

1-29-2025

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Recommended Citation

Roslan, S. B., Ismail, N. A., & Ismail, S. (2025). Soul Surfers Forced Into a Fragmented Exteriority. *Interiority*, 8 (1), 5-24. <https://doi.org/10.7454/in.v8i1.1112>

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Soul Surfers Forced Into a Fragmented Exteriority

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Abstract

This study explores the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on soul surfers, individuals for whom surfing transcends mere sport to embody a spiritual, psychological, and physical communion with the sea and ocean. The pandemic's restrictions, which limited access to the sea, challenged the core of soul surfing practices, prompting surfers to seek alternative means to sustain their connection with the sea and ocean. Through qualitative research, employing phenomenological analysis, theories of affordance, symbolic interactionism, and interpretive interviews, the study examines the transition from a natural exterior to a built interior, adapting their living spaces to maintain their surfing identity, rituals, practices, and the re-creation of their sacred space that was once the sea and ocean. The study also examines the philosophical implications of identifying as a surfer when physical engagement with the sea is obstructed, highlighting the enduring nature of the soul surfer's identity beyond the physical act of surfing. The findings reveal a shift towards an inward spiritual and psychological practice, where meditation, mindfulness, and physical training within the confines of their homes served as a bridge to the oceanic experience and a renewed sense of their interior affordances. This adaptation underscores the resilience and creativity of soul surfers in preserving their deeply rooted bond with the sea despite external disruptions. Conclusively, the study offers insights into the dynamic relationship between soul surfers and their sacred spaces, illustrating how the pandemic has reshaped their practices and, by extension, their identities.

Keywords: soul surfer, pandemic impact, phenomenology, sacred spaces, affordance

Introduction

A soul surfer is a water person, drawing power and purpose from the sea and ocean. Soul surfers are a subset of the surfing community that experiences the practice through spiritual terms, deriving a higher meaning and life lessons from it, and some consider it an aquatic religion in and of itself (Taylor, 2007). For the soul surfer, the sea and ocean provide an array of affordances enabling physical and spiritual engagement, such as the dynamic waves for surfing, open air for mindfulness, and a natural and sacred space for meditation. Soul surfers require the natural exteriority to sustain their spiritual, psychological, and physical state.

Rell Kapolioka'ehukai Sunn, a revered historical figure in the surf community, represents the epitome of a soul surfer and the spiritual act of soul surfing (Hunter, 2018). She extends herself to Mother Nature through meditative practice to immerse and experience a spiritual and emotional connection to the sea and ocean (Denker & Lagarde, 2002). The soul surfer's performative practice becomes part of their daily being, a pilgrimage to the sea and ocean likened to a 'temple,' a place of sanctity and worship. The intimacy and the sensual connection are a sacrament and create an Aquatic Nature Religion that makes the practice powerful, transformative, healing, and personal (Taylor, 2007). While the sea provides external affordances like open space, natural rhythm, and sensory experiences essential to the soul surfer's ritual, the interior environment must adapt these qualities into interior affordances, such as spatial flexibility for movement, quietude for mindfulness, and tools or props for simulating the physicality of surfing. Omar bin Jamaludin, an important personality in the surf community of Malaysia and the ultimate embodiment of the soul surfer with a strong connection to Mother Nature, stated that when surfing, there is calm and chaos, and the ocean is both (O. Jamaludin, personal communication, February 6, 2021). This innate idea transcends beyond the physical realm of surfing to the spiritual and is projected to the surrounding space. He further expressed that he actively sought out places where the strength of Mother Nature emanates from performing his daily rituals of surfing (Figure 1).

Elongated restrictions in accessing this cardinal and sacred space in daily practice during the height of the pandemic have disrupted the soul surfers' state of sanctity, suppressing their daily practice. The walls become confinement during quarantine, creating a new reality of stasis and forcing a recalibration of the practice. A heightened awareness of body composition and health catalysed by stasis has the soul surfer recreating an interior sacred space to sustain physical movements and maintain physical attributes and training. To maintain

the ritual, the soul surfer must adapt interior affordances to simulate or recall the external conditions—relying on interior space for forms of bodily movement, creating sensory memories of the sea and ocean's energy. The interiority of the dwelling takes on a new meaning.



