungry and cold. But we will live...

After organising our equipment for an early start the next morning, the solo climber, Tom, came stumbling down the rock debris. He was happy for the opportunity to sit down and rest a while and chat with us. He explained the details of descending via the ridge. He then explained his own ascent. He had made the summit but had only descended a third of the way down the ridge before it got dark. So, with only rain gear for warmth, he simply ‘shivered it out’. In one swift expression, Tom had casually dismissed six hours of struggle
in a cold, near to hypothermic state. But more so, he expressed it with the casualness of experience. This was something that he did, a normal event. This is how you climb mountains. It steeled Mitch and I. So if Tom could do it with only rain gear, we could surely do it with a few extra layers.

We were up the next morning at 3:30am and out of camp by 4am. After over 900 metres of climbing through moderate terrain we reached the summit at around 6pm. We then began descending the ridge perhaps thirty minutes later. But although we had completed a reasonable amount of the descent, by 10pm it was too dark to negotiate the ridge and the few remaining rappels. We decided to bivy and wait for the sun to begin rising again in around six hours.

It is quite hard to put into words the suffering of that bivy. For six hours we shivered. I would sometimes stand up and jump up and down. But I was already too cold for it to have much of an effect. At one point I fell asleep for fifteen minutes. I woke up and was not shivering anymore – a sign of the onset of hyperthermia. For the next forty minutes I tried desperately to warm up, finally beginning to shiver. I was too scared to go back to sleep. When Mitch was quiet for long periods I would worry that he was dead. Mitch later told me when I was quiet for long periods he would worry that I was dead. Through clenched teeth I would continually repeat ‘It is so... fucking cold’. As we were so far to the north, the sun could be seen just barely skirting underneath the horizon, returning to the east. It was a constant torment to wonder where it would begin its rise. For thirty minutes of the night the splendid distraction of the aurora borealis could be seen bending and warping across the sky.

Finally at around 4am usable light had returned and we continued along the ridge. Within fifteen minutes we had forgotten the horrors of night, being warmed through the movement along the ridge. After a few difficulties in returning across the glacier, we made
it back to our bivy site at about 8am. In total, it was a twenty eight hour ‘day’ (Fieldnotes, Cirque of the Invincibles Expedition, Remote North America, August 2012).

What is encapsulated in this example is the transference of dispositional potentiality. Firstly, the logic of the field had already prepared myself and Mitch for an acceptance of new experiences. A difficult bivy and deepening preparedness for suffering is akin to Spencer’s (2009) notion of fighters ‘body callusing’. The encounter with Tom showed us a casualness about the capacity to suffer (to simply ‘shiver it out’). It was here that we gained the basis for a forging of a new configuration of our own skills, which were already in a highly improvised state (neither of us trying a first ascent of a rock route of this size before and myself having little experience with first ascents). Both Mitch and I had bivvied on climbs, though never without being fully prepared. Further, we were already contemplating this course of action prior to the arrival of the Tom. Thus, a combination of dispositions was already prepared. Tom nevertheless ‘gifted’ (Bennett et. al. 2009: 153) embodied capital through the casual transmission of the ease in which he could endure such harsh environments. This was what solidified our own determination to climb without bivy equipment. Thus, a combination of dispositions were already prepared. While never fully enacted in this new configuration, travelling light was informed by multiple sources. This built a new dispositional orientation in ourselves and the body-centric logic of the field. That is, we both now practiced a new approach. We could bivy with little equipment and our bodies were sufficiently ‘callused’ to endure the cold and control our fear.

8.7 ‘Psychological Gear’ – Creating Uncertainty in the Face of Definite Injury or Death

This may sound obvious, but adventure climbing is about seeking as much as possible to avoid falling. To fall brings into question one’s protection: how good is it? And this is a question that can only be answered in the affirmative when a fall has been held (Lewis, 2000: 62).

A common dimension of high risk climbing styles is climbing into situations that offer only serious injury or death as the likely outcome of falling off. That is, while the potential for falling off may remain an uncertainty, the outcome of a fall is definite. As a desperate measure to modify this
certainty, climbers will often place ‘psychological gear’ as protection that probably will not hold a fall, but makes the climber feel a little more comfortable in a committed situation. Poor protection, or bad gear ‘may produce accentuated fear, a closing down of the possibilities of the body. But nothing is fixed; bad gear may also produce a greater delicacy of movement, a heightened sense of the need to draw together one’s psychological and physical resources. It affords micromoments of self-overcoming’ (Rossiter, 2007: 301). In this way, some measure of uncertainty has been created: the piece of protection (piece) may hold should the climber fall off, meaning that the outcome is more uncertain than it had been beforehand.

In a fieldnote from the Blue Mountains, Australia, I recount an experience while belaying a lead climber through a difficult, poorly protected pitch:

I was belaying my partner on a one hundred metre Blue Mountains sandstone route called ‘The Battle of Stoke’. He had just moved into a hard section of climbing. He placed protection, clipped it to his rope and yelled back to me ‘just watch me; I’m pretty sure if I fall off this piece is going to blow’. His fall potential was quite high, as his next piece was reasonably far away – it was likely that he would swing sideways (pendulum) before hitting a corner, undoubtedly getting injured. So in order to give himself a slightly greater sense of comfort he placed the piece with whatever possibility that it presented of protecting him in a fall (Fieldnotes, Blue Mountains, June 2012).

In these situations climbers may also begin placing lots of pieces of psychological gear, if the opportunity exists. This comes in part from a perception of control through an intellectual understanding of the physics of a climbing fall. The first reason to do this is that by placing many pieces of gear it increases the likeliness that one piece will hold. But it also serves another function. As each piece of gear ‘rips’ as it is loaded by a falling climber it is slowing down the fall.

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103 Climbers will spend extended periods of time discussing the physics of climbing falls and the capacity for various pieces of protection to hold falls. This will include the size of the fall (and thereby the force it creates) and the quality of the piece of protection. See Cox and Fulsaas (2003) for further discussion.

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reducing force – which increases the chances that the next piece will be able to hold the fall. Climbers therefore need to try and preserve their ‘lead head’ and strategise where they make placements in order to conserve protection for the rest of the pitch. In placing psychological gear in the heat of the moment of panic, terror and action two important functions can be drawn out. Firstly, the control of the circumstances is being flimsily asserted. While climbers often feel like they are in control (West and Allin, 2010) there are times where remaining calm requires the perception of control. As can be seen in the above example, calling to one’s belayer to pay careful attention, along with placing psychological gear, are both attempts at sustaining a sense of control over what has become increasingly dangerous. Secondly, in ‘normal’ climbing conditions the climber is attempting to shift the ratio between uncertainty and risk toward risk – where they can maintain a sense of control. They change the perils of a situation from unquantifiable to quantifiable. But in situations where one is placing psychological gear the risk has become too great. Placing psychological gear is an effort at shifting risk (as the probable outcomes have become terrible) back towards a state of uncertainty. Rather than accepting that this risk means potentially falling to the ground (or worse), placing dubious protections nevertheless affords an unknown chance that their fall will be arrested. This correlates with Lyng’s (2009) assertion that edgework is a balance between these two states. Yet, I would argue that in most circumstances, as can be seen throughout this discussion, the tendency in edgework is to make risks knowable. In this example, the questionable protection might not hold, but it also might (no matter how small the odds). Therefore, if the climber falls off, there is, however slight a possibility (though not a probability) that the situations they imagine will occur in the case of a fall may be averted.
8.8 Conclusion
Improvisation is a potent and powerful dimension of the concept of habitus that is often overlooked in both critiques and application. This chapter has utilised the concept to focus on the partialness of appropriation of dispositional schemes to show how improvisation is demanded of agents in the particular field of climbing. This position is driven further by the body-centric logic of the climbing field. This is because climbers require a broad array of skills and abilities that cannot be organisationally regulated. Through this, the disposition of the climber demands a high degree of self-assessment of their own capacities in order to relate these to appropriate objectives, styles and techniques. Climbing techniques, while still confined to a narrow dispositional scheme, are continually modified and improvised throughout planning for and executing ascents. Further, this improvisational capacity is also present in the prereflexive movement of the body. The climb is not a choreography but a rough plan for which a wide degree of methods may be deployed. The landscape is not simply an inert backdrop in which human action takes place, but an active environment that requires improvisation as a core aspect of the dispositional matrix of a climber.
9. Distinctive Space: Feeling the Way

9.1 Introduction

Bourdieu gives us a succinct account of the meaning of distinction in his work:

The very title *Distinction* serves as a reminder that what is commonly called distinction, that is, a certain quality of bearing and manners... is nothing other than *difference*, a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a *relational* property only in and through its relation with other properties (Bourdieu, 1998: 6, emphasis in original).

In what follows I shall examine the pursuit of climbing from the perspective of the mountain as a distinctive space. The particular features of the mountain, the cliff and the curtain of ice provide a spatial screening of entrants, as it is not possible to simply inhabit vertical terrain without a particular set of abilities. From the gradual movement from the accessible spaces of the tamed – a place subjugated for the purposes of human safety – to the remote mountain the climber need only master their skills and move *within* a space to enhance, maintain and confirm distinction. Symbolic capital is embedded within this hostile space. To control and master is a demonstration of one’s inherent abilities. Even against other edgeworking fields a relational competition unfolds, where an edgeworker’s ‘capacities for control are sometimes viewed as deriving from a basic “survival skill” that distinguishes true edgeworkers from those who are attracted to risk taking but lack “the right stuff” to conduct it successfully’ (Lyng, 2009: 118). The edgeworker accrues symbolic capital through a continual return to and successful negotiation of a dangerous space. In this way, peril equates to distinction. Climbing logic is the *only logic available* for the understanding of and movement in the particular terrains of *ascent*.

Because distinction is relational and hierarchical this discussion will proceed through an analysis of the leisure space. Here I will argue that status in the leisure field is produced through the activation of embodied cultural capital. Climbing authenticity is perceived through the mastery of the mountain space. This is an unambiguous state, since the alternative may entail serious injury or death. In the innate doxic logic of climbing, this makes distinction relationally superior to other leisure/sporting fields. To demonstrate this I will look at particular circumstances where...

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the climbing field interacts with other leisure fields. This is typically at the fringes of the physical spaces of climbing. These accounts provide the best means of demonstrating the struggle over definitions of meaning in the leisure field. Past this fringe is a more or less fortified physical space, whereby the contradictory ‘dream of social weightlessness’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 220) is experienced precisely because its borders are impassable without the correct configurations of embodied cultural capital. Therefore, while climbing can be considered from its symbolic aspects of ‘inner essence’ – athleticism, courage, skilfulness and resourcefulness – the primary function of climbing, misrecognised both in the climbing field and in the broader leisure fields, is that the pursuit of climbing is inaccessibility. A mastery of this space is only perfectly known and felt through its embodiment, whereby distinction – perhaps even misrecognised as self-actualisation – is gained through the movement in spaces that can only be attained by an elite few. In this way, edgework and critical necessity in climbing are aimed at gaining access to distinction not through institutionally recognised symbolic spaces, but through the embodied realisation of mastery. To be in these spaces is to make conspicuous the symbolic power of the agent.

9.2 Tautological Reasoning
‘Arbitrariness is the basis of all fields’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 96) where the ‘fundamental law’ of a field is ‘only stated (on the rare occasions when it is stated at all) in the form of tautologies. Irreducible and incommensurable with any other law, it cannot be related to the law of any other field and the regime of truth that the field imposes’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 96). Bourdieu cites examples such as ‘art for art’s sake and ‘business is business’. This presents some substantial difficulties for addressing the above question, since:

...once one has accepted the viewpoint constitutive of a field, one can no longer take an external viewpoint on it. The nomos, a “thesis” which, because it is never put forward as such, cannot be contradicted, has no antithesis... Being the matrix of all the pertinent questions, it cannot produce the questions that could call it into question (Bourdieu, 2000: 97).
This chapter will not examine the reasons people consciously assign to climbing – meaning. These are *abstractions* of meaning, afterthoughts about meaning. Rather, in keeping with this framework, I would like to offer that meaning is granted by illusio and thus remains in the *embodied* and practical logic of action. As soon as an effort to capture meaning is undertaken meaning elusively remains embedded in the moment of the search for meaning somewhere else. Perhaps this seems itself an abstract point but it has a tangible outcome: that the best explanation of meaning is to see it in process and account for it as such.

Therefore, while not offering deeper insight into the more direct or conscious reasons people climb, I will look at the embodied moment of meaning creation. As Bourdieu asserts, ‘illusio does not belong to the order of explicit principles, theses that are put forward and defended, but of action, routine, things that are done, and that are done because they are things one does and that have always been done that way’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 102). Illusio belongs to the doxic principles of the field and that, since the embodied echo rests on the durable echoes of action, there is no origin to the meaning of climbing outside of its own practice. Meaning thus happens *in situ* during the process of legitimating risk by *taking risks*. It exists in the moment of decision, whether it is the commitment to climb a route the following day after deliberating on possibilities in a guidebook or choosing to unrope to move more quickly over easier terrain. In each decision meaning is being created. And like dispositions, this process functions with a deepening sense of worth as the agent explores the depth of their commitment to a pursuit of the field’s objectives. The schemes of apprehension, perception and appreciation are ordering the experience, not only to follow its practical sense, but also to imbue the experience with practical meaning. Climbing, while in the act of climbing, does not appear as a distinction through symbolic mastery of a hostile physical space. It is because practical meaning is difficult to approach outside of the moment of its activation. The effort to seek it outside of this moment is guided by the *practical urgency of finding practical meaning*. Key to the desire to act upon this tautology is that it remains prereflexive, mysterious, so that fulfilment is forever partial.
As the key principle of the matrix of dispositions framing experience illusio does not allow one to apprehend these elements of practical sense precisely because they are what is generating it. Or in other words, how can you see the thing that allows you to see? The mountain, understood through interpretations of a practical engagement with rock and ice does not allow itself to be seen. As a light-humoured engagement with this principle, the guidebook for the Wolgan Valley, trying to help the climber identify the beginning of a particular climb, notes that ‘the initial chimney houses strange rock formations that would be interesting and aesthetic to anyone else but a climber’ (Stevens, 2001: 103). What is meant is that the rock, while aesthetic, is loose and very friable, meaning that in any practical sense of climbing it represents a problematic feature to be engaged with through the process of training the body into a ‘sense’ of these terrains. But the climber will possibly engage this haptic sense as second nature, as a sense of looseness, friability and poor protection. Illusio functions as practical meaning evident in its bestowing of urgency on particular actions ‘to be done’. These meanings, as opposed to having any grandiose sense of self or purpose, serve to spur an agent into action. To repeat, to accumulate and refine disposition is to embody practical meaning that serves to make these meanings accessible again in the future.

