THE BREAK

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Through surfing man enters the domain of the wave, is contained by and participates in its broadcast, measures and is in turn measured, meets its rhythm and establishes his own, negotiates continuity and rupture. The surfer transforms the surfbreak into an architectural domain. This thesis undertakes a critical exploration of this domain as a means of expanding and enriching the territory of the architectural imagination.

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For my parents,
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Poet's Obligation

To whomever is not listening to the sea
this Friday morning, to whomever is cooped up
in house or office, factory or woman
or street or mine or harsh prison cell:
to him I come, and, without speaking or looking,
I arrive and open the door of his prison,
and a vibration starts up, vague and insistent,
a great fragment of thunder sets in motion
the rumble of the planet and the foam,
the raucous rivers of the ocean flood,
the star vibrates swiftly in its corona,
and the sea is beating, dying and continuing.

So, drawn on by my destiny,
I endlessly must listen to and keep
the sea's lamenting in my awareness,
I must feel the crash of the hard water
and gather it up in a perpetual cup
so that, wherever those in prison may be,
wherever they suffer the autumn's castigation,
I may be there with an errant wave,
I may move, passing through windows,
and hearing me, eyes will glance upward
saying: how can I reach the sea?
And I shall broadcast, saying nothing,
the starry echoes of the wave,
a breaking up of foam and of quicksand,
a rustling of salt withdrawing,
the grey cry of sea-birds on the coast

So, through me, freedom and the sea
will make their answer to the shuttered heart.

Pablo Neruda*

* Mark Eisner, ed. The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004) 145.

Prologue

FROM THE CREST OF THE HILL the Pacific remains hidden from view, concealed by the remnant of a forest that once stretched from Alaska to California. Before the highway bends inland the gravel shoulder widens, its soft surface criss-crossed by tire-tracks full of last night's rain. It's quiet and deserted. Streamers of white slip through the trees which loom wet and ancient. The air is cool and damp with the taste of salt. From the side of the road a trail leads down to the ocean and an unspoken break. Every surfer has his secrets.

Surfing is a solitary activity. Often it doesn't feel that way, particularly at the crowded spots. But in truth everyone paddles out alone. There's only so much one surfer can do for another should trouble arise in the water: surfing is to inhabit one's solitude. Surfers share a fascination for unmarked trails, and along this coast, for ugly beaches and bad weather. The desire: to slip into the ocean unseen; to seek out the lonely struggle, where we might lose and so find ourselves.

Stepping into the forest the gloom descends in a few quick strides, green devouring light. Surfing includes hiking in this part of the world, since most breaks are inaccessible by vehicle and must be approached on foot. The air grows thick and sluggish, full with the sick-sweet flavours of decay and fertility, and the smell of black rich earth. Breathing slows and becomes conscious. The threshold between things blurs: promiscuous roots and branches embrace, fungus grows on the dead and dying, epiphytes bloom in the canopy. The edge of one life bleeds into another. When the surf is powerful a fine mist rises above the coast, coating the spider's web, collecting on oily leaves and soaking into deadwood. The cracked trunks of the cedars glisten. Water beads on skin and neoprene.

Some claim that technology has changed surfing irrevocably, demystified it. Some say with the internet, with satellites and web-cams, modern science has eliminated contingency. But waves are subtle creatures: they feel the pull of the moon and distant sun, but still respond to the touch of a gentle breeze. A slight change in the swell direction or shift in the tide can turn perfection into slop. And there are always the unexpected gifts, the dark lines that appear unannounced. The sea has secrets too.

Stepping into the forest here is always an act of faith. It's impossible to verify the conditions from the highway, and often the ocean is miles away. In the forest distances are difficult to judge and progress is not easily measured. Sometimes the forest seems to brighten, promising an end. But it's just another clearing, and past that more trees and mist. It's easy to lose one's way, to travel in circles. And then, somewhere along the way, the air changes or the hollow thump of a breaking wave cuts through the silence.

* * *

I CAN'T BREATHE. The water is cold and dark. I'm drowning and I've been here before; as a child I almost drowned. Underwater a long forgotten feeling brushes against me: I'm going to die. This thought is pushed aside by another wave, which sends me spinning. I can't tell what's up or down, if I'm being pushed to shore or dragged to sea. This could be the last wave of the set or just the latest. The demand for air becomes deafening. Breathe. This is the base desire. It belongs to those functions too important for our conscious mind: heartbeats, digestion, sweat. There's no time to think. *Breathe!* annihilates thought.

Fear is an inescapable part of surfing. Mostly it lingers vaguely at the edges of one's awareness, a constant hum that everyone must learn to endure. Surfers can't let their fears overwhelm them or surfing becomes impossible. But nor can they ignore them: only the foolhardy tune them out entirely. The dangers at any break, however unlikely, are still real and ever-present. In truth, surfing is not exceedingly treacherous but the margins for error are small. Much depends on a surfer's instincts, which fear sharpens. Still, the ocean is ultimately unknowable: sneak-sets happen, accidents happen, sharks happen. One simply learns to accept these things. But anyone who has spent long hours alone offshore knows this is easier said than done. Below our fragile acceptance prowls a more basic terror,

which slaps us awake when we sense something pass beneath us or when we are held underwater and we've run out of air.

I need to breathe now. Desperate, I half-surface, inhaling foam and seawater in harsh gasping breaths. My throat convulses. Retching, stars multiply. My eyes burn with brine. I can't see. The next wave catches me unaware, throwing me end over end. My hands come up– too late. My face is thrust into the bottom, forcing my mouth open. Gritty silt washes between my teeth and swirls at the back of my throat. I can't move. The wave holds me firmly. Panic sets in. Then suddenly the wave lets go. The leash tugs at my ankle and I climb its length back to the surface. Bobbing in the froth the sound roars for a moment then quiets, muffled as my head dips below. Breaths come ragged and uneven. Another wave rises up, dragging me towards it.

Sometimes paddling-out can be the most difficult part of a session, so taxing and infuriating that it leaves one too exhausted to catch waves. Nothing is more frustrating then being turned back by surf that's too big and blown-out– except a succession of flat pleasant days. If they pray, surfers pray for storms. In their private ways each invokes the spirit of the ancient Hawaiians, who would lash the water with strands of morning glory hoping the ripples would be answered in kind.[1] At times the sea responds with abundance. Other times it is silent. Sometimes the answer is unrestrained fury.

I drag myself on top of the board, turning it seaward again. I'm not making any headway. I know this. The waves are too powerful and the outside is no closer than it was twenty-minutes ago. My strength is starting to fail. But my tired arms keep lifting, one after the other. What brought me into the water? What transformed this storm into an invitation? Or made the lack of other surfers seem like providence instead of cause for caution? Why I am still out here? Answers escape my grasp. They don't matter anymore. I paddle because I can, and will until my arms give out. I've lost all my reasons.

* * *

SAND DUNES RISE UP at the foot of the Rodanthe Pier before giving way to the waves. The pier is one of many which extend seaward from the resort communities of the Outer Banks, a series of narrow islands off the coast of North

[1] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996) 48.

Carolina separating the mainland from the open ocean. North of Florida the Outer Banks are the most hurricane-prone region on the Atlantic coast; and the islands' sandy composition, coupled with the seasonal storms and strong currents, make their coastline extremely susceptible to erosion. Like the dunes, the shore is constantly in flux. When the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was built in 1870 it was half a kilometer from the ocean. In 1987 the waves were breaking less than fifty metres away. Despite such uncertain ground, however, development on the Outer Banks has flourished.

Row upon row of condominiums and summer-homes elbow each other for space in the sand, wedged tightly on either side of the lone highway. They are interspersed with golf courses, strip malls and go-cart tracks. Billboards line the asphalt strip announcing more of the same. The risks to building here are high, but so are the returns, given the millions who flock to the coast each summer. Unlike the visitors, however, the developments don't stray past the dunes, which form a physical and psychic limit to the architect's ambitions. The buildings seek shelter from the sea, hunkering down behind the dunes' protective bulk. Beyond them extends but one construction: the pier.

Unadorned and unkempt, the pier staggers down the beach. It's a vestige of impolite society, and out of place amid the buildings inland, colonial impersonations painted in the garish colours of Miami Beach. In contrast its pilings stand in disarray, bare but for the barnacles and algae. There is relief in its artlessness. The pilings form a ghostly forest, rising from the brine to support a canopy of uneven planks. They shelter starfish and anemones, crabs and urchins. Colonies of barnacles huddle at their feet. The pilings dampen the force of the waves, causing the water to deposit sand as it swirls around them. Over time sandbars accumulate. Their size and shape change, as well as their location, depending on the direction and strength of the currents; and a particularly violent storm may frighten them away altogether. The pier also attracts seagulls and pelicans, and in the summer months, fisherman, all of which are drawn to the fish that congregate beneath the piles. And piers attract surfers too.

Keeping one's bearings at a surfbreak is challenging at the best of times, and when the weather is bad or the surf is big it can become almost impossible. The ocean is never still. On long exposed beaches like those of the Outer Banks the strength of the wind and currents grows with each unencumbered mile. The pier offers surfers a modest shelter and orients them amidst the ever-shifting waves. But

around the Rodanthe Pier even the ground is protean and unstable. Like the dunes, the sandbars are constantly in motion. Surfers are drawn to sandbars because they improve the shape of the breaking waves, and surfers are drawn to the pier because it collects sandbars. When the weather turns foul the towns of the Outer Banks empty and the pier closes for the season. But winter brings storms, which bring waves, and the waves bring surfers. As they have for years, they gather together in the shadow of pier.

* * *

Inside Out

Surfing as a subject really has no edges. It's not like baseball or aviation or beekeeping, where the relevant information– box scores, airports, honey produced– is more or less identifiable. Organized competition, for instance, takes up only a small corner of the surfing world. There is a loose set of enterprises known as the surf industry, which surfers depend on for equipment (though it seems geared mainly to selling sunglasses by wrapping them in the mystique of surfing), but if it were to vanish tomorrow nearly all surfers would somehow carry on with their wave-riding lives. So surfing, in a way, has no center, no institutional structure– no obvious place to start or finish...[1]

[1] Matt Warshaw, *The Encyclopedia of Surfing* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003) foreword.

AT ANY SURFBREAK the most dangerous place for a surfer is on the inside. In surfing the term 'inside' describes the area shoreward of where the waves break; 'outside' refers to the area seaward. Currents tend to be more powerful and unpredictable on the inside, and surfers must frequently contend with rocks, coral and shifting sandbars in addition to waves that break in almost uninterrupted succession. Even more perilous, however, is the impact zone, the area immediately shoreward of a breaking wave. Here the force of each breaker is most concentrated and consequently it is where almost all surf-related injuries and deaths occur.[2] The first task for any surfer is to get outside.

At some breaks and in favourable conditions, this can be achieved with relative ease. If timed to coincide with a lull between sets, one might be able to paddle into the line-up without getting one's hair wet.[3] At most breaks, however, getting outside tends to be challenging and in many cases, trying under any circumstances. Getting outside is the basic test of any surfer. One must have the stamina to endure the onslaught of breaking waves and the patience not to rush prematurely into the impact zone. Sometimes it's a futile endeavour. When it's blown-out, the lull between sets can disappear,[4] and without a channel of deep water, paddling through the constant breakers can become impossible, particularly when the waves are large and 'closing-out'.[5] In these conditions, after being pummeled by the waves and repeatedly held underwater, surfers are often forced back to the beach.

[2] Warshaw 287.
[3] The 'line-up' is the area just beyond where the waves are breaking, where surfers congregate to wait for and catch waves.
[4] In windy conditions waves can be blown over and pushed into one another, thereby disrupting the natural rhythm of the sets.
[5] A 'closeout' wave doesn't have a shoulder, but breaks all at once, all along its length– often this is a feature of beachbreaks, but can also be the result of high winds.

Other times, even if they've made it to the outside, the struggle can leave them too exhausted to catch waves or push themselves to their feet. Sometimes a surfer can get 'caught inside'.[6] Often waves break offshore from jagged rocks, sheer cliff-faces or along coastlines where passage to and from the water is difficult at the best of times. After a bad wipeout or change in the conditions, a shift in the tide or a quickly rising swell, a surfer can suddenly find himself trapped, battered by the surf with no means of exiting the water.

On the outside, in contrast, waves tend to pass silently and unobtrusively, their immense power expressed only by the rhythmic billowing of the sea.

> On the open sea, with no wind, a toddler on a body board would be perfectly safe floating over one-hundred-foot swells; he'd rise and fall in big happy circles. Shove the same kid into shallow water during a four-foot south swell at the Wedge in Newport Beach… and you'd get arrested for attempted murder.[7]

Waves don't break on the outside because of the greater depth, and unless the wind is blowing, the surface tends to be smooth. Despite the proximity of the breaking waves, sometimes detonating less than five or ten feet away, it is often surprisingly quiet. In the relative calm surfers conserve their energy while they wait for waves, timing the sets and positioning themselves to enter the fray. Surfers take refuge on the outside.

But they don't stay there. Surfers seek to place themselves on the edge of where inside and outside meet, sometimes gathering in numbers, sometimes looking to be alone. While waiting for waves they inhabit this threshold and while surfing they traverse the boundary itself. Because they are determined by each successive wave inside and outside don't refer to fixed territories; instead they describe equivocal regions whose limits are constantly changing. At some locations the waves break in fairly regular patterns, but even the most consistent spots are subject to variation.[8] Sandy beachbreaks tend to be the most erratic, since waves break over a constantly shifting terrain, but breaking waves are influenced by a host of factors: the direction and size of a swell; the type and magnitude of the tide and whether it's incoming or outgoing; the local weather, particularly the direction and strength of the wind. Furthermore, how waves will break at a given location not only varies from swell to swell, but can change over the course of a

[6] 'Caught inside' means "being trapped on the shoreward side of an incoming wave, or set of waves." (Warshaw 116).
[7] Steve Hawk, Waves (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005) 13.
[8] Reefbreaks and pointbreaks tend to be the most consistent type, as they are generally composed of rock and/or coral.

surf-session; and within each set the size of every wave fluctuates considerably, thus altering where and when it will break. Consequently, the boundary between inside and outside is always in flux: a surfer in the ideal position to catch the third wave of a set might suddenly find himself in the impact zone of the second; or conversely, he may have retreated too far outside after a close-out set, leaving him out of position for the best waves of the day.