Figure 1
Temple of pleasure;
Omar bin Jamaludin,
a soul surfer from
Malaysia, with his
10' Custard Point
shaped by Tim
Mellors, performing
his signature *The Claw*
stance in Medewi,
Bali, Indonesia
(Photograph © Omar
Jamaludin)

Here, the dwelling itself is reimagined to accommodate specific interior affordances—those that support physical training, mental calm, and embodied connection previously facilitated by the sea and ocean. It becomes an active dimension to reconnect and simulate movement with the outside world. The prayer is expressed in forms of movement with the existing space of worldly establishments. The bodily space of sacredness transforms to host the soul surfer's mindfulness, sanctity, and meditation; the spiritual and psychological practices are now inwards, drawing energy from the sea and ocean and relaying it towards the dwelling. The prayer is expressed through forms of experience and memory within the soul surfer state of mind.

This paper explores a colloquy of the soul surfer in their experience and insight during the pandemic and how a highly physical practice in a dynamic, natural, and sacred space extends to a seemingly impossible interiority. The paper is structured as follows. First, it delineates the methodology for data collection and analysis through a qualitative method of phenomenology. It further explores the adaptation of soul surfers during the pandemic, emotionally and spatially. The paper further discusses the philosophical and existential implications of being a soul surfer when separated from the sea, referencing thinkers like Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger. The concept of affordance is examined through the interior of the space, highlighting how soul surfers utilised their immediate environments to simulate the sanctity,

spirituality, sacredness, and physics of surfing. The narrative includes personal anecdotes and reflections from interviews with surfers. Within the post-pandemic context, the paper asserts that these adaptations have led to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between physical space and spiritual fulfilment, reinforcing the role of architecture in facilitating the creation of sacred spaces. The paper concludes by illustrating how the pandemic has redefined the soul surfers' rituals and the meaning of their living spaces, ultimately questioning if the fragmented exteriority has been mended.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, combining phenomenological analysis and interpretive interviews to explore how soul surfers navigate the loss of their traditional practice during the pandemic lockdown. The objective is to examine the shift from the exterior spaces to the interior spaces, focusing on how soul surfers recalibrated their practice of ritual and meaning-making within the confines of their dwellings. A phenomenological approach guides the research as it centres on the lived experiences of soul surfers, who are described as having a profound, spiritual relationship with the sea and ocean. This approach is suited to understanding the impact of pandemic restrictions, specifically how the absence of access to the body of water redefined their personal identities and their daily practices. Phenomenology allows an analysis of these changes by capturing participant's reflections on their adjustments, reconstructions of daily practice, and evolving relationship with interior spaces (Norberg-Schulz, 1979/1991).

The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals who identified as soul surfers. The sample group includes 12 soul surfers from various locations but considers Cherating, Pahang, Malaysia, as their home break—the surf break to which they are spiritually and physically connected. Each participant was encouraged to discuss their connection to the sea and ocean, the spiritual elements of their surfing practice, and how they adapted during the lockdown. Questions were designed to elicit deep, introspective responses, encouraging participants to reflect on their inner experience of practice in the absence of an aquatic environment (Yin, 2011). These included questions that explored shifts in identity, the change, adaptation, and relationship towards their interior spaces and their implications as well as the emotional connotations of being unable to surf.

An interpretive framework grounded in the qualitative research of phenomenology that encompasses interviews, literature review,

theory of affordance, and symbolic interactionism is used to analyse how soul surfers repurposed domestic objects and spaces to simulate the essence of the sea and ocean and maintain continuity with their everyday rituals and practices. The theory of affordance presents a view of perception as an active process grounded in the interaction between an organism, in the case of this paper, the soul surfer and their environment, emphasising the practical opportunities for action that the environment offers (Gibson, 2014). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective focusing on how individuals create, interpret, and interact with symbols in their social world with key principles of understanding meaning, interaction, and interpretation. Blumer (1969) emphasised the importance of understanding the subjective and dynamic aspects of the individual's social life. In architecture and interior architecture, symbolic interactionism's premise is that individuals attach meaning to objects and spaces based on interactions and cultural significance (Smith & Bugni, 2006). This perspective helps tie together the research in identifying how objects like surfboards, indoor exercise spaces, and ocean- and sea-themed artwork became symbols of resilience, sacredness, and connection to surfing's spiritual and physical aspects. Additionally, this expands and facilitates an understanding of how these meanings evolved during and after the lockdown.

The data analysis was done through transcriptions from the interviews, which are thematically analysed to identify recurring motifs, including adaptation, embodiment, and symbolic transformation. Themes are identified in line with affordance theory, specifically focusing on how soul surfers perceived and repurposed their confinements to recreate the sacred space. Affordance theory aids in discerning how soul surfers saw potential in their interiors to simulate aspects of their exterior practice, thus creating a 'fragmented exteriority' within a contained space. The concept of affordance is introduced for its psychological aspects. It instinctively reflects human needs in objects, spaces, and communities; the natural and built environment would have contextual clues regarding affordance, and occupants could decide what behaviours to perform (Kim, 2021). Each theme is analysed within the broader context of the pandemic, highlighting how soul surfers internalised and redefined their relationship with their exterior, interior, and identity.

Cognition of the Fragmented Exteriority

Adaptation is a notion many soul surfers are familiar with through the experience of seeking waves through unfamiliar terrains. Though in the confinement of the pandemic, a new form of adaptation through emotional resources in the fragmented exteriority of the

four walls of their abode has forced soul surfers to be creative in changing unique circumstances. Old and familiar spaces slowly take on different functions to become new spaces. Coming to terms with an unpredictable future and the constant implication of shifting rules set by the government has caused pandemic-induced fatigue. The soul surfer may have more time, but in isolation and with restrictions, the sense and passage of time are distorted, leading to boredom and pathological depression (Droit-Volet et al., 2020). Access to the surf break is now highly regulated or banned during the obscure pandemic. The daily practice has become disrupted. The sense of the passage of time becomes a phenomenological time to which it is closely related to the self and sense of existence. Women and men are nothing else but those who make themselves of themselves (Sartre, 1946/2007). Is the surfer even a surfer when she or he is not able to surf?

The idea of being needs to be radicalised; the human being is, first and foremost, not an isolated subject when cut off from a realm of physicality. Instead, the soul surfer is a being who is constant with the outside and alongside a form they do not distinguish themselves from. Though physically disconnected, the belief in itself of being a soul surfer should not distinguish them as not to be. According to thinkers like Kierkegaard, as cited in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is through the relation towards God that the self finds itself (McDonald, 1996/2017); in this case, the temple to which God resides is the sea and ocean. The subjectivity of what a person wants, chooses, and desires is the purest form of passion and surfing for the soul surfer resides in passion and resets on emotion. The idea of passion, often criticised as resetting on irrationality, emotion, and feeling rather than knowledge, counters the knowledge that the soul surfer has—a metaphysical intuition of forms that are purer, less discursive, and tied to the intangible idea of being. She or he, the soul surfer, is allowed to be and can choose to be through passion. As cited in *Heidegger's "Being,"* for Heidegger, what defines the human is the question towards the perplexity of why there is 'nothing' rather than 'something' (Gray, 1952). The question unequivocally bores unconsciously in the minds of soul surfers when faced with pandemic-induced barriers.

Due to the pandemic restrictions, the abrupt separation from the sea and ocean is likened to the state of traumatic experiences of the soul surfer. Soul surfers who have gone through a life-or-death situation have been forced to recoil into a healing and recalibration state of mind. It forcibly separates them from the sea and ocean—whether through a violent encounter at a gnarly reef break, a hold down in a set of turbulent waves, an encounter with mother nature in form of

a great white shark, a near-drowning experience. Many experienced surfers have needed to take months, if not years, of reconnecting their minds and bodies to the sea and ocean. Edwin Chong, a soul surfer from Malaysia, experienced close encounters with the drowning of an individual off the coast of Perhentian Island in Malaysia in 2010. This incident has dismantled his physical relationship with the sea and ocean caused by a sense of guilt, which caused him to step away from surfing for a month to reflect on the incident.

Several near-drownings, a drowning death, countless encounters with turtles, dolphins, sea lions, sea snakes, and friendly swarms of jellyfish, almost 50 surf spots in 15 countries and 20 years later, I am still surfing. Surfing was worse than a drug...like a moth that is drawn to the light from a fire, I'd fly closer to the light...even if it meant my imminent death. (E. Chong, personal communication, January 18, 2023)

However, he continues that his connection to the sea and ocean was not severed and became a catalyst for philosophically understanding the ideology of surfing. For the soul surfer, the principles and ethos of surf carved into their state of being, however, are still transcended to inform their daily conducting of activities in navigating space and movement in their daily happenings. The spatial and temporal dimensions away from the temple do not fully disconnect them but inform their habits, decision-making, and execution.

"We ourselves are the entities to be analysed" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 67). The opening text of *Being and Time* is key to a crucial concept of owning your being, the concept of *Jemeinigkeit*, or mineness (Haugeland, 1982). The question of being is mine to be. The soul surfer can be a soul surfer despite their circumstances. The being of a human, the being of a soul surfer, is defined by time. We are creatures with a past who move through a present and who have a series of possibilities available to them, which Heidegger opines as 'ways to be' (Gray, 1957).

The human being is not definable by a 'what', like a table or a chair, but by a 'who' that is shaped by existence in time. What it means to be human is to exist with a certain past, a personal and cultural history, and by a series of possibilities that can seize hold of you or not. (Critchley, 2009, para. 6)

The question of 'who' shaped by the contemporary existence of the current time that is within the restrictions of the pandemic becomes

a discussion of cognition of fragmented exteriority. With the concept of owning your being, the cognition of the fragmented exteriority becomes a new territory for the soul surfer to explore and find their centre of practice. The epistemology of place in assessing, knowing, and acting is related to the soul surfer's surroundings from multiple perspectives in investigating the occupying space. To fill in the void of their daily practice, the soul surfer must conceive the physical environment of the dwelling. What is the nature of a person's cognition of the representation of a physical space in their current dwelling?

Figure 2
A form of prayer;
Qadeja binti
Mussadiq, a soul
surfer from Malaysia,
performing on a
9' 2" *Kemudi*
longboard shaped
by Shazrul Izwan bin
Shukor, executing
a cheater five in
Cherating, Pahang,
Malaysia (Photograph
by Ghazi bin Rahmat)



Propositional models of the representation emphasise schematic components of spatial representations, which provide organisational frameworks and generic rules for storing information about spatial relations. The soul surfer has a retention of a mental map of their interiority that helps them understand the layout of spaces and their designated function. In understanding this concept further at an urban scale, an urban setting is commonly expected to be in a grid form, organised and parallel for intersections to occur at a 90-degree angle. When the schematic expectations are violated, confusion ensues. Recalling spatial information is often distorted and influenced by a superordinate category that we tend to underestimate, such as distances and circulation (Gärling & Evans, 1991). A soul surfer's dwelling is familiar as a transitional environment of gathering, organising, reparation, preparation and rest—gathering of the community, organising surf pilgrimage, reparation of the quiver, preparation of tools, and deep rest. With the new reality of confinement due to the pandemic, the cognition and mental map of the spaces are recalibrated. The space initially was never thought to

be considered the temple, the place where the physical execution of the surf routine occurred.

The Bodily Space of the Soul Surfer: Performance, Refuge, and Spirituality

The bodily space of the soul surfer comes between the intensity of their relationship with water, where highly performative action is executed, and their abode, where it becomes a place of refuge and rest (de Vignemont, 2017). It becomes a cyclical application in which both spaces are fundamental to daily practice; it embalms sacredness. The body of a soul surfer is also profoundly intertwined with the sanctity and energy of the natural world. The visualisation of the creation of bodily space of the soul surfer and water can be seen in the intensity of the *lignes de fuite* [lines of flight] of the soul surfer Qadeja binti Mussadiq and her joy and harmony with the wave (Figure 2). The experiences of the soul surfer become a practice in spiritual terms, deriving meaning and important life lessons, understanding it as a religion in and of itself and can be traced back to ancient Hawaii and to as recently as the 1970s in both the United States and Australia (Finney, 1959; Taylor, 2007). However, the contemporary understanding and practice of aquatic religion extends beyond the community of soul surfers, where it is still considered in the early stage of research.

The five crude elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether (*akasa*). These are the *panca mahabhutas*. There are also five fine elements or *panca tanmatra*, the subtle aspect of the *mahabhutas* within the human body. These include touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. The physical universe with its stars and planets is compared to the human body with its organs. (McDaniel, 2013, p. 344)

The Balinese, however, have preserved a strong, complex aquaculture, which is marked by the use of water for various human needs (Eiseman, 1985). In the pre-Hindu era, the basic philosophy and religion of Balinese people was called water religion or *agama tirta*. *Tirta*, meaning holy ceremonial water, eventually became associated with the unique form of Hinduism practiced in the region, where it also signifies water (Gde Agung Rahma Putra & Sedana, 2022). As Bali becomes a surfer's Mecca, it inadvertently has influenced surfers, including Malaysian surfers due to the island's proximity to its aquatic culture and religion, creating a profound sacred space of and for practise. The space of the sea and ocean is defined as the largest source of water and, therefore, the most powerful source of life and perceptions of energy (Dougherty, 2018). "It is a strength so

great that man becomes meaningless." (Yudari et al., 2016, p. 60). The recreation of sacred spaces that emulate the same energy comes in the forms of the soul surfer's ingenuity and inspiration, manifesting it into a space that caters to the need to connect back to the sea and ocean, a space of sanctity.

Recreating Sacred Spaces: The Impact of Affordance of Space and Body

In architecture and interior architecture, space becomes a central theoretical discipline. However, the problem of space in itself is not confined to only architecture and interior architecture but exists as an empirical problem (Hillier & Hanson, 1984). In a theory of affordance, Gibson describes how the environment provides possibilities for body movement based on the individual's abilities (Gibson, 2014). The study of affordances in architecture and interior architecture investigates how the physicality of the space affords different behaviours and actions. The idea of an affordance of architecture and its interiority indicates the potential for a behaviour or action. The affordance of certain artefacts of the architecture and the interiority of the space primarily existed before the person's behaviour is exhibited (Park et al., 2023). Buildings and building components that create space must initially be designed to afford desired uses to its inhabitants, where both artefact-user affordances (AUA) and artefact-artefact affordances (AAA) express a relationship that becomes directly and indirectly useful to users (Maier et al., 2009). In the pandemic situation resulting in restricted movement and lockdown, it is important that the soul surfers ultimately perceive the affordance of the spaces available to them to simulate the temple and allow for practice in varying forms to connect.

Researchers have discussed the influence of the sociocultural context on the individual's understanding of affordances (Young & Cleveland, 2022). Costall (2016) posited that individuals experience objects in relation to the community within which they have meaning. In the understanding of affordance, it is not achieved by fixation of the object or artefact in isolation; it is understood in a network of relations not only among different people but an array of other objects or artefacts drawn into a shared practice (Costall, 2016). Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014) further opined that affordance perception is considered relative to an individual's abilities acquired through experience in sociocultural practices. The concept of affordances as part of a sociocultural "form of life" suggests that in a human case, abilities acquired by participating in skilled practices, in the case of soul surfers is the practice of surfing, are abilities to act adequately according to the norms of the practice (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014, p. 327).

To elucidate the bond between soul surfers and their sacred spaces and surroundings, we look at the affordance theory opined by Beek and de Wit (1993). They propose that affordances within architecture and its interiority can be categorised into three distinct dimensions: organismic personal, socioeconomic, and cultural aesthetic. The organismic personal dimension lays the groundwork by focusing on the fundamental interactions between the environment and its users. The socioeconomic dimension delves into the dynamics of human collaboration towards shared objectives, while the cultural aesthetic dimension highlights the role of culturally influenced aesthetic aspects in architecture (Beek & de Wit, 1993).

Beek and de Wit (1993) argue that a holistic integration of these three dimensions is crucial in architectural design. They believe that the shortcomings often stem from overemphasising one dimension at the expense of the others, underscoring the importance of a balanced approach to fully cater to the multifaceted relationship between soul surfers and their spatial settings. The collective memory of the exteriority of soul surfers' confinement during the pandemic expresses a form of poetics applied to their sacred space and the emotional component of affinity linked to their physical surroundings. Bourdieu's understanding of social space expresses the importance of "spatial frameworks" and the importance of space and memory (Reed-Danahay, 2020, p. 15).

To further discuss this point, two experiences of the human are described as amenity and efficiency (Lee et al., 2017). Amenity is an emotional reaction to emotional background, requiring an involuntary withdrawal of implicit memories, whereas efficiency is an attitude toward certain actions in goal-oriented attention, voluntarily withdrawing of explicit memories (Bechara et al., 2000). From a psychological standpoint, perception is evaluated through the unconscious and conscious with tacit knowledge. Evaluation of satisfaction, for example, can be determined through the continuous cognitive process in terms of amenity and efficiency through withdrawing sophisticated knowledge in the long-term memory. The evaluation of affordance can be regarded as a construction integration process to create a new experience by priming episodic memory (Conway, 2009).

For the soul surfers, the amenity lies in the profound religious experience with the sea and ocean, which serves as their temple for the equilibrium of their emotional and mental state. The efficiency is seen as how the sea and ocean meet their physical needs and offer the natural environment. The dual evaluation of amenities and

efficiency allows them to derive maximum satisfaction through their experiences, profoundly embedding the feelings in their long-term memory and influencing how they recreate this within the spaces of their homes (Lee et al., 2017).

In illustrating the point above, it was feared that a cultural depletion and deterioration of surfing was thought to happen during the pandemic. However, if surfing to the soul surfer is bounded as a religious experience, it becomes an embodiment not just through the spiritual dimensions but also through the bodily dimensions and its extension towards the soul surfers' surroundings. An interview with Sherilyn Lim, a Singaporean soul surfer based in Malaysia and Indonesia, further iterates that amid the pandemic's solitude, surfing became more than a sport, evolving into a ritualistic experience that facilitated a deep symbiotic relationship between her psychological state and the temple (S. Lim, personal communication, February 7, 2023).

Fairus bin Ahmad, an integral part of the fabric of the surf village, has been a resident in Cherating, Pahang, Malaysia, for the past 10 years and has built his life and business around the surf culture. When contracting COVID-19, he realised the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO), a series of national quarantine and cordon sanitaire measures implemented by the federal government of Malaysia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in its third phase in Malaysia, which took place between 1 January 2021 and ended 31 March 2021 (Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia, 2021), contributed to the slow deterioration of his physical and mental state.

I contracted the 'long' Covid virus during the height of the pandemic and nation-wide lockdown in Malaysia and it has caused not just sickness but affected me emotionally, causing fear and anxiety. During the time, I would use my personal space to keep my mental and physical health in check by rope skipping and keeping the connection with friends, like Adwin bin Adam (in the village) by talking about surf as it is a large part of my life and business. (F. Ahmad, personal communication, March 13, 2021)

The effects of surf 'detraining' have also contributed to the complete loss of training-induced adaptation of the surfer, where various physiological systems are affected and their corresponding physical capacities. Studies have shown that two to four weeks of detraining affects the maintenance of the body, returning to its baseline values. The surfer's strength, power, endurance, speed, and flexibility are significantly impaired (Lima et al., 2021). Cris Mills, a surf

strengthening coach, states that behaviours and tendencies in the water are often reflections or mirrors of behaviours, mental patterns, anxieties, and personality traits in life (Mills, 2022). In Ahmad's case, in which the study of affordance and the effects of detraining are considered, he recognised the seriousness of his situation. He extended his practice to be mirrored from water to land instead of land to water whilst instinctively understanding the affordance of his interiority's structural components. It has allowed for Ahmad to use his understanding as a user to benefit his daily practice, creating a fragmented exteriority in the confinement of the pandemic within the four walls of his living space.

Space and Body Post-Pandemic

The collective experience of soul surfers during the confinement of the pandemic shows that architecture and interior architecture are constitutive and transformative mediums of an institution of society, its assemblages, and its subjects. It highlights the significant role of architecture and interior architecture in shaping and transforming societal institutions, their components, and the individuals within them. It further implies that architecture is not just a backdrop but actively participates in the narration, creation and modification of the social, cultural, and spiritual fabric. Architecture and interior architecture influence how the ritualistic practices of surfing and its forms of prayer are imagined and reimagined, affecting the collective (institutions and assemblages) and the individual (subjects).

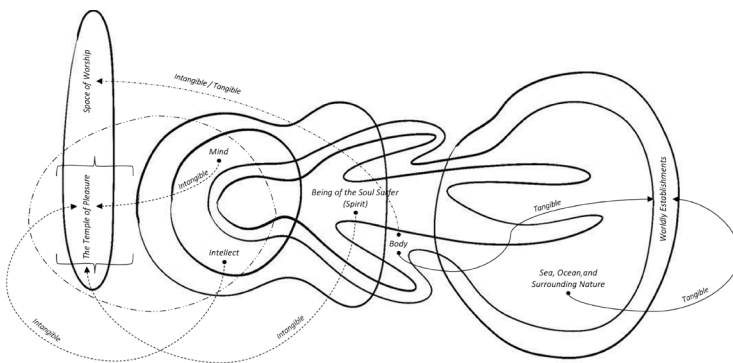


Figure 3
Diagram of the being
of the soul surfer
(Image by authors)

In understanding this concept, a diagram of the being of the soul surfer is synthesised through the phenomenological approach of an analysis of the collective experiences and observation of the subject. Figure 3 illustrates the interconnected elements forming the essence and being of the soul surfer's existence and their relationship with the sea, ocean, and the world through the tangible and intangible. At the centre, the 'being' encompasses the 'mind, intellect, and body,' which

are intricately connected. Surrounding this core are the 'sea, ocean and surrounding nature,' representing the natural environment crucial to the surfer's experiences, and 'worldly establishments,' symbolising societal structures. 'Spaces of worship' represent a physical place of sanctity that goes beyond the physicality of sea, ocean and surrounding nature, with the 'temple of pleasure,' signifying fulfilment. The diagram's dashed lines overlapping shapes indicate the fluidity and dynamism between these elements, expressing a holistic integration of the soul surfer's inner being, their spiritual and physical environment, and the broader world that they navigate.

Experiencing the pandemic through the body of the soul surfer embarks on a journey of reflection on the daily practices and rituals of surfing as well as the transcendence of surf culture. The experience of the soul surfer post-pandemic gave a renewed meaning to their practice and the sacred spaces that were a part of their daily rituals, emphasising the profound interconnectedness between the physical environment and spiritual fulfilment. This period of reflection and adaptation revealed the resilience and adaptability of the soul surfer as they navigated the constraints imposed by the pandemic to maintain their connection to surf. The revaluation of their practices and affordance of space shows an innate extension of self towards architecture and the role of architecture—both natural and built—in its facilitation and enrichment of sacred rituals. As the soul surfers reengage with their environment post-pandemic, the heightened awareness of the symbiotic relationship between their spiritual practice and the sacred spaces that host it ultimately reinforces the notion that architecture is an integral part of the soul surfer's journey towards transcendence.

Surfing's most important dimensions are its ritualistic practices of 'visiting the temple for prayer.' The pandemic, however, gave new meaning to the soul surfers' ritualistic practices through symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism rests on three premises: first, human beings act toward objects on the basis of the meaning that the objects have for them; second, the meaning of objects is derived from, or arises through and out of social interaction; and third, meanings can change over time as interpretive processes are modified (Blumer, 1969). For the surfers, these objects include three types which are 'physical objects' such as buildings, tables, and chairs; 'social objects' such as friends, family, and other surfers; and 'abstract objects,' such as emotions (Bugni & Smith, 2002).

The soul surfer living space becomes an intimate collection of experiences that inheres sacrament, reinforcing the meaning of

the space post-pandemic through objects and adornments. Their homes are expressed through a delineation of space for exercise, surf magazines, surfing symbols and slogans, nature-themed art, music, and clothing. The surfboard itself transforms from becoming a sacred object needed to perform the surfing ritual to an art piece that exudes the embodiment of the soul surfer's agency. Omar bin Jamaludin's quiver is a duality of function and expression of his being, which can be seen in Figure 4. The carefully chosen batik and *songket* material, one of the most intricate forms of Malay art, is inlaid and framed under a resin layer of the surfboard, elevating the aesthetic beyond the form and massing. The surfboards are displayed within the home, transcending their original use and becoming a symbol of connection to the sanctity of the sea and ocean. Blumer (1969) opines that symbolic interactionism is based fundamentally on the meanings a person assigns to objects or the physical environment and that these meanings impact the self.

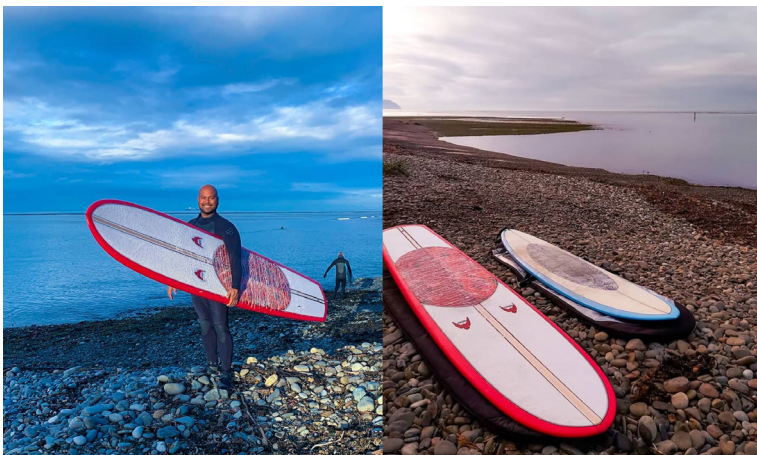


Figure 4
Omar bin Jamaludin with two of his intricately designed surfboards from Osprey and Bauer inlaid with the traditional Malaysian batik and *songket* shaped respectively by Dane Perlee and Chris Bauer (Photograph © Omar Jamaludin)

I had tasted a level of fluidity that I wanted to integrate into my life. That came in the form of music, movement practices and art. There was a growing need to nurture myself physically and emotionally so that I could express myself in those forms. I saw that I was missing a fundamental tool—presence (during the pandemic). The exploration from all that was eventually fed back into surfing. For me, the pandemic was a great lesson in honing presence and the power of choice. (S. Lim, personal communication, February 7, 2023)

Sherilyn Lim's experience of weaving fluidity into her life during the pandemic through music, movement, and art deeply influenced her post-pandemic surfing experiences and her interiority. It serves as

a vivid illustration of symbolic interactionism towards physical and abstract objects whilst missing social objects. The role of the interior, in particular, underscores a sociological perspective on the significance of subjective meanings and symbols in human interactions, which are profoundly shaped by the spatial contexts in which they occur. Lim's deliberate engagement with the 'presence' in a post-pandemic world from her experience in fragmented exteriority became an essential tool for the expression of how individuals construct meanings within and through their interactions with both the tangible space and intangible emotions. Lim's experiences become a continuous negotiation of symbols and meanings, where surfing, music and art become interconnected symbols deeply embedded in the spaces they inhabit. This narrative highlights the power of individual agency in constructing personal and social realities, emphasising the significance of presence, choice, and space. Has the fragmented exteriority mended itself?

Conclusion

The pandemic has precipitated a profound existential interrogation among soul surfers regarding their identity, connection with the body of water, and living space, culminating in a significant reassessment of their rituals and bond with these consecrated locales. Through a qualitative methodological approach, this investigation questions and sheds light on the complex modalities through which soul surfers have adjusted to the constraints of their fragmented exteriority giving new meaning to their interiority, underscoring their resilience and ingenuity in preserving their surfing ethos despite physical limitations. A salient theme from this analysis is the change towards a more introspective spiritual and psychological engagement among soul surfers towards their architecture and interior architecture. The impediment to direct access to the sea and ocean has necessitated the pursuit of alternative practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and physical conditioning within the domestic confines. This introspective orientation not only represents a pragmatic adaptation to external restrictions but also signifies a deeper existential journey of meaning and a reconnection with the oceanic experience.

The research also explores the philosophical ramifications of maintaining the soul surfer's identity in the absence of tangible interaction with the sea. It looks at the essence of identity and the intrinsic nature of being a soul surfer beyond the physical act of surfing. This existential exploration accentuates the profound importance of surfing not merely as a sport or a leisure activity but as an integral component of one's identity and spiritual fulfilment.

From an architectural standpoint, this study highlights the critical role of affordances in cultivating and enhancing soul surfer's sacred practices and rituals. It advocates for a comprehensive integration of physical, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions within architectural design to address the complex needs of soul surfers and support their spiritual journey for transcendence. The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism provides additional insights into the processes through which individuals ascribe meaning to their interactions with their surroundings. The intentional engagement with both tangible and intangible elements within their living spaces denotes an ongoing negotiation of symbols and meanings, illustrating the intricate interrelation between self, space, and spirituality.

The pandemic has acted as a pivotal catalyst for transformation among soul surfers and their spaces, fostering profound introspection and adaptation in their practices. As they traverse the post-pandemic terrain, soul surfers are equipped and endowed with an enhanced consciousness of the symbiotic nexus between self and space, enriched by their reflections and experiences during this unparalleled period. A space imbued with sanctity and sacredness is borne within the fragmented exteriority.

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