9.3 Defining the Leisure Field

The leisure field is defined by its distance from the fields of necessity, so much so that to do things in these spaces are considered by agents as ends in themselves. Leisure then, is an ostentatious display of meaning and purpose outside of the basic, perhaps fundamental tautology ‘existing to exist’:

As one moves away from the lower regions of social space, characterised by the extreme brutality of the economic constraints, the uncertainties diminish and the pressures of economic and social necessity relax. As a consequence, less strictly defined positions, which leave more scope for manoeuvre, offer the possibility of acquiring dispositions that are freer in respect of practical urgencies (Bourdieu, 2000: 17).

The room to manoeuvre constitutes ‘leisure’ in its broadest social sensibility. The leisure field relates to the field of power not only through the distribution and accumulation of wealth, of
how money is earned and spent, but primarily through a temporal economy of meanings, of how time is spent and recognised by others. This is a relational economy of not simply differentiation, but difference based upon distinction. Where status and wealth have certain detemporalised characteristics – such as that experienced by a politician, wealthy business person or celebrity, who may be recognised long after they have died – most of the cultural capital earned in the economy of meanings occurs in situ, often fleeting and requiring constant upkeep (Bourdieu, 1986: 244-245). The agent must continue to act, to invest time in the appropriate acts of, and for, distinction.

One of the important things to consider is that we recognise one another in the leisure field. The relational nature of symbolic capital is shown in the recognition of each other inhabiting a symbolic leisure space, whereby an interpretation can be roughly fit within a practical sense of horizontal and vertical differentiation. Bourdieu recognises this, albeit in a substantially broader way than is being enacted in the current study. This is the ‘economy of practices’ (Bourdieu, 1984), where ‘the space of lifestyles in which different forms of cultural consumption find their meaning and value from the positions that they occupy in relation to one another’ (Bennett et al. 2009: 32). In this way the leisure field operates as a place of positions and position-takings that are often best felt against a particular field of leisure but nevertheless still function as symbolic capital across the leisure field.

It should be emphasised that for the most part, agents do not consciously operate within the broader struggle of the leisure field. They remain in the particular fields of leisure, whereby their capital is most easily recognised and understood. But it is in the brief encounters where these capitals meet that it is possible to observe that a struggle is taking place over the symbolic meanings of leisure. The reason that we consider the pursuit of leisure as a means of expressing inherent ability is because it is fundamentally characterised as an autonomous space. But this is misrecognition, for, as Bourdieu notes ‘agents only have to follow the leanings of their habitus
in order to take over, unwittingly, the intention immanent in the corresponding practices, to
find an activity that is entirely “them” and, with it, kindred spirits’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 223). To
make a choice deemed ‘independent’ (or at least perceived to be), wilfully pursuing a particular
course (even though, again, this may be a misrecognition) is likely to manifest symbolic
attributes of the agent as distinction:

What is at stake is indeed “personality”, i.e., the quality of the person, which is affirmed in
the capacity to appropriate an object of quality. The objects endowed with the greatest
distinctive power are those which most clearly attest the quality of appropriation, and
therefore the quality of their owner, because their possession requires time and capacities
which, requiring a long investment of time, like pictorial or musical culture, cannot be
acquired by haste or by proxy, and which therefore appear as the surest indications of the
quality of the person. (Bourdieu, 1984: 281).

This time taken to become a proficient master of the vertical environment is one that becomes
a self-evident quality of the practitioner. To be in these spaces cannot be achieved by ‘haste or
by proxy’, but requires vast amounts of time spent accumulating the cultural requisites
presupposed by the symbolic and physical space itself.

This ongoing embodying and embodiment of cultural capital is misrecognised, somewhat
nakedly, as experience. But experience is a history, dispositions that are the embodiment of
distinction previously gained. It represents disinterestedness and as Bourdieu notes this is ‘the
supreme affirmation of personal excellence’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 282). It is to act, ‘autonomously’
to accumulate for accumulation’s sake. But the climbing illusio defies the supremacy of other
leisure tastes, as these cannot approach the ‘authenticity’ of moments spent doing where any
other response is death. It plays the game in a way that hides the game, as the moments become
genuine – this must be done. This, then, reveals the ultimately contrived nature of other games,
one that must be continually assessed based upon arbitrary distinctions. But a climb, on a
mountain, is at the hands of an apparently non-human logic, whereby the disinterestedness of
a falling rock will kill the climber with no sense of itself, its purpose or its action.
9.4 Social Weightlessness and Distinctive Space

In this study I do not have the necessary data to consider how climbers are perceived by the public, by other recreational pursuits or even by other outdoor, adventure or high risk sports (though most of the latter will have certain sympathies). However, the importance of illusio is that it functions to give perceptions of the agent back to the agent as if they were the perceptions of agents of other fields. The status and distinction of climbing is seemingly high from within the field, though not necessarily from outside of it. Importantly, the climber will usually misrecognise this distinction through the disinterestness of the field: ‘climbing for climbing’s sake’. Because of this, I will examine cases where the climber’s sense of distinction is primary. Or in other words, when the act of climbing presents itself as a mastery beyond the scope of the ordinary layman. The symbolic capital of the climber is one that is not reproducible out of a sheer investment of economic capital or cultural capital. Many of the capacities generated within the climbing field are its own unique combination. Yet it is important to consider how distinction is articulated in climbing’s struggle within the leisure field, where it is distinguished against other positions:

At each level of the distribution, what is rare and constitutes an inaccessible luxury or an absurd fantasy for those at an earlier or lower level becomes banal and common, and is relegated to the order of the taken-for-granted by the appearance of new, rarer and more distinctive goods; and, once again, this happens without any intentional pursuit of distinctive, distinguished rarity. The sense of good investment which dictates a withdrawal from outmoded, or simply devalued, objects, places or practices and a move into ever newer objects in an endless drive for novelty, and which operates in every area, sport and cooking, holiday resorts and restaurants, is guided by countless different indices and indications, from explicit warnings to the barely conscious intuitions, which, like the awareness of popularisation or overcrowding, insidiously arouse horror or disgust for objects or practices that have become common (Bourdieu, 1984: 249).

As noted earlier, there is a great deal of debate in the climbing field over aspects of commercialisation, popularisation and rationalisation (see Heywood 1994, Kiewa, 2002 and Bogardus 2012).104 Distinction in this sense does not simply imply differentiation, but

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104 Also see Ives (2014) for an account of the debate regarding 2014 Everest deaths. This is a powerful demonstration of the climbing field reacting against commercialisation that has brought the non-climber into the mountains. It is an intersection of the public/commercial sphere, where anyone can climb provided they can pay, with the disinterested and autonomous pole of the climbing field where self-reliance and rounded skills sets are considered critical.

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hierarchical difference. It is a space that is scarcely attainable, proving to its adherents the
greatness of their own personhood and autonomy. In an interview with Colin, I am discussing
the benefits of living in Squamish, Canada – where there is an abundance of easily accessible
granite rock climbing. This makes it quite popular, especially given the lower levels of
‘commitment’. I had been in town on and off over a period of four months and had found that
it was easy to find rock climbers, but it was hard to find enthusiastic alpinists. Colin shared my
preference for alpine climbing and during the beginning of the interview we discuss alpine
climbing and numerous places where we have been or would like to go. It seemed reasonable
to ask what he thought about living in such a popular climbing area:

Interviewer: what do you find it like here in Squamish when it comes to adventure climbing?
Colin: That’s definitely the drawback, I’d say, to Squamish, is that it’s just a saturated area
with climbers that, you know, it’s hard to get away from the crowds.

An aspect of a quality adventure climbing route is this separation, not only from the public, but
also from the general populace of climbing. Yet, distinction is not a process, as Bourdieu
suggests, that needs to be pursued in a deliberate manner:

Distinction does not necessarily imply the pursuit of distinction, as if often supposed,
following Veblen and his theory of conspicuous consumption. All consumption and, more
generally, all practice, is “conspicuous,” visible, whether or not it is performed in order to
be seen; it is distinctive, whether or not it springs from the intention of being “conspicuous,”
standing out, of distinguishing oneself or behaving with distinction. As such, it inevitably
functions as a distinctive sign and, when the difference is recognised, legitimate and
approved, as a sign of distinction (Bourdieu, 1985: 730, emphasis in original).

Through engaging in a particular set of practices distinction is being enacted through both its
function and reception in social space. Engagement within a given field and the position
occupied within that field entirely embeds the agent within its doxa, continually adapted by
practical sense, without ever acknowledging or having revealed the process of differentiation
that this embeddedness supposes.

In consideration of the climbing field, Bourdieu was remarkably accurate in his observation that
mountaineering ‘offers for minimum economic costs maximum distinction, distance, height,
spiritual elevation, through the sense of simultaneously mastering one’s own body and a nature
inaccessible to the many’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 219). Here, Bourdieu notes both ‘distance’ and
‘height’ as components of alpine pursuits. Further, he draws not only on the skilful mastery of body but also on its relationship with ‘nature’. I wish to draw this out further: mountains and the vertical terrain more generally are a space of distinction. This is the production of distinctive space:

Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space (Lefebvre, 1991: 170, emphasis in original).

The body of the climber is inherently seen embedded within space and in so being moves within a very particular environment that is reserved for the purposes of distinction. Climbers often distinguish themselves from the people who inhabit overlapping physical spaces but do so, in their view, in a mediocre way. The long-distance hiker, trail runner, kayaker, back-country skier and BASE jumper all share a certain mastery of particular forces within this space. Outdoor sports share a very similar recognition of one another. Likewise with the related domain of edgework, as, for example, ‘edgeworkers of various types always recognise one another, despite great differences in lifestyle and social location’ (Lyng, 2005: 3). But the tourist, the family careful not to transgress the boundary fences of the lookout and the expensive resort tucked in the mountainside all have something in common: they are only capable of inhabiting the wild and remote places of the climber through its taming, where its wildness is reduced to a spectacle and the experience of such space as primarily visual. In effect, the experience can be considered as a Baudrillardian ‘simulation’:

‘When “nature” becomes an object for visual consumption, to be appreciated by the connoisseur’s eye sweeping over an expanse of landscape, there is a good chance it has already left the realm of firsthand experience and entered the category of constructed experience that we can appropriately call simulation. Ironically, then, many of the experiences that contemporary Americans most readily identify with nature – mountain views seen from conveniently located lookouts, graded trails traversed along gurgling streams, great national parks like Yosemite visited with reservations made months in advance – could equally well be considered simulation’ (Hayles, 1996:411, emphasis in original).

Rationalised tourist spaces could also be considered as what Urry (2002) refers to as the ‘tourist gaze’. Further, this experience even extends into edgework practices, where experiences are produced
For the climber the sense of touch is more vital to physical survival and it is this haptic sense that is more strongly related to the body-centric orientation of climbing. The wealthy resort goer is equally as incompetent, in the perception of the climber, as the middle class family in comparison to the skilled and powerful alpinist, marching unquestioningly past the boundaries of over-regulated (rationalised) space. Indeed, climbers generally consider the challenges of the ‘summiteer’ a lesser format of climbing. In an interview we are discussing the climbing ascents of another two people both the interviewee and I had met in different climbing areas throughout Canada. They had been climbing serious alpine peaks throughout the season, including the largest peak in North America, Denali. Denali has a well-known alpine climber’s route known as the Cassin Ridge, which is often referred to as a test-piece for aspiring alpinists. However, the peak also has a popular and much easier guided route known as the West Buttress (also referred to as the Standard Route) used by summiteers to climb this peak because of its notable prominence and status:

**Interviewer:** What route did they do?
**Colin:** They were going to do the Cassin Ridge, but I guess they got blown off, so they just did the standard...
**Interviewer:** ...oh okay...
**Colin:** ...you know, hiker’s route.

Not only do we tacitly share and demonstrate our understandings of mountains and routes, we also demonstrate a significant level of understanding of the status of an ascent of each of these routes within the climbing field. We both shift towards a more dismissive language when we turn to this discussion, even though it has been acknowledged that this route was probably chosen because of poor conditions on the Cassin Ridge.

There is an important correspondence here between social and physical space. As the alpinist leaves behind the incompetent and ‘vulgar masses’, equally designated to rich and poor, they enter a physical and social space of ‘social weightlessness’: the only ones that may exist here are to carefully balance exhilaration with safety – in effect to experience edgework without doing edgework. An example of this is whitewater tourism, see Holyfield, Jonas & Zajicek, 2005.