In addition this boundary is essentially invisible. It reveals itself for a moment, manifest as a wall of white-water, then is gone, only to reappear later in a different location. After a set has rolled through, there may be a line of foam suggesting the division, or the colour of the water might indicate the location of a reef or sandbar. But these signs are not definitive. The next wave could be smaller or larger than the last, it could pass by harmlessly or send a surfer careening onto the reef. If they're experienced, surfers will know what to look for; and if it's a familiar break they may know its particularities, what tends to happen in certain conditions and what to expect at different times of the year. But experience and knowledge only go so far. Because of their proximity to the edge a surfer can't know which side he's on until the wave is already bearing down. And nobody can know what the next set will bring. As such, surfers are ever-watchful for subtle changes: they feel for shifts in the current or tide and are always checking the horizon for sneak sets and rogue waves.[9] Inattention can lead to an unpleasant trip over the falls, a broken board or worse when the surf gets bigger.[10]

Because the line can't be fixed, surfers are constantly guessing where the next wave will break: they approximate, they observe, they educate their instincts over time. They stay in motion. In the end it's an intuited boundary that separates inside from out, and every surfer must determine its location for themselves. Those who are more experienced might drift closer to the impact zone, confident in their ability to slip out of harm's way or bear the consequences of miscalculation. Those who are less certain might linger further out, foregoing waves in favour of a safer position. Errors in judgment usually result in some bruises, embarrassment and a mouthful of seawater, as most surfers don't tackle the monster waves that dominate the surf-media, where the slightest error can be deadly. But even smaller waves can do considerable damage, and experienced surfers have drowned in less than terrifying

[9] A 'sneak' or 'clean-up set' is "a set of waves much bigger than the going standard; a fairly regular occurrence when a swell is on the rise." (Warshaw, 124). A 'rogue wave' refers to a large wave, sometimes twice as big as the average waves on a particular day– like a sneak set, except it is a single wave.

[10] Going 'over the falls' is "a type of wipeout, or stage in a wipeout, in which the surfer is embedded in the crest as it hooks over and drops into the trough. Regarded as the sport's most dangerous type of wipeout…" (Warshaw, 437).

conditions. Sometimes it comes down to luck: for some, an unexceptional fall or collision has resulted in horrific injuries, while others have endured spectacular wipeouts without a scratch.

Surfing is founded upon a relationship with the wave, a phenomenon that is unpredictable and terrifying but also reassuring in its constancy: each wave is harbinger of the unknown, but there are always more waves. Despite its evanescence the wave is an image of endurance, a fragile permanence achieved through endless repetition and change. Surfers mirror this strange paradox upon each wave and at every surfbreak. Over the course of a session surfers will travel between inside and outside many times, paddling into waves, riding along their face, and returning to the line-up– where they wait for and drop into more waves. Similarly, most surfers return to the same break or stretch of coastline week after week, season after season. On land as in the water their movements revolve around the waves, reflecting the cyclical patterns of the changing seasons, the ebb and flow of the tides and the alternations of day and night. Like the waves, surfers leave no evidence of their passing, not on the surfbreak, where they spend so many hours, nor on the waves themselves. Surfing inscribes itself upon a self-effacing canvas. And yet, through their repeated inhabitation surfing gains substance, becoming a source of meaning and identity, and over time the surfbreak becomes more than a stretch of ocean: surfers draw it within the sphere of culture, if only temporarily.

In the end, the surfbreak is too unpredictable and inhospitable to be domesticated entirely. But nor is it merely wilderness: every surfbreak bears a name, has a history; each is governed by its own codes and traditions. Every break has its locals and drifters, possesses an inside and an outside. It is a created place, a cultural domain where 'domain' is taken to mean, "the sphere of influence of a function or functions; it may have physical effects on some geographical locality or it may not."[11] Thus, the term 'surfbreak' not only refers to a physical space but includes the surfers and the waves. To the geographer a coastline's features can be considered independently of the waves. But for the surfer the two are inalienable. The surfer's understanding of the break is more akin to the biologist's, for whom the surfbreak constitutes an ecotone, a region of biological intensity caused by the convergence of two ecosystems. For biologists an ecotone includes the physical landscape, but also encompasses the movements of air and water, the plants and their pollen, the paths of predator and prey, the migrations of animal and insect. For biologists the animal and the environment through which it moves are inseparable, including environmental phenomenon.

[11] Susanne Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) 95.

Like the biologist, surfers are also conscious of the other creatures with which they share the surfbreak. Many surfers have had the pleasure of surfing with seals or dolphins, and many value surfing precisely for this reason, for placing them in such close proximity with the natural world. But there are risks to such proximity, not least of which being the threat of sharks. Though they are unlikely, shark attacks are an unavoidable possibility at many locations, and a reality that every surfer must come to terms with:

> … you know they're out there, you even know they're more likely to be at one place than another, and, yet, the odds are on you side. You either quit surfing (unthinkable), or accept a sentiment commonly shared in the water: "Yeah, I figure, if a shark's going to eat me, he's going to eat me." Sensible enough, although one feels compelled to ask how many aspects of late-twentieth-century American life involve the possibility of being devoured by a two-thousand-pound predator with razor teeth.[12]

The surfer's primary focus, however, remains on the waves, and after that, on other surfers. For good or for ill the surfbreak is a profoundly social place, a commons where groups of surfers can gather together or a solitary refuge where individuals can escape the rigours of communal life. Without the presence of surfable waves, or rather their *possible* presence, and thus the presence of surfers, the surfbreak ceases to be. Even when it's flat or deserted Malibu is still a surfbreak. But if the possibility of waves were to suddenly vanish, 'Malibu' would again refer only the beach, as it did before surfing began. In some locations, where coastal development has destroyed reefs or sandbars, although the waves still break they are no longer surfable. In these cases the surfers have disappeared and along with them the names of the breaks, their history and traditions. The wave is an event, which along with surfer transforms the ocean into something else. Like the running of the bulls in Pamplona, the surfbreak is both a place and an event: during the festival the city does not physically change, but it's no longer the same place; similarly, if the festival were to cease altogether Pamplona would cease to be the same city.

Although each is different, similarities between surfbreaks exist. Reefbreaks tend to resemble other reefbreaks, as do pointbreaks and beachbreaks. They all share the same basic division of inside and outside and all occupy a similar geographic context, situated between dry land and the open ocean.[13] There are also cultural similarities: although locally determined and maintained, the codes which govern

[12] Daniel Duane, Caught Inside (New York: North Point Press, 1996) 59.

[13] There are examples which stretch this axiom: the Cortes Bank, for instance, breaks a hundred miles off the coast of California. The overwhelming majority of surfbreaks, however, are located much closer to shore.

the surfbreak are remarkably consistent with one another across continents, as are many traditions and surfing techniques. Ultimately, however, each surfbreak belongs to a specific coastline, and like any civic space, each possesses a unique cultural identity. Strange as it may seem, although it also the element which unifies each break with every other, the wave is also the source of a surfbreak's singularity.

All waves begin in the same way, the result of wind blowing across the surface of the ocean. Stronger winds blowing for longer periods produce larger waves or swell, and in the open ocean all waves share the same sinusoidal form. Waves created by a single storm will break in Hawaii as well as up and down the coast of North America or even further afield. In this sense the wave is a unifying element, and surfers at Waikiki and those at Malibu surf the same waves. But as waves leave the frictionless deep they begin to feel the touch of the sea floor, which, depending on their size,[14] can begin very far from land. As the depth decreases the effect of underwater contours on the form and course of the waves becomes more acute. Consequently, every wave is shaped by the shore upon which it breaks, from the deep underwater canyons and ridges to the curve of the coastline and the shape of the reef, sandbar or point over which it collapses. In this sense, at first gradually and then with increasing intensity, every wave is honed by its destination. The surfer does not inhabit an ideal or anonymous wave but rather one which is indigenous to a place, a specific surfbreak of which it is the signature.

Indeed, surfers often use 'wave' and 'break' interchangeably: 'Pipeline' is equally a break and a wave. Indeed, many surfers can recognize the shape of famous waves by sight, even if they haven't surfed there. Because of magazines and film the shape of certain iconic waves has become common knowledge, from the mythic tubes of Pipeline to the tapered perfection of Malibu. But the signature of a place isn't purely nor even primarily visual. Most surfers know their home break by feel, by smell, by how the wind blows and how the currents twist through the line up: it is a domain. They know who surfs with them, birds or seals as well as other surfers. But the wave is not only a phenomenon common to all oceans and surfbreaks. It is also one of the most pervasive forms in nature:

> We are surrounded and influenced everywhere by waves. From the radiations of light and color, to the sounds that vibrate through our atmosphere, to the cycles of the tides, and of night and day, and of the movements of our lives – it seems that everything

[14] Below a depth of ½ its wavelength the movement of a wave will not be effected by the seafloor; larger waves have longer wavelengths and are thus subject to the effects of underwater contours in deeper water than smaller waves.

> comes in waves, or as cycles moving within waves… wave action is the fundamental way in which energy is transported and transmitted in this world.[15]

All waves possess a similar form, whether waves of light and sound or those in the ocean. But ocean-waves are unique, not only for how they respond to a place but also because they are commensurable with the human body: they move about as fast as we can run,[16] and the medium renders their form perceptible and their power tangible. They have a lifespan: they are born, they mature, they decay and lose their coherence. Nor are waves actually 'things'. They are not masses of water moving in the ocean, rather they are energy passing through the medium of water. Herein lies the key to the wave's evanescence: they are energy, they only exist in motion, they cannot be secured or preserved. Like us, waves are in transit.[17]

Because of the wave's evanescence surfers must attune their lives to be as responsive to its rhythms as their bodies are while in the water. Surfing is not something to be scheduled into one's life; rather, it is something one's life must scheduled around. As a result, determining where surfing begins and ends can be as difficult as fixing the boundaries of inside and out. This is one of the real reasons why surfing is referred to as a 'lifestyle'. Its considerable demands regularly draw surfers outside the conventional time and space of modern society. In this, surfing transcends the narrow definitions of sport and leisure, and for many surfers becomes a way of being in the world. Indeed, from its origins in ancient Hawaii to the present day surfing has been a highly symbolic as well as physical act. Like his ancient counterpart, the modern surfer is a mythic figure, one that has transformed the surfbreak into a place of enduring cultural significance.

* * *

[15] Drew Kampion, The Book of Waves (Santa Barbara: Arpel Graphics, Inc. and Surfer Publications, 1989) 38.
[16] Hawk 10.
[17] Octavio Paz, Itinerary: An Intellectual Journey (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1994) 5.

Juárez

JUÁREZ IS A CITY of temptation. Each year it draws thousands of Mexicans to the border from farms and villages to the south, lured north by the promise of work in Juárez and the possibility of slipping into the United States. Most arrive with nothing and those who are unable to cross into America end up in the shantytowns or *colonias* that surround the city. For the young men living in the *colonias*, lack of opportunity tempts them into joining gangs and into smuggling drugs, guns, and immigrants across the border. The promise of making a living wage tempts the young girls into selling their bodies.

For American teenagers living across the border in El Paso it lures them south with a lower drinking age, cheap booze and a surfeit of illicit drugs. "I'm not twenty-one," one says about his trips across the border, "I'm too old for Juárez, but too young for America…. I'm in limbo."[1] They come to party in the bars along the Avenida Benito Juárez and their reasoning is simple: "For us, being high school kids, you know, and sometimes college kids, especially in college, you have little money… It's a good way to save some money, come have a good time with a bunch of your friends; the atmosphere's great. It's a little risky, but it's worth it."[2] When asked about the risks their answers are equally uncomplicated: "Sometimes you can get really trashed, and do some stupid stuff…" Other tourists are drawn to Juárez by the cheap price for sex. As one teenager put it, "you're about two minutes from anything you want..."[3]

For the multinational corporations that have settled in Juárez there are numerous attractions: the abundance of low-cost labour, lax environmental regulations and

[1] Scott Carrier, "Juárez: A City on the Edge (Part 4)," Day to Day, NPR, Washington, June 21 2004, accessed June 2007 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1966988>.
[2] Carrier, Juárez (Part 4).
[3] Carrier, Juárez (Part 4).

labour laws, inexpensive land, and most of all, the Maquiladora legislation, which permits foreign-owned factories or *maquiladoras* to manufacture and export goods tax-free.[4] For similar reasons Juárez has proven profitable for drug dealers or *narcotrafficantes*, who have taken equal advantage of the city's poverty and lawlessness– its two most valuable commodities. The destitute and disenfranchised majority is easily terrorized and controlled, and the small powerful elite is easily bought: judges, government officials, police and border guards. Indeed, the drug trade is perhaps the biggest temptation in Juárez, so big that its dimensions are difficult to comprehend: in 1994 it was estimated to have contributed $30 billion to the Mexican economy. The same year the oil and gas industry contributed $7 billion. In the mid-nineties, one Juárez 'businessman' was moving one hundred tones of cocaine across the border each year, or the equivalent of $200 million a week.[5] Drugs are estimated to constitute between four and twenty percent of Mexican GDP. To many observers the picture is clear: "without [the drug trade] the Mexican economy would totally collapse."[6]

For those living in the developed world the city offers a different temptation: to ignore, and then to forget Juárez. Its ugliness and brutality tempt us to look away, to divert our eyes and our attention; it tempts us to deny the existence of such a place and other places like it. The image of Juárez is so stark and chilling that we are tempted to believe it is an aberration or a momentary phase rather than a consistent pattern– the 'growing pains' of a 'developing' nation. We are tempted to believe that what happens in Juárez happens over there, to someone else.[7] We are tempted to be silent.

