Dance with a fish? Sensory human-nonhuman encounters in the waterscape of match fishing

Vesa Markuksela and Anu Valtonen

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

ABSTRACT
This study sets out to explore human–nonhuman encounters in the leisure activity of match fishing. Informed by practice theory, studies on the body and the senses, and the human–animal literature, it focuses on analysing the practice-specific, embodied and sensory doings and sayings of both humans and nonhumans during match fishing. The findings from three-year sensory ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Finnish Lapland suggest that human–nonhuman encounters can be characterised as partner dancing. That is, this phenomenon is tantamount to a dance between a fish and an angler taking place in a dancehall of water, in which the weather acts as an orchestra framing the rhythm and tempo of the dance. Considering both fish and anglers, the study emphasises the agential and embodied quality of human–nonhuman encounters. It challenges the dominant position of the human, suggesting a move from anthropomorphism to zoomorphism – animalising the angler in a dance with a fish. The study also provides novel insights into the dynamic nature of a waterscape, highlighting its dual nature consisting of the underwater world and the above-water world. In summary, this study offers a detailed account of the dynamic interactions between humans, nonhumans and the natural environment.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 September 2018
Accepted 20 February 2019

KEYWORDS
Human–nonhuman encounter; body; practice; senses; waterscape; sensory ethnography; fishing

Introduction
Recently, there has been increasing interest in including the nonhuman world within the study of leisure experiences and landscapes (Hughes, 2017). Instead of focusing merely on humans, scholars have begun to explore leisure as a complex, multispecies phenomenon. For instance, researchers have explored human–animal encounters with horses (Dashper, 2017) or dogs (Carr, 2010) and how space shapes these encounters (Cloke & Perkins, 2005). These studies – echoing the wider ‘animal’ and ‘non-human turn’ in the social sciences (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 2008) – have been valuable in challenging the prevalent anthropocentric thinking in leisure studies and paving the way toward more balanced between humans, non-humans and environments.

To add to this literature, this study seeks to examine human and non-human encounters in the hobby of match fishing. Match fishing refers to the competitive pursuit of angling to catch the heaviest and/or largest fish within a defined time period, according to a specified set of rules (Cowx, 2002). This leisure provides us a fruitful context for further theorising about the nature of encounters between humans, non-humans and the natural environment. It allows us to highlight the sensory and bodily nature of the encounter for both the fish and the human, and to consider the particularities of a waterscape as a context in which and with which these encounters take place.
To study these encounters, we combine practice theoretical stances (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002) with anthropology-zoo-genetic ones (Despret, 2004), also drawing on the literature regarding bodies, senses and movements (e.g. Howes, 2005; Hui, 2012). This study is based on three-year fieldwork conducted in Finnish Lapland, employing a combination of sensory ethnography (Valtonen, Markuksela, & Moisander, 2010) and multispecies ethnography (Dashper, 2017; Maurstad, Davis, & Cowles, 2013).

Consequently, this study illuminates the complex choreography of match fishing that we characterise as partner dancing. Match fishing is a dance between a fish and an angler that takes place in a dancehall of waterbodies. The weather acts as a dance band, orchestrating the rhythm and the tempo of the dance. Our study provides a novel understanding of the dynamic and changing nature of human–nonhuman encounters, highlighting the sensoriality of these encounters, including the non-human sensuousness of the fish.

This paper begins by reviewing the previous literature on human–animal encounters, after which it discusses the practice-theoretical perspective of the study. The methodological section describes the research context and the fieldwork. The analysis, informed by a narrative research approach, illustrates how the encounters taking place in a fishing practice can be described as dancing with a fish. To conclude, we present the contributions of this study to the existing leisure literature.

**Previous literature**

Social scientists have explored different encounters between humans and water systems as well as various types of water animals and organisms. While Probyn (2016), for instance, has studied aspects of ‘human–fish entanglements’ in the sea, we explore these entanglements in the context of waterbodies, freshwater fish and sport fishing.

Freshwater angling has gained relatively little attention in leisure research (see, however, Bear & Eden, 2011). Therefore, we lean on studies of hunting because hunting and fishing both are activities that entail a close sensual, embodied relationship between nature and humans (Franklin, 2001; Lovelock, 2008; Mordue, 2009). In these activities, it is not only the co-agency of humans and animals that matters but also the delicate tension that these agencies produce (Franklin, 2001). The heart of hunting is, indeed, a contest based on two sets of senses, that of the human and that of the animal (Marvin, 2005). To date, the focus has been on human senses. Studies demonstrate how hunters seek to sharpen their understanding of animals’ senses, as well as their own ability to counter and overcome these animals’ senses (ibid.).

In fishing, there is no honing of human senses, because humans do not possess any sense organs that fish do not possess. Quite to the contrary, the fish has sensory organs that humans do not have because the senses of the former are adapted to the water; humans have difficulty seeing and hearing underwater. However, fishermen attempt to alter their own embodiment and senses to match those of the fish. As Mueller’s book Being Salmon, Being Human (2017) demonstrates, our sense of who we are as humans is mirrored in our lived relationships with other creatures. Mueller (ibid.) sees himself as an embodied mind pondering the lives of other species with very different embodied minds. According to Mueller, his body becomes an arena of confrontation with otherness in a dialogue between the researcher and the salmon. In the same way, Haraway (2008) considers the relationality between human and non-human species, pondering how non-human worlds can change us as we change them.

The vital role of the body and the senses has also been acknowledged in studies of leisure experiences and landscapes (Hughes, 2017). Allen-Collinson and Leledaki (2015), for instance, point out that just ‘being-in-the-out-door-world’ is a sensuous and intensely embodied act. Humberstone’s (2011) study of windsurfing provides another case in point detailing how the body interacts with its natural surroundings via the senses. A recent study of Hughes (2017), for its part, investigates the relationship between the senses and the natural environment by
showing how paddling, as a sensuous leisure activity, is deeply haptic and acoustic. Then again, Brown (2017) touches on the leisure environment by investigating how the identity of an offshore sailor is contingent upon being attuned to one’s environment via the senses. Studies focusing on sporting activities with animals have, in turn, paid attention to the human-built (obstacle course) or partly natural land-based landscape (eventing course) in which leisure activities such as agility or riding take place (Davies, Maurstad, & Cowles, 2013; Wlodarczyk, 2017). Our activity, match fishing, occurs in a non-built environment, waterscapes, and we address this encounter from a practice-theoretical perspective, as explained in the next section.

**Theoretical perspective**

Our theoretical perspective draws on practice theories, literature on movement and mobility, and literature that discusses the body and the senses. The form of practice theory on which we lean takes a cultural stance towards understanding social action and social order (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002). With this anti-individualistic approach, the analytic attention is directed to practices that organise and shape individual action. Practices, per se, are conceived as skilful performances from a meaningful repertoire of bodily doings and sayings as well as their accompanying sensations (Schatzki, 2002), including elements of interconnected forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002).

Put differently, practices are assemblages of these elements, and they are ‘sets of hierarchically organised doings and sayings, tasks and projects’ (Schatzki, 2002, p. 59–63). Each time people synthesise and organise these elements together, they take part in the act of ‘practice-as-performance’ (Hui, 2012), in which they reproduce the routinised activities of a practice. We treat match fishing as a practice of this kind, as a type of performed, integrative practice (Schatzki, 2002).

Practice-theoretical accounts highlight the embodied nature of practicing, conceiving the body as a carrier of practice (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002). Commonly, bodily activities are discussed in terms of competences, knowledge and skills. For instance, a bodily activity, such as landing a fish, is something fishermen do as part of their practice with their skilful bodies. Practices – and their attendant rules, values and skills – become thus embodied once they are learnt. In this sense, bodies and practices constitute each other in the embodiment of practices. The body learns to act in a practice-specific way, and in doing so, maintains and reproduces the practice.

The body necessarily is a sensing actor. When enacting bodily activities, the practitioner perceives the world and judges it through the senses. Importantly, the embodied practitioner develops sensory skills that help him or her accomplish the activities at hand (Vannini, 2011). The senses are not only a means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also are invested with cultural values and meaning (e.g. Classen, 1997; Howes, 2005).

Embodied practitioners perform acts of movement; even more seemingly static acts, or even motionless ones, entail movement of some sort (Hui, 2012). Mobile activities are particularly central to our encounters with nature, as the body and its particular ‘equipment’ must anticipate and react to the continually changing environment (Humberstone, 2011). Through pondering the micro-movements of the body, we can analyse the dance, capturing its sequences, rhythms and routines. The movements of the body and its limbs allow the sensory inspection and observation of our surroundings.

Our treatise acknowledges that non-humans also are carriers of practice. In troll fishing, the non-human world actively contributes to the perpetuation of practices. Fish in a body of water swim their routes below the surface and propel their sensing bodies through the water. Fish also
have their own bodily routines and rhythmicity (e.g. eating, sleeping, mating) that form underwater patterns, constituting the secrets of the world of the fish. Likewise, the weather and water have the capacity to enable, constrain, direct and redirect human practices and thereby shape forms of coexistence and action (Rantala, Valtonen, & Markuksela, 2011). In this sense, non-humans – fish, weather and water – are treated as active elements within practices that can be routine or, conversely, can involve random and unusual, emergent happenings.

The Pickerian metaphor of a ‘dance of agency’ is apt for our analysis: ‘we act in the world, the world acts on us, to and from, in a dynamic process’ (Pickering, 2017, p. 4). All the agents (anglers, fish and waterbody) are unpredictably and emergently transformed, and the agency performed during the dance is distributed among those who take part in fishing practices (Mattila, Mesiranta, Närvänen, Koskinen, & Sutinen, 2018). There is, however, an imbalance of power between practitioners. In our case, the fish, on some occasions, have little possibility of refusing to take part in that practice.

**Research methodology**

To empirically investigate the anglers’ embodied and sensory encounters with the fish and the water, this study leans on sensory ethnography (e.g. Classen, 1997; Howes, 2005; Valtonen et al., 2010). This enables us to explore the senses in action in the immediate settings within which the activity takes place. In line with the practice–theoretical lens, the analytic focus is directed toward the ways in which the senses play a part in the performance of practices and in subsequent encounters with the social and natural world.

The lead author of this work conducted three-year multi-site ethnographic fieldwork in Finnish Lapland by participating in 22 match fishing competitions, which lasted from eight to 24 hours and took place in a variety of freshwaters. Each year, the trips lasted from June to November. Therefore, a wide spectrum of Lappish weather – from heat to sleet – was experienced. The scrutinised mode of match fishing is trolling, a method of fishing in which some form of bait is drawn on a line through the water from watercrafts by two to four anglers. Competitive trolling provides an arena for the investigation of human and nonhuman encounters and grazing. The angler directly and indirectly (through technology) encounters many species of fish and other non-human actors, such as birds and flora (e.g. the unwanted touch of bottom plants or snags), not to mention mosquitos. The author belonged to a local trolling club whose members – all men – participated in fishing competitions. The very idea of a fishing competition entails several stereotypical masculine values such as domination and conquest over nature (Adkins, 2010; Birke, 2012). Indeed, every fishing competition exudes the human desire for challenge and racing. It is performed on a ‘showdown’ stage, where anglers gather in a competitive manner to perform ‘dance choreographies’ that entail skilful intra-actions of all the entangled elements of a practice. The competition also represents a moment when one is not supposed to fail; just ‘asking to dance’ is not good enough – anglers ‘gotta dance’.

During the competitions, the lead author was one angler among others, either in his own boat or as a crewmember in other anglers’ watercrafts. The researcher thus immersed his body in fishing activities and, for that matter, moments of paused mobility (Sheller, 2014). This allowed him to make participant observations ‘from the inside’. He also carefully ‘listened’ to his own body, reflecting this bodily knowledge within the fishing practice and comparing it with the ways that a fish senses. The latter turned out to be the most challenging part of the fieldwork: the researcher had to be simultaneously aware of his own human sensory embodiment and put effort into detaching himself from human sensations to grasp the sensing body of the fish.

The data were generated via participant and non-participant observations (written head notes, field notes and diaries), informal discussions on the water and onshore with other anglers, visual materials (e.g. photos, video clips) and autobiographical stories. Most
commonly, the data were gathered via observations and technical apparatuses. For instance, closely following the screen of a fish-detecting sonar system or depth camera allowed the ethnographer to follow the movements of the fish. While doing so, he was constantly asking himself questions. What did the fish just do? Why did the fish do it like that? How did the fish do it? What senses were involved in these actions? Gradually, the researcher was able to create a sensorial connection and understanding between the studied fish and the human, as well as the associated micro-mobilities of the body, bodily rhythms, and motions (Sheller, 2014). Thus, interconnection can occur without actual ‘contact zones’ via technologised observation. This ‘distant’ way of familiarising differs from Haraway’s (2008, p. 3) view of ‘learn to be worldly from grappling with’, in which familiarisation happens in close contact with humans and non-humans. Apparently, distant ways may reduce the ‘unknown’ characteristics of fish, and the non-human other can become close and familiar (Bear & Eden, 2011).

The analysis took the form of a practice-theory-informed, data-driven narrative analysis (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). During and after the fieldwork, the author wrote autobiographical narratives that combined his experiences and the observations of human and non-human others, discussions and reflections. They form the ‘LEGO bricks’ of a grand narrative. The results of the analysis are also represented in the form of a narrative – short vignettes, to be more precise. These vignettes are chosen to illuminate the various aspects of dancing with a fish, as the following section shows. They are written ‘from the inside’ of the cultural practice of fishing that is competitive and male-centred by its very nature.

Human–nonhuman encounters in the waterscape of match fishing

The wind has calmed down, and the heavy rain has stopped. The air is moist, and the sky is full of shades of grey. A gentle wave ripples the surface of the lake. The wind has blurred the watercolour. Bouncing gently, our watercraft moves at a slow trolling speed above the water. I stand up from the bench and glance around. There are no isles or shoals in sight. I can’t spot any fellow anglers, either, only flat water as far as the eye can see. One could say that we are in the middle of nowhere, but this is not the case. We are exactly where we want to be. We are in our fishing grounds – our secret water fishing spot.

I glance down at the sonar’s large colour screen, which displays a diverse, lively underwater landscape. The sonar outlines a basin wall, which sinks steeply into an abyss. The sonar adduces the changing features of the bottom of the lake. The different colours on the screen also indicate the depth of the water and the various water temperature layers, or thermoclines. It is this basin wall and these changes in depth and water temperature that are tempting to life, particularly fish. The sonar outlines many fish underneath us. There are large, moving schools of small fish, and nearby, there are swarms of larger fish, presumably pikes, the catch we seek.

The fish are mobile, but they stay in a relatively small area. Nonetheless, it takes some time to locate promising stock. Since this discovery, we have been crisscrossing this distinct area, waltzing various lures near the fish, wooing and politely ‘asking’ the fish to take a bite.

According to the sonar, the water temperature is +14°C. The pike love this kind water. It’s the pikes’ hunting season, so why don’t they strike? I’m stupefied. Is it the changed weather? Helplessly, my mind goes back to yesterday. At this time and in the same spot, I was holding a rod, and on the end of the line was a large pike. After the hooking, we had a long fight. The pike had run and dived. I had pumped, released and provided pressure, time after time. I was almost closing the deal, ending the dance, when the pike suddenly jumped and managed to release itself from the hook. Its large tail waved goodbye as it dove into the depths.

Today, I have the same lure in the water. Come on, what’s the matter? You should know this fish by now! Feel it! Sense like a pike!

This vignette describes one scene in a day of competitive fishing, illustrating how the fishing practice is comprised of encounters between the fish and the anglers within the waterscape. It also illustrates
the ways in which the movements of the human body and those of the fish, as well as both their senses, are central elements in the accomplishment of an angling practice. It highlights that the key dynamics of the mobility and movements of anglers are based on the senses. The angler seeks to understand the movements and senses of the fish by sensing the weather and the changing water-body, either directly through his or her body or via technological devices such as sonar.

As this vignette indicates, the different encounters that make up fishing practice can be characterised as a kind of dance between a fish and an angler. This dance has elements of open position partner dancing, ballet and even line dancing. Our analysis brings forth three components of dance in competitive match fishing: (1) fish and angler as dancing partners, (2) the waterbody as a dancehall and (3) the weather as orchestral accompaniment.

**Dancing partners**

When fishing, the angler does not necessarily need to know his or her dance partner beforehand. However, to ‘hook’ with a partner in this dance, he or she must first be properly introduced to the prospective dancing partner. This introduction stipulates that he or she can locate the fish. In this quest, watercrafts are gliding here and there, performing crisscrossing choreography above the water, and looking constantly below the surface into the underwater world. Anglers seek to dive into the abyss metaphorically because the aquatic is a part of the practical understanding of fishing practice. The aquatic world is also the ‘neighbourhood’ of the fish (Figure 1).

To find a dance partner, the competent angler attempts to familiarise himself or herself with the fish. The fish has a lifecycle of its own, as well as seasons of activity and diurnal rhythms. They eat and sleep. The times and places of these activities vary between species and between individual fish. A competent angler may specialise in one specific species (e.g. pike), but in match fishing, it makes sense to become acquainted with all ‘catch’ species in the competition at hand and, more broadly, with the ecosystem of the fish. Unlike the vignette above, anglers seldom have the privilege of spending time exclusively on their own in a ‘spot’. Usually, there are fellow anglers offering lures to fish; indeed, one crew can have up to a dozen lures in the water. In a way, trolling crews make up their own swarms, next to existing fish schools.

When the trolling watercrafts with their fascinating lures arrive in the ‘neighbourhood’ of the fish, a disturbance is caused. In the beginning, before the dance and partnering, there may be some reluctance in the water. The fish may move away from the angler as he or she attempts to move toward the fish. When approaching the fish, the angler endeavours to sense like a fish and to anticipate its location, movements and intent. The fish, like many other animals, can feel curiosity

![Figure 1. Crisscrossing above Lake Kilpisjärvi.](image-url)
Using different lures with various sensorial stimuli, anglers strive to rouse the curiosity of the fish. It is curiosity and sensorial cues that drive both humans and fish down new paths, in this case to the incipient partner dance.

The senses of a fish diverge from those of a human. The fish does not have external ears, but anglers know that the fish hears with the inner ear (Franklin, 2001). Making the right kind of noise can be the key to getting a fish to strike. Thus, the angler often makes a lure audible by attaching various sound effects, and he or she also knows that the noise from banging on the bottom of the boat will conduct extremely well through the water.

Anglers commonly try to learn about the senses of the fish, for instance, through magazines and meetup e-groups. For example, the fish uses the sense of smell to search for nutrition, detect enemies, and identify its own species, and it uses taste to identify the quality of nutrition (Franosch, Hagedorn, Goulet, Engelmann, & Van Hemmen, 2009). While the fishing industry has developed pheromonal gels that can be attached to a lure to attract fish, other more traditional means of enhancing lures are also used, such as dipping them in a fish broth or spitting human saliva onto the lure.

Finland’s freshwaters are not particularly clear. Therefore, the area that fish can see is limited—the weather and the light affect the ability to see (Bleckmann & Zelick, 2009). Colours disappear as one goes deeper into the water column. Thus, the fish can spot the colours of the lure only fairly nearby in deeper waters. Anglers also tend to use visible colours in their lures, especially in muddy waters, on cloudy days or in deep waters. They help the fish to see better.

The fish also has a unique sense, known as the lateral line. With the aid of this sense, the fish can move in dark waters and at times when it is difficult to see (e.g. night or winter). It is a type of sonar that fish use to orient themselves, notice obstacles and hunt (Bleckmann & Zelick, 2009).

A competent angler wants to have at least one distinctive lure that will stand out from the dozens of others being offered. Anglers seek to appeal to all the senses of the fish. Hence, they create sensual stimulus bundles by bringing their lures to the right depth, close enough to the fish. In this way, the fish can see the colours; hear and feel the vibrations of the lure, which imitates the movements of a wounded quarry; and smell alluring scents.

The offered lure can be seen as a petition, as a way of asking a fish to dance. When the fish bites the lure, dancing partners are hooked, and the dance can finally begin. It is a dance of belonging that may turn out to be the last dance of all. This is partner dancing in an open position, in which the partners are connected without bodily contact. The dancing partner, the fish, is ‘at arm’s reach’. The angler has a ‘grip’ on the partner through the rod and line. This phase of the dance emphasises the sense of touch and the dance’s kinaesthetic dimensions. In fact, the partners usually do not see one another, due to the colour of the water, the distance between them or the depth. The existence of the dance is expressed through bodily movements, and these are sensed by both parties through the fishing line. On the angler’s side, the sense of hearing is ‘knotted’ to the kinaesthetic movement. The angler can hear the loud sound of the reel’s fishing drag, Simultaneously, he or she can feel how hard the fish pulls on the line. This gives the angler a hint of the size of the fish. The other partner, the fish, receives sensory perceptions via the line pressure using the sense of touch and the lateral line.

This partner dance is not strictly choreographed. At least, the other dance partner has not ‘read the directions'; even if the angler has written such. There are no fixed leader and follower roles. Usually in dancing, the leader suggests by one’s lead the figures that will be executed. The leader has the privilege of maintaining the rhythm and deciding what figures one will lead the other dancer into. The angler, on the one hand, strives to lead by maintaining a tight line, reeling and pulling with the rod in a smooth manner. On the other hand, when a fish is making a run and is in charge, the angler extends his or her line and allows the fish to lead and perform its own dance manoeuvres.

In this form of dance, partners lead and follow one another, switching back and forth. They compete for the leading role. For instance, the fish might wish to be the principal dancer and to perform adagio, leaping solos to stand out in the pas de deux, the dance duet. The angler is often in the role of the follower, who does not have any idea what the leader, the fish, will do next.
There is always the possibility of failing in moments of resistance and evasion during this dance. The angler’s knowledge of the special conduct of a given fish species reduces the risk of stamping on his or her dance partner’s toes.

‘Fighting’ and ‘landing the fish’ are the closing phases of this partner dance. Then, anglers must adjust their movements, considering those of their fellow fishermen who are sharing the watercraft’s relatively small inner spaces. In dance terms, this could be ‘a rolling grapevine’ move or a form of line dancing. Along with performing such dance moves, anglers must also manoeuvre the watercraft to enable practice performance.

This partner dance can end in many ways. The fish can get away. Its runs and leaps, as dance manoeuvres, can be successful due to line breaks or detachment from the hook. Then, the fish is the ‘winner of the dance competition’. Alternatively, the last dance can occur above the water, at the bottom of the vessel. This is a dance of death, and the inanimate fish will never dance again. The following excerpt from a field diary illustrates one such scene.

I look at the bottom of my watercraft. Yes, the big, dead corpse of a pike lays there. It’s easy to tell: it’s my record, the biggest fish I’ve ever caught! I hear my dad’s rejoicing voice, ‘Yes, yes, YES!’ Still, at this peak moment, I am mostly puzzled. My mind somehow can’t join my father’s exultations. I ask myself, ‘Where is the joy and elation? Why don’t I feel satisfied? Why do I feel so numb? I take one more look at the big fish, and remorse starts to grip me.

After the tumult of the fish dance, it is not unusual for the angler to feel remorse for the fish and its destiny. Perhaps the angler is hoping that there could be an alternative end, a happy one, a win–win situation in which both dance partners could depart as living and more experienced ‘dancers’.

In a sense, the deceased fish can still be in touch with the living world through its dead body. For instance, in trophy shots, the angler holds the fish’s corpse, which is memorialised in pictures. There is yet another bodily resurrection, or magical encore, namely, the weighing of the catch. The deceased fish can lead the angler to glory on the podium. This can also be seen as reinforcing both the supremacy of the human and the oppression of the animal (Birke, 2012). Finally, on certain occasions anglers make food from their catch and gather for shared meals – an act that honours both the fish and the anglers. Furthermore, eating the catch represents another form of bodily entanglement between the angler and the fish (Probyn, 2016).

**Dancehall**

The above dance encounter takes place in a certain waterbody, a dancehall. In this study, the dancehall is a river or lake whose surface area and depth topography change repeatedly. These waters may have reefs or islets, and their landscape is volatile. No inner or outer homogeneity is to be found. The dancehall’s general features and topographical structure guide life under the water and the praxis of the fish, also determining the possibility of the fish surviving in the water. The specific features, such as the basin wall, create an essential framework for a functional micro-ecosystem and the well-being of the fish.

As illustrated in the vignette, the basin wall is an anomaly in the otherwise monotonic structure of the bed of the water, gathering a magnitude of organisms and providing the basis of a rich food chain. For instance, larger predatory fish seek schools of small fish that, in turn, find their nutrition in the basin area. Situational changes in the surroundings of the waterbody can also threaten the lives of the organisms in it. For example, long-lasting hot weather and a high-pressure area can warm the water too greatly. If thermoclines disappear and there is only warm water left, the organisms left in it are threatened, as their oxygen may run out.

Waterbodies’ common and situational circumstances define whether the dance will flow. Is the dancehall’s floor slippery or frictional? Is there space, or is it crowded? Before the dance ‘match up’, trolling watercraft wander over every part of the dancehall, in the corners and in the midst of
the floor, looking for a dance partner. In this search, anglers’ own bodies are moving in the vessel, and the same time, their bodies are moved by the watercraft.

The watercraft is moving simultaneously in the landscapes over and under the water. The non-human dancehall’s unique feature is this vertical depth dimension. There is an aquatic, underwater landscape that is impacted by the conditions above it. For instance, the air pressure and temperature, wind and weather (e.g. sunny or rainy) determine the state of the water. Are there surface waves or high-wind waves? What kinds of thermoclines are present?

The dancehall can be crowded for purely topographical reasons. Moreover, the number of trolling watercrafts can cause jams. Dance cavaliers may come too close to one another. The situational elements of the waterbody, such as whether there is calm or surf, may operate as friction in the dancehall. Therefore, trolling crafts’ motions above the water may not be smooth. The vessel may be bouncing and tossing around from one wave to another. Metaphorically, the watercraft represents dancing shoes. There may or may not be friction between the shoes and the dance floor during the glide above the water. The dancing shoes can also be slippery and cause the dancer to fail. Next, consider an excerpt describing the act of landing a fish:

The fish had made several runs, leaped and dived. Now, I can feel less drag, less tension in the line. The fish stops running, and I manage to reel in the slack line. The fish finally surfaces and flashes its flank. Softly, I mutter, ‘Reckon it’s about time’. My dad stands up from the cockpit on the left; he knows what I mean. Dad is the net-man. It’s his job to land the fish. Perhaps due to the long wait, my dad rushes past to retrieve the net from the right side of the boat. He nudges me as he goes by. Dad is a tall man, a big fish in a small pond. I almost drop the rod and fall overboard. Without saying a word, my dad returns with the net. I feel yet another impact. This time, it’s the landing net’s hoop and the rubber mesh that grazes my face. Meanwhile, the waves toss the boat unexpectedly. There is no one to hold the wheel, no one to warn us about the coming waves. I lose my balance and start to fall…

This excerpt shows how both anglers’ movements in the craft and the water’s sudden practices (the coming waves), which move the watercraft and the bodies within, can cause friction and stumbling, that is, stepping on toes.

An angler encounters the water and its changing nature via the formal Western senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch and its kinaesthetic constituents. In these sensory encounters, the embodied doings and collectively shared meanings of the space are produced and attached to it. In this way, a neutral ‘space’ is shaped into a specific dynamic ‘place’, a multifaceted sensory waterscape and, perhaps, into a ‘holy ground’ of matchmaking.

Dance orchestra

Dances are distinct from each other in the same way that rhythms of different types of music are. The rumba is danced differently from the samba or swing. In the ‘dancelike’ practice of fishing, the weather acts as a dance orchestra, providing music for the dancers. The rhythm of the music, in turn, orchestrates the circumstances of the dancehall, that is, the waterbody. It moulds the context in which both fish and anglers saunter. The rhythm that the weather provides organises the match fishing praxis. Is it possible to fish? Where should the watercraft be piloted? The weather above the waterline also shapes the weather below the waterline. The ‘weather below’ (e.g. the water pressure and temperature) affects the behaviours of predatory fish and fish schools, including their whereabouts and movements. For example, in times of high water pressure, fish gravitate toward the colder layers of water on the bottom. There, they are inactive, and feeding activity is low. In the angler’s practical understanding, such fish are said to have ‘lockjaw’.

The weather provides the basic beat for the praxis of fishing, and it also affects the dancing style of the potential partner dance. The weather and its various material forms, especially the wind, stipulate the rhythm of the dance. Is it a hot-tempered and hectic rumba of high tides or a cheek-to-cheek dance at a slow tempo in calm waters?
Rhythm is ‘the perception of an order’ (Fraisse, 1982, p. 151). This definition implies that we can predict or anticipate what will come next in a sequence. In arrhythmia, in contrast, such an order is not assessed directly (ibid.). In match fishing, this arrhythmia emerges when anglers are water bound and something unexpected happens in terms of the weather. Competent anglers will attempt to avoid this and seek to sense the upcoming weather and water circumstances. That is, they want to be weather-wise (see Rantala et al., 2011).

For anglers, the preparation for the dance and journey to the dancehall begin with a consideration of the prospective weather. Anglers do not rely solely on meteorological radar forecasts and other weather prediction techniques. They also utilise prediction by observation, with which they try to interpret the ‘sensorial cues’ of nature and attach them to experiences and knowledge, both their own and those of others. This implies, for instance, interpreting the colours of the water, waves and clouds, as well as air odours. Observations of certain plants, such as trees (the movement of sprigs and the swaying of the trees) or certain animals’ appearance and behaviours (e.g. swallows’ flight altitude, with a low altitude indicating rain) can also be a basis for predicting the weather.

The prevailing weather conditions constitute a central feature of the waterscape and play a crucial role in shaping the sensory elements of the scape in question. Next, consider an excerpt from a narrative describing fishing in challenging changing summer weather conditions:

Our watercraft is moving quickly to the competition centre. We are fleeing from the upcoming storm. Longish waves begin to form due to the wind. Our aluminium craft bounces from one wave to another. I have to hang onto the railing not to fall overboard. Water is pounding against the watercraft, splashing inside, making us wet and even colder. The wind is getting more intense. I feel it blowing more forcefully against my face, and at the same time, the wind whistles in my ears. The waves instantly become even longer. With another bounce, my head is flipped backwards. Suddenly, I am gazing at the sky, where more and more dark clouds are gathering. It smells like rain. The wind begins to wail, and instantly, the rain streams down.

This excerpt illustrates that a sudden weather change may surprise even relatively skilled anglers who have tried to anticipate the forthcoming weather. Coping with sudden arrhythmia typically requires altered fishing practices, for example, seeking the shoreline or some other shelter from the waves. Sudden arrhythmia also affects assorted senses. Usually, proprioceptive (sense of balance) sensations are emphasised. Besides sudden arrhythmias, there are also seasonal changes in the weather. In our context, summer in Finnish Lapland, the weather

---

Figure 2. Rumbling rumba of high waves.
can range from heat to sleet. The weather’s rhythm also determines the angler’s dress code in the dancehall. On rainy days, a floating suit is needed. In the sun, the dress code is more casual, and a swimsuit is allowed.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This study has provided an empirically grounded analysis of the ways in which humans and nonhumans, anglers and fish, interact bodily and sensorially in the waterscape in the midst of a match fishing practice. It was suggested that this multifaceted encounter is best described as a form of partner dance, as a dance with a fish. This metaphor enables us to highlight the embodied, dynamic and changing nature of the encounter and focus on the agential qualities of non-human entities. Fish and waterbodies are not passive targets or platforms for actions but active constituents of the action. Our study thereby contributes to the existing leisure studies literature, which has begun to include the nonhuman world, in the following ways.

*First*, our study offers novel insights into the ways in which the bodies and senses of both the animal and the human play a role in the encounter. The first part of the analysis detailed how the anglers search for a dance partner in the dancehall. In this search, the angler is attempting to adopt, bodily and mentally, the same wavelength as the fish. This can be understood as an Ortega-y-Gassian-process, which refers to ‘being open to the animal’. For instance, anglers attempt to adopt many of the practices of fish, such as eating, and set their human practices aside. Our analysis further elaborated on the actual dance and the ways in which partners are in touch through the material elements of line and rod. While perhaps ephemeral, the encounter carries meanings of deep connectedness. The non-human and the human exchange intense and extremely sensual moments. The angler can sense the fish, as an individual, and connect this sensation to the fish’s species-specific attributes. In sensing like a fish, the angler is, in a way, becoming an animal, not in terms of understanding the fish’s inner experiences (Mueller, 2017), but in terms of the fish’s practical understanding. This may not be merely a one-sided change, because the fish may also be pulled into becoming a man (Wlodarczyk, 2017). Then, the fish has the prospect of becoming aware of the angler’s intentions and practices, of learning how a man acts. Thus, the fish is acting not on but with human anglers (Haraway, 2008).

In the dance, the fish is considered a discerning artist of the waterworld. For example, it can choose whether to strike the lures offered. Thus, the fish has pivotal agency. This somewhat deviates from the existing literature on human–animal relationships and its latent humanocentrism. For instance, Dashper (2017) argues that, while horses in human–horse relationships can demonstrate some agency by choosing to interact with or ignore humans, their choices are ‘bound by the human-centric context in which these interactions take place’ (ibid., 4). In our case, there are various levels of freedom. Our findings also differ from the previous literature on hunting (e.g. Marvin, 2005), which concerns the honing of a (hu)man’s abilities to defeat an animal.

*Second*, our analysis of the waterscape contributes to the existing knowledge of leisure landscapes. In her study of surfing, Humberstone (2011) emphasises that the landscape structure in water-based activities is important, because the ‘seascape’ is always mobile and fluid. Humberstone provides an account of how this changing scape evokes human emotions – it is about feeling-in-the-place. Our analysis, in turn, demonstrates how the ever-changing waterscape is coped with via adjusted and embodied sensory practices – for us, it is doing-in-the-place. In line with our approach, Humberstone (2011) illuminates the animate and sensory characteristics of the waterscape. However, she is concerned only with the world above the water. We suggest that the waterscape structure is divided into interconnected above-water and underwater ‘landscapes’. By highlighting this dual nature of the waterscape, our analysis offers a novel perspective, compared to studies of landscapes framed by the notion of gaze and focusing commonly on the aboveground landscape (Urry & Larsen, 2011). We also continue the discussion concerning the active agency of
natural elements over leisure places (Cloke & Perkins, 2005) by pointing out the dynamic relationship between the above-water and underwater worlds. The weather above the waterbody affects the conditions below, where the fish are. Then again, the fish underwater guide the actions of anglers in the above-water landscape.

Third, our understanding of weather’s role as a force of nature adds to pending discussions of non-human agency in leisure activities. In their work, Rantala and her colleagues (2011) articulate how weather guides the material and corporeal human practices that take place in natural environments. Our analysis continues this insight by discerning how weather also governs the practices of non-humans. For instance, changing weather above the surface, such as a torrent or storm, causes arrhythmia in the waterbody (e.g. tumultuousness). This, in turn, breaks up the practice routine of fish and anglers. We do not treat sudden weather changes as a mere disruption (see Cloke & Perkins, 2005). For us, arrhythmia is a new situation calling for situated weather practices. The arrhythmia evoked by the weather and its agency in leisure activities and the waterscape contributes to existing discussions of the relationship between humans and non-humans. In fact, we suggest that a waterbody’s arrhythmia can be treated as a special kind of landscape.

Overall, we have used the metaphor of dance to describe the relational entanglement between fish, angler and waterbody in a fishing competition. The metaphors are not without problems, as they simultaneously highlight and hide aspects of the phenomenon (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The metaphor of dance highlights the very logic of the fishing practice, as it clarifies that fishing is a pair activity: it takes two to tango.

Furthermore, the given metaphor enables one to highlight the thoroughly embodied nature of the practice. Both dancing and fishing are bodily activities in which one must account for the bodily movements of others, in this case, the bodily movements of the non-human fish. As dancers, anglers must improvise, often because of suddenly changing weather conditions.

While the metaphor of dance arguably is human-centric, it still accords the fish a more ‘equal’ position in that the fish is understood as a partner that has the power to guide and frame the angler’s actions. Dance – especially a duet – is a gendered activity. The practice of fishing is predominantly a male-centred activity and involves logic as well as sayings and doings that are commonly interpreted as masculine, such as competing, fighting and winning. Therefore, the metaphor of dance is hardly appropriate for an analysis that seeks to uncover wider sociopolitical implications of the thoroughly gendered nature of the more-than-human entanglements formed around fishing, as cogently discussed by Probyn (2016). Yet, it captures adequately the cluttered encounter of the human–animal relationship in the practice of match fishing, during which both parties are bodily knotted to each other in a swaying motion. As one angler explained amidst the whirl of fighting: ‘One step forward, two steps back. Heck, this fish is leading this waltz. I’ll bet this will go to the last call’.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The authors have not received no funds for the completion of this work.

Notes on contributors

Vesa Markuksela is a Senior lecturer at University of Lapland. His research interests include: social theory of practice, sensory turn, affect, leisure studies, organizational research, service design and ethnographic research methods. His long-term grounding concern is the bodily and sensory encounters with human and non-human
actors in the leisure Servicescape settings. He received a Phd from University of Lapland for the thesis ‘Sense like a fish – an ethnography of troll fishing brotherhoods competition practice’.

Anu Valtonen is Professor of Cultural Economy at University of Lapland. Her research interests relate to cultural theories and qualitative methodologies in marketing and organizational research. Her current research projects explore embodiment, sleep and senses in today’s economy and society. She is also intrigued about aspects of Anthropocene and non-anthropocentric.

References

Adkins, T. (2010). Fishing for masculinity: Recreational fishermen’s performances of gender in the rust belt, Master of Arts Thesis (Sociology), Kent State University.

Allen-Collinson, J., & Leledaki, A. (2015). Sensing the outdoors: A visual and haptic phenomenology of outdoor exercise embodiment. Leisure Studies, 34(4), 457–470.

Bear, C., & Eden, S. (2011). Thinking like a fish? Engaging with nonhuman difference through recreational fishing. Environment and planning D. Society and Space, 29, 336–352.

Birke, L. (2012). Animal bodies in the production of scientific knowledge: Modelling medicine. Body & Society, 18 (3–4), 156–178.

Bleckmann, H., & Zelick, R. (2009). Lateral line system of fish. Integrative Zoology, 4, 13–25.

Brown, T. (2017). The offshore sailor: Enskilment and identity. Leisure Studies, 36(5), 684–695.

Burghardt, G. M. (2005). The genesis of animal play: Testing the limits. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Carr, N. (2010). Animals in the tourism and leisure experience. Current Issues in Tourism, 12(5–6), 409–411.

Classen, C. (1997). Foundations for an anthropology of the senses. International Social Science Journal, 153, 401–412.

Cloke, P., & Perkins, H. C. (2005). Cetacean performance and tourism in Kaikoura: New Zealand. Environment and planning D. Society and Space, 23, 903–924.

Cowx, I. G. (2002). Recreational fishing. In P. B. J. Hart & J. D. Reynolds (Eds.), Handbook of fish biology and fisheries (Vol. II, pp. 367–390). Oxford: Blackwell Science.

Dashper, K. (2017). Listening to horses: Developing attentive interspecies relationships through sport and leisure. Society and Animals, 25(3), 207–224.

Davies, D. L., Maurstad, A., & Cowles, S. (2013). Riding up forested mountain sides, in wide open spaces, and with walls. Developing an Ecology of Horse–Human Relationships, Humanimalia, 4(2), 54–83.

Despret, V. (2004). The body we care for: Figures of anthropo-zoo-genesis. Body & Society, 10(2–3), 111–134.

Fraisse, P. (1982). Rhythm and tempo (pp. 149–180). Orlando, FL: The Psychology of Music Academic Press.

Franklin, A. (2001). Neo-Darwinian leisure, the body and nature: hunting and angling in modernity. Body and Society, 4, 57–76.

Franosch, J.-M. P., Hagedorn, H. J. A., Goulet, J., Engelman, J., & Van Hemmen, J. L. (2009). Wake tracking and the detection of vortex rings by the canal lateral line of fish. Physical Review Letters, 103(7), 78–102.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2008). Narrative ethnography. In S. Nagy Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), Handbook of emergent methods, 241–264. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.

Haraway, D. (2008). When species meet. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Howes, D. (2005). An introduction: Empire of the senses. In D. Howes (Ed.), Empire of the senses: The sensual culture reader (pp. 1–20). Oxford: Berg.

Hughes, C. (2017). A song of the paddle: Haptic aesthetics of canoe travel in the English Lake District. Leisure Studies, 37(3), 268–281.

Hui, A. (2012). Things in motion, things in practices: How mobile practice networks facilitate the travel and use of leisure objects. Journal of Consumer Culture, 12(2), 195–215.

Humberstone, B. (2011). Embodiment and social and environmental action in nature-based sport: Spiritual spaces. Leisure Studies, 30(4), 495–512.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). Metaphors we live by. London: The university of Chicago press.

Lovelock, B. (2008). Tourism and the consumption of wildlife: Hunting, shooting and sport fishing. New York: Routledge.

Marvin, G. (2005). Sensing nature: Encountering the world in hunting. Etnofoor, 18(1), 15–26.
Maurstad, A., Davis, D., & Cowles, S. (2013). Co-being and intra-action in horse-human relationship: A multi-species ethnography of be (com)ing human and be (com)ing a horse. *Social Anthropology, 21*(3), 322–335.

Mordue, T. (2009). Angling in modernity: A tour through society, nature and embodied passion. *Current Issues in Tourism, 12*(5–6), 529–552.

Mueller, M. L. (2017). *Being Salmon, being human. Encountering the wild in us and us in the wild.* White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Pickering, A. (2017). The ontological turn: Taking different worlds seriously. *Social Analysis, 61*(2), 134–150.

Rantala, O., Valtonen, A., & Markuksela, V. (2011). Materializing tourist weather: Ethnography on weather-wise wilderness guiding practices. *Journal of Material Culture, 16*, 285–300.

Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practice: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory, 5*(2), 243–263.

Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The site of the social: A philosophical account of the constitution of social life and change.* University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Sheller, M. (2014). The new mobilities paradigm for a live sociology. *Current Sociology Review, 62*(6), 789–811.

Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Valtonen, A., Markuksela, V., & Moisander, J. (2010). Sensory ethnography in consumer research. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 34*(4), 375–380.

Vannini, P. (2011). Senses, *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture, by Dale Southerton.* New York and London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Wlodarczyk, J. (2017). Be more dog: The human–Canine relationship in contemporary dog-training methodologies. *Performance Research, 22*(2), 40–47.