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those whose chief characteristic is a certain mastery over a hostile environment. Indeed, to step from the social in pursuit of corporeal and environmental mastery is a powerful example of the inversion of ‘the ordinary hierarchies’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 144). In this space, not only might one be said to have stepped into social weightlessness, but also at home in this physical environment the climber reigns over those that might venture there. To step into the mountain terrain is to engage in an ordering where the dominant group are those with the greatest capacity to function within this space. For instance, the encounter between a wealthy couple at the summit of a mountain, being guided by professional mountain guides on the ‘walk-up’ route (the easiest route to the summit) and a pair of amateur alpinists who climbed a technically demanding route poses an interesting inversion. The clients are at the mercy of the technical competence (symbolic capital) of the guide and also without the capability of the amateur climbers, for their skills are the dominant power of this space. The clients, at least symbolically, become the least powerful agents in the encounter. The amateur alpinists still lack the competency of the professional guide, who in this space is dominant at least for the length of this encounter. Yet the guide is at the economic mercy of the client. From a different perspective, there is a strong contrast in the experience as opposed to the competencies of those involved. The client’s encounter is short-term and conforms to the tourist’s notion of ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ somewhere different, as opposed to the habituated knowledge of the guide through a range of embodied senses attained through long term experience.

9.5 Mastery and Distinction
Once the climber moves beyond the crowds into the vertical realm they must first enter the transitional space of ‘the approach’. The approach remains entirely a means to an end. Depending upon the climb, this is a space whereby a variety of skills might be required. This spectrum is hard to capture. It ranges from heavily travelled paths used by climbers and sight-seers alike through to multi-day approaches requiring numerous means to accommodate travel. The particular terrains become increasingly specialised and will at times require professional
assistance (for instance, hiring a helicopter or boat as a stage in the approach). But even in the trodden and accessible paths a climber’s trail will typically emerge, unposted, whereby the climber veers sharply from the better travelled and into the more rugged. The approach acts as a transitional space between the vulgar/rationalised and the vertical. As it is traversed, spatial screening begins.

The approach places the climber in a space of ‘kindred spirits’, creating a performance of social weightlessness, of pseudo-equality. Indeed, this is far easier to achieve in remote places, where the likeliness of an encounter with even another climber becomes increasingly rare. But the only way to achieve this sense of social weightlessness is to have a mastery of a physical space that by its very nature is restricted to an elite. Critical necessity is a space and temporality of a powerful mode of embodied distinction. In the case of climbing, social weightlessness is embedded inside moments that can only be experienced through practical mastery.

Mountains and cliffs are not regulated in such a way as to prevent access to any group of willing adventurers (for instance, see Brown, 2009). This gives mountain climbing its strong sense of ‘authenticity’, owning to the apparently disinterested borders of the wilderness and in opposition to the more apparently arbitrary and institutionalised rules and procedures for other leisure spaces or social space more broadly. It is in this sense that climbers paradoxically come to see vertical space as one of distinction. Access to unrestricted borders is seemingly egalitarian in that they contain no regulated barriers. However, particularly as the technical demands of the field increase, so too does the cultural capital required in order to successfully participate in position-taking in the field. The mountain offers a space for social weightlessness:

And how could one fail to recognise the dynamics of the dream of social weightlessness as the basis of all the new sporting activities... whose common feature is that they all demand a high investment of cultural capital in the activity itself, in preparing, maintaining and using the equipment, and especially, perhaps, in verbalising the experiences, and which bear something of the same relation to the luxury sports of the professionals and executives as symbolic possession to material possession of the work of art? (Bourdieu, 1984: 220).
But vertical space and this sense of social weightlessness is marked by a particular temporality. This has been discussed earlier in this thesis in the manner that speed becomes a form of safety. Here I wish to add a number of other elements to this consideration while broadening the conceptualisation further across vertical terrain. Rather than a narrow focus on the need to move quickly in this terrain, it is possible to consider that one must simply move in the vertical. This is because it has not become subjugated to common human existence, but remains a temporary space. This is because of the inherently dangerous properties of the mountain, incapable of supporting human life. In this way, following Lefebvre (1991) the mountain is an ‘appropriated’ space. As Borden demonstrates for skateboarding:

The tactics here are both spatial and temporal, seizing specific spaces for small periods of time; skateboarding is thus rhythmically out-of-step with the dominant routines of the city, “inconsistent with the adapted pace and uses of our moulded environment”, creating a counter-rhythm of moves and runs. Skateboarding shows that the temporality of appropriation is different to that of ownership, seeking an active, moving time related to the specific needs and actions of urban dwellers (Borden, 2001: 241).

Here, there is a similarity between skateboarding and climbing in terms of a shared body-centric focus: in both the emphasis elevates the tactile senses. They require the brief appropriation of space in order to transform its meaning for the length of time that the movement occurs. Likewise in BASE jumping a ‘spatial transformation’ occurs whereby the air and the towers and antennas that pierce it have their purpose modified as the BASE jumper appropriates the tower in order to master falling space (Ferrell, 2001: 82). But rather than a seizure of space from the ‘dominant routines of the city’, the climber finds uses for the vertical in movement where no human purpose is ordinarily assigned. In this way the climber is producing distinctive space.

A moat of glaciers and treacherous terrains guard these spaces from the uninitiated. The climber misrecognises that the temporal commitment to climbing is an immediate screening of the leisure field. Just to be able to gain entry into the stakes of climbing requires large investments of time. But in particular, these investments are in large blocks, as opposed to

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106 This is not to say that cultural (for instance, spiritual or aesthetic) meanings are not attached to the mountains, but rather that vertical space is not embodied for any other purpose.
activities that can be mastered piecemeal through an hour or so at various intervals through the
day. The climber, in order to even embark on many climbing trips, will require outlays of time
measured in days, weeks or even months. But this is interpreted as a boundary that only the
climber can cross and sacrifice for, self-evident in the existence of the climber.

It should be emphasised that many elite sports share this exclusivity of space. For instance, while
in play, the grounds of a football stadium can only be accessed by the elite: the players, trainers,
linesman and so forth. But it is a space that is transformed through the habitation of this space
by individuals in possession of elite capacities. Their gameplay generates an intermingling of
space and person that can only be accessed by this elite. That is, the field of play is not in and of
itself hostile to particular forms of human habitation but made that way through human
habitation.107 Outside of gameplay it is possible for any person to step onto a professional
football field, given its physical properties. Indeed, the late-capitalist re-imagining of the football
stadium has produced ‘tradiums’, an entertainment venue, which can accommodate ‘rugby,
rock concerts, religious revivals and a whole range of other activities’ (Bale, 2000: 93). The space
itself remains only temporarily designated. At others, it bears no clearly defined purpose outside
of consumer practices. In contrast, the mountains do not possess carefully cultivated conditions.
Nor do they have spectator stands. Further still, the mountain, the cliff or the frozen waterfall
can reject entry for those without a particular body of abilities. The very nature of the vertical
space requires the climber to be a climber whenever they enter and will remain so until they
exit.

Climbing space is constructed for the accrual and representation of symbolic mastery. To climb
a difficult, committing and dangerous route restricts the entrants. To move through this space
– to delicately scratch crampons against rock looking for the slightest edge – is an exercise in
embodying distinction. The envious eye of the less capable climber can be cast upon these

107 For instance, as is considered earlier, the construction of sporting venues around spectatorship and
consumption, (see Crawford, 2004: 78).

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spaces with a recognition of this, whereby the desire to enter the physical spaces of the climbing elite can be longed for precisely because it is so inaccessible. Fear and suffering in these spaces do not just equate to a demonstration of practical competence but is fundamentally required of the space to screen out those who cannot endure. Indeed, unlike many other skills, these spaces do not appear as arbitrary in that in order to simply be there is an act in itself that can only be entertained by an elite. Climbing is hence fundamentally distinction gained through inaccessibility. High-risk styles of climbing take place on powerfully inaccessible terrains, requiring the utmost mastery, so much so that a false claim to such could be paid for with one’s life. To combine technical skill, bodily power and development and carefully trained fear is to gain entry to these spaces. Through doxa the climber misrecognises the space, first and foremost, as a space of mastery that in itself is satisfying, as a disinterested engagement with the field. But the physical space is actually a symbolically distinct space. Its ephemerality means that it must be practiced, rather than owned. As embodied cultural capital to experience distinction as a climber is expressed most powerfully, and at times ironically, through traversing spaces that the masses – rich and poor alike – cannot even comprehend. It is therefore a fleeting embodiment, as it is at its strongest when in the moment of practice. In the wake of action, only fragmented representations of this identity may exist. That is, to be known as the great alpinist is different from being the great alpinist. These converge in their deployment, a confirmation of the always suspected, but now realised capacity of the agent.

The climber firstly misrecognises distinction as the primarily appealing prospect. The idea of standing on top of a mountain is perhaps the most obvious image of distinction to be gained from climbing. But this is a very symbolic image, without necessarily accounting for the actions required to reach the top of the mountain. Climbers have only partial interest in reaching a summit. Many routes may not even entirely reach the top. Or, the summit could be reached via a hiking trail, gondola, road or easier route. My argument is that distinction, in its most powerful form, is experienced in situ in a misrecognised format. It is the space of the climb itself where
distinction is enacted. To act in this hostile environment is a production of distinction through action. It collapses potentiality, like the general state of the embodied echo, in order for distinction to be gained as an actuality, an embodied state. I do not mean to suggest that this does not grant distinction in return from the mountains. Rather, in this act of the body, there is no potential to consider or be consumed by these thoughts. As Mitchell (1983: 154-157) suggests, this is a state of ‘flow’. And more broadly, Lyng’s (1990) notion of edgework suggests that this is what might be called a hyper-presence. In this state, distinction is captured inside of the act. It is a realisation of dispositions that are constructed around the establishment of distinction, and therein, become their realisation in situ. This is because the mastery itself is so rare, emphasising the illusio of climbing and the sense of autonomy it produces. What better expression of autonomy than to deliberately suffer, to deliberately be fearful, to deliberately put the self in harm’s way? It is not about a conquering of the mountain; rather, it serves as a difficult terrain filled with perils and challenges that would only ‘voluntarily’ be entered through an expression of autonomy. This is especially emphasised by the self-regulating nature of the climbing field. But again, this autonomy is a misrecognition of the particular social gravity that at the very least partially directs agents toward an interest in outdoor or edgework activities in general and climbing in particular.

9.6 Conclusion
Rather than the mountain being offered as an alternative to the alienation of the social world, it is argued above that the primary logic of the climbing field is derived from differentiation from other practices. This is inherently based in the spatial properties of the mountain. The space of distinction that the vertical world affords is one generated through embodied movement. It is a terrain that is appropriated only briefly for the purposes of this exertion. This sense of distinction remains entirely embedded within this experience and, as has been shown, is lost within the central tautologies of the climbing field. The climber hence does not need to pursue distinction, for the pursuit of the objectives of the climbing field will necessarily bestow differentiation. This
hence becomes an acquisition of symbolic capital that is connected to a space of distinction. This is precisely through the properties both of presence within this space as well as the memories associated with this space:

In its abiding character, place is there to be re-entered, by memory if not by direct bodily movement. As continually available, place does not naturally lead us to become preoccupied with indirect, symbolic representations of it, or to feel that we are somehow forced to choose between these representations. For place tends to hold its contents steadily within its own embrace, while site and time characteristically replace their respective contents (Casey, 2000: 186).

And,

Unlike site and time, memory does not thrive on the indifferently dispersed. It thrives, rather, on the persistent particularities of what is properly in place: held fast there and made one’s own (Casey, 2000: 187).

The mountain acts as a space that continually holds distinction. While the moments of appropriation remain fleeting, the vertical and the sense of both past appropriation and potential reinsertion into this domain remain. This property, while anchored firmly to the social meanings imbued within the mountain, mark a space that can be continually returned to where the interaction of body and treacherous space can continue. It is lived outside of this space, therefore, as a continual understanding of the distinction that is still held within the mountains that can be accessed through memories of climbs done and through a return to them.
10. Risk, Non-Knowing and ‘Safety’

The mountains we love can be unforgiving at times. In order to be prepared for our adventures, the [American Alpine Club] publishes *Accidents in North American Mountaineering*. Our goal is to help you learn from the mistakes of others so you can come home safely and climb tomorrow (American Alpine Club Website).

10.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give examination to the way in which the climbing field protects itself *against itself*. Climbing, as an inherently dangerous undertaking continually faces the problem, if not crisis, of having at its heart the pursuit of objectives that can continually kill off its own membership. In what follows, I will look at the way that climbing accidents are reviewed and analysed in the field. The epistemological basis of climbing serves to provide a panoramic scene of the perils of the mountain scape that removes the agent from the phenomenological grounding of the climbing experience. In this way the mountain is exposed, naked and seen. Vertical space shrouds dangers and reveals the perils and uncertainty present in its folds only through active exploration of its labyrinthine features. Here, the experiential maze of scope, preparation and judgement along with emotional, physical and psychological weaknesses serve to present the climber with a very different world. In this way the doxic core of the climbing field is rarely exposed to scrutiny but instead is enshrouded in a circular logic that the climber will follow through a practical sense of the game. This discussion will serve to illustrate not only the protective elements of the climbing field, but also the *collusio* (Bourdieu, 2000: 145) whereby the participants within a particular field come to collude on the meaning of given practices and regularities without any formal ‘rules’ being brought into play. Through the examination of human error, it is possible to examine the boundaries of appropriate climbing conduct where agents have come to approximately agree on procedures without ever being acknowledged systematically. Instead, interactions with the dangers and risks of climbing takes place in piecemeal ways, whereby an understanding of accidents is learnt through examination of accidents *that have already occurred*.
Here, it is useful to consider Beck’s conceptualisation of non-knowing: ‘World risk society is a non-knowledge society in a very precise sense. In contrast to the premodern era, it cannot be overcome by more and better knowledge, more and better science; rather precisely the opposite holds: it is the product of more and better science’ (Beck, 2009: 115). For Beck, modernity embraces risk more as an equation that rests on a mathematical calculus of quantifiable risks and probable accidents. Nevertheless, the production of knowledge in climbing tends to remain in the rationalised pursuit of knowledge as control. Climbers rely on knowledge systems as a means of interpretation of what a risk is and how it can be managed. Thus, the climbing field produces, extends and refines its information base. This leads to knowledge which produces a sense of greater control over risks. Through this sense of control climbers will submit themselves to vertical space whereby the conditions of these risks leave the pages of books and the comforts of the horizontal realm and engage in the intensity and severity of climbing practice. It is this tension between a detached and distant production of textual knowledge and the climbing experience where meaning is revealed and created simultaneously in practice. Non-knowing is a consequence of taking risks that are experienced in the mountains but rationalised in the return from the mountains.

Another distinction must be made. This is between the objective epistemological basis of the field and that of the individual habitus. There are three major positions that must be drawn out. Firstly, the epistemological basis of the field applies a modernist, teleological process of rationalisation of risk through a number of forms. These include better technologies (for instance climbing systems, bolting, weather forecasting, communication and rescue devices etc.) and better understandings of risks (through analysis of accidents, taking courses and so forth). These produce a knowledge basis that continually expand the expectation the individual will embody knowledge while climbing that will result in a more clearly defined edge between possibility and destruction. What is important is how the production of these forms of detached knowledge correspond with Beck’s ‘unconscious non-knowing’ since they create only a ‘limited
horizon of a form of knowledge that does not reflect on its own limits. One does not know what one does not know’ (2009: 126, emphasis in original).

Secondly, the individual outside of the climbing space has the possibility to integrate more fully with the field’s objective epistemological basis through something akin to Bourdieu’s (2000) skhole, a formal knowledge detached from the issues at hand in practice. There is a leisured lack of urgency by means of interpretation of knowledge regarding risk. Risk can be cognitively engaged with and assessed, drawing in climbing techniques along with analysis of accidents. Thirdly, the embodied engagement with these risks shifts regarding two important aspects: temporality (urgency) and isolation. Urgency produces situations that do not resemble the epistemological platforms of either of the first two positions. This is because things are being hurried and must be addressed at speed, without thought. The second point to be raised is that the non-embodied knowledge, the objective basis of the field, becomes increasingly scarce. While guidebooks can and will be consulted on route, urgency provides limited engagement with this and other forms of knowledge. In other words, the sum basis of the climber is in the climber as they cannot consult the field for ‘new’ knowledge. These situations break from the basis of knowledge where they are learnt. The return from a climb thus marks a point of reassembly of the climbing experience in order to fit the objective basis of knowledge of the field.
10.2 Human Error, the Accident and the Field

Rather than with the notions of danger and peril, the notion of risk goes together with those of chance, hazard, probability, eventuality or randomness on the one hand, and those of loss or damage on the other—the two series coming together in the notion of accident. One insures against accident, against the probability of loss of some good. Insurance’s general model is the game of chance: a risk, an accident comes up like a roulette number, a card pulled out of a pack. With insurance, gaming becomes a symbol of the world (Ewald, 1991: 199).

The accident itself is to be regarded as a unique event that disturbs an otherwise harmonious order (Dean, 2010: 214).

While climbers demonstrate a high degree of capacity for negotiating risks, there are nevertheless injuries and deaths that continually occur in what is an inherently dangerous undertaking. Accidents in climbing form a regular element of climbing discussions. This may be around a campfire at night, travelling or on route. It is also regularly engaged on internet climbing forums and in climbing literature. However, the most systematic treatment of climbing accidents is through the publication Accidents in North American Mountaineering (from here referred to as ANAM) which is released by the American Alpine Club each year. It provides an account of reported accidents (as many accidents that are not fatal will not be reported). This is usually followed by an analysis of the incident. While this is by no means a mandatory resource for climbers to inform their practices, it is representative of the treatment of these accidents in the climbing field. In order to present a preliminary analysis of the accidents I have utilised copies of ANAM spanning between 1995 and 2013. I have noted whether there is both description and analysis of the accidents. In the analysis of accidents I have considered how many function as a means of demonstrating how the situation could have been avoided. This is further considered from the vantage point of those who authored the analysis.

Of course, this publication considers all accidents made by climbers. These range from basic belay failures from inexperienced climbers through to errors made by veteran climbers. They also range from minor injuries through to fatalities, which I am making little effort to distinguish. What is of most importance in these reports is the logic applied to the mistake. Further, the level of human error (that is, how exceptional or unlikely it is that someone would commit such a
mistake) involved in these accidents has been overlooked. This would be hard to assess. Judging from my own experience in the climbing field, most of these accidents are ‘understandable’ in the sense that they are part of a calculable risk. Indeed, in the case of an avalanche, one of the accident reports considers the ‘psychological factor’ that makes climbers ignore warning signs. However, ‘these are traps any of us can fall into, which highlights how important it is to approach avalanche terrain with scepticism and keep asking critical questions’ (ANAM 2013: 64). It should also be noted that many of the reports from large mountains (especially Alaska) lack an analysis when there has been a fatality or a whole team has died. This is often because there is no information on what occurred and thus describes the events to whatever extent they are known. This is also the case when a soloist has been found dead, where little information can be gathered to ascertain the nature of the accident.

In the majority of the reported accounts, the analysis focuses around the way in which the accident could have been avoided. These reports come from rescuers, park rangers, the publication editor, bystanders (other climbers) and the climbers that were involved in the accident. They all tend to share in the same logic of reducing the possibility of an accident occurring by being aware of the limits of their own knowledge and ability.108 Curiously, this is relatable to trends in other edgework activities. In skydiving Laurendeau (2006) reports that ‘pilot error’ (the skydiver) is thought to be at fault in the accident and hence framing the accident as avoidable. As one report in ANAM suggests: ‘your best protection is to know your own limits (and those of your partners) and to resist being tempted far beyond them’ (ANAM, 2005: 19). Climbers reporting on their own accidents demonstrate this same basis of knowledge. Climbers will identify their own view of what had caused their accident. These accounts, particularly when the analysis was made by the climber, involve terms such as ‘I was so complacent that...’, ‘I am

108 Some of these factors tend to be repetitive. In fact, ANAM shows an editorial exacerbation at the consistency of lowering and rappel accidents.
going to... climb with greater care’; ‘I hope others can learn from my mistake’ and; ‘looking back, this was an incident that should have never happened, but it provided me with some exceedingly useful lessons, and for that I’m grateful’ (ANAM, 2013: 69). Others identify the need to be more focused and more thoroughly research and inspect a route before making an attempt. These articles also draw out terms such as ‘underestimate’ that suggest an under preparedness of the climber. This also corresponds with Laurendeau’s discussion of the skydiving practice of ‘blaming the victim’, where ‘when someone reflects on getting injured, for instance, they often express frustration with themselves that they did not handle the situation better’ (ANAM, 2006: 596).

Further, ‘in the case of a serious accident (or near accident), skydivers scrutinize the performance of the victim as well as the choices he or she made about what skydive to do, arguing that the mishap could have been avoided had the person exercised better judgement’ (Laurendeau, 2006: 597).

The tendency to ‘other’ the failed edgeworker is seen across a variety of these practices. In the case for pugilism, Wacquant (1995) suggests that:

The boxing universe constitutes a closed world, a self-contained web of social relations and cultural meanings that acts as a prism refracting outside information and judgements according to its own logic. More than this lack of information or the alleged peculiarities of the boxer’s psychic makeup, it is the ordinary functioning of the pugilistic field, as a relatively autonomous space of material and symbolic exchanges aimed at (re)production of its specific form of capital, that provides the best explanation for the fighters; seeming disregard for a “rational” assessment of the risks they take… Boxers engage in routine practices and operate in mundane situations that constitute so many “framework of interpretations”… that tend to “screen out” awareness of physical danger and impairment… everyone in the isolated circle of the gym has interest in the collusion supporting the collective illusion that serious injury does happen, but… to others (Wacquant, 1995: 85-86, emphasis in original).

As can be seen in the above discussion, climbing has a similar discussion of injuries and accidents. By allocating human error and providing analysis of incidents to show they could have been avoided, the collective illusio of climbing maintains a sense that risks are avoidable if properly prepared. These centre on an epistemological system of insurance: to know is to insure against.

But this insurance functions as compensation to the survivor: those who come back from an

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accident or who have yet to have one. This bears similarities to Ewald’s discussion of risks in a workforce:

Regardless of the size of a workforce or the turnover of its recruits, a given mine or factory will show a consistent percentage of injuries and death. When put in the context of a population, the accident which is taken on its own to be random and unavoidable, can (given a little prudence) be treated as predictable and calculable. One can predict that during the next year there will be a certain number of accidents, the only unknown being who will have an accident, who will draw one of existence’s unlucky numbers (Ewald, 1991: 202).

Where Ewald considers that ‘insurance’s general model is the game of chance: a risk, an accident comes up like a roulette number, a card pulled out of a pack’ (1991: 199) the climbing field offers to climbers that the treatment for accidents is knowledge; to avoid being one of the ‘unlucky numbers’, since one knows the card deck more fully. This is a tacit instituting of a logic of risk that relies on the heteronomous principles of the field, where risk perception and knowledge extends from broader institutional means of engaging with risk.

While this line of reasoning suggests a teleological component of risk confrontation by the climbing field, there are a number of reports that also acknowledge the omnipresence of risk. Many of these reports indicate that absolute risk negation is impossible, conflicting with the above discussion. In one report, a climber had fallen after getting off route. Rather than assessing the ways for self-improvement, he states that ‘this is a risk I accepted then and accept now. Getting off-route happens, and falls happen’ (ANAM, 2013: 73). Hence, this also demonstrates an interesting factor in the way that accidents and assumed responsibility unfold in the publication. Climber error is typically assigned rather than existing as an objective fact. In this case, there is no responsibility assumed outside of the acceptance of the risk. Another account of this type notes ‘this was truly a freak occurrence. It is unlikely that the accident could be reproduced. Just poor luck’ (ANAM, 2013: 85) or ‘it was fortunate that the rope caught partway across the ledge’ (ANAM, 1999: 5). Rescuers sometimes made similar accounts:

Occasionally, well-prepared climbers fall off. These two climbers were experienced, and the East Ridge of Temple was an appropriate undertaking for them. They chose a day with good weather and conditions, which also showed that they displayed good judgement. The [Canadian Rockies] are inherently loose, and occasionally things happen and people can fall.

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Despite their bad luck, they were well prepared, which facilitated a smooth rescue (ANAM, 2013: 111).

Or, after climbers were injured by a falling snow block on an Alaskan mountain: ‘short of not climbing that route on that day, this was one of those accidents that could be described as an “act of nature”’. There are hazards in the mountains, and it is impossible to mitigate all of them’ (ANAM, 2005: 21). Here, it is possible to suggest that mountains still retain a sense of a pre-industrial hazard that are seen as “strokes of fate” raining down on mankind [sic] from “outside” and attributable to an “other” – gods, demons, Nature’ (Beck, 1992a: 98). Rather than risk being contained, as in Ewald’s discussion, inside the construction and perception of an event, risks, or perhaps dangers, loom outside of human action and reasonable comprehension. Further, the nature of the present risks depends on the particular mountain range being climbed in. These conditions change according to the rock type, snow and ice conditions and altitude, among others.109 The loose limestone rock of the Canadian Rockies has a much higher rate of discussion of rock fall in comparison to more stable granite rock ranges. Yet the reports do not suggest that people should stop climbing in the range to altogether as a means of avoiding the dangers. Rather, cautions are offered as means of prevention. For instance: ‘picking protected locations for breaks, moving quickly between safe zones, and travelling during the cold early morning parts of the day are possible mitigating measures’ (ANAM, 2005: 17, my emphasis).

In this analysis, it is hence possible to begin noticing some of the prereflexive components of habitus necessary to engage in the climbing field. As can be seen in the discussion of rock fall, the tendency of habitus is to construct conscious understandings of the environment that tend to make invisible some of the possibilities outside of the field. As Bourdieu notes:

Through the systematic “choices” it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions by offering the market most favourable of its products... the schemes of perception and appreciation of the habitus which are the basis of all the avoidance strategies are largely the product of a non-conscious, unwilled avoidance, whether it results automatically from the conditions of existence... or

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109 For an interesting discussion of cliff rock types see Howett (2004).
has been produced by a strategic intention originating from adults themselves formed in the same conditions (Bourdieu, 1990a: 61).

The dynamics of the climbing field and the orientation of the habitus operate as a defence of itself. This is an important point in a field such as climbing, where the doxic assumption of the possibility of a completed dispositional competence, even though never attained, functions as the field’s doxic self-protection. Indeed, there are often contradictory and conflicting explanations for the relevance of danger in the climbing field. But these tend to remain within the field and as such remain a part of the coillusio. That is, the contradictions of climbing belief and practice remain hidden inside the more durable collective dispositions.

These stories and analyses of accidents consider the agent who is acting in a particular way with a specific constitution of vertical variables in a more or less static image. It thus assumes a certain generalisable character of this specificity that can be applied across vertical space. Lessons from one mountain, mountain range or one terrain type (rock, ice etc.) can be successfully applied to avoiding these accidents in another space. But importantly, it is up to the self-educating reader to interpret these general lessons and incorporate them into habitus. The climber is hence called upon to continually cross a divide that denotes texts, disembodied learning and embodied action. These accounts of human error continue to assume a failing of the path from the text to the practical avoidance of error. It is important to move from this logic of text through to the practical embodiment of these capacities. The climber is continually moving between these two states, both in the less urgent space of the horizontal to the in situ desperation of figuring out how to get back on route. This is a demonstration of climbing doxa: ‘a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma. The “free” and “pure” disposition favoured by skhole implies (active or passive) ignorance not only of what happens in the world of practice... but also of what it is to exist, quite simply, in the world’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 15). Climbing doxa, much like the function of Bourdieu’s skhole in academic space, forgets the world of practice and its variables: ‘practical belief is not a “state of mind”, still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines... but
rather a state of the body’ (Bourdieu, 1990a: 68). But doxa conceals this relationship in the oscillation between the two states because the climber believes in both. It forms a protection embedded in a hidden logic about the practice itself. Thus, this discussion shall move to a consideration of this embodied understanding. Firstly, it will be important to consider how doxa is embodied through the sense of control over the risks of vertical space before moving on to consider the way in which the space demonstrates its own agency against the bodies of climbers.

10.3 In Control
If the above provides the epistemological representation and meaning framework for risk, it also constitutes a specific ontological space for such representations to arise. But the ontology of climbing practice explodes these representations as they are assembled into unique combinations of embodied practices to match the urgency, severity and uniqueness of vertical space in situ. In order to begin this discussion it will be useful to turn to another form of climbing text: the climbing guidebook. The climbing guidebook represents the acquired understandings of a given vertical space from a climber’s perspective. It denotes the gathered experience of the route as what Latour refers to as an immutable mobile:

The “things” you gathered and displaced have to be presentable all at once to those you want to convince and who did not go there. In sum, you have to invent objects which have the properties of being mobile but also immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another (Latour, 1986: 7, emphasis in original).

Here, we can see the basis of the climbing grade scale and guidebook functioning as immutable mobiles. The climbing grade assigned to a particular fragment of a mountain that delineates a possible route of movement from bottom to top, then top to bottom. It affixes the possibility of convincing not, as Latour suggests, only those who have not gone there, but also those who will: the climbers who rely on the knowledge of those prior to know the route. The translation and interpretation of these grades and descriptions are impossible without embodied experience of the landscape. However, these routes only come to properly exist once they have been shifted from the world into inscription:
Scientists start seeing something once they stop looking at nature and look exclusively and obsessively at prints and flat inscriptions. In the debates around perception, what is always forgotten is this simple drift from watching confusing three-dimensional objects, to inspecting two-dimensional images which have been made less confusing (Latour, 1986: 15).

In the realm of mountains this is no less accurate. The mountain is brought back by the first ascensionist and its repeaters in the form of simplified systems of classification in order for it to be known. This is best demonstrated with the use of the climbing grade system. This is an extensive system that expands across rock (free and aid climbing have independent grading), ice, mixed and alpine – which is often a combination of these difficulties. For the sake of simplicity, I will use an international comparative grading chart to convey this point.

![Figure 7: An international grade comparison chart. The grades become increasingly difficult from top to bottom. From left to right are different grading systems used globally and how they compare to one another. (Source: http://www.alpinist.com/p/online/grades).](http://www.alpinist.com/p/online/grades)

In isolation, what is expressed in this grading chart is the absolute quality of physical rock climbing difficulty. It allows transmission, therefore, of a simplified version of vertical space that can be translated across rock climbing systems. For instance, a 5.10a in the YDS is an 18 in Aus
and vice versa. These climbing grade systems function as a primary immutable mobile. Firstly, the climbing grade and description is a mobile inscription in that it brings the mountain to the ‘disembodied’ climber allowing them to ascertain and make judgement of routes to be climbed in advance of approaching any route, mountain or mountain range. Secondly, this grade represents something immutable in that it is expected to be similar to other comparative difficulties in other circumstances. In effect a climber familiar with the technical difficulty of rock routes in one climbing area can anticipate that this experience will be relevant elsewhere (a 5.10 rock route in New Zealand is comparable to a 5.10 rock route in Peru). However this system becomes far more complex, which is why a number of other systems are offered. A route will be given an ‘overall’ grade based upon its hardest section of climbing. In some cases this will be broken down; in others it will be left vague, generally relative to the popularity of the route. This will be approached both through worded description and a superimposed ‘line’ over a photograph of the mountain (known as a ‘topo’).

The primary function of this form of difficulty grading is, therefore, to know the route without knowing the route – to imagine the difficulties to be faced without facing the difficulties. It allows the climber to assess their own capacity and the perils of a particular route before entering into the terrain – or whether it is even terrain that they should enter. With this established, it is possible to consider how these systems of knowledge and capacity about risks come to be incorporated into the climber.
While the guidebook can be seen as a body of knowledge aimed at formalising procedures, its main function is to delimit climbing possibility. The guidebook extends corporeal limits (Barratt, 2011) through the removal of uncertainty. A climber who is nervous at climbing at a particular climbing grade does not have to choose a route that would be poorly protected, but can instead choose a route that has abundant and/or high quality protection opportunities. The guidebook thus becomes a formal social memory of place. Space, in particular the slowly transforming worlds of rock climbing, remains quite constant against the force of time. However, even in the more ethereal worlds of alpine and ice climbing many of these memories are retained (for instance, where a particular ice line will form) albeit in a broader way. Therefore, this discussion will turn to the way that these risks become incorporated as dispositional potentialities. Or in other words, learning these theoretical perspectives in spaces that lack urgency will allow them to become potential, mutable and combinable when in the heat and intensity of action.

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The guidebook thus brings a sense of control to climbing. Research on risk in rock climbing confirmed that ‘participants in this study described climbing as a voluntary risk-taking activity; one they had chosen because of the opportunity to select a degree of exposure to risk or more importantly the amount of control they could exert when climbing’ (West and Allin, 2010: 1240).

As Heywood (1994) notes, climbing communities do not debate whether dangerous spaces should be rationalised, but rather to what extent this rationalisation will occur. In the realm of rock climbing, particularly accessible and shorter routes could be used to exert high levels of control over the risks present. For instance in one interview we are discussing a route that the interviewee had led that was near to her level of climbing ability. However, the discussion demonstrates the idea of the relative safety of falling on this route:

**Interviewer:** it would be a clean fall. Like even if you had a couple of pieces of gear rip...
**Fiona:** yeah that’s the thing. That’s why I didn’t mind leading that... ‘cause you know it’s right, the gear was really good. And if you fell off nothing bad’s gonna happen and the gear’s so solid, so get on it.

Here, the sense of control of the risks is present in the relationship between the climber’s capacity and the risks that are present being well-aligned, suggesting a ‘feel’ for this relationship between climber and climb, ‘guided’ through space as much by somatic habits as conscious intentions. This also demonstrates another aspect of the immutable mobile, as ‘the two-dimensional character of inscriptions allow them to merge with geometry’ (Latour, 1986: 20).

The guidebook provides a description of the difficulty of the grade and the protection possibilities. But this is confirmed as it is merged with the three dimensional world, whereby visual confirmation precedes embodied confirmation of the guidebooks validity.

Whilst climbing on short cliffs have more calculability in terms of danger, mountains present a realm of dangers that are less predictable, as Mary suggests: ‘I think a lot of it’s control too. You’re in control of a lot of the risks climbing... oh apart from alpine where there’s a lot more objective dangers. But I think rock climbing a lot of the risks are in your control’ (Mary). However, in the next excerpt, it is possible to see a reading even of these ‘objective hazards’ as becoming embodied in parallel with objective knowledge:
Ben: ...But, yeah, it's risky. It's dangerous, but...but there's an asterisk. It's if you screw up, it is, you know?

Interviewer: So, well, what about things like rock fall and avalanches and stuff?

Ben: Yeah. I mean...Well, and I guess there's another simplicity to that where, um, you know, if you make that decision to go into...on a pitch or in an area that has potential, you...you've made it dangerous by stepping into it.

As Ben suggests, the climbing space, as Lefebvre (1991) might have it, is produced as dangerous space by entering into it. The negotiation of danger is hence related to knowing why, how and where it is dangerous and whether this is acceptable relative to one's experience level. Ben continues to explain his position:

Ben: I remember I was on a panel... where there was a panel of [elite climbers]... we were doing one of these panels in front of an audience, and we kinda got into it, and I simply just sat there and just got hammered on because I'm like, “Listen, this stuff is safe, you know? This stuff is actually safe.” And it's the same thing I was telling you – you just can't fuck up.

In this instance, climbing is safe in a radical temporality of ‘getting things right’ – the improvised strategies of habitus being successfully matched to the objective conditions of the vertical.

However, there are numerous situations that cannot be properly calculated or accounted for in that they are just bad luck:

Ben: And then...then, I did talk about...you know, it's like the drunk driver. You can be the best driver in the world, but the rock fall, just like the drunk driver, can just take you out.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Ben: And that's just...that's part of the deal there, you know, and...and avalanches – well, you should do the research and do the testing and look at the snow pack and know your shit, and if it's risky don't go in there, you know?

Interviewer: Yep.

Ben: But rock fall...I can speak mostly of rock fall. I've had some natural rock fall that's been really close, and, um, that, I've gotta say, is the one little area that's grey, because it's...it's frightening, and yeah, that's...you're putting yourself in a dangerous environment, and so there is a little note there that it's not 100% safe and I can't factually defend that, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So, but I mean, overall, as long as you know what you're doing, I mean...

Ben: Yeah...

Interviewer: ...it's a relatively safe environment.

Ben: If I thought it was dangerous, I wouldn't do it... Well, I should say this – if I thought I was going to die, I wouldn't do it.

Ben’s final point here is critical. He stumbles over the difference between calculating the possibility of death and the possibility of danger. Death is the other side of the boundary of edgework and is seen as an absolute state. But danger remains inherently blurry, whereby risk calculation succumbs to capacities of an in situ sense of the circumstances. Thus, he tries to
present the dangers of the mountains as avoidable risks if they are addressed carefully, rigorously and conservatively. But he leaves space empty in his explanation for the incalculable and ultimately improvised space that must be experienced before it is known. This relates to Robinson’s account of climbing when she suggests that ‘the point is to live to climb another day, in a way ordering and controlling what they see as an ordinary aspect of their life, not the extraordinary as climbing may be perceived as being in the non-climbing world’ (2004: 121). But these ‘practical beliefs’ are not adherence to specific rules of practice but exist as a ‘state of the body’ whereby the experienced climber has a ‘feel’ for the conditions that they face as they are being faced (Bourdieu, 1990a: 68). This is emphasised and given urgency by illusion, as can be seen in the reference to the ‘drunk driver’. The comparison of risks from the everyday world to those in climbing is frequently rehearsed to indicate the comparative omnipresence of danger inherent in human life. This also shows the incorporated practical belief, as noted in the accounts from the ANAM, that ‘acts of nature’ sometimes just happen and that they are not isolated to the experiences of climbers.

There are many strategies that can be deployed to negotiate the production of these dangers. In another interview, a respondent acknowledges the risks around remoteness as a reason to shift towards conservative judgement about dangers, as the ‘edge’ becomes blurrier:

...if something goes wrong, the station’s closed for winter, then you’re a long way from anywhere. So you really pull back. You don’t stick your neck out at all. You’re very conservative, because if something goes wrong, [the situation] compounds pretty quickly (Oz).

Here, there is a rough sense of the dangers presented, that relies more deeply on a feel for and assessment of the conditions as they are faced rather than a strict rational calculation entirely based on grades or texts. Climbers maintain a sense of control over risks within alpine and other high risk environments, but add that these require a greater level of careful and conservative attention to the ‘gravity’ of the situation. This can vary of course, depending upon the person’s assessment of their own capacity. As has been suggested earlier in this thesis, climbing requires a careful development of a self-reflexive interpretation of one’s skills. An important part of a
climber’s cultural capital is both the capacity to build the correct skills independently, along with being able to assess which skills need to be built. For the alpine, one must have a strong understanding of their bodily limits. One method of training this is by climbing in styles where falling off is acceptable, so that one can both realise their skills within climbing grading difficulties, along with an embodied sense of these limits:

You definitely don’t want to fall in the mountains. Um, or even on big climbs. Like trad cragging¹¹⁰ is a little more acceptable, uh, provided the gear’s good. But I think, again, with sport climbing comes into that training your technical ability to perform on longer, harder routes. So obviously, to push your technical ability you have to get yourself to that point where you’re falling off at some time. Sport climbing has made that a safe place to do that (Sol).

Here, the emphasis is on knowing and feeling bodily limits. In this way, the climber not only incorporates embodied capacity for climbing, but also a dispositional interpretation of systems of difficulty that can be transmitted through the immutable mobile of the climbing guidebook. The grading systems of the safer vertical terrains below the mountains confirm bodily mastery, which in turn can be combined with the multiple variants offered in the hostile spaces of the alpine.

Thus, these examples demonstrate the capacity for the climber to become inculcated in the model of risk that exists in the objective knowledge base of the field. This is perhaps most perfectly summarised by John: ‘it’s funny when I first went to Yosemite I did a big reading up of what killed people ‘cause I wanted to know so I could try and stop it from happening to me. And the majority, like 70 per cent of the accidents were on abseil or on descent’ (John). Here, John has repeated the doxic component of the field in full, whereby he suggests that climbing accidents are preventable. He wants to try and prevent the situation unfolding for himself. What is therefore created is an awareness not only of the basis of the accidents but also a generation of awareness in the spaces where accidents can occur. This is an effort to try and create a sort of anticipatory anxiety, where once entered into the descent, the climber will maintain a strong

¹¹⁰ See ‘Crag’ in Glossary 1: Terms.

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consciousness of the possibility of catastrophic failure. However, this is a generalised system that can never properly anticipate the conditions that will be confronted. As has already been argued, the agent can never fully take on the knowledge sum of the field. In practice, numerous variables can come into play to shift the equation of risk and the climber’s ability to apprehend it.

10.4 In Practice
An important thing to remember about avalanches is that 90 per cent of them are triggered by the individuals who die in them (ANAM, 1999: 2).

The above discussion demonstrates that the climber shows a vast degree of control and awareness of this control through the discussion of climbing technique and style. Presently, it is important to turn to a discussion of the experiential basis of knowledge while climbing. Here, a maze of possibility comes alive, where these static factors of risk begin moving, forming their own unique combinations that the climber must interpret *in situ*. What will be explored are some of the ways in which the knowledge contained in text cannot be properly reproduced in the space of practice. The first of these examples is exhaustion. In the realm of alpine climbing, it is not uncommon for a climber to do ‘single pushes’ where they will continue climbing for twenty, thirty, forty hours or more. This kind of commitment is attractive in the alpine climbing illusio. The idea of pushing harder and for longer is a part of pursuing the deeper objectives of the field. It is also a part of climbing quickly, dropping the need to carry bivy equipment and therefore being able to increase climbing speed over this distance.\footnote{See discussion in Chapter 8: Echoing Improvisation.}

This entails a commitment to these ‘ontological shifts’ being a prerequisite of the field and anticipated as a part of the climbing strategy. But in these states – exhausted, delirious, and at times even hallucinating – how does the agent change in their response to the field? The desire to forego safety out of indifference for anything other than getting down may seem contradictory from a logical...
distance, but these experiential spaces implode the normal functioning logics of the agent. In an interview, Paul recounted doing the first ascent of a long ridge climb in central Asia:

Paul: We spent five days on it, the last two without food, and we did 65 pitches of rock climbing, and, um... And we’re definitely feeling upwards after about 50, because we were doing all these traversing pitches that we couldn’t reverse, and below us was all ice falls, so if we descended, we’d just go...we’d have to rap over ice falls – obviously not so safe... So it was...it was full on. And yeah, we were completely exhausted and out of food, and I...I learned on that trip why so many people die in the Himalayas, ’cause it’s just so big and committing that it’s so easy to get in over your head and then basically have to continue and being without food and just starting to cut corners and not really being careful, ’cause you’re so tired... We were soloing a lot of stuff that I would never solo in like good conditions if I could...If I was in...if my head was straight. Um, where one little slip and we were for sure done. Like stuff that I wasn’t comfortable soloing, but we were just doing it ’cause we wanted to get off...

Interviewer: ...Oh, wow. So it’s pretty, like um, and I mean high up and at altitude.

Paul: Yeah, with noth...like a 300 meter wall below us... So, like, yeah, no chance of survival if we slip.

In this insightful elaboration, Paul recounts the ontological shift that had occurred. In a state of exhaustion and hunger, if not starvation, he and his partner lost the bodily ability to perceive the dangers of the climb as he would if his ‘head was straight’. In this shift, an alternate experiential state, Paul began soloing\textsuperscript{112} out of the desperate desire to be finished with the route. These constitute moments where the typical logic ordering the experience is abandoned or becomes inaccessible. He was aware that this was terrain that he would not usually solo and that there was ‘no chance of survival’ in the event of a fall. But this could not be entirely comprehended because of the fatigue and shattered headspace that he was immersed in. Though it should also be considered that what has been recounted here is a desperate situation. As has been discussed earlier in the thesis, abandoning safety systems for the sake of speed in the circumstances that Paul and his partner found themselves in may have saved their lives.

10.5 Objective Hazards

\textit{God! Everything's like falling and moving - Jess}

Objective hazards refer to circumstances that may possibly be reduced, but never eliminated. These include bad weather, avalanches, and rock and ice fall. Objectives hazards represent the

\textsuperscript{112} Soloing would dramatically increase their overall speed. This is discussed extensively in Chapter 8: Echoing Improvisation. See also Glossary 2: Styles.
most compellingly uncontrollable aspects of climbing. For instance, while rock fall typically occurs more often during the warmest periods of the day, it does not entirely cease during other parts of the day. Climbers may choose to pass areas of active rock fall during the pre-dawn hours in order to reduce the odds that they may be hit by rock fall. But there is no certainty about this outcome as rock fall could still occur.

In the case of objective hazards, an element of uncertainty will remain. But interestingly, climbers will often dismiss this with hope or perhaps a sense of its unlikeliness. A good reference to this is an example from a guidebook (Frimer, 2005) for a Peruvian mountain range. On a difficult route there is a section known as the ‘death couloir’. In the description for the route it states simply ‘solo the death couloir as fast as possible’. Presumably, this couloir is highly active, dropping debris down (couloirs function as funnels for debris). In order to minimise this chance, the climber should solo in order to improve the rate of movement to reduce exposure to the hazard (though increasing the consequences of falling). But by doing this, they are still greatly exposed to the chances of injury, if not death. What little control a climber can exercise in these circumstances must go to reducing the time spent in them, which lowers the overall chances of an adverse consequence. In my field notes I have recounted numerous examples of the process of negotiating objective hazards in detail. Below is an account of making a decision regarding one such event:

While the guidebook called for bivying out on the glacier underneath the route, we opted to make our bivy on the rock just underneath the glacier. While this would increase our travel time and difficulty for the route, it would be more comfortable than sleeping on the snow and ice, along with being far less cumbersome (trying to keep snow out of our bivy sack and clothes for example). Our site selection, however, was underneath (though some way down snow slopes) a reasonably large serac. We reasoned that bivying

\[113\] See Glossary 1: Terms.

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underneath the face of the mountain, where the route we were attempting began, would also have the possibility of sending debris down towards us. Thus, either site would be dangerous, but this one would be more comfortable.

We spent two days at this site (I had got sick and tried to recover before attempting the route) with absolutely no sign of movement from the serac. At 2:30am on the final morning, as we prepared to leave camp to begin the route, a small chunk of the serac calved. The debris bounced its way gradually right down to the foot of our bivy. It occurred to me that even though we had theoretically been in danger the whole time, we were actually in a dangerous position.

Soon we were moving up the snow slopes below the serac until we were finally directly underneath it. We navigated without headlamps as the full moon on the slopes was enough to negotiate all but the more concerning crevasses. All the while, we both watched the serac, feeling extremely uncomfortable being underneath it. But this was the most reasonable line across the glacier, so we just hoped that the serac would remain silent. In our position, nothing we could do would save us from it if it crumbled. It would be an hour before we were out from underneath it, unscathed (Fieldnotes, The Andes, July 2013).

In these cases, the climbers, while still able to make skilled decisions about the danger, are nevertheless enticed into an abandonment of the concern in order to pursue the objectives of the field. The illusio therefore functions to insulate the climber from thinking too heavily about the possibility of the risk. My partner and I reasoned that this was an acceptable danger. But it was an entirely unpredictable one. We had considered the possibility of catastrophe and

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114 See Glossary 1: Terms.

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removed it from the ‘actual’ and placed it into the ‘theoretical’. This is because the uncertainties presented by objective hazards must be accepted in order to exist in the alpine environment.

The mountain expresses agency in that it determines when it will act. In some cases the climber must take a risk with the objective conditions of the mountain; in others the climber must take a chance because of the incalculable conditions that the mountain creates. The mood of the mountain may only be known in retrospect. That is, while some conditions are likely to occur in some circumstances more than others (fifty degree slopes with fresh snow are likely to avalanche) the specific timing, severity and circumstances will remain unpredictable – thus the full nature of an event can only be examined in its wake. However, even mountain weather can be hard to predict depending upon the range, the forecasting services and the access to forecasts. The embodied practice of the climber thus succumbs not only to a world of conditions that are shifting in uncertain ways, but are doing so of their own accord. The specific combinatory of events, while often routinised, can occur in ways that must be dealt with by the climber as they happen.

In particular the interaction in this space is not between people, but between an agent and terrain. This owes to the fact that very little time on a mountain is spent in the physical presence of a climbing partner. Indeed, much of this time is spent out of both eye and earshot of one another. In this case, while climbers do refer to the notion that emotions ‘run up and down the rope’ the primary and intense focus of the climber remains in the interaction with the particular array of things that are in the current space. These must be effectively negotiated with the prime goal of moving above them.

\[115\] In the circumstances it was possible to have made other, safer decisions. In this way it is possible that climbers would have made alternate decisions in the positions we were in. However, the place we opted to bivy had been used previously as a bivy site (flat spots had already been cleared of rocks).

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One of the critical insights in the shift from the epistemological basis of the field to the ontological tensions of practice is that the mountain presents a formidable mass of variables that cannot be entirely reduced to risk or prediction by the agent. This is because ‘objects do do something, they are not merely the screens or the retroprojectors of our social life. Their sole function is not merely to “launder” the social origin of the forces that we project onto them’ (Latour, 1996: 236). Indeed, the interaction between climber and mountain cannot be reduced to a social interaction, for the mountain determines more of the conditions of its state than the climber can address. The mountain and the conditions by which it is understood only exist properly, momentarily in the spaces of the mountain. The risk, therefore, is in excess of the ability to comprehend. In this regard the dispositional configurations gained by the epistemology of the climbing field, embodied by the climber, are not enough in and of themselves to interpret a situation. The climber and their wide possibilities of interpretation and shifts in embodied state (exhaustion, cold, fear) combine with the unique combination of the mountain to produce a setting that is in defiance of the properly teleological engagement of the objective basis of climbing risks.

10.6 Conclusion

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it “speaks”. All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity. They therefore cannot be reduced to the graphic trail (deCerteau, 1984: 99).

The panoramic perspective of climbing’s epistemology of risk is positioned to reveal the causes of accidents. It can ensemble accounts, data, statistics and analyse human error in order to demonstrate to the climber that it is possible to avoid injury and death in the vertical. This is a discussion about the dangers of climbing between climbers: those who are already ‘pre-adapted’ and maintain the fundamental illusio of climbing. The sources of information that could endanger this belief in climbing as a worthwhile experience will be screened out or reinterpreted in order to better reflect the ‘reality’ of climbing. A newspaper editorial or a relative proclaiming
that climbing is ‘stupid’ or ‘foolhardy’, for the climber, is a priori missing the point. They are disregarded or humoured, as the habitus is already geared to do so. So accidents are assessed ‘knowledgeably’, whereby they are dissected to reveal the causes of the accident. Through understanding that these happened to someone else is a means of preventing it happening to you. Interestingly, that person who had the accident is also a member of the climbing field, or at least was. But this is knowledge transmitted through non-urgent temporalities. When the climber steps out from the leisured connectivity of the field and into the vertical space the reality of climbing practice will become fully known. In this way, the climber is at risk in a non-perfect, improvised state where edgework becomes a possibility not only of the climber to enact, but for the mountain to enact upon the climber. The epistemological panorama is only ever given rough translation, through the immutable mobiles of the climbing field, into the three dimensional domains of vertical space.
11. Conclusion

11.1 A Field in Change
This thesis gives focus to the dynamics that operate to pull people deeper into the pursuit of risk from within and around the climbing field. The individual does not begin as a risk-taker but becomes one. Importantly, this thesis shows that one of the key processes in the construction of a climber is time. Slowly individuals enter into social and physical spaces that provide the foundation for an appreciation of the pursuit, and an incorporation of the perceptual scheme that becomes overlaid on the vertical space. Cliffs are transformed from the aesthetic to the navigable. Places that once looked impossible to traverse begin to have weaknesses (quite literally ‘cracks’ in their fortifications). And as the mountain itself becomes exploitable, the overlay of climbing logics of ‘easy, medium and hard’ become appreciable. It has demonstrated that risk-taking can be understood through the internal logic of the pursuit, where individuals slowly rework themselves to accommodate risk and danger. But this is not mere acceptance of an objective increase in the harm possible to the agent. Mountains are never fully objective spaces. The climber enters a relationship with the mountain whereby danger is produced. And as the climber slowly increases their ability, the space and the interaction between terrain and agent changes. The mountain is redefined.

While this thesis has emphasised high-risk (or what is sometimes called ‘high consequence’) climbing styles, such situated knowledge and practices occur in the context of a radically developing sport. Heywood (1994) has referred to these developments as the rationalisation of the sport, which is well advanced. For instance, the exploding popularity of the climbing gym is one of the various changes that can be seen. One consequence is that people are being introduced to climbing at younger ages, in much safer environments, for their first opportunity to ‘feel’ the world of climbing. As Derrick stated:

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Derrick: Because when I started, there weren’t any climbing gyms. So, you had to find it somehow. You...somehow you were going to find it. With climbers today, they can go to a gym when they’re 7 years old for a birthday party...

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Derrick: ...and, uh, you know, it’s like, oh, suddenly they know about climbing, you know?

The climbing gym offers a sanitised version of the climbing experience as it had been traditionally known. People can come in at any time and experience a relatively high level of safety, but simultaneously engage with the bodily movement of climbing, along with the emotions of fear and excitement from being in a vertical terrain. My interviewee Barry, a climbing gym owner, comments ‘I think people come [into the climbing gym] for the experience and then you’ll see some like, “oh yeah, it was good but it’s not for me.” Like people, people even get scared in the gym. And I feel like that’s their adrenaline rush’ (Barry). Nevertheless, this affords an opportunity for people who may otherwise have no engagement with the climbing field. These more rationalised versions of climbing account for the rapid popularisation of indoor, sport and boulder climbing styles.

While the climbing field may still offer autonomy and adventure, it is questionable to what extent, or in what shape, this will eventually take. Heywood (1994) notes that the climbing field is not impervious to the process of ‘rationalisation’ that is taking place across most other leisure fields. Climbing technologies can provide better safety margins, which grant climbers a greater ability to select the level of risk that they engage in. Further, climbing continues to become more rationalised through regulatory and promotional bodies. Through promotion, climbing has become more popular, ushering in a great deal more regulation in order to preserve climbing areas from degradation and overuse. Rationalisation, however, only concedes this as a possible future. Struggle over the definitions of climbing practice and style will continue.

The realisation of these systems of climbing is in part a form of misrecognition. What a climber learns as a means of ascent – systems of rope and equipment – were forged through struggles between elite climbers as they pioneered new systems and new styles in new terrains. While
this struggle is ongoing and often geographically localised, there are particular periods and locations in climbing history that demonstrate much of the orientation of climbing today. The concept of ‘free climbing’ is instructive in how a very particular set of conditions must be fulfilled in order to climb legitimately. These systems become increasingly codified and doxic. That is, while climbers come to consciously recognise the grading of climbing difficulties and the proper use of equipment, they are tacitly taking in particular systems of logic that appear natural and often escape any questioning. To be legitimate as a climber, one must make an ascent in a proper way.

11.2 Necessity and Risk
Regardless of the outcome, high-risk climbing negotiates a very difficult and dangerous space. In this way, Lyng’s (1990) conceptualisation of voluntary risk-taking as ‘edgework’ has been indispensable for forging the basis of this research. It avoids a basic cognitivist account of risk in order to focus on the fuzzy experiential basis in which risk is encountered in the body. It is not a cold calculation, but a sense; a feeling of an encroaching edge that provides a definitive boundary between life and death.

But edgework should not be overused. It is a concept that has a limited and specific focus. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the experience of edgework is preceded and succeeded by other states of being. In Chapter 3: Critical Necessity, Seriousness and Edgework I argue for the idea of necessity having a potentially more useful conceptual toolbox to draw from than an emphasis only on risk. Essentially, while edgework characterises brief explosions of the experience of climbing, one of the overarching experiences of climbing is the need to act in order to survive. A climber becomes ‘committed’. Yet, the development of this critical necessity is simultaneously artificial. The agent carefully constructs the parameters of the exercise before delving in. Moreover, the agent produces critical necessity from a position that is not characterised by any form of extreme social or economic necessity.
With the tools of habitus and the embodied echo there is a potential to carefully engage in an analytical traverse between the larger social cosmos where the parameters of critical necessity are constructed through to the moment-by-moment intensity of making one’s way up and down a mountain. This thesis has begun this work through an establishing of the conceptual framework and the experiential properties of climbing space. But this could be drawn out further to explore the interplay between these two states and how the climber relates back to the broader social space.

11.3 Practice and Climbers
Bourdieu’s theory of practice has been used as a foundation for uncovering the diverse, sophisticated and improvised processes of climbing. Bourdieu fused together social structures and the acting body in his sociology. Society – structure – happens not just to but also *through* the body. It is the conductor of social reproduction and change. But it reaches a major difficulty in its sociological interpretation. One primary validation of sociological research, as Howson and Inglis (2001) note, is to be able to track broad scale or macrostructural institutions to gain its credibility. Outside of this, other forms of sociological research – such as interactionist or ethnomethodological approaches exist – but assert a tendency towards something more phenomenological in its orientation.

The difficulty of combining these different orientations was never lost on Bourdieu, as he ultimately privileged the explanatory value of macrostructural analysis. His work continually extended examples of the individual as an instrumental (Nettleton, 2011) means of gaining insight into broad scale change and reproduction. But this is a matter of emphasis. This thesis follows on from Bourdieu but asks more questions about a less developed side of Bourdieurian analysis. If society, at large, is contained fundamentally in the acting body, then we must be able to explore the structure of society as it explodes into existence through each of the agents’ acts.

The crucial focus of this thesis has been how society gets under the skin and, once there, how it gets back out again.

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One of the ceaselessly returning issues in using Bourdieurian analysis is the extensive web of critique that resolutely challenges his position. As I note in the introduction, Lahire (2011: viii) argues that Bourdieu has been misrepresented by critics who often provide a superficial and hasty disregard of his work. But Lahire also notes how damaging it is to merely reproduce the concepts with faith in their explanatory usefulness. I hope that this thesis has navigated through these positions so that critique and development can go hand-in-hand. Climbing is a deeply embodied practice that requires agents to face expert and athletic use of the body in high-stakes scenarios. It is an experience that should not be reduced to containment in concepts that merely give them a theoretical gloss without deepening our understanding of the experience. Unlike many of the critiques of Bourdieu, I take the omissions in his work as opportunities to deepen and extend his project. The appeal of Bourdieu’s work is that it can be modified to include emphasis on things Bourdieu himself did not deal with. As can be seen in Chapter 4: Habitus and the Embodied Echo, there is great potential inside of Bourdieu’s basic framework to further extend and alter concepts to better accommodate a particular research focus. Bourdieu continually reminded readers that these were not static theories – concepts without grounding in empirical research – (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 34-35) but were always intended to work as rough guides that could be more carefully honed for the task at hand. Certainly, this is what the embodied echo does.

While I offer a critique of Bourdieu’s emphasis on always returning to the macro-structural, it would be reasonable to criticise this thesis for its lack of concern with broader levels of analysis. This thesis essentially emphasises the ‘autonomous’ pole of the climbing field with little exploration of the ‘heteronomous’ pole (Bourdieu, 1993: 38-39). But to forego this level of analysis has given a greater space for consideration of the sophisticated, yet abstract, concept of the disposition. Rather than giving in to a notion of simple transferal of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984: 170) I have attempted to capture many of the different processes that occur in the habitus with the concept of the embodied echo. The embodied echo, it must be added, was not intended...
to function as a substitute for habitus. Rather, the embodied echo should function to extend habitus in its analytical capacity to more deeply account for action. What this gives to an account of embodied echoes is the assumption that this process is taking place within a broader social space explainable by recourse to generalised accounts of disposition and habitus. But the echo suspends these concerns temporarily in order to get closer to an emphasis on the moment of action. It entails that it is possible to dig into the moment of action – as the realisation of dispositions – to look at the specific configuration of dispositions, along with the particular forms of dispositional enrichment and decay that accompany the practice they inform. But these can return back to various levels of analysis utilising habitus as a means of locating action in social space.

Chapter 8: Echoing Improvisation returns to the concept of habitus to consider its use in dealing with field-based needs for reflexivity. What is shown is that climbers are never fully in a space of reflexive decision making, nor in one over-determined by codified practices guiding their every movement. Instead, they rely heavily on embodied echoes to inform their practices. Risk is something that must be planned for based upon embodied echoes as the climber apprehends their own histories and reapplies these lessons to new contexts. Importantly, in the case of alpine climbing, one must find a balance between safety at the sake of speed and speed for the sake of safety. This makes for a powerful example of the improvisational techniques that become habitualised. In this example it is possible to see many of the useful crossover functions of habitus and the embodied echo. Habitus allows for a deep engagement with improvisational technique that demonstrates the way in which the climbing field requires reflexive skill. This extends from reflexivity about what is required for the current task through to a reflexive posture about the climber’s own limits in an endless adjustment and situating of their own practices against the field and objective nature of the climb itself. But from here we can turn to the embodied echo to understand much more of the way in which these skills become internalised and the specific constitutions of dispositions that are internalised. These examples...
range from the reflective conversations that re-apprehend the body through to the distinctly
pre-reflective form of emotional callusing where the agent may slowly reorientate their
response to fear.

The embodied echo functions as an ontological basis for much of this thesis that could
potentially deepen habitus. In particular here, I have emphasised the aspects of the embodied
echo that more effectively analyse how we act on disposition and the tangled mass of
dispositions that are continually wound together and pulled apart. But outside of the neater
constitution of the moment of action, it remains embedded in the cacophony: the tumultuous
and tense space of dispositional activation, maintenance, enrichment and decay. In Chapter 7:
Capital, Climbing Bodies and Emotional Callusing, this tension is explored particularly in the
redevelopment of the notion of capital. Here, a simple system of transferral and sedimentation
of dispositions gives way to the tension of embodiment of structure and the exercise of
accumulation of experience through the echoes of a body struggling not only in the field, but
also to comprise itself of the fleeting realisation of itself as climber. The climber is continually
called upon to navigate the dangerous vertical environment as the only means of serving to build
the capital that will make it possible to again navigate climbing space. Once in this process,
dispositional enrichment is endlessly threatened by dispositional decay: spending too little time
climbing and allowing dispositions to degenerate.

As is evident in the development of capital, I maintain a position throughout this thesis that the
gradual and often imperceptible transformation of individual to climber is one that is
accompanied by a deeper immersion in the field and an inculcation of the logics of the field. To
a large extent it is this tacit process itself where meaning in the pursuit is generated. Climbing’s
appeal is hence buried in the practice itself. However, I single out the experience of distinction
to demonstrate that the relational position that climbing plays within the leisure field. I argue
that this is a sense of distinction that is firmly anchored in space. One of the foreground

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experiences of climbing is that of ‘social weightlessness’. Mountains provide an effective mode of screening to make it possible to feel divorced from the ordinary hierarchies, inequalities and violence of the everyday world. That is, climbing space is one that can only be entered by those who are adept in the practices of climbing space. This is important, because this screening does not rely on human arbiters but rather the space itself. Those who have wilfully submitted themselves to the training required to know them can only traverse the hostile vertical environments. In this regard distinction relies on symbolic capital being recognised – in effect the misrecognition of cultural capital. Distinction hence is gained through movement in space that can only be attempted by a small elite.

Distinction is not the only implicit and often unrecognised component of the pursuit. The Chapter 10: Risk, Non-Knowing and Safety demonstrates a minute proportion of what I believe is an important mechanism for the maintenance of edgework fields. It suggests that the epistemological basis of the climbing field does not lie in the mountain scape, but rather in a general space between agents that are primarily not in the action of climbing. Commentary on climbing practice occurs outside of climbing practice. The act of climbing thus resides in a state severed from epistemological footing. It is a distinct ontological condition that depends upon this epistemology, but can never properly exercise it in the moment of action. When the climber returns from this, their reflective and reflexive experiences return them to this epistemological condition. Bourdieusian theory captures this dynamic effectively through the interplay of field, doxa and illusio. These conceptual tools help us to isolate the logical systems – both conscious and unconscious – that perpetuate climbing practice. However, one of the difficulties that emerge in this chapter is that of incorporating a relational discussion of the material world into a Bourdieurian framework. It relies heavily on discussions of abstracted social space; something that can be observed to be happening but is never properly or clearly mapped in objective space. It always resides somewhere between its own realisation – the production of objective space – and the potentiality embedded in generally predictable and routinised behaviour. But when
physical space is added as a variable, not just as a backdrop for human action, the challenge becomes apparent. When we consider that the environment acts back upon the agent, forcing the agent to respond to its actions, then alterations to the conceptualisation of fields and practice therein becomes mandatory. Mountains and cliffs are composed of non-human action. They continue to produce new conditions and through their own unique configurations of variables that remain generally predictable but impossible to fully pin down. It is hence the interactions between the two states – agent and terrain – that composes the climbing experience.

This thesis has extended social phenomenology to examine intense body-centric experience. It details the sociological individual – how the climber is the producer of the social – and how the social is realised in the moment of action. It draws from established conceptual frameworks to explain climbing practice while pushing the boundaries of these. Hence, this thesis functions as its own nuanced version of a theory of action that could potentially serve to explain a great variety of edgework practices. It has explored the inner workings of climbing practice and how these spaces of seriousness and commitment, risk and danger, become slowly enmeshed in the bodies of agents that become willing to put themselves on the line in the pursuit of vertical space.
Climbing talk is made up of an extensive vocabulary of jargon terms that outsiders will probably not have engaged with before. As such, I have put together a brief glossary to make understanding this study a little easier.

**Aid:** Aid climbing, in contrast to free climbing, is the act of climbing using devices in order to ascend. The climber will place a piece of equipment in or on the rock. After this they will attach a nylon ladder to the piece and climb the ladder as high as possible. From here, the climber will place another piece of protection. This process is repeated to make upward progress.

**Anchor:** Anchors are typically confined to multipitch climbing. The lead climber will get to a suitable position to belay the second up to the current position. Usually at least three pieces of removable protection will be used and equalised to form a sturdy anchor point should one of the climbers fall. Anchors are often referred to as ‘belayes’.

**Belay:** A belay, or belaying, occurs when one anchored climber feeds the moving climber’s rope through a device that can be used to catch moving climber should they fall. This is used
for both lead climbers and second climbers. Anchor’s on routes are often referred to as belays.

**Bigwalling:** Bigwalling is a particular style of climbing applied to large, near to, at or above vertical rock faces (known to climbers as walls). These regularly lack the features required to make swift free ascents and therefore often require extensive aid climbing. The ascent style is much slower and will require substantial amounts of equipment to be hauled behind the climbers, including portable rigid hammocks (portaledges). A climbing team may remain on a wall for days or even weeks at a time.

**Bivouac (Bivy):** Generally a bivouac is a point where climbers sleep (or try to sleep) while on a route. The nature of these can vary. Climbers may bring a small tent or a ‘bivy bag’ (large enough to put a sleeping bag inside but will protect from moisture) to facilitate this, though may also opt to sleep in the open in a sleeping bag or on certain routes excavate a snow cave. Climbers may also sleep while sitting on a small ledge. In some instances climbers will have a forced or unplanned bivouac. This refers to when climbers did not bring equipment such as a pad or sleeping bag either to drop weight to move faster or because they did not expect to still be on route. These are often unpleasant, cold and with little sleep.

![Figure 9: A 'comfortable' bivy spot. (Photo: Matthew Bunn, July 2013).](image)

**Bold (climbing):** Bold climbing generally means that falling off would result in serious injury or death. Therefore bold climbing may refer to poorly protected routes, soloing of routes or
routes that demand the forgoing of safety for reasons such as speed. Being known as a 'bold climber' can be a notable distinction in the climbing field.

**Bolts:** Bolts are typically a more dependable form of protection (exceptions exist). A hole is drilled into the rock and the bolt is glued into the hole. Bolting has been one of the most controversial issues in contemporary climbing.

![Anchor Bolts: The Rings Attached to the Bolts are to Facilitate Easier Abseils. (Photo: Matthew Bunn, May 2011).](image)

**Bomber:** Or bombproof. Generally refers to something that a climber is sure will not fail under load. While it can be used to refer to many things, two major uses is in reference to gear placements (a bomber cam could be fallen on confidently) and rock or ice quality (bomber rock will not break).

**Cam:** A cam is a form of removable protection that can be inserted into parallel-sided cracks in rock. They consist of lobes that can be retracted and, due to the angle of the lobe, they will expand if weighted and force themselves harder into the crack.

![A variety of camming devices. (Photo: Matthew Bunn)](image)
**Cirque:** A cirque is a group of mountains in a semi-circular formation.

**Coulouir:** A steep mountain gully. These often provide obvious lines of weakness for climbing routes because of their lower angle. They also often contain snow and ice. However, they tend to funnel debris falling from the mountain, making them subject to being quite dangerous.

**Crack:** Cracks are ‘cracks’ in the rock. These are ideal for climbing as they provide an obvious weakness – as they will typically accept protection and provide more options for body placement. ‘Crack climbing’ refers to the particular method of climbing a crack. This involves ‘jamming’ hands and feet inside the crack. Cracks sizes are referenced based upon the approximate hand technique required. These include ‘fingers’, ‘hands’, ‘fists’ through to more creative uses of the body in ‘off-width’, or cracks beyond the normal size of human appendages.

**Crag:** A crag is usually a series of small cliffs. The climbing is short, being no more than a pitch or two.

**Crevasse:** A crevasse is a split in a glacier. These can be very small or large fractures. These are perilous for climbers as they can be hidden by snow or can form labyrinths across a glacier. Many accidents occur in crevasse fields.

**Crimp:** A crimp is a tiny hand hold, only big enough to provide purchase for the finger tips. The fingers are typically bent at both joints, forming a ‘U’ shape. Crimping is a technique that is frequently found on moderate and hard climbs.

**Dirtbag:** In climbing, dirtbag is a term used to refer to climbers who do little other than eat, sleep and climb. They often live off seasonal work and/or savings and travel, ‘living’ in various climbing areas. This is typically done as cheaply as possible and often includes evading camping fees, hitchhiking or sharing rides and eating very cheap meals.

**Downclimbing:** Downclimbing refers to the process of ‘climbing’ downwards. This is usually more difficult than ascending for a variety of reasons. However, it is a technique that is regularly required by high-risk climbers.

**Face:** A face, or a rock face, is an approximately vertical section of unbroken rock. Faces typically end at either ‘corners’ or ‘aretes’.

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**Features:** A feature is a particular or notable aspect of a vertical space. These may refer to qualities of the rock that pertain to the tactile ascent (that is, a crack as a feature that will provide a particular means of ascent). Features may also be used to refer to notable reference points for the purposes of bearing and navigation. For instance, a large roof on a mountain may indicate where the correct line of ascent goes.

**First Ascent:** A first ascent is the first time climbers ascend on a particular route. At times, it is used to refer to the first ascent of a cliff, mountain or frozen waterfall etc. (i.e. the first ascent of Mount Everest). In this sense it has two usages: the mountain and the route taken, which will be attributed to those climbers even after more routes have been established. It is possible to also do first ascents of route on a previously climbed cliff or mountain. These are also often referred to as ‘new routes’. Mountains will gradually accumulate numerous routes following different features with a wide range of difficulties.

**Gear:** A word used to refer to removable protection.

**Holds:** A position on the rock suitable for holding onto. This is a general term that can be more specific depending upon the technique being used or the features being climbed.

**Lead climber:** The lead climber, in a ground-up ascent, is the first climber. The rope trails them, and they are responsible for placing removable protection that is clipped to the rope in order to provide a point of protection. A lead climber is more at risk than a second. Provided the protection holds, a fall will be twice as far as the last piece of protection (if a climber has moved two metres above the last piece of protection, they must fall four metres, plus rope stretch, until the equipment arrests the fall). Lead climbers are also responsible for building anchors for the second to come up. It should be noted that in most climbing partnerships, leading and seconding are shared during a multipitch route.

**Laybacking:** Laybacking is a particular climbing technique where the climber pushes their feet horizontally against a feature (for instance inside a crack) while pulling off the other side of the crack to create a counterforce. The climber can then slowly walk their feet up the crack, simultaneously moving hand over hand.

**Pitch:** A pitch typically refers to a rope-length of climbing. This is usually about 30-60m. Ropes are generally 60m long, however rope drag, the friction created by the rope dragging across the rock or running through protection, will often prevent climbing a full 60m. Roped
climbing is usually practiced by climbing from one anchor until another suitable anchor site is found during the 60m.

**Piton:** A piton is a form of removable protection. These consist of a thin blade of steel with an eyelet on the end to allow for it to be clipped to the rope. These are hammered into thin seams in the rock where no other protection would be useable. However, modern traditional climbing frowns on their use, as that they ‘scar’ the rock. Nowadays their use is usually confined to aid and alpine climbing.

**Rappelling:** Also known as abseiling. This is a technique of descent, whereby the rope is anchored and a friction device is attached to the harness and used to slowly descend the rope. Rappelling is a frequent component of high-risk climbing.

**Removable protection:** pieces of safety equipment that utilise weaknesses in the rock (such as crack and pockets). These are used to arrest a leader fall, which are removed while the second climber ascends after the leader has arrived at the next belay. Although often reliable, they are entirely dependent on weaknesses existing in the rock and being competently placed. For a longer discussion, see Cox and Fulsaas, 2003.

**Runout:** A runout is a section of climbing where protection is not available. Runouts usually mean that the climber faces the potential to take a long (and scary) fall and in some cases may face death, depending upon the conditions the runout occurs in. Runouts are usually found in routes that are considered to be ‘bold’. Runout can be used in two ways. There is a ‘runout,’ as in ‘I’m in the middle of a runout’ or to describe a section of climbing ‘that sections looks pretty runout!’

**Second climber:** The second climbs the pitch the lead climber has just led. They remove the protection placed. This is generally a safer task, as they only fall the distance that the rope stretches when the fall is arrested.

**Scree:** Slopes of loose and broken rock found underneath mountains and cliff faces. These can be reasonably well consolidated or can shift while attempting to traverse. As such, they can be relatively straight-forward to cross in some conditions and extremely dangerous in others.

**Simulclimbing:** This is a variation on the leading/seconding method of climbing. It is usually used on easier ground that both climbers are comfortable on in order to speed up the climb.
Like the leading/seconding method, the leader leads off from a belay. But instead of building an anchor, the climber continues until the rope runs out. The second then moves from their anchor point and begins climbing at the same time as the leader. The leader places protection in case of a fall and will climb until either easier ground is reached, a belay is required, or has ran out of equipment to protect the pitch.

**Smear (or Smearing):** Smearing is the climbing technique of placing feet sheer on a rock wall where no useful foot or hand holds exist. The climber pushes their feet or hands hard against the wall and uses friction to hold the foot in place.

**Stemming:** Stemming is usually done in a 'corner', where the climber puts a foot on either side of the corner in a wide stance.

**Whipper:** A whipper is another word for taking a fall while leading. However, it typically refers to a big fall, over ten metres in length.
Glossary 2: Styles

**Top-roping**
Top-roping consists of a rope that runs through an anchor at the top of the climb. The climber begins from, and is belayed from, the ground. It is generally the safest form of climbing because falls are short. In contemporary climbing, most people will have top-roped in a gym and/or on real rock before they begin climbing styles that require leading or seconding.

**Sport Climbing**
Heywood gives a good account of sport climbing. ‘In high standard sport climbing generally short (one pitch) routes are “worked”, perhaps over days or weeks, with the climber repeatedly resting or falling onto the frequent bolts or pitons which provide security; in most sport climbs the climber is very unlikely to suffer serious injury however many times he or she falls, jumps, or rests on the protection’ (Heywood, 1994: 185). It should be noted that high-risk climbers are often cautious towards, or opposed to, sport climbing. For instance, Paul Pritchard (1997), once a leading British adventure climber refers to sport climbing with clear frustration in his glossary of terms. Here sport climbing “represent[s] a threat to the uncertainty and adventure of the cliffs that lies at the centre of making climbing a uniquely rewarding pastime” (Pritchard, 1997: 190).

**Bouldering**
Bouldering, as the name suggests, takes place on large boulders. Bouldering typically consists of highly technical climbing ‘moves’ over a short distance (3-6m). The climber is unroped and uses ‘spotters’, climbers who help to direct their fall onto large foam pads for protection. A more dangerous form is known as highball bouldering, where the bouldering ‘problems’ may rise up to around 10 metres. Although this would be acceptably defined as a high-risk form of climbing, it nevertheless has a low commitment factor because the climber is only in a dangerous position for a matter of moments before reaching the top or coming back to the ground.

**Traditional/Adventure Climbing**
Traditional rock climbing is often referred to as adventure climbing in Britain. Heywood provides a good description: ‘In adventure climbing the climbing team (usually two or three) starts from
the ground, without much in the way of preliminary inspection, and ascends to the top relying on a brief guidebook description, direct observation and experience, and protecting itself with ropes and leader-placed, removable devices which do not damage the rock surface’ (Heywood, 1994: 184). These routes can be one pitch, however typically are ‘multipitch’ consisting of at least two pitches (a pitch is typically between 30 and 60 metres). Multipitch climbs are of a high level of commitment, exposing climbers to dangerous circumstances where retreat is more difficult.

Aid Climbing
Aid climbing is the process of gaining ground on a climb by placing protection that an etrier (a nylon ladder) is clipped to and weighted in order to place another piece of protection. This process is then repeated until the pitch/climb has been completed. Typically this method is used when a pitch is too difficult to free climb, but in order to complete a route the pitch must be ascended. However, some climbs are aid only and employ frightening techniques to scale seemingly impassable sections of vertical territory.

Ice/Mixed Climbing
Ice climbing typically takes place on ‘water ice’ – ice that forms from frozen waterfalls, cliff seepage etc. Hence, this only occurs in colder climates that experience constant temperatures below freezing in order for ice to form. Ice climbing utilises sharpened tools to penetrate the ice for purchase. It is protected by removable protection that is placed/screwed into the ice. Mixed climbing is the process of climbing ice and rock but primarily utilising ice axes and crampons for the entire climb. Often a rock section will connect two sections of ice as a part of the route. Here, either bolts or removable rock gear is used for protection. (For an overview, see Gadd 2009).

Alpine Climbing
Alpine climbing, or Alpinism, has a rich and varied history and a diverse range of tactics and strategies may be applied. Hence, the basic definition would be ‘to climb a mountain’. However, alpine climbing has moved from ‘siege tactics’ – bringing huge amounts of resources and people to a mountain in order to complete a route - to ‘alpine style’ – a lightweight, fast climbing style of typically two or three team members. Mark Twight (2004) eloquently defines alpine style as ‘attempting to climb mountains on the most equitable footing possible, neither applying
excessive technology to overcome deficits in skill or courage nor using permanently damaging tactics and adhering to this ethos from beginning to end. It means being equal to the challenge imposed by the natural state of the mountain’ (2004: 15). While this statement ignores the use of technologies or rationalised training programs to match the challenges of the alpine environment, it nevertheless emphasises the all or nothing aspect of the style. More specifically, alpine climbing is defined here as a conglomerate of technical climbing styles that are applied as conditions require. Hence, an alpine climb may utilise rock, aid and ice/mixed techniques, while also having to manage snow climbing, glacier travel and other severe objective hazards of the mountains.

Soloing
Soloing is the act of climbing a route alone. This usually entails climbing unroped and is practiced by experienced climbers, typically well below the difficulties that they are capable of. ‘Some might call soloing the ultimate mastery of a route. Anyone who has experienced that life-affirming rush understands’ (Wright, 2009: 91). However, it is also possible to climb alone while using a rope. This is an advanced practice, requiring substantial knowledge of technical systems. It is also highly laborious, since the climber must effectively climb a route twice during an ascent (they must lead, abseil back to their anchor and then second the route in order to retrieve their equipment). Many climbers see it as a reckless and an unnecessary risk. This position also demonstrates the ‘degrees’ of rationalisation that are incorporated within various climbing styles.
Glossary 3: Places

**Alaska Range:** Predominantly known for large granite mountains at high altitude. It is most famous for consisting of the highest peak in North America, Denali (or Mt. McKinley). Most climbing is alpine rock and ice and demands long day to multiday ascents.

**Arapiles:** A famous Australian climbing site located in Victoria. Mount Arapiles is known for its high quality rock and traditional climbing practice.

**Baffin Island:** an extremely remote expeditionary big walling area located in the Arctic circle to the east of Greenland. Trips here require extensive planning and highly experienced climbing teams.

**Blue Mountains:** Located near Sydney, Australia. The climbing here ranges across sport and traditional rock climbing (though is progressively becoming known for the former). The rock is a sandstone of varying quality. Climbing routes range between 10 and 350 metres.

**The Bugaboos:** A reasonably accessible alpine rock climbing area, consisting of a number of granite peaks located in Western British Columbia, Canada. The area has an established alpine hut and campground between the major peaks. While glacier travel is necessary for most routes, the glaciers are usually stable and easy to navigate.

**Greenland:** a major area for remote expeditionary climbing, with large numbers of mountains remaining unclimbed. Most climbing is on rock, though snow and ice climbing is possible. Climbing experience required can vary due to the wide range of potential ascent methods.

**Himalaya:** The Himalaya consists of the highest altitude mountains in the world. Many of these are also some of the largest mountains (in terms of volume). It is most well-known for Mt. Everest, however it hosts extensive possibilities for rock, ice and snow alpinism.

**Ouray:** located in South-Western Colorado, US. It is a hub for climbers, particularly during the ice climbing season. It is home to the world’s first and most well-known ice climbing ‘parks’ – a place where ice is built artificially.

**Romsdalen:** A valley in Norway that contains Europe’s highest rock wall, the Troll Wall. It houses substantial amounts of long rock climbs along with some of the longest ice climbs in the world.
Squamish: an extremely accessible climbing area located in Eastern British Columbia, Canada. It is known for granite crack and friction climbing.

Warrumbungles: one of Australia’s most remote climbing locations located in central NSW. It boasts some of the longest climbing routes in Australia, with most being 200-300 metres in length. It is a series of ancient volcanic plugs. It is a traditional rock climbing area.

Wind River Range: The Wind River Range is located along the eastern edge of Wyoming, USA. It’s most well-known group of mountains are the Cirque of the Towers. While the climbing is high quality on granite, the area maintains a remote ethic. There are no established camping grounds and climbers are urged to bring human waste out with them. The area is inhabited by Grizzly Bears, requiring vigilance on the part of the climbers.

Yosemite: Located in California, USA. Yosemite has been an extremely important climbing area in terms of the development of rock climbing style and technique, particularly big wall climbing.
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