Juárez stands pressed-up against the border between Mexico and the United States, separated from El Paso by the Rio Grande or the Rio Bravo– depending on which side one is standing.[8] For the writer Charles Bowden, the city is a kind of ecotone:

> Where an ecotone occurs there is more life and life is louder and more grasping because two or more groups of plants and animals overlap, boosting life's pitch and intensity. Every naturalist knows this and every successful hunter stalks these zones. That is what is happening now on the border of México and the United States, where a

[4] Under the law they are considered 'assembly' plants, and so strictly speaking nothing is produced– and so nothing is taxed.
[5] Charles Bowden, Juaréz: The Laboratory of our Future (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1998) 64.
[6] Bowden, 64.
[7] Bowden.
[8] In the United States it's called the Rio Grande; in Mexico, the Rio Bravo.

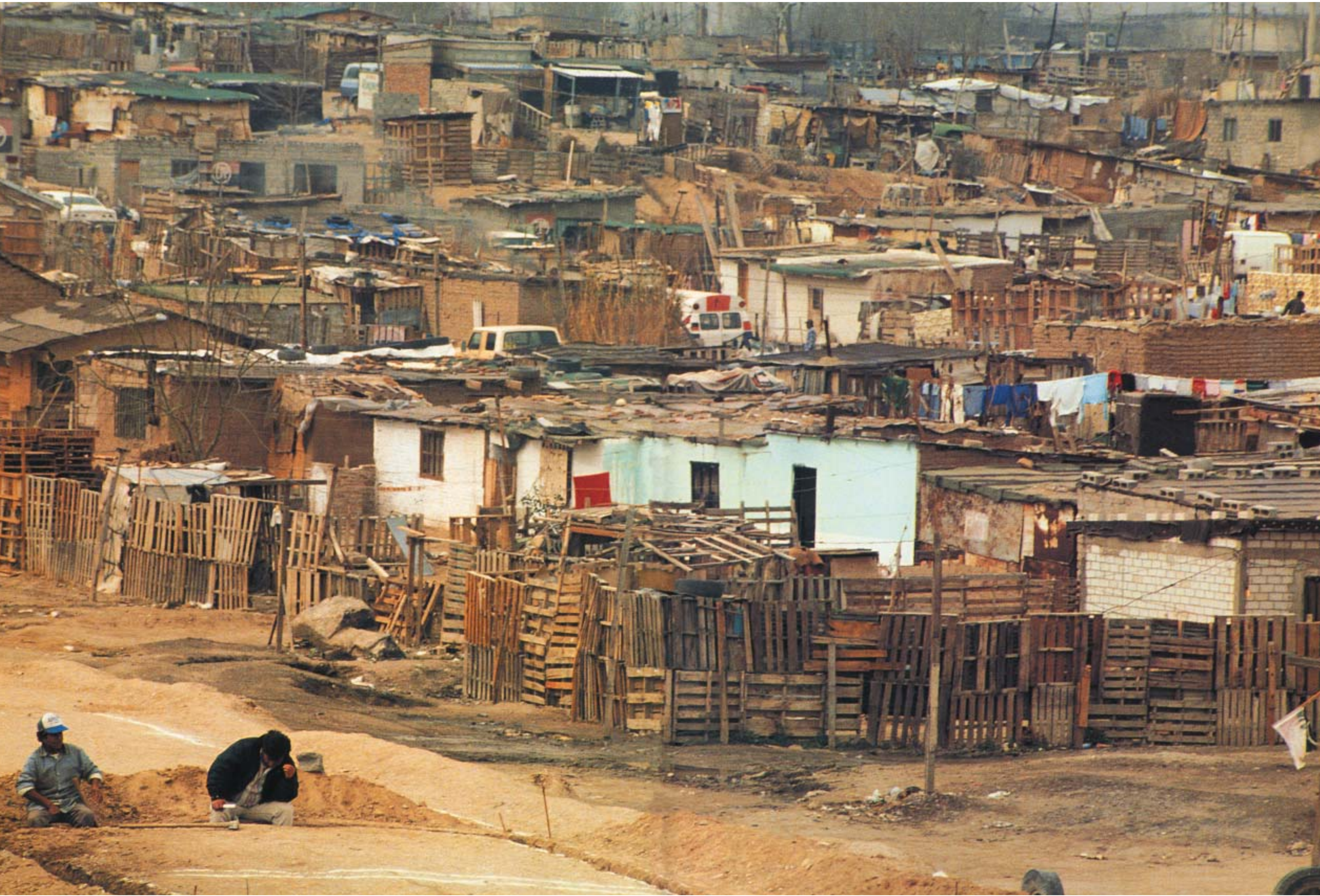
> huge ecotone of flesh and capital and guns is rubbing up against itself as two cultures and two economies and two languages meet and mingle and erupt into something we cannot yet name.[9]

Juárez is a city on the edge of things, but it's also where the edges of things break down and blur together. Juárez and El Paso are very different places but from the air it's impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. From the air they are one city. Technically the border follows the path of the river through Juárez, but boundaries here are rarely so clean or clear. Running parallel with the actual border is a thirty-kilometre ribbon, a designated 'free-trade' zone. Politically it belongs within Mexico, but practically it exists in legal-limbo: it is nowhere, like the 'tariff-free' zones created in China and South-East Asia– like Guantanamo Bay.

The zone was created in the 1960s to lure foreign investment to Mexico with tax-exemptions, making cheap Mexican labour even more attractive. The stated intention was to introduce taxes to support the local community as the economy grew, emulating the development models of the industrialized world. In 2001 there were over three hundred *maquiladoras* operating in Juárez collectively exporting over $10 billion a year. In total they contributed $1.5 million in 'voluntary taxes' or one-fifteenth of one percent.[10]

Today the *maquiladoras* employ over one hundred thousand workers. They are paid anywhere between one-eighth and one-fifteenth of their American counterparts. Most of the workers tend to be young women and the turnover is very high– between fifty and one hundred and fifty percent a year. Officially women are preferred because they have smaller, more nimble hands better suited for the tedious work. But they are also more easily exploited and intimidated in a managerial structure dominated by men. For a 48-hour workweek they will earn about fifty dollars (twice the minimum wage in Mexico). But prices along the border hover between eighty and ninety percent of those in the United States.[11] In Juárez one dollar-an-hour is a starvation wage.[12] But even that is no longer competitive: in China and South-East Asia people will work for a quarter an hour. In the past three years thirty percent of the border factories have moved overseas, with one hundred leaving Juárez alone.

[9] Bowden, 48.
[10] 15 Nov. 2006, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/amnestynow/juarez.html>.
[11] Bowden, 80.
[12] Carrier, Juárez (Part 3).



Still, many point to the *maquiladora* as a great success story and an important part of Mexico's march towards industrialization. In the past ten years it's estimated that $130 billion dollars of foreign capital has flowed into Mexico. Since the early nineties its $1.3 billion dollar trade deficit with the U.S. has become a $47 billion dollar trade surplus.[13] Many argue the Mexican economy has never been stronger. There are those, however, who don't share this opinion. Charles Bowden:

> It's a lie. Good God, why don't you ask the real question: If the economy has doubled or tripled why are people poorer now then before that happened…? How can you triple an economy and by every indices, the Mexican government's and our own, people are worse off in México then when we agreed to NAFTA? It's been ten years. We're causing a flight to the United States as we destroy the countryside. These small peasant farmers can no longer compete. You go out there and they're ghost villages, everybody's in Chicago or Los Angeles to stay alive… México is collapsing, and any sane person's going to get out– and they are. They're coming north to survive. You don't find 16 year-old girls with one month-old babies walking through 50 miles of hot, southwestern American desert on a lark. Those kind of people are moving. They don't have a choice. If they stay where they are they won't survive. This is a different world on the border now; and that's part of the violence that's suddenly occurring. Because they're desperate to get out. They're trapped, like rats.[14]

Officially the population of the city is around one and a half million but most agree it's probably over two. Hard numbers are difficult to come by in Juárez. Most of the unofficial population lives in the *colonias*, which have spread-out into the desert and surrounding hills. Their residents don't show up on official lists; they don't live on official streets or have official addresses. The poorest live in houses made of wooden palettes covered with sheets of cardboard and plastic. Sanitation and electricity are improvised or non-existent, as are education, medicine and security. Unemployment is high and options are limited. Life in the *colonias* is uncertain and often brutal. Each year they spread further into the desert and higher up the hills.

All the neighborhoods in Juárez are criss-crossed by lines not easily recognized by outsiders. Every few blocks the graffiti changes, indicating one has passed from the turf of one gang to that of another. It's estimated there are around four hundred and fifty neighborhoods in Juárez, and each is home to at least three or four gangs. Sometimes it's possible to pass through the territory of several different gangs in the span of ten blocks.[15] For local residents and gang members alike it's crucial to know whose territory one is in. Disputes between gangs are common and usually

[13] Carrier, Juárez (Part 3).
[14] Carrier, Juárez (Part 3).
[15] Carrier, Juárez (Part 2).

violent. Many people are shot and killed each year. The conflicts are most common where the two territories overlap. But the edges are always in flux, changing as alliances form and break-apart, as rivalries begin and end. As such, residents are ever-watchful of these shifts in power, which are constantly re-writing the city's boundaries.

Similar to the spaces of the city, the law is also a relative concept in Juárez: it's proportional to wealth and power, it depends on who you are and where you live. Like the free-trade zone, different areas of the city are governed by different laws. In the *colonias* they are established and enforced by the gangs. Elsewhere in the city they are established by the *narcotrafficantes* and enforced by corrupt police and *federales*. In the slums rules change from block to block, but most of Juárez is governed by variations on the same basic law: those with power make the rules. Like the street names and addresses in the *colonias*, these laws aren't written anywhere. But they are no less binding because of it. They operate like powerful taboos. Residents are encouraged not to see or speak out, or speak of what they have seen. And the consequences for breaking them are severe.

There is a story about a defence attorney in Juárez– a brave man.[16] His partner at the law firm they owned had already been killed, an execution ordered by high-ranking officials in the government and well-known public figures. The attorney constantly received death threats for his work. On one occasion, two of the clients he was defending were brought before a judge. They had agreed to confess to their crimes. When they entered the courtroom it was clear they had been badly tortured. One was covered in purple bruises and his eye was swollen shut. His penis had been burned using electrical wires. The other could hardly stand. Ten-inches of his intestines were hanging from his anus, forced out by the powerful electrical current administered to his abdomen. The attorney pleaded with the judge to at least put the injuries on record. The judge was hesitant, evasive. He claimed he couldn't see the injuries: there wasn't enough light in the courtroom. In Juárez things happen and don't happen.

In the past ten years between one and three hundred young girls have gone missing– depending on who you ask. They are raped, tortured and murdered; their bodies are dumped in the desert. Many were *maquila* workers abducted on their way to the factories. Since many of the girls were poor and from the *colonias* they were forced to walk long distances to work, usually in the early morning or late at night. Every year more disappear but to date there has only been one arrest.[17] In the same

[16] Carrier, Juárez (Part 5).
[17] Carrier, Juárez (Part 1).

period over seven hundred men have also been murdered, although the actual number is probably higher, as many deaths go unreported. Their bodies turn up in the desert too, but they often appear on busy street corners and in public places. Frequently they've been tortured, beaten and burned. Sometimes their bodies are horribly disfigured or charred beyond recognition. They are advertisements for what happens if you talk or cross the wrong people, or happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Being a photographer in Juárez is a dangerous occupation, particularly for the street-shooters featured in Charles Bowden's *Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future*. Along with Bowden's book, it is their photographs which have drawn attention to the murdered *maquila* workers. It is their work which seeks to expose the brutality and desperation of Juárez, to both its own citizens and the outside world. Many share the beliefs of Julián Cardona: "the purpose of photojournalism is to show the social effects of power." [18] But those who retain power in Juárez don't want their actions captured on film. The corrupt police and officials, the gangs, the *narcotrafficantes*: all want the truth to remain hidden. Like journalists in Juárez, photographers are often the targets of violence and intimidation. Their equipment is stolen or destroyed and many are threatened or assaulted. Some disappear. On the streets they are alone and defenceless but for their cameras.

Most of the street-shooters keep day jobs as photographers for local dailies or tabloids. They capture the violent scenes which are a constant reality in Juárez, and which sell papers. The pay is enough to live on, but not much above the poverty line. Their true subject is the city itself. It is their passion, that which keeps them in Juárez and keeps them taking difficult photographs. These photographs are not published. The street-shooters constantly monitor the police frequencies, ready to move at a moment's notice. Some keep them by their beds, others sleep in their cars. Timing is everything. The city is unpredictable and what they seek to capture is fleeting: the restless line separating life and death.

Like all residents of Juárez they live in a world where the ground shifts beneath their feet, where the objective and subjective blend together. Neutral decisions don't exist in Juárez: the camera doesn't create detachment, it puts the photographer into play.[19] They approach the rupture that most of us are loathe to see, which even their fellow citizens are reluctant to acknowledge. It is a volatile edge which they seek to inhabit, one that obliges them to stay in motion and requires them to be ever-attentive to subtle details and changes.

[18] Carrier, Juárez (Part 1).
[19] Bowden.

> Like all the shooters in Juárez, Julián is keenly aware of the seasons. Following the harvest in November and December, there is a good crop of drug murders as the merchandise moves north and accounts are settled. Then around Christmas and New Year's people hang themselves. The first few months of the new year bring fires and gas explosions as the poor try to stay warm. Spring means battles between neighborhoods (or colonias) over ground for building shacks, and outbreaks of disease in a city largely lacking sewage treatment. Summer brings water problems to a head …, more disease, and batches of murders by the street gangs. The cool days of fall open a new season of battles between colonias, and then with the holidays the photographers return to drug killings and Christmas suicides.[20]

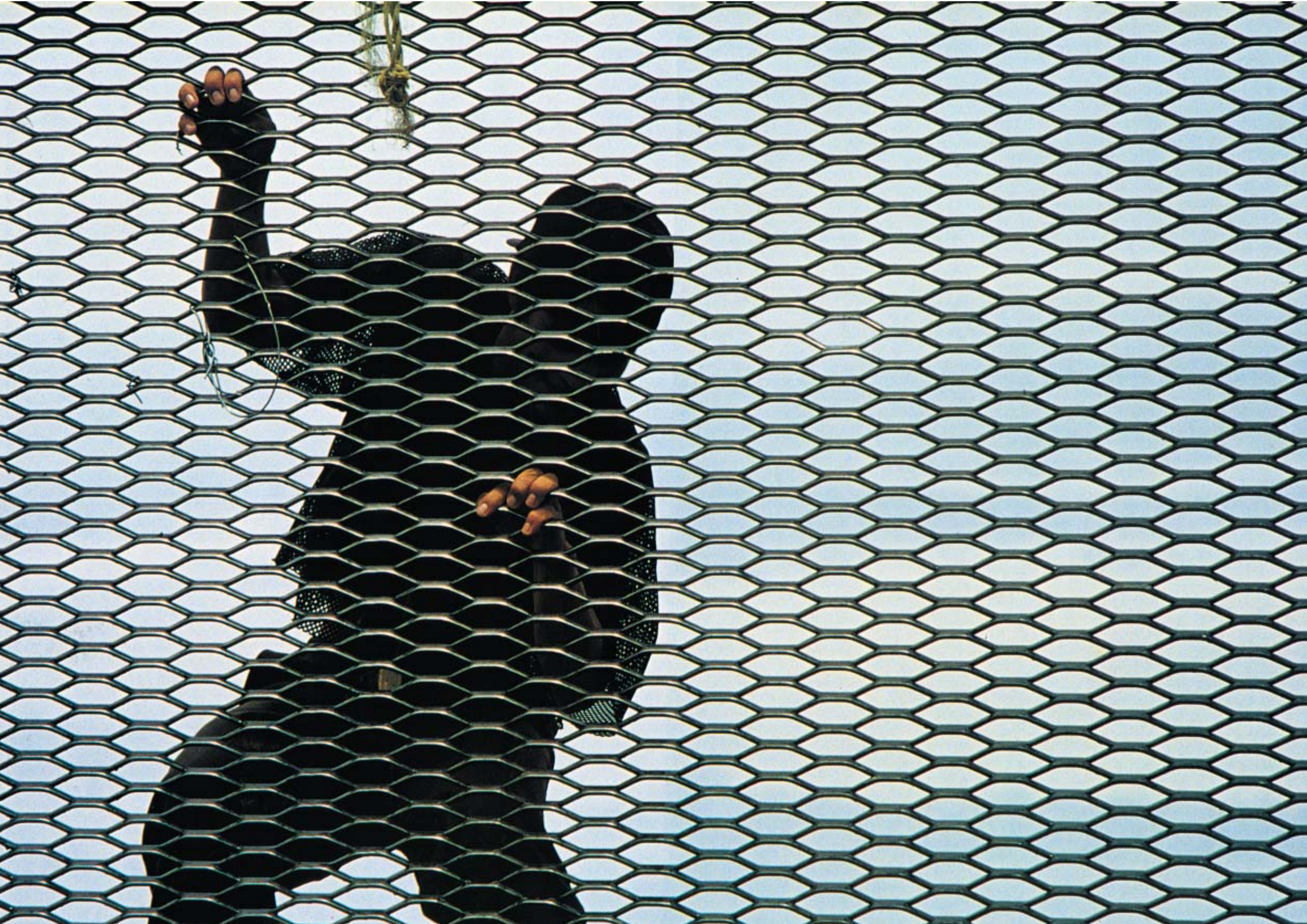
Like all photographers the street-shooters of Juárez seek to freeze what is in motion, to capture what is elusive and fleeting. Often the photographer seeks to rescue and preserve a moment from the cruel and relentless march of time: to heal the rupture. But street-shooters from Juárez take us to the scene of the crime, their photographs cut and bruise: they pry open the wound.

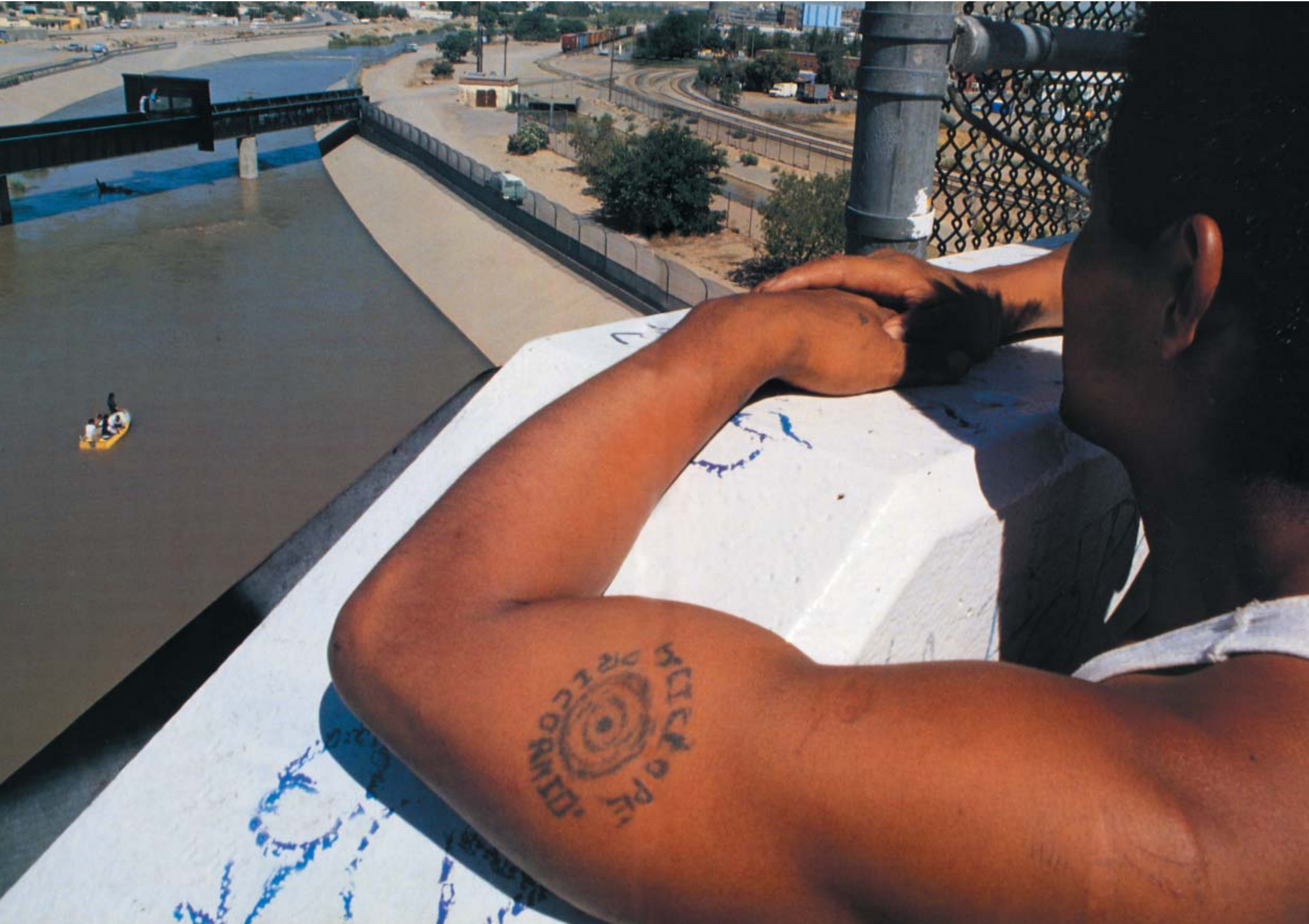
Juárez is situated about midway along the border which stretches for almost a thousand miles in either direction. Even the border seems unable to pass through the city unchanged. From the Pacific to the outskirts of Juárez, it travels in straight unequivocal lines, impervious to the details of geography. But as it passes through the city the hard-line of the cartographer falters. As it moves eastward it relents to the sinuous contours of the river. To the East, the border spills into the Gulf of Mexico in a brown plume. To the West, its conclusion is more abrupt and dramatic.

The border fence marches down the beach and as it plunges into the ocean it begins to break down. Gaps begin to appear as the water rises around the steel girders: the ocean has knocked out its teeth; the wind has torn off the top panel. As it moves further from shore the steel piles become more disorderly and confused. The spaces between them widen and their edges grow rusted and jagged. As the water deepens the structure becomes incoherent. The piles drift apart as the fence dips beneath the waves.

* * *

[20] Bowden, 70.





THE MAN WATCHING

I can tell by the way the trees beat, after
so many dull days, on my worried windowpanes,
that a storm is coming,
and I hear the far-off fields say things
I can't bear without a friend,
I can't love without a sister.

The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
across the woods and across time,
and the world looks as if it had no age:
the landscape, like a line in the psalm book,
is seriousness and weight and eternity.

What we choose to fight is so tiny!
What fights with us is so great!
If only we would let ourselves be dominated
as things do by some immense storm,
we would become strong too, and not need names.

When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not *want* to be bent by us.
I mean the angel, who appeared
to the wrestler's sinews
grew long like metal strings,
he felt them under his fingers
like chords of deep music.

Whoever was beaten by this Angel,
(who often simply declined the fight),
went away proud and strengthened
and great from that harsh hand,
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.
Winning does not tempt that man.
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,
by constantly greater beings

Rainer Maria Rilke[*]

[*] Robert Bly, ed. News of the Universe (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995) 121-2.

Surfer

… Mnemosyne is one of the Titans. She appeared when the sky still rested in the arms of the earth, when Ouranos shared the bed with broad-hipped Gaia, an eon before the Olympian gods were born. The Hermes calls her the Mother of the Muses. Hesiod remembers her flowing hair as she stretches out to engender with Zeus her nine daughters. It is she who adopts the son of Maya, the "shamefaced" or "awful" nymph, and thus makes him the son of two mothers. She provides Hermes with his two unique gifts: a lyre and "soul." When the god Hermes plays to the song of the Muses, its sound leads both poets and gods to Mnemosyne's wellspring of remembrance. Hermes is both messenger and guide of the Gods. Even the immortals must draw on the waters of his titanic mother if they want to remember. The appearance of Mnemosyne among the Titans…tells of water before there were gods…, a cosmic element– water that washes– became the source of remembrance, the wellspring of culture, and acquired the features of woman.[1]

[1] Ivan Illich, H20 and the Waters of Forgetfulness (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 1985) 32.

GEOGRAPHICALLY Hawaii is the most isolated place on Earth. Its eight small islands are surrounded in all directions by a seemingly endless ocean. Currently Hawaii appears on political maps of the United States. But these maps must undergo modification: the islands lie 4,000 km to the west of mainland America and economy of space requires they be shifted to a more reasonable distance, often just off the coast of California. As a result it's unlikely that most Americans know how far away the islands truly are, just as most are unaware of the proximity of places like Juárez.

Hawaii forms the northern limit of the Polynesian triangle, a vast region of the Pacific encompassing thousands of settled islands. Despite the great distances separating them, however, these scattered populations share a common heritage, a seafaring people who began sailing into the Pacific from shores of New Guinea as early as 2,000 B.C.[2] These ancient mariners gradually settled nearly every inhabitable island in the Pacific. Hawaii, the most remote of all, is believed to have been colonized between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D.[3] By the time of Cook's arrival in 1778 it had developed into the most hierarchical, and arguably the most complex, of any Oceanic polity. It had the largest and most densely settled population, estimated to be around 300,000.[4] Prior to the appearance of the Europeans memory of the outside world had long faded into myth, to the mythic time of their ancestors arrival from *Kahiki* (Tahiti). For well over a thousand years their civilization developed alone and undisturbed in the middle of the Pacific.

[2] P.V. Kirch, Feathered Gods and Fishooks (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985) 54.
[3] Kirch, Feathered Gods 58.
[4] Estimates vary between 200,000 and 400,000.

Although all civilizations rely on the natural world they also depend on the distinctions they create between themselves and Nature: what is beyond their ken, what is outside, what is *other*. If a civilization is to endure it must define itself against this *other* or be overwhelmed by wilderness. How Nature is symbolized differs in every civilization, but it is rooted in a common source: what is unknowable. In the cultural imagination of the West the forest often figured as the home of *otherness*. For the Hawaiians it was the unending ocean. Whether ocean or forest, the domain outside civilization's bounds has always been enigmatic and paradoxical:

> If forests appear in our religions as places of profanity, they also appear as sacred. If they have typically been considered places of lawlessness, they have also provided havens for those who took up the cause of justice and fought the law's corruption. If they evoke associations of danger and abandon in our minds, they also evoke scenes of enchantment. In other words, in the religions, mythologies, and literatures of the West, the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray. Or where our subjective categories are confounded. Or where perceptions become promiscuous with one another, disclosing latent dimensions of time and consciousness. In the forest… the straight line forms a circle.[5]

In the past century, however, the meaning of Nature as an awesome and menacing force has largely been lost. Nature has become an endangered species, something civilization is charged with preserving lest it become extinct. Nature is now something to be protected *from* civilization. *Otherness* now resides in the outer reaches of space or the microcosm of DNA, the psyche or atom. And it has become a quality of modern civilization itself. It is embodied by the modern city, which has become increasingly uninhabitable, and by its unregulated fringe, particularly in the developing world– the slum, the *favela*, the *colonia*. As such, it has become difficult to grasp the earlier significance of Nature as imagined by primitive peoples.[6] The natural world represented an ever-present threat to the survival of ancient civilization, which invariably stood, to a greater or lesser degree, in opposition to its subversive power: the power to blur distinctions, to erase humanity's constructions.

For the ancient Hawaiian, nature's power was manifest in the boundless Pacific. Still, however imposing the forest, nothing can surpass the alien quality of the

[5] Robert P. Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) preface.

[6] The term 'primitive' is used here, and throughout, in the 'anthropological' sense, as it is by Amos Rapoport in *House Form and Culture* to describe 'primitive vernacular': "The term *primitive*… does not refer to the builders' intentions or abilities, but rather to the society in which they build. It is of course a relative term; to future societies we will undoubtedly appear rather primitive."

sea. From time immemorial and across human cultures it has figured as the quintessential *other* and nowhere else are its dimensions as imposing as in Hawaii. The islands' original inhabitants must have understood their home as modern man understood the Earth after seeing it from space: a lonely human world set against a vast and uninhabitable void. As far as the Hawaiians were concerned, their civilization stood alone at the edge of oblivion.

Rather than build a physical partition between themselves and the sea, however, the Hawaiians sought shelter within a social construction. The social hierarchy served to concretize distinctions between culture and nature, and like the walls of the ancient city it was intended to be as enduring and impermeable as stone. Indeed, although we are most impressed by their physical symptoms, the most crucial distinctions a civilization creates between itself and nature are symbolic.

The space of the ancient city,[7] for instance, was not merely distinguished from the wilderness by a material barrier. Rather, its mythic power to keep the forests and barbarians at bay was derived from the sacred furrow upon which the walls were built.[8] The ploughing of the furrow was the primary act of creation: it separated inside from outside, culture from nature, human time and space from that of the natural world. The plough is the archetypal agrarian symbol and the shape it inscribes is the image of the vessel or jar– the plough was always lifted over the ground of the future gate or *porta* to keep the city from being 'sealed off' completely.[9] Together the plough and jar signal an interruption in the rhythms of the natural world. Agriculture created a steady and reliable source of food, and the ability to store and preserve it ended the nomadic life. The movements of the hunter-gatherer, dictated by the migratory patterns of prey and the changing seasons, were replaced by permanent settlement. The furrow asserts the unnatural character of civilization and amplifies the otherness of the natural world.

Alone in the middle of the Pacific, the ancient Hawaiians confronted the most potent and primal *other* of all. They were surrounded not by competing civilizations or encroaching forests, not by an earth-bound wilderness, but by the capricious sea whose elusive meaning, as Ivan Illich has written, is always dual: "To keep one's bearing when exploring water, one must not lose sight of its dual nature…Water is deep and shallow, life-giving and murderous. Twinned, water rises from chaos, and waters cannot be but dual."[10] The sea was the great mother of the Hawaiians.

[7] Cities of the classical world (in particular Etruria) as described in Joseph Rykwert's *The Idea of Town*.
[8] Illich, 14.
[9] Illich, 15.
[10] Illich, 27.

Their ancestors had emerged from the sea and their civilization depended on its bounty. But it was not merely the fountainhead of their civilization: it was the symbolic source of creation itself, that from which the world was formed. Water symbolized the time in Hawaiian lore when "water forms of life [were] paired with land forms," before "the period of the gods was passed and the birth of the great gods and of mankind ushered in the era of light."[11] The waters surrounding their home were not simply 'outside' the bounds of civilization. They were before civilization. Illich:

> Water remains a chaos until a creative story interprets its seeming equivocation as being the quivering ambiguity of life. Most myths of creation have as one of their main tasks the conjuring of water. This conjuring always seems to be a division. Just as the founder, by plowing the *sulcus primigenitus* [sacred furrow], creates inhabitable space, so the creator, by dividing the waters, makes space for creation.[12]

The sea habours the creative and destructive power of the time before creation, the time before distinction. Its waters are the substance of original chaos. Consequently, they preserve a secret and awesome power: in the mythology of the Greeks they are more ancient than the gods;[13] in the Bible they precede the Word. Just as the biblical flood invoked these waters to reclaim the earth, the sea forever retains the capacity to unmake creation: to dissolve distinction and return the universe to its original state. This power is manifest in the sea's fluidity and ceaseless motion: the power of chaos, perpetual change. For the Hawaiians, although it was the great provider and mother of their civilization, the sea also retained an ominous potential.

As Octavio Paz has remarked, "the relation between past, present and future differs in each civilization,"[14] and the Hawaiians' dread of change stemmed from their image of time. The social hierarchy, perhaps their most impressive architectural achievement, was primarily a temporal construction, and its primary purpose was to oppose change. It was an embodiment of their temporal archetype:

> In primitive societies the temporal archetype, model for the present and future, is the past– not the recent past, but an immemorial past lying beyond all pasts, at the beginning of the beginning. Like a wellspring, this past of pasts flows constantly, runs into and becomes part of the present… Social life is not historic but ritualistic; it is made up not of a succession of changes but of the ritualistic repetition of the timeless

[11] Martha Beckwith, Hawaiian Mythology (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1970) 3.
[12] Illich, 25.
[13] Illich, 32.
[14] Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 9.

> past. Always present, this past protects society from change by serving as a model for imitation and by being periodically actualized in ritual… it is not what happened once, but what always happens…although it is time, it is also the negation of time.[15]

Unlike modern society, which dreams of itself facing the future, the ancient Hawaiians had their gaze fixed upon the past, a bearing rooted in their language itself:

> Ka wā mamua and ka wā mahope are the Hawaiian terms for the past and future, respectively. But note that ka wā mamua (past) means the time before, in front, or forward. Ka wā mahope (future) means the time after or behind. These terms do merely describe time, but the Hawaiian's orientation to it. We [Hawaiians] face the past, confidently interpreting the present, cautiously backing into the future, guided by what our ancestors knew and did.[16]

Hawaiian society was defined by four distinct classes, established by heredity and related to one another by a fixed hierarchical structure. Each generation was the ritual repetition of the previous, a *regeneration* of society's timeless image. At the base of the social pyramid were the commoners or *maka'āinana*, who worked the land and sea and comprised the majority of the populace. The chiefs or *ali'i* formed the elite minority at the apex of the structure. Between these two groups were the priests or *kahunas* (which included certain specialists: artisans, healers, scholars etc.). Finally there were the *kauwa* or untouchables, the lowest class, who were considered less than human.[17] The paramount chiefs, at one end, were believed to have descended from divinity. The untouchables, at the other, were fodder for the gods and used in human sacrifice.

In contrast to the ambiguous waters around their home the social order was a categorical edifice. It was built on the literal and figurative ground of the ancestor: it was a common practice for families to bury their dead beneath the floor of the family home.[18] The parts of the social order and their relation to one another were clearly articulated and strictly regulated by convention and taboo. The highest chiefs were so sacred it was forbidden to look upon them.[19] Certain foods were reserved for different classes. Men and women were prohibited from eating with one another and their meals had to be cooked in separate ovens.[20] In the ancient

[15] Paz, Children of the Mire 9.
[16] J.K. Osorio, Dismembering Lahui (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 7.
[17] The class included those of low birth or those who were captured during war or displaced by the fighting– and thus unable to prove their lineage.
[18] Kirch, Feathered Gods 243.
[19] P.V. Kirch, On the Road of the Winds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 7.
[20] Kirch, Feathered Gods.

city crossing the furrow was considered a sacrilege.[21] Similarly the breaking of taboo, any taboo, was considered an attack on the foundation of society. The smallest transgression was often punishable by death.

In Hawaii the struggle between civilization and nature is distilled in terms of earth and sea: where the sea is fluid, society is rigid; where the sea is ceaseless change, the social hierarchy is immobile permanence; where the waters' movements reveal chaos and perpetual otherness, the social order embodies stillness, sameness, and perpetual identity. The immense horizontal of the Pacific is confronted by a vertical form, the social analogue of the islands' geology. Hawaiian society depended on the sea but was nevertheless rooted in the earth. It was where they made their homes, buried their dead and built their civilization, which, like the islands themselves, was constantly threatened by the relentless motion of the waves.

The surf ringing their islands was a threshold between the earth and sea, culture and nature, cosmos and chaos. It was the *porta*, the ambiguous break in the sacred furrow, an indeterminate place between *domi* meaning 'dwelling' and *fori* meaning 'outside' or "whatever else is shut out."[22] The breaking waves were a domain of great danger and potency, the meeting of two irreconcilable but coextensive worlds. And this was the birthplace of surfing.

* * *

THE SPECIFIC ORIGINS OF SURFING, its first entry into Hawaiian civilization and subsequent development as a cultural form, are uncertain. Mythic accounts of its emergence, if they existed, have been forgotten and archeological evidence from this early time is absent. The ancient surfboards of the Hawaiians were as vulnerable to the corrosive effects of the sea as their aural traditions were to colonization. At the time of European contact, however, surfing was clearly a significant cultural form: it was practiced by large segments of the population; the making of the surfboard and the act itself were accompanied by various rituals and prayers; it was the subject of myth and song expressed by a rich descriptive vocabulary.[23] The mythic accounts of surfing that have endured, coupled with evidence from other Polynesian settlements, suggest that surfing is likely as old as Hawaiian civilization itself.[24]

[21] Illich, 14.
[22] Illich, 15.
[23] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996) 36.
[24] Surfing existed in a less developed form, as a children's pastime, in other parts of Polynesia, meaning it was likely practiced by the original settlers of Hawaii.

Between the islands and the open ocean was a domain of breaking waves that partook of both land and sea but belonged to neither. For the ancient Hawaiians these waters were the symbolic limit of nature and the beginning of civilization, where the power of the natural world came up against the constructed order of human society. In this sense the waves existed outside the bounds of civilization. But surfing drew the break tentatively within these bounds, and although the break could not ultimately be civilized, it nevertheless became a cultural domain.

In the mythology of Hawaiian surfing, the surfbreak appears as a rupture through which society is exposed to and overcome by the primal sexuality of Nature. In the Western tradition, the symbolic association of breaking waves with fertility and eroticism is an archetypal theme, stretching back to Hesiod's *Theogony* and the birth of Aphrodite– meaning 'foam-born'– in the billowing surf. Castrated by his son Chronos, the testicles of Ouranos are thrown into the sea where semen, blood and seawater mixed together, creating a white foam from which a maiden emerges.[25] By this account Aphrodite, the god of sexual love and beauty, boasts a lineage more ancient than Zeus. The implication was clear: the power of sexual desire is more primal and potent than the power of hospitality upon which Greek civilization was founded. In her subsequent transformation, as the Roman deity Venus, she continues to appear in the sea and foam, borne by a scallop shell upon the crest of a breaking wave. In Hawaiian mythology the god of fertility, Lono, is also associated with "the disturbed sea,"[26] along with the storms, clouds, and rolling thunder. Not unexpectedly sexual themes permeate the ancient mythology of surfing: among the waves men and women seduce and are seduced, overwhelmed by tempestuous desires which the veneer of civilization scarcely conceals.

The myth of Kelea, for instance, tells of a 'graceful and daring' surfer from Maui who is abducted in the waves at La-haina by a visitor from the neighboring island of O'ahu, the chief Kalamakua. While out surfing Kelea is invited to ride the waves in his canoe, and after a short while they are caught by a sudden squall and blown out to sea. Rather than returning to shore, however, Kalamakua seizes the opportunity to spirit Kelea to O'ahu, where she is betrothed to the paramount chief of the island (and later to Kalamakua himself).[27]

Frequently the surfer figures as an object of desire, whose presence amid the breaking waves inflames an observer's passions, drawing him or her into the surf. In the story of Puna-ai-koae, a young chief is seduced by the shape-shifting

[25] Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Shield, trans. A.N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) 18.
[26] Beckwith, 32.
[27] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 40.

woman Kalamainu'u, after she spies him surfing beneath her home. Captivated by his beauty and athletic prowess she descends to join him in the waves, where she lures him onto her board and carries him back to her cave.[28] In another myth a young chief sets out from Kauai to seek 'the beauty of Puna' on the island of Hawaii. Before setting out he vows to 'enjoy no other woman' until he has won her affections. As he reaches Maui, however, he notices a beautiful chiefess riding in the surf at Puhele. Charmed by her graceful surfing he forestalls his journey to court the chiefess, breaking his earlier vow.[29] On Kauai the wandering ways of the chief Mo'ikeha are brought to an end in the surf at Waialua Bay. While riding the big waves, he is observed by two beautiful sisters, whom he impresses with his skill and fair appearance. After returning to shore he is received by the sisters, and agrees to marry both.[30]

The affiliation of surfing with sexuality and the latent eroticism of the break are clearly expressed in the mythology surrounding Hawaiian surfing. But the social implications of this affiliation were potentially problematic. Surfing admitted a subversive agent into the civic realm, one whose influence was capable of undermining the social order and thus the fabric of Hawaiian society. According to Freud it is a central concern of all civilizations: "Society believes that no greater threat to its civilization could arise than if the sexual instincts were to be liberated and returned to their original aims."[31] The social implications of surfing in ancient Hawaii are most clearly revealed by the story of Pikoi.

While surveying the waves at Waikiki, the young surfer Pikoi encounters a high-ranking chiefess just come in from the surf. Perhaps attracted by his lei, 'made from orange *lehua* blossoms,' she rides to the beach to meet him. Pikoi naïvely asks to borrow her surfboard, which she reminds him is forbidden: because of his lower rank, riding her board would break taboo, and Pikoi would be put to death. Instead, he borrows the board of a lesser chief and paddles out into the water.

After reaching the surf, however, Pikoi realizes the best waves are breaking further down the beach, in the area reserved for the chiefess and thus forbidden to him. But the temptation of the surf, or of the chiefess, is too great and he allows himself to be 'carried by the waves' towards her. While in the water together she requests one of his colourful leis to wear around her neck, a show of affection made only after leaving the confines of dry land. Soon lines of swell appear on the horizon. According to custom, Pikoi offers the first wave to the chiefess, resolving to follow

[28] Beckwith, 194.
[29] Beckwith, 222.
[30] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 33.
[31] Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 48.

her ashore on the second. But instead of catching the first wave she lets it pass, choosing instead to ride to shore with Pikoi, thus breaking taboo. Upon reaching shore, Pikoi is seized and taken away to be executed.[32]

The seriousness of Pikoi's transgression hinges on its sexual implications: in ancient Hawaii, "if a man and woman happened to ride the same wave together, custom allowed for certain intimacies when they returned to the beach."[33] Each citizen's place within the social hierarchy was dependant on hereditary; and especially among the higher chiefs, one's power was contingent on establishing a clear and uninterrupted bloodline to the ancestors. In the case of the paramount chiefs it linked them to the gods. Sexual intermingling between classes threatened to blur such lines, and among the high-ranking elite it created greater competition at the top of the pyramid. If left unchecked, sexual mixing between classes would gradually undermine the basis of the social order and Hawaiian civilization as it existed would have disintegrated.

The story of Pikoi can be interpreted as a cautionary allegory: in the foaming surf man is overwhelmed by the sexual power of Nature, which causes him to transgress the social contract; only after returning to the land is order restored, punishment exacted and the rule of law re-established. But the Hawaiians couldn't leave the surfbreak to Nature's jurisdiction: it was a social space, a cultural domain. Consequently, an attempt was made to apply the civic order to the surfbreak. The hereditary logic of the social hierarchy was extended to the waves: the first-born of each set was given paramount status and reserved for the chiefs. Different breaks or parts of breaks were restricted for different classes.[34] It became taboo for commoners to ride the *olo*-type of surfboard, which was reserved for the chiefs. Rather than testify to the efficacy of these measures, however, the mythology of surfing bespeaks the futility of the endeavour.[35] If the story of Pikoi was intended to affirm civilization's power, it does so only after conceding the limits of such power.

And yet despite its subversive potential, surfing seemed to address a need among the ancient Hawaiians that justified both the personal and collective risks involved, as perhaps it still does for the modern surfer. When there was good swell, and to the amazement of the first colonists, whole villages would stand empty: "daily

[32] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 42.
[33] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 38.
[34] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 42.
[35] As any surfer is aware, the conditions that might make such divisions possible– well-defined and consistent sets and calm conditions– are the exception rather than the rule, and often it's difficult to determine where one wave begins and another ends. Also, at most breaks maintaining one's position can be extremely difficult, even when conditions are favourable.

tasks such as farming, fishing and tapa-making… [were] left undone while an entire community– men, women and children– enjoyed themselves in the rising surf and rushing white water."[36]

* * *

PERHAPS THE REASON for surfing's emergence and enduring popularity in ancient Hawaii is impossible to fathom. Perhaps there are no reasons beyond a happy accident of history and the favourable circumstances of geography. But lingering questions and correspondences remain, for which these explanations do not convincingly account. Why didn't surfing develop as a significant cultural form elsewhere in the Pacific, where similar conditions, knowledge and materials were present? Why would the practice become preeminent only in the most highly structured and rigid of Polynesian societies, considering that surfing engages a fluid and equivocal domain where human-imposed order becomes difficult if not impossible to uphold? In this respect surfing and Hawaiian civilization might seem like an odd couple.

There was another domain within Hawaiian society, however, where the usual codes governing behaviour broke down in a similar way: the Makahiki or harvest festival. Linking traditionalist peoples across continents and throughout history, the time and space of the festival, like that of the surfbreak, are characterized by *otherness*. Paz:

> The [Mexican] fiesta is a revolution in the most literal sense of the word. In the confusion that it generates, society is dissolved, is drowned, insofar as it is an organism ruled according to certain laws and principles. But it drowns in itself, in its own original chaos or liberty. Everything is united: good and evil, day and night, the sacred and the profane. Everything merges, loses shape and individuality and returns to the primordial mass. The fiesta is a cosmic experiment, an experiment in disorder, reuniting contradictory elements and principles in order to bring about a renascence of life. Ritual death promotes a rebirth; vomiting increases the appetite; the orgy, sterile in itself, renews the fertility of the mother or of the earth. The fiesta is a return to a remote and undifferentiated state, prenatal or presocial. It is a return that is also a beginning…[37]

Life in ancient Hawaii revolved around and stemmed from the Makahiki. Held in celebration of Lono, the god of fertility,[38] it began in October and lasted four

[36] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 27.

[37] Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985) 51-2.

[38] In Hawaiian mythology the Gods had numerous 'incarnations;' fertility seems to have been Lono's primary association.

months. Taboos were suspended during the festival and the population ceased its usual labour. Instead, the people engaged in religious rituals, prepared sacrifices and participated in athletic games.[39] According to legend the god Lono, seeking a bride on earth, descended to the island of Hawaii after discovering the beautiful *Kaikilani*. The two married and settled on the coast where they would 'delight in the sport of surfing'.[40] But one day Kaikilani took an earthly chief as her lover and an enraged Lono beat her to death. Grief stricken, Lono traveled the islands challenging those he encountered to contests of strength, inaugurating the Makahiki. Finally, inconsolable, he built a massive canoe and returned to mythic Kahiki.[41]

As all harvest festivals, the Makahiki was principally a temporal act. It re-established society's connection to the time of creation, drawing upon the immemorial past to nourish the present, insuring the vitality of Hawaiian society and the success of the next year's harvest. To begin the festival the Hawaiians bathed in the sea under the darkness of night, evoking the time of origins. The paramount chief would then sail to sea. After meeting with the Gods he would return to shore, reenacting Lono's arrival. Throughout the festival the Hawaiians would engage in various 'boastful demonstrations of prowess,' competitions and sports, including surfing, as a symbolic *re-creation* of the inaugural Makahiki. To close the festival and signal the start of a new year, a sacred vessel was constructed and sent to sea, returning Lono to Kahiki.[42]

During the festival the power of nature re-entered Hawaiian society, unencumbered by the usual restraints. It was a time of sexual and social licence, when taboos were ignored and broken. Certain practices, like the *hula*, were only permitted within the confines of the festival. It was a time of intoxication, revelry and dance. Society was plunged into ritual disorder emulating the chaos out of which the world was created. It was a time of celebration and renewal, but also a time fraught with danger: Nature's power was fecund, but also unpredictable. As such, containment was crucial. Like the sacred furrow the Makahiki was a vessel: a series of rituals *opened* the festival, temporarily admitting the *other* and its rejuvenating power; then the festival was *closed* and the vessel re-sealed.

Surfing was a popular part of the festival, with many Hawaiians participating in competitions, both as participants and spectators. The Makahiki also occurred during the months when Hawaii received the most powerful and consistent swell,

[39] Beckwith, 34.
[40] Beckwith, 37.
[41] Beckwith, 37.
[42] Beckwith, 35.

leading some to suggest a closer connection between surfing and the festival.[43] In addition, the two also shared a mutual connection with Lono, the harbinger of storms, and consequently, the creator of waves.

> In prayers to Lono the signs of the god are named as thunder, lightning, earthquake, the dark cloud, the rainbow, rain and wind, whirlwinds that sweep the earth… waterspouts, the clustering clouds of heaven, gushing springs on the mountains…
>
> *Lono the rolling thunder,*
> *The heaven that rumbles,*
> *The disturbed sea,…*[44]

It's unclear whether there was a specific god of surfing,[45] but of any, Lono would have heard the surfer's prayers. The domain of break, like the Makahiki, was a symbolic threshold between nature and culture, and like the festival, within its precinct certain distinctions began to break down. In particular, the sexual potency attributed to the break is suggestive of their connection. The act of surfing also resonated with the reenactments of Lono's arrival from and departure to Kahiki: at the close of each session, after weathering the sea, the surfer's return recalls Lono's arrival to the islands; to begin each session the surfer paddled out beyond the reach of civilization, like Lono escaping the memory of his loss. In addition, the temporary nature of the surfer's inhabitation echoes the Makahiki's evanescence: a surfer can no more live amidst the waves then society can exist in a state of perpetual festivity. The violent and unpredictable nature of the sea makes permanent occupation impossible, in fact, even before the surfer rises to his feet, the wave is already crumbling. Like the festival, surfing temporarily placed the surfer between nature and culture, putting him in contact with that which society both protects and excludes its citizens from– "for all its glory, civilization cannot console us for the loss of what it destroys."[46]

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[43] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 48.
[44] Beckwith, 36.
[45] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 48.
[46] Robert P. Harrison, 51.

EXILE

The sport of surf-riding possessed a grand fascination, and for a time it seemed as if it had the vitality of its own as a national pastime. There are those living… who remember the time when almost the entire population of a village would at certain hours resort to the sea-side to indulge in, or to witness, this magnificent accomplishment. We cannot but mourn its decline. But this too has felt the touch of civilization, and today it is hard to find a surfboard outside of our museums and private collections.[1]

[1] M.A. Reed, Waves of Commodification: A Critical Investigation Into Surfing Subculture (Master's Thesis, San Diego State University, 1999).

THE ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEANS to Hawaii in 1778 signaled the approach of an ill fated century for Hawaiian civilization; and when the colonists began arriving in numbers, some forty years later, the impact was nothing short of catastrophic: the native population suffered a decline of nearly ninety-percent,[2] the social hierarchy disintegrated, traditional farming ceased, myth and song passed out of memory, ancient rituals and beliefs were abandoned and renounced. Surfing followed the general decline and by the beginning of the next century had all but vanished from the Hawaiian coast. Colonization radically and irrevocably transformed Hawaiian civilization, and profoundly changed how the Hawaiians perceived themselves and their culture in the context of a newly expanded and modern world. Once alone in the universe, they suddenly found themselves outsiders in their own land, their centuries-old solitude replaced by the nostalgia of modern man– an inconsolable longing for home.

The nineteenth century was a period of physical, social and spiritual disintegration for the Hawaiians, brought on by the numerous contagions introduced by the colonists: new diseases, in the form of small pox and measles, new economic and political structures, and a new religion. The new diseases decimated the population (a consequence of their arrival that the colonists could not have been unaware of) and the new social and religious institutions eroded and eventually usurped the place of the old. By the beginning of the twentieth century Hawaiian civilization had collapsed, and colonists outnumbered the native population by almost four-to-one.[3]

[2] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996) 51.

[3] R.C. Schmitt, Historical Statistics of Hawaii (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977).

Apart from the ravages of disease, the most devastating blow came in 1819, with the destruction of the *mana-kapu* system,[4] the elaborate matrix of taboos and beliefs that had once been the bedrock of traditional Hawaiian society. Runners were sent throughout the kingdom, ordering the temples or *heiaus* overturned and the idols burned'.[5] It marked a radical and irreversible break with the old order: the reign of the ancient Gods had come to an end.

Following the events of 1819 the fabric of Hawaiian society began to unravel. The social hierarchy depended on the *mana-kapu* system for coherence and legitimacy, and without it the bonds that once held chief and commoner together began to break down. Also, everyday rituals and practices were robbed of their mythic import– including surfing. The most profound symptom of this change was the end of the Makahiki, which was celebrated for last time in 1820.[6] In the past it had served as an umbilical connection to the time of creation; it was not merely a tradition, but rather, the source from which all traditions derived their mythic power. The end of the Makahiki signaled a fundamental change in the time and space of Hawaiian society, severing the once living connection to the immemorial past.

For the Hawaiians this was the hinge about which the ages turned, where the ancient gave way to the modern. What is modern implies the tendency not only to break with the past but to deny it. Modernity is defined not simply by its cult of the 'new and surprising,' but by the fact that what is new is also a rejection, "a criticism of the immediate past, an interruption of continuity… The new is not exactly modern, unless it carries a double explosive charge: the negation of the past and the affirmation of something different."[7] The end of the Makahiki and the disintegration of the social hierarchy mark a rupture in time itself, where the primitive temporal archetype is supplanted by the modern.

Both the festival and the social order were temporal in nature, and founded upon a conception of time that placed eternity at the beginning. The former opened a portal through which this original time could nourish the present; the latter served to maintain the current shape of society as an identical effigy of the past. Both functioned to resist change. The termination of the festival severed this connection

[4] The '*mana-kapu* system' refers to the matrix of taboos which permeated every aspect of Hawaiian life. The concept of taboo is adequately dealt with in the preceding chapter; the concept of *mana*, however, is beyond the scope of the present work.
[5] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 48.
[6] The Makahiki would be resurrected in the twentieth century, but as cultural tradition in the historical rather than religious sense.
[7] Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 3.

and the disintegration of the social order opened society to the unknown: the previously unapprehended future. The break was radical and decisive– modern. Paz:

> For the Ancients, today repeats yesterday; for the Moderns, denies it. In the first case, time is seen and felt as a regulating factor, a process in which the variations and exceptions are actually variations from and exceptions to the rule; in the second, the process is a fabric of irregularities because variations and exceptions are themselves the rule. For us [moderns] time does not repeat identical moments or centuries; each century and each instant is unique, different, *other*...[8]

For the ancient Hawaiians, the natural world had been the home of otherness, which the stable and unchanging form of their institutions was set-up to oppose. In the modern era, however, otherness is brought within the bounds of civilization as a quality of time itself; it is the principle upon which the social, political and economic structures of the modern world are founded: progress, perpetual movement and change. This is the meaning of the 'modern tradition' articulated by Paz:

> [S]ince the beginning of the last century [nineteenth century] modernity has been termed a tradition, and rejection considered the privileged form of change… Modernity is a polemical tradition which displaces the tradition of the moment, whatever it happens to be, but an instant later yields its place to still another tradition which in turn is a momentary manifestation of modernity… the old tradition was always the same, the modern is always different.[9]

We call this possibility or movement history; and during the colonial era the Hawaiians' struggle to maintain their identity becomes historical: rather than being overrun by nature, they faced the prospect of being erased by the movement of history. The destructive capacity of the natural world had been replaced by the destructive capacity of Western culture, the tide of modern civilization driven by the force of progress. The otherness that once existed at the edges took over the centre. That which colonial society could not absorb was marginalized or destroyed, beginning with the preeminent institutions of the Hawaiians: their ancient religion, political structure and traditional economy. These were replaced by a new religion, in the form of Calvinism, a new political structure, in the form of a constitutional monarchy, and a new economic system, in the form of Capitalism. What remained was pushed underground and swept to the periphery. Religious rites were performed in secret; traditional pastimes, like surfing, were practiced in private or in defiance of the new social and religious order.

[8] Paz, 5.
[9] Paz, 9.

For the colonists, particularly the missionaries and capitalists, the native was a barrier to progress; and the collective body of the Hawaiian people, both their actual flesh and the land itself, came to be regarded as corrupt. Their physical bodies represented 'fallen nature,' and were in need of salvation; their land was viewed as unproductive, and in need of development. In both cases the re-orientation was temporal as well as moral and economic, an attempt to turn the backward-facing savage from his primitive past towards an enlightened future. As the colonial project advanced, the surfer became emblematic of the native's degraded condition.

> When foreign vessels arrived at these islands Hawaii's people were living in great darkness. They were idolaters, and, in amusements and in all evil activities they have been taught and were well prepared. They were led by Satan to do his will. Because of long experience in sinful living the light had been extinguished, the heart had been darkened and indifference had increased and they had sunk very low – were very degraded – animals were higher, they were lower.[10]

Shortly after their arrival, the missionaries established themselves as the new moral authority in Hawaii, setting up congregations and religious schools, and installing representatives of the church in important political positions. Their view of the Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture was severe. The Reverend Hiram Bingham, among the first to arrive in Hawaii, described the Hawaiians as "stupid and polluted worshippers of demons;"[11] and later, the Reverend Sheldon Dibble remarked that they presented "an almost entire destitution of the power of reflection– of originating thought, or of carrying on a continuous chain of reasoning."[12] As the influence of the missionaries grew, its effect on Hawaiian traditions became more pronounced:

> A change has take place in certain customs… I allude to the variety of athletic exercises, such as swimming, with or without a surfboard, dancing, wrestling… etc., all of which games, being in opposition to the strict tenants of Calvinism, have been suppressed…[13]

For the missionary, one of the most disturbing aspects of Hawaiian culture was its attitude towards sexuality. The Hawaiians' lack of modesty, their promiscuity, and the widespread practice of polygamy, by both men and women, scandalized the Calvinists. Furthermore, not only were the sexual habits of the natives detrimental for their personal salvation, but these habits were also subversive to the new society the missionaries sought to build. Consequently, eliminating

[10] G. Obeyesekere, The Apotheosis of Captain Cook (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 160.
[11] Ibid., p. 162
[12] G. Obeyesekere, 159.
[13] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996) 53.

corrupt native traditions, and the lifestyle they promoted, became a cornerstone of moral reform. Through legislation, conversion and education, activities which celebrated the body as a source of sensual pleasure were denounced and their practice was discouraged. The powerful eroticism of surfing made it an obvious candidate for suppression. Dibble:

> The evils resulting from all these sports and amusement have in part been named… some were reduced to poverty, both by losses in gambling and by neglecting to cultivate the land; and the instances were not few in which they were reduced to utter starvation. But the greatest evil of all resulted from the constant intermingling, without any restraint, of persons of both sexes, and of all ages, at all times of the day and at all hours of the night.[14]

Dibble's condemnation of surfing highlights the sexual impropriety of the act, but it is also an economic critique. Not only was surfing subversive because of its erotic elements, which presumably tempted surfers into having unproductive or *non-reproductive* sex, it was also economically unproductive. In this, the colonist as missionary and capitalist coincide,[15] as did their objections to surfing and the lifestyle it was perceived to encourage. For the missionary, the Hawaiians' most pernicious failing was their lack of sexual restraint; for the capitalist, it was their sloth. The new captains of industry used the apparent laziness of the natives to justify seizing their lands and excluding them from the political process, a position summed up in a series of articles written by Henry Whitney, the Hawaii-born son of an early missionary:

> If we could but compel our idlers, loafers or vagrants (for such they may well be called) to work, for their own good, and the good of the kingdom, we would at once have a supply of perhaps 5000 able-bodied men and women. It is said that at this moment there are upwards of 500 of that degraded and worthless class in Honolulu alone.[16]

In another article he would write:

> Amongst *us*, they live without any social or civil disqualification, rejoicing in their right to eat the bread of their neighbors, to harbor themselves in other men's houses, seduce their wives and daughters, and to vote for such law makers as will protect them, their dogs, and their horses. Ought such men to be allowed to vote at the polls? Would it not be charity in the state to exercise a patriarchal power over such *moths* of society, and as a father coerces his vicious children, so to coerce idlers to eat bread earned by their own hands?[17]

[14] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 54.
[15] In fact, towards the end of the nineteenth century the wealthy elite of Hawaiian society was dominated by the sons of the early missionaries.
[16] J.K. Osorio, 119.
[17] J.K. Osorio, 120.

For the wealthy plantation owners, the native population offered the tantalizing possibility of cheap and abundant labour– just as the developing world and places like Juárez do today, for the modern corporation. This ambition was frustrated, however, by the fact that many Hawaiians simply wouldn't work.[18] The majority of the population had been reduced to veritable serfdom by the 'Great Mahele' or land redistribution act of 1848,[19] which tied voting rights to property ownership. Rather than labour on the plantations many refused to participate. The thought of working land that had previously been theirs, producing crops whose bounty went elsewhere, was too much. Instead, some simply chose to go surfing. Under these new circumstances the surfbreak became a refuge of Hawaiian culture and surfing became a way of resisting the new forces of erasure.

Prior to the nineteenth century, there was no written account of the Hawaiian people, no history in modern terms. It was an oral culture: their history and knowledge was passed from generation to generation through myth and song, embodied in their decorative and practical arts, rituals and pastimes. As any pre-literate society, the primary text and storehouse of Hawaiian civilization was the people themselves; their collective wisdom was suspended in language and maintained through continual repetition. Consequently, as the Hawaiian people began to vanish, so too did their knowledge, forever. Although a number of native scholars emerged in the nineteenth century,[20] their success in preserving Hawaiian culture was somewhat limited, since that which passed out of practice, though recorded, was effectively lost– like a language that ceases to be spoken.

There were some traditions, however, which endured, despite having lost their mythic import, and despite the hostile colonial influence. As the historic consciousness of the Hawaiian people grew, these traditions gained a new kind of significance: they became a way of preserving and returning to the past. In this new context surfing became a vehicle of history: the surfbreak became a receptacle of collective memory and the practice became an act of remembrance.

In the past, surfing had been an inhabitation of *otherness*, and the break had been a threshold where civilization's distinctions broke down and identities dissolved. But in the modern world Hawaiian civilization had broken down, and the physical

[18] The plantation-owners eventually brought in thousands of labourers from Japan, China and Portugal.

[19] The legislation converted 'the land' into property, to be distributed among all Hawaiians– including naturalized foreigners. Most went to the Crown (approximately three quarters of the Kingdom's 4.2 million acres); and the bulk of the population, approximately 80,000 commoners, were left with 30,000 acres or about 1 percent. The rest went to the colonists.

[20] The earlier native chroniclers were educated in schools set up by missionaries, and nearly all were converts to Christianity.

expressions of their culture, their sites of collective memory, had been erased or taken over by the new power. The towns and villages had been overrun by colonial development; the taro fields and fishponds had been abandoned and were falling into ruin; the temples had been torn down and desecrated. What had previously been the source of Hawaiian identity became a reminder of loss and defeat. But the surfbreak eluded this desolation. It was, and is still, a domain that is not easily occupied. Even stripped of its earlier mythos, the surf remained a symbol of persistence and regeneration.

In the nineteenth century the waves continued to break as they always had, and presumably, as they always would, even in the newly-formed future. As the site of myth and legend, where the romantic and heroic scenes of the past had unfolded, they remained an unblemished canvas. On the island of Hawaii, the ancient names of over 60 breaks still endure,[21] and with them a catalogue of the Hawaiian language and history. Among them, Kealakekua, where Lono and Kaikilani had once enjoyed the surf together,[22] and the waters at Puna-lu'u, home to the beautiful surfer who caught the eye of the young Kaua'i chief. Surfbreaks throughout the islands became a means of recollecting the past: on Kaua'i the waves at Wailua recalled the good fortune of Mo'ikeha, whose surfing so impressed his two future brides; on Maui the surf at Lahaina summoned memories of Kelea's abduction; and on O'ahu, near Waikiki, the waters at Kalehuawehe (meaning 'the removed lehua or lei') conjured images of Pikoi's transgression. As the repository of myth these breaks would become a text, a series of monuments to the past. The surfbreak remained as a threshold, but rather than leading to the immemorial past, it became a portal to the secular past, to the history of Hawaii.

Previously, the tumbling waves into which the ancient surfer paddled had been an expression of nature's power of erasure. But within the new historical framework, the surfer now entered the realm of collective memory– like the Muses returning to the waters of Mnemosyne's well. In the past, surfing had been a sacred act of cosmic renewal; now it was a secular re-creation, a kind of remembering. For those pushed to the periphery, the waves offered a limited refuge, and surfing became a limited act of resistance– though both were bittersweet. Rather than labour for the new masters of the islands they went surfing. But it was an act of contrition: they escaped collusion, but it didn't return to them what had been taken.

* * *

[21] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 28.
[22] Coincidentally this is also the location where Cook was received when he landed in Hawaii.

Waiting for the Barbarians

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?
    The barbarians are due here today.

Why isn't anything going on in the senate?
Why are the senators sitting there without legislating?
    Because the barbarians are coming today.
    What's the point of senators making laws now?
    Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.

Why did our emperor get up so early,
and why is he sitting enthroned at the city's main gate,
in state, wearing the crown?
    Because the barbarians are coming today
    and the emperor's waiting to receive their leader.
    He's even got a scroll to give him,
    loaded with titles, with imposing names.

Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today
wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas?
Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts,
rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds?
Why are they carrying elegant canes
beautifully worked in silver and gold?
    Because the barbarians are coming today
    and things like that dazzle the barbarians.

Why don't our distinguished orators turn up as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?
    Because the barbarians are coming today
    and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?
(How serious people's faces have become.)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?
    Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.
    And some of our men just in from the border say
    there are no barbarians any longer.

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

C.P. Cavafy[*]

[*] C.P. Cavafy, Collected Poems (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) 14.

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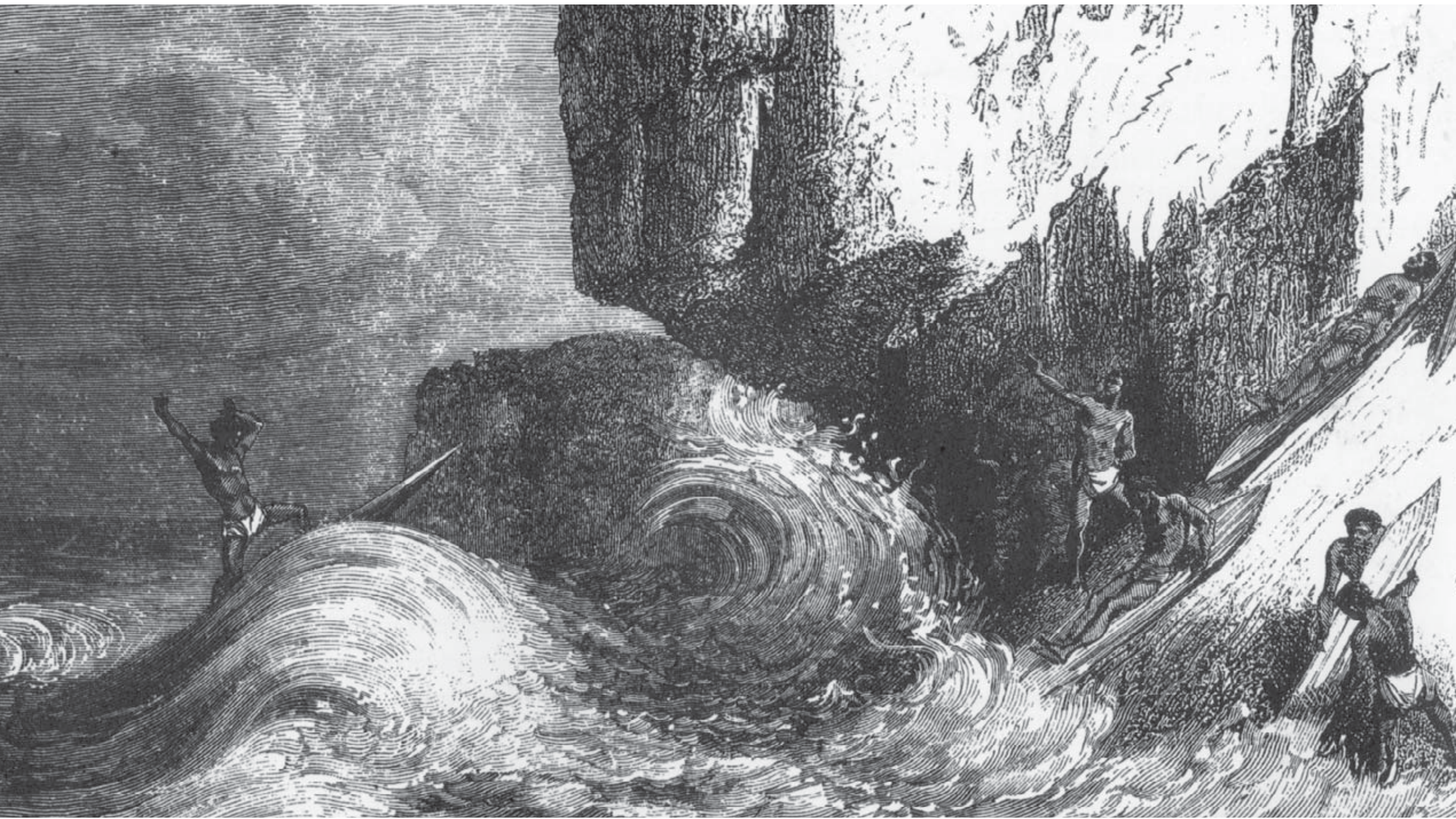


IN PART, the myth of the modern surfer grew out of and in response to the colonial era in Hawaii; however, some of the most persistent motifs in modern surfing derive not from the impressions of the colonists but from others who encountered the practice early on– and wrote about it. Most notable among these accounts are the descriptions of surfing made by the European explorers, who were the first Westerners to witness the practice, and the writings of Mark Twain, who was the first non-native to attempt surfing. These unique but related perspectives suggest a vision of the surfer that sharply contrasts the one cultivated by colonist: the explorer's perspective predates the sensibility of the colonial era; and Twain's perspective foreshadows its end.

One of the first descriptions of wave-riding comes from Captain James Cook,[1] whose expedition was also the first to discover the islands (after the Hawaiians), and the first to witness and record Hawaiian surfing. Cook's description, besides being the first of its kind, was also unique for its sensibility: "[They are not] strangers," he remarked, "to the soothing effects produced by particular sorts of motion, which, in some cases, seem to allay any perturbation of mind, with as much success as music;" and after watching this early surfer he would state, "I could not help conclude that this man felt the most supreme pleasure while he was driven on, so fast and so smoothly, by the sea..."[2] Cook associated surfing not with sport or leisure but with music, comparing the solace of the waves with the solace of melody. But his flash of insight, though illuminating, would remain as an isolated spark. Although many of Cook's contemporaries shared his wonder for surfing, they would focus instead on the physical prowess and daring of the act, rather than its meditative qualities.

[1] Cook's initial account describes a Tahitian canoe-surfer; later he would witness Hawaiian surfing, but this account was completed by Lieutenant James King following Cook's death.
[2] Matt Warshaw, ed. Zero Break (Orlando FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2004) 3-4.

Following Cook's death,[3] Lieutenant James King would complete the account of their expedition, which included the first description of Hawaiian surfing. Unlike Cook, however, he was filled with a different sort of wonder: "…they wait the time of the greatest swell that sets on shore, and altogether push forward with their arms to keep on its top, it sends them in with a most astonishing velocity,… On first seeing this very dangerous diversion I did not think it possible but that some of them must be dashed against the sharp rocks [before] they quit their plank, and dive under till the surf is broke…"[4] Whereas Cook had fastened on mutual sensibilities, King's description emphasized surfing's exotic quality, its *otherness*. Similar aspects would later fascinate the traveling missionary William Ellis,[5] who would visit Hawaii in the early nineteenth century: "As we crossed the head of the bay, we saw a number of young persons swimming in the surf, which rolled with some violence on the rocky beach. To a spectator nothing can appear more daring, and sometimes alarming, than to see a number of persons splashing about among waves of the sea as they dash [towards] the shore…"[6]

For many, however, their wonder stemmed not simply from the daring of the surfer, but from how surfing illustrated the native's relationship to the sea. As one observer noted, "There are perhaps no people more accustomed to the water than the islanders of the Pacific; they seem almost a race of amphibious beings."[7] For the European sailor the sea was a harbinger of death, rife with malevolent forces both real and imagined. Long voyages bred superstition and fear; and since many couldn't swim, falling overboard was often a death sentence. Consequently, the comfort of the Hawaiians in what seemed their natural element was almost unbelievable: "familiar with the sea from their birth, they lose all dread of it, and seem nearly as much at home in the water as on dry land. There are few children who are not taken into the sea by their mothers the second or third day after birth, and many can swim as soon as they can walk… they remain for hours [in the water] and yet I never knew of but one child being drowned…"[8]

Nor was it only the children who inhabited these waters, but the elderly as well: "All ranks and ages appear equally fond of it. We have seen Karimoku and Kaioeva, some of the highest chiefs in the island, both between fifty and sixty years of age,

[3] Cook's expedition would make two visits to Hawaii, and he would be killed by the Hawaiians during their second sojourn.
[4] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 97.
[5] Ellis was a missionary, but his love of travel and the sensitivity of his writing aligns him with the explorer rather than the missionary.
[6] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 97.
[7] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 98.
[8] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 98.

and large corpulent men, balancing themselves on their narrow board, or splashing about in the foam, with as much satisfaction as youths of sixteen."[9] And women too, who would "swim off to the ship, and continue half a day in the water…"[10] And of course, all of them were naked. As it had been for the ancient Hawaiians, the surfbreak was both a fearsome domain and one powerfully charged with eroticism. After months at sea, Cook's crew may have thought Venus herself was riding the waves in Hawaii. After returning to Europe, the exotic tales these sailors and others like them would fill the sexual imagination of a continent– or rather, the male sexual imagination. Amphibious, exotic, unashamed of their bodies and without fear of the sea: this was the native upon which the explorer had stumbled. But this vision of the surfer was short-lived, abandoned in the nineteenth century for that of the colonist. The notable exception was Mark Twain.

Twain's encounter with surfing was unlike any that had come before: he tried it; and though he visited Hawaii in 1866, his writing sets him clearly outside the Christian and Capitalist paradigms of the colonial era. Probably the first Westerner to attempt surfing, Twain is often portrayed as the droll 'grandfather' of the practice, and his story, treated as an amusing accident of history. But Twain is perhaps more profoundly the patriarch of modern surfing than such casual treatment suggests. If surfing is understood as taking place on both the literal and figurative periphery of civilization, and if the surfer posits a realm of being that exists outside the conventional social order, then Twain in the persona of the surfer makes sense, and his title as the 'grandfather of modern surfing' seems less perfunctory.[11]

Twain stands in the threshold between worlds and between ages, a bridge between surfing in the past and in our own time. Driven and perplexed by similar contradictions as the modern surfer, he was also confronted by similarly conflicting identities. In him, the spirit of the explorer returns as the surf-traveler, motivated by a need for the new and authentic, but also by a longing for home– a tourist. But Twain was no ordinary tourist. He was also a writer and storyteller, an idealist and self-confessed 'revolutionist,'[12] and animated by the conflicted spirit of Romanticism: both attracted to and repulsed by the "systems fashioned by critical reason"[13]– the social, economic and technological structures of the modern world. He was restless, curious, and above all, sought to explore and inhabit the edges

[9] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 99.
[10] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, 97.
[11] The non-native grandfather of surfing.
[12] "I am always on the side of the revolutionists, because there never was a revolution unless there were some oppressive and intolerable conditions against which to revolute." Mark Twain and the Three Rs, M. Geismar, ed., (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973) 159.
[13] Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 38.

of modern life. His desire for the strange and exotic brought him to Hawaii, not simply a desire for new knowledge but for new forms of knowledge: the elusive realm of *experience*. It was a path that would lead from the exotic to the erotic, to the body and to the surfer:

> At noon I observed a bevy of nude native young ladies bathing in the sea… They were [accomplished] swimmers and divers, and enjoyed themselves to the last degree. They swam races, splashed and ducked and tumbled each other about, and filled the air with their laughter.[14]

Like his predecessors, Twain was struck by the ease of the Hawaiians with their bodies and surroundings, particularly the sea. With Twain, the earlier affiliation of surfing with sensuality and eroticism reemerges, expressed by nakedness, the free mixing of the sexes, and the foaming surf; and he also emphasized the precariousness of surfing: "at the right moment he would fling his board upon its foamy crest and himself upon the board, and here he would come whizzing by like a bombshell!"[15] Like the explorer before him, Twain frames the Hawaiian's *otherness* in terms of land and sea, using the surfer's inhabitation of the break as evidence of the Hawaiian's amphibious nature: "It is said that the first thing an Islander learns is how to swim; learning to walk being a matter of smaller consequence, comes afterward."[16] But Twain differs from his predecessors in that he was also participant in what he described. That which had elicited voyeuristic wonder in the explorer, and fearful suspicion in the colonist, was for Twain an irresistible invitation:

> I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right, and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself. The board struck the shore in three-quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me.[17]

There is a vitality to Twain's writing which sets it apart from what came before, the fact that we can touch and feel him, and what he feels touches us: the salt in our mouths, the sinking feeling in our stomachs, the bitter taste of bile at the back of our throat– they are familiar experiences, known to each of us. If we've surfed, we've all gone over the falls; and even if we haven't, we've all been humbled by the sea. He is one of us, not some disembodied voice from another time and place, but a vital and recognizable presence: a man learning to surf.

[14] Twain, Roughing it 495.
[15] Twain, Roughing it.
[16] Twain, Roughing it.
[17] Twain, Roughing it.

As his description ends, and in light of his own defeat, Twain remarks: "None but the natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly."[18] His admission signals a subtle but important shift: the transformation of the surfer's *otherness* into *naturalness*, into something of value. Twain foreshadows what will come to pass in the next century, when surfing once more becomes a source of sensual pleasure, knowledge and identity, and when the domain of the break again offers refuge to the surfer, from the time and space of civilized society.

* * *

DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY surfing ceased to be a strictly Hawaiian domain, taking root first in California, and then later, spreading throughout the globe. As it grew, the meaning of surfing as a cultural form would grow more heterogeneous and complex; and within Western culture, the surfer would eventually develop into a prominent albeit enigmatic icon, especially in the United States where the practice has been inextricably woven into the myth of California and modern tourist-friendly Hawaii– two paticularisms of the 'American dream'. The modern surfer is a paradoxical figure, however, and his relationship to modern society has often been tenuous. At times the surfer has been celebrated as an exemplar of society's values and ambitions; other times he has been perceived as subversive to them. But often surfing is simply dismissed as juvenile escapism; and the surfer, particularly the older surfer, reproached for being irresponsible. Like the native Hawaiian was to the colonist, the surfer has come to be regarded by society as a modern-day Peter Pan who refuses to grow-up, to become civilized and productive.

In the early part of the twentieth century, however, before surfers began appearing on the shores of California, the practice was still considered an exotic curiosity from a far-away land. Nostalgia for the lost frontier was still fresh and many were fascinated by the adventure and innocence that the pan-like surfer seemed to represent. As such, surfing was initially well-received by the American public, both through the exuberant descriptions conjured by Jack London, the first twentieth-century figure to write about the practice, and their physical embodiment in the famed Hawaiian surfer Duke Kahanamoku. In each case surfing was promoted as a new sport, and the native who practiced it, as a kind of 'noble savage'. Both affirmed Western values and beliefs, and did so at a comfortable distance.

[18] Twain, Roughing it 501.

Hawaii was a late addition to the United States, and the native Hawaiian, a late entry into the American imagination. The popularity of London's writing and of 'the Duke' (as he came to be known) reflected the sensibility of an earlier era. They echoed a shift that had already taken place on the continent during the previous century, a shift in the perception of the North American Indian by an emerging nation. The Hawaiian was a new kind of Indian, but his assimilation into American culture followed an established pattern. What happened with surfing at the beginning of the twentieth century could be seen as an epilogue to the American Romantic Period of the nineteenth, "with its emphasis on feeling, its interest in nature, its fascination with exoticism, mysticism, and eroticism, and its preoccupation with the glorification of the past." [19] During this period the Indian became, as Thomas King explains, "a symbol in which all these concerns could be unified."[20]

> Not the Indian who had been assimilated to the plow. Not the Indian who had been crippled by European diseases and vices. Not the Indian who had been buried on reservations and locked up in military prisons. Certainly not the educated Indian who had fought American expansion in the courts. Rather it was the wild, free, powerful, noble, handsome, philosophical, eloquent, solitary Indian – pardon me, solitary male Indian – that Europeans went looking to find. A particular Indian. An Indian who could be a cultural treasure, a piece of North American antiquity. A mythic figure who could reflect the strength and freedom of an emerging continent. A National Indian… A single Indian who could stand for the whole.[21]

For the North American colonists, the creation of this 'National Indian' was a symbolic means of legitimizing their claim to land. During the Boston Tea Party, for instance, the participants dressed-up as Mohawks.[22] "Indianness helped [the white colonists] define custom and imagine themselves a legitimate part of the continent's ancient history. Indians and the land offered the only North American past capable of justifying a claim of traditional custom and a refiguring of the rhetoric of moral economy."[23] The Hawaiian surfer would undergo a similar process during the twentieth century, transforming what Twain had previously dubbed the 'national pastime' of the Hawaiians into an American tradition. Hawaiianness gave American surfing authenticity, history– but not as it stood. It was material for the creation of a new myth, a persona created by Jack London, which Duke later came to epitomize. Together they would establish the iconography of the modern American surfer.

[19] Thomas King, The Truth About Stories (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2003) 33.
[20] King, 33.
[21] King, 79.
[22] King, 80.
[23] King, 81.

Like Twain before him, London came to Hawaii in 1907 as a traveler and writer. But unlike his predecessor, who mentions surfing only briefly and towards the middle of his narrative, surfing is the first activity to receive London's attention and garners an entire chapter. For London surfing was nothing less than "a royal sport for the natural kings of earth":

> Out there where a big smoker lifts skyward, rising like a sea-god from out of the welter of spume and churning white, on the giddy, toppling, overhanging and downfalling, precarious crest appears the dark head of a man. Swiftly he rises through the rushing white. His black shoulders, his chest, his loins, his limbs… Where but the moment before was only the wide desolation and invincible roar, is now a man, erect, full-statured, not struggling frantically in that wild movement, not buