Pure Filth: Apocalyptic Hedonism and the Postmodern Surfer

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Postmodern Surfer

In *Apocalypse Now* (1979) Colonel Kilgore confounds the logical lines of conflict by ordering Lance Johnson, the young Californian soldier, to "surf or fight". For Kilgore surfing represents the illumination of national and cultural difference; the Americans will inscribe their presence on the territory not merely by conquest or geographical co-option but by the demonstration of their cultural pleasures. After all, Kilgore explodes in defense of his intention to take the Viet Cong held river mouth, "Charlie don't surf!" Coppola is, of course, betraying the hubris of the Americans' imperialist Darwinism through the hyperbole of the Colonel's character. Charlie has not the sense to surf, the military nor political savvy, the decency, the civilization. But when Lance Johnson takes to the water amid the napalm jets and dismembering bodies, he is not just the standard-bearer of traditional forms of military conflict; Coppola's surfer, in fact, is ensign to a more complex irony, a more prescient cultural and social condition.

While a good deal of the critical discussion of *Apocalypse Now* has located the text and Kilgore's hyperbole within a postmodernist lexicon, little direct attention has been paid to the motif of surfing itself. Indeed, in a previous essay on the subject of surfing and culture (Lewis, 1998), it was noted that surfing remains largely unnoticed in cultural analysis; the few essays that have attended to the topic have tended to idealize the textualized surf, often overclaiming its ideological and utopian potential (e.g. Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 1987; Fiske, 1989; see also Morris, 1998). In the present essay, we would like to explore a range of textualizations, most specifically in terms of contemporary cultural and ideological conditions. To this extent, *Apocalypse Now* provides a useful point of departure; Coppola's surfing motif, in fact, evinces much of the cultural significance of the text as it illuminates substantive arguments on the modernist/postmodernist divide (cf Huyssen, 1986).

In particular, Coppola's surfing scene and the character of Colonel Kilgore function as the point of entrance for the much discussed re-rendering of Joseph Conrad's modernist dialectic (*Heart of Darkness*). In fact, Coppola's film works through a series of cultural dictions (heterodictions) and never fully reconstructs the dialectic at all; Colonel Kurtz's 'horror' and Willard's antithetical 'duty', while dramatically propitious, are never able to approximate the oppositional force that inscribed Conrad's imperial heart (cf Said, 1993). Indeed, Coppola's aesthetic divides itself perpetually between dramatic conviction and a language play, a virtualization, which undermines Conradian vision. Kilgore's presence and the surfing motif destabilize the conviction, leading the dialectic away from itself and into a more loquacious and parodic comic drama. The apocalypse, the revelation, is mediated through angles, dictions and perspectives that are never allowed to settle into the comfort of contrast or official discourse. The madness of the War, that is, must be mediated by other madnesses –

not only Kurtz's 'extreme vision', as it was imagined by Conrad's modernistic nihilism, but by the devotee photographer who barely assumes the proportions of anything let alone the hegemonies of institutional media. Thus, the dark apocalypse promised by the film manifests itself as a series of captions – a bleak end that is redeemed not by the moral decency of Conrad's Marlow or Hamlet's Horatio, but by the frames of a young man surfing. Bodily pleasure and the affluence it represents becomes the dispensation and ascendant ideal for a life that is hell, a distorted and confused belligerence that has no origin and no clear conclusion. Kilgore certainly loves "the smell of napalm in the morning", but he also likes to punctuate his military operations with a surf, with bodily release. The apocalypse of Coppola's film is thereby fused with a peculiar but resonant hedonism which can never be de-fused from the bloody and awful power which gives it expression. Surfing, that is, becomes the centre of the parody and the conviction, the nucleus of Coppola's apprehensive convergence: pure filth.

Andrew Milner has characterized the aesthetic and social conditions of postmodernism in terms of what he calls "apocalyptic hedonism" – a "textualized erotics deriving from the simultaneous juxtaposition of the terrors of imminent extinction and the delights of hedonistic affluence" (Milner, 1994: 191). While referring specifically to the film and novel *On the Beach* (1959), Milner's characterization of the postmodern text acknowledges the shifting and contentious nature of texts like *Apocalypse Now*. Our contention here is not that surfing constitutes a central or defining motif for postmodernism, but rather that our rendering of the cultural dimensions of surfing may be enhanced by reference to the thematic of apocalyptic hedonism and to wider discussions of the postmodern typology. Coppola's surfing motif and the unstable dictions which produce and issue from Kilgore's anti-aesthetic (cf Foster, 1983, 1985) represent a significant moment in contemporary textualizations.

We explore here the relationship between surfing as discourse and Western political modes of emancipation within culture – the point of Kilgore's 'victory' – drawing on the concept of dissociating signification. Signification always gives the *impression* of orderliness, control and macro social definitions of meaning but is ultimately and already surrendering meaning and experiential substance. The relationship between power and language is highly volatile, largely because language is itself an unstable convergence of mental concepts and their culturally constituted pointers over time. This convergence is really little more than a clash of otherwise arbitrary elements, creating a compound which wriggles, slides, bounces apart again by that equal and opposite force of non-meaning and arbitrariness. It is *power* that seeks to sustain the compound beyond what is sensibly tolerable. Power takes that moment of language harmony or meaning out of the temporal and concrete and into the realm of politics and abstraction. The dissociating effect is the counter-flow toward the normal state of imbalance and arbitrary collision.

The dissociating signifier presents the semblance of completeness, monadism, definition and structure – the sort of natural order that Althusser might call ideology or Barthes might call *doxa*. Dissociation is the outcome of constitutive (always partial) victory whereby the capacity of power and meaning to conduct one another into concentrated zones is critically split or destabilized, casting the probabilities of meaning into varying and erratic directions. This double movement of meaning from dispersed and immediate conditions into central nodes of signification and power, and their ultimate dissolution, might appear to be inevitable. However, as the text or power nodes congregate into ever larger and more formidable positions, the capacity of the individual and the community to imagine, to create and enjoy signification becomes increasingly limited. And indeed, while de Certeau has tried

to reassure us that individuals will always find freedom in 'disguises' (*le perrique*) and in pre-lingual otherness (de Certeau, 1984, 1988; also Fiske, 1989; see Lewis, 1998), these emancipations seem to rely on a fairly confined projection of what imagination can be. Jean Francois Lyotard's rendering of a complex and 'inhuman' imagination assaulted by cybernetic formations demonstrates more fully how the individual's capacity for meaning-making can be confined in a nodalized, institutionalized and corporatized postmodern culture (Lyotard, 1991, also 1995: ch. 13). Freedom, that is, cannot be guaranteed. The microphysics of power identified by Foucault and celebrated by a number of postmodern enthusiasts is not of itself an assurance of liberation, but must contend with the ranging and multiple impetuses of power and diction, including (as Foucault himself would discover) those institutional and state nodes that continue to appropriate and dissociate meaning for the building/re-building of their own constitutivity.

Coppola's surfing motif betrays a concessional ambivalence about the potential and expressive potential of populism. The whole film is, after all, a re-rendering of the horrors of colonialism within an aesthetically gratifying popular medium. The surfing motif and the devotional absurdity of Kilgore's character are as alluring and 'enjoyable' as they are horrific. As a 'postmodern' rendering of the modernist imperial trajectory, the film's ironies are inestimable; the semiotic values of the text slide open through the uneven exchange opposing claims and meaning potentials. The 'surf or fight' motif lies at the centre of these semiotic struggles, as Coppola's own populist imaginary concedes that surfing might equally constitute a resource for imperialist conquest or expressive trangression. In this sense, Coppola's postmodern surfer articulates a faltering convergence of pleasure and risk, militarism and freedom, meaning and meaninglessness.

It may be that Coppola's textualization announces the activity of surfing as characteristically postmodern inasmuch as it articulates a convergence of these oppositions through the locus of the individual, the body and expressive pleasure. The aim of this paper is to locate and identify the 'postmodern surfer' in terms of a cultural politics which addresses the inevitable problematics of representation itself. The emphasis here on the 'postmodern' surfer does not confirm (or deny) the validity of the concept of postmodernism itself; rather, we are using the concept in terms of a rendering of the continued problematics of the modernist trajectory. Our concern here is to illustrate the ways in which questions of the modern/postmodern divide might illuminate the various moments of dissociating signification associated with surfing. We move now from the fictional rendering of surfing, as it is presented in *Apocalypse Now*, to a somewhat widened analysis of the specific genre of the surf movie and video with reference to several specific examples.

Celluloid Surfer

Surfing has been somewhat idealized as antithesis to the contemporary conditions of social control, hegemony and Althusserian ideology. Yet the textualization of surfing necessarily removes it from any pure state of transgression, engaging its everyday practices and its signification in the functioning of consumer capitalism and processes of power (Lewis, 1998). Thus, just as Kilgore's deployment of surfing is an exercise in military imperialism, Coppola's aesthetic deployment, despite the intent of his political satire, is also an exercise in Hollywood/U.S. cultural imperialism: the trading of pleasure-transgression with pleasure-power is never fully able to eschew these fundamental paradoxes. Surfing appears to be a mark of madness, ironically dissembling the 'logics' of war and militarism. But Coppola's engagement in other forms of capitalist logics, other forms of global imperialism, strangely

mutes the intensity of his claim. Kilgore's surfing is a logics of super-imperialism; Coppola's logics is an aesthetic of giant proportions, a mechanical reproduction that would present itself as everyday practice, but which inevitably attaches itself to broader fields of privilege and power. Coppola's film, that is, becomes a textual, economic and cultural canon, mobilizing an extraordinary range of ideological and discursive potentials.

A good deal of academic and historical/social writing on surfing and the beach experience has illuminated these discourses in terms of national, cultural geographies (see Dutton 1985; Drew 1994; Wells 1982 with respect to Australia). While there is certainly some validity in this approach, the tendency has been to emphasize local mythologies to the exclusion of more substantive postmodern and global thematics. Indeed, by the time Coppola's film had been released in 1979 a significant surf movie genre had already been established. Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer: The Search for the Perfect Wave* (1964) and Albert Falzon's *Morning of the Earth* (1972), in particular, had marked themselves as archetypes for the genesis and development of a highly particular style of surfing text. The surf movie, shot on 16mm stock and distributed through public halls and surf clubs, combined elements of the travelogue documentary with a specialized content which engaged the rising youth culture in 'alternative' articulations of community and self-defining pleasure (Young, 1983).

This emblemized anarchy was most forcefully expressed for these alternative surfers in the first large-scale commercial surfing movie, *The Endless Summer*. Combining the generic qualities of the travelogue with the discursive characteristics of the surfing sound, *The Endless Summer* became an archetype for the generation of films that followed. As importantly, however, the film gave expression to the desire for 'freedom' which was becoming the central paradigm for youth culture generally. While the progress of the 1960s saw the experience of freedom personalized in the experimentation of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Doors, for the surfer freedom could be essentialized as the journey to perfect surf – an endless summer of borderless territories which could be sought and experienced by traveling the globe.

Several years after this American classic *Morning of the Earth* was released, representing surfing and its followers' lifestyle as genuine alternatives to the capitalist project. Falzon's film uses the travelogue structure, though the 'narrative' is carried largely through the lyric of accompanying music. This preclusion of voiceover serves generally to underscore the nomadic pace of the film while coloring its euphoric and utopian tones; voices that sing from within the image rather than speak from an extraneous perspective tend also to dissolve textual authority and directiveness. The deployment of the flute promenade to indicate the change of surf setting (cf *Pictures at an Exhibition* [1972]) carries the audience as though across seamless borders, the popular song lyric suggesting a Romantic intensity which is elevated through moods of iridescence and transcendentalism. The *Morning of the Earth* theme, borrowed perhaps from Nehru's famous description of Bali as 'the morning of the world' (see Vickers, 1990, for elaboration of Nehru's visit to Bali), deepens this Romanticism by linking surfing with natural and spiritual essences. The 1970s social theme of escape and rejection of capitalist principles is transformed as it is ennobled by more lofty ideals about the mystique and enriching potentials of surfing as oneness with nature. *Morning of the Earth* was immensely popular among the sub-culture, attracting significant audiences through coastal universities and hired auditoriums.

While the mood and intent of surf movies have changed somewhat since 1972, certain features remain common. Most particularly, the primary focus of the surfing movie – and

indeed the wider spectrum of surfing texts – is the exceptional, high quality wave surfed by outstanding male athletes, represented through a cultural context which emphasizes release from capitalist-social constrictions. The celluloid and videoscape waves are always bigger, less crowded and of far higher quality than those surfed by the majority of viewers; the surfing film idealizes as it edits out the conflicts, tediums, frustrations and sheer disappointments which are the constant of the everyday surfing experience.

Global Surfer

While there is much that could be said about the genre and its evolution, we are most interested here in the utopian ideal which generates much of this articulation – the search for the 'perfect wave'. Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, indeed like many idealized and metaphoricized journeys, the surf journey is generally experienced as an idyll, a domain that transcends the restraints of everyday life, its conventions and social mores. Most particularly, the perfect surf cannot be constrained by national borders; the utopia of perfect surf is most likely to be found outside the crowded and urbanized geographies of First World cities and their civilization. To this extent many of the early surf movies parallel the explorations of affluent, young travelers of the 1960s and 1970s who were seeking some greater knowing in the "Third World" (see Hamilton, 1990). Thus, the transborder excursions depicted in films like *The Endless Summer* and *Morning of the Earth* are informed by broader social and cultural processes. The surf, that is, is imagined as a particular kind of territory – a space which is both evanescent and miraculous in its formations but eternal in its rhythmic re-appearance and connections to all other waves and all other water on the planet. These Romantic imaginings of air and water defy the logics and territorial imperatives of land-based cartographies and international political and military determinations. Surfing could free the individual from the suffocating orderliness of the land; the surfer is uniquely placed to access the mystery and primitive pleasures of this essentialized, 'other' geography.

This Romanticism, however, is very much steeped in the imperialist-orientalist problematic outlined by Edward Said (1978, 1993) and others (e.g. Perera, 1993, 1996). Films such as *Morning of the Earth* engaged the 'east', especially Bali/Indonesia, and its mystical otherness into the constructed essentialism of surfing. Like the Romantic poets and philologists so critically condemned by postcolonial theory, the early surf filmmakers framed much of the surfing body with images of exotic culture and natural (primitive, tribal) knowing. Indeed, the concept of 'nature' (sense, energy, natural knowing, essence) represents something of a constant in surfing movies. Thus, the de-bordered water as an ideological manifestation of globalism is idealized as nature, as *natural*. The framed territories of other culture are simply integrated through this naturalization; the imagined community of water and the bodily pleasure of surfing constitute a universalism – like the liberal humanism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – which implicitly vindicates the appropriation.

Said, of course, is generally correct in his estimation of First World cultural appropriation, and all that is true of Jane Austen and E. M. Forster is also true of surf film-makers like Bruce Brown and Albert Falzon. The textualization of Third World cultures and their geographies is the privilege of the First World. The ideal of global community might inspire a utopian imagining in surfing, but there can be little doubt that the postcolonial critique is equally forceful. Beyond this dispute, however, and as Ien Ang and Jon Stratton have pointed out, all such textual appropriations must be placed within a broader international economic and ethnographic context (Ang and Stratton, 1996). Arjun Appadurai makes the further point that global trends and the internationalization of communications and culture makes it

extremely difficult to identify simple causal connections; the appropriation of territories is itself difficult to locate within the complex of cultural and economic disjunctures (Appadurai, 1990).

This is to say, that the ongoing march of global capital (see Hall, 1991; Soja, 1989) has most certainly swept up the activity and textualizations of surfing, producing modes of 'globalism' that are significantly removed from utopian essentialism. The growth of a corporatized and internationalized surf industry has clearly affected the character, content and production of surfing texts. Indeed, while the early surf movies were produced by independent filmmakers and were characteristically low-budget, innovative and of limited technical sophistication, the more recent movies have been very much shaped by the systematizations of corporate capital. Many of the travelogue style movies of the later 1980s and 1990s, in fact, have been designed as promotion vehicles for the major surf companies, their products and their sponsored surfers. In particular, the international competition circuit has provided the larger corporations with an ideal facility for product marketing; the competitions themselves become the raw material for surf movies that can be shot on video and distributed through the chain of surf shops carrying all other forms of surf accessories and clothing. Economies of scale have enabled the promotional surf movie to dominate the market, squeezing the independent movies almost entirely out of the scene. While the independent, 16mm, privately distributed surf movie almost disappeared during the late 1980s and early 1990s, there have been a few enthusiasts for a more innovative and adventurous movie style have attempted to revive the independent film tradition. While retaining a focus on some of the world's best surfers, Taylor Steele's work such as *Hit & Run* (2000), in particular, has attempted to reinstate the low budget movie that features a range of surfers and surfing styles without functioning primarily as a corporate promotion vehicle.

In fact, the typological distance between the highly professionalized and market-based surf text, and the everyday practices of everyday surfers has markedly increased in the corporatized system. As with many other professionalized sports texts, corporatization has exaggerated the differences between the star and the every-person, producing images of extreme athleticism in circumstances, which most approximate the ideal of the perfect surf. These idealizations might seem also to reconcile the contrary movements of danger and pleasure, producing something like the condition of (mythological) bliss, as outlined by Barthes. However, this reconciliation is only ever partial and the force of the unremitting annihilation/apocalypse is never far away. While the corporatized surf movie prefers to edit out the mistakes, injuries and wipeouts of its 'extra-men' professionals, many movies include images of large dangerous waves and the perils of lesser surfers. Moreover, the audiences, the everyday practitioners of the surf, are exposed to alternative texts, including their own experiences, which restore inevitably the memory of danger and damage; the dissociating signifier of apocalyptic hedonism dissembles at the moment it seems most resolved. To this extent, the corporatized, global surfer becomes the unattainable. The impossibility of the apocalyptic hedonism ideal returns as threat, as prosthetic, as irony against the aspirations of bodily and experiential perfection (Lewis, 1998). Thus, the identity of the everyday surfer and his/her practices can never be fully realized, never complete.

Indeed, this returning implosion and separation of the hedonism/apocalypse ideal is equally problematic for the corporatized surfer himself. As a dissociating signifier, the corporatized surfer can never be actualized as global 'surfer', but can only ever be the constitutivity (symbol) of commodified success. This success is limited in time and space and is already a predetermined erasure of itself – i.e. immanent to any notion of present success is prior and

eventual failure. The utilitarian principle of competitive and individualized pleasure ensures that success can never be sustained over and above the success of others. Success, therefore, is ephemeral and partial, but it is also the thing of its own limits, its own absence. Failure is the interdependency of success, the double entry matrix in Lacanian terms; and as one succeeds, one also fails. This principle applies most obviously to the limits of the commodified body itself since all that a body can do is determined by all that it cannot do. The commodified body is a construction of corporate capital. The body as display, as advertisement, is only valid inasmuch as it satisfies the needs of the corporation, its identity, its products, its success. This hierarchy of bodies is demonstrated most powerfully in the Surfing Hall of Fame recently initiated by the *Rip Curl* surfing corporation. The progenitors and directors of the corporation have placed their own images and memorabilia beside the images of surfing legends, thereby reminding patrons that the corporation is the significant contingency within and as the supporting framework of modern surfing. The individual body therefore becomes universalized as currency, symbolic exchange value; but again this conjuncture of success/failure, universal, individual, pleasure/fear is also and always threatening to split and dissemble its dissociating meanings in very process of its formation.

Gendered Surfer

Clearly, we are arguing here that the textualization of surfing is both virtual (as symbols and ideals) and visceral (as the engagement of emotions and physiology). To this extent, gender is implicated in a range of surfing dictions and ideological disputes. John Fiske has argued that the 'surfie journal' tends to exclude female surfers as participants, preferring to depict the female body as the shore-based focus of male sexuality (Fiske, 1989). While it is true that the surfing ideal might seem to marginalize the female body in particular ways, the unattainable condition of that idealized male body and the constant threat of discursive split, in fact, threaten the identity as surfer of both genders. The heroic ideal which would reconcile danger and pleasure is always imposing itself against the everyday practices of surfing. Of course, the limited presence of an idealized female surfing body and identity carries its own well-discussed perturbations. But for the male the constant exposure to the heroic ideal as unattainable demands an ongoing dialogue between his own everyday practices and the ineluctable threat of identity disjuncture. The threat of his failure must contend inevitably with the prospect of bliss.

In this context, Laura Mulvey's well-known formulation oversimplifies the complex of gendered screen presence and the gendered gaze of the audience (Mulvey, 1984). The castration threat outlined by Mulvey is only partly sustainable because the movement is both toward and against this prospect of bliss. The female body is energized in the male imagination in equally complex and contradictory ways. As noted in my earlier essay on this topic, the prosthetics of the comic strip super-surfer Gonad Man and of the female super-surf-star Pamela Anderson (*Baywatch*) constitute an hyperbolic or ironic manifestation of these same contradictions (Lewis, 1998). The one represents an excess of the unattainable heroic, the other an unattainable desire.

This dialogue between comic reflexivity and desire is also evident in the broader textual fusings of fear and ecstasy. In particular, the relatively few examples of narrative fictional films constructed around surfing demonstrate the uneasiness of these multiple dictions. In films such as *Big Wednesday* (1978) and *Blue Juice* (1995) the populist image of surfing as a transgressive anti-authority activity is deployed as a central trope. This political 'naturalism' is articulated through the community of young male surfers whose lifestyle is unrestrained by

social and financial duty. The dramatic impetus of both films, however, is constructed around the significant challenges to this freedom constituted by the domestic-female on the one hand and the 'natural' decline of male prowess on the other.

Superficially, at least, these dramas seem to accord with narrative tropes common to many sports based films. Domesticity and wider forms of social engagement appear to ameliorate the danger and the heroic potential of this 'extreme' activity. A dark and threatening nature is replaced by a bland, domestic ageing, a nature that has no face but which manifests itself continuously in the failing of male prowess. Life changes, domesticity and children draw the surfer further and further away from the ideal. Thus, it is only the restorative and revitalized danger, which might challenge the decline into gradual death. In both *Big Wednesday* and *Blue Juice* this decline is halted, if only momentarily by the return to the dark and powerful nature of dangerous pleasure; so it can only be the restorative and redemptive pleasure of threat which might save the surfer from the grey vision of a Marlow or a Captain Willard. Paradoxically, however, this re-immersion in dangerous bliss and the re-confirmation of the heroic ideal of masculine culture is not inscribed as a permanent return to youthful vigor. Both films, in fact, conclude with the heroic act being counterbalanced, even reconciled, with the domestic and social. In both films glory is restored by the heroes stepping out from the crowd and taking to the exceptionally large and dangerous surf. The destructive and redemptive power of nature is transformed through the extra-social actions of the heroic males; the surfing ideal of dangerous pleasure is re-confirmed through a new and rejuvenated fusing of male/female, domestic/nature.

Surfing, therefore, is presented as both normative and exceptional; in an Aristotelian sense the climax draws together the exceptional with the banal, leaving the protagonists with little else but the majesty of their fall. The male body in both *Big Wednesday* and *Blue Juice* is featured as active and potentially heroic but also as vulnerable. This juxtaposition of physical power and vulnerability exposes the male body to a range of emotional, sexual and ideological responses. As David Buchbinder and other commentators interested in masculinity have noted, the sexualization and display of the male body complicates the "cultural pressure to force notions of masculinity into neat representational configurations" (Buchbinder, 1998: 27). For Buchbinder this cultural pressure, which may also be manifest in critique, demonstrates clearly that representations of the masculine will necessarily stray from the norm, and, significantly, "that this is the cause of some considerable anxiety in the culture" (Buchbinder, 1998: 27). The male surfer, that is, is frequently exposed to his sexual and physical vulnerability: the fusion of dangerous pleasure and self-mocking desire are manifestations of this inevitable vulnerability and simple human banality.

Endangered Surfer

The dissociation of signifier and signified in contemporary culture implicates ideology and relationships of power. It is not enough, as Ernesto Laclau points out in his discussions on identity and emancipation, to celebrate the radiality of language; at some point we must engage with or actively oppose hegemonies, even as we confront their constitutive nature (Laclau, 1996; see also Agger, 1992; McGuigan, 1992; Inglis, 1993). The multiple dictions that surround, inform and issue from surfing are not of themselves political gestures, nor are they the raw material of an idealized postmodernism, as Deleuze seems to suggest in the following passage:

> Many of the new sports – surfing, windsurfing, hang gliding – take the form of entry into an existing wave. There's no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting into orbit. The basic thing is how to get taken up in the movement of a big wave, column of rising air, to "come between" rather than be the origin of an effort. Yet in philosophy we're going back to eternal values (Deleuze, 1992: 283)

Indeed, surfing needs to be understood as potentially transgressive only when the condition of dissociation is fully confronted, and its incorporation into the hegemonies of capital is effectively challenged.

In particular, it is the instability of the signifier-signified relationship which carries the facility of power nodalization, as well as the opportunities for dispute. As we have noted, this instability is immanent to those discursive compounds which draw together opposite and contending cultural claims. Andrew Milner's postmodern typology, apocalyptic hedonism, is certainly significant to the contemporary surfing text; the apparent resolution of the tension would seem also to remove the surfing text's capacity for transgression and render it a more orderly, sublime and compliant (Milner, 1994). That is, with the resolution of alternative cultural claims, the surfing text might well be conscripted into the grand ideology of international capital. Yet, as we have also seen, the dissociation process is by no means monadic, nor even complete, but rather it works in various directions simultaneously. The question, therefore, is not whether the surfing text is of itself transgressive, but rather how might the impulse of dissociation be mobilized for the purposes of active contention. Equally, the nomination of surfing as a primary, postmodern textual definer is far less important than the opportunities that surfing texts might provide for disruption to the systematization of global capital and externally imposed order.

The notion of 'apocalypse' is sufficiently vague to allow it to refer to the revelatory annihilation of an individual, community or entire life group. In our discussions on surfing we have tended to emphasize the personal dangers of the surfer which are attached to personal pleasures. However, because of its attachment to Romantic ideals and social conceptions, surfing might also articulate the wider globalist devastations of 'nature' or the 'natural environment'. Through a range of official, aesthetic and private dictions, the surf and surfing culture is very much imbued with this 'high value'. And yet, fundamental paradoxes persist since 'nature' is itself threatened by the consumption capitalism (most particularly the petro-chemical industry) which provides the products for the surfers to use. The waves break according to the patterns of nature; but it is the affluence of culture that constitutes the space, the action and the meaning of the surf. Nature becomes a contingency of affluence.

Of course the concept of 'nature' – like 'environment' or 'ecology' – is by no means an ideologically neutral term, but has been widely deployed for polemical and political purposes. In particular, surfing texts construct nature as a 'non-originary origin', a Romantic trope in which pure nature is contrasted with modernity, social constraint, and environmental damage. Thus, setting forth on an existing wave, as Deleuze describes it, might seem to commend the surfing act as uniquely natural - deriving from and acceding to a pre-lingual condition, the spirit of a tribal or primordial (un)consciousness. Both directly and indirectly this political nature is an undercurrent of much surfing discourse, even though the paradoxes persist. Organized and official discourses such as the international, corporatized discourses of competition surfing, for example, are replete with environmental messages. The *Quicksilver Pro* held annually at Garujigan, Indonesia, specifically addresses the issue of environment,

development and world heritage though without acknowledging the implications of its own corporatist appropriations, its privileges and power.

Jean Francois Lyotard has spoken about the significance of the inhuman dimensions of the human condition (Lyotard, 1986, 1991, 1995). Lyotard is railing against the diminishing of imagination by the processes of systematization, but his discussion directs us to consider more fully the character of our culture. For many, liberation can be estimated in terms of logically constructed ideology, definitions of power that are easily locatable and easily challenged. Even without the convenience of class-based struggle, proponents of this approach locate their opposition in zones of privilege and power. The problem with this approach is that it fails continually to account for the complex nature of power and language, and wherever it defines itself, there is always the rushing in of new modes of control.

Lyotard's definition of the inhuman permits a more elusive and contradictory apprehension of our humanity. In surfing the inhuman is most noticeable. The dimensions of surfing's multiple dictions can only be illuminated, never actualized. The dissociation of signifiers like apocalyptic hedonism allow us to wriggle free of closures that would infinitely define us in acts of pleasure or resistance. Our pleasure is bleak. We ought, therefore, resist the confinements of language and power by gestures and actions of the imagination. The immediacy of experience should allow us the freedom to imagine and articulate, to construct a politics that will confront the paradox without the return of 'glassy essence', as Rorty calls it. That is, our aesthetic must be accomplished politically and through a horizonal vision rather than through the unsustainable utopias of faith, pleasure or submissive reconciliation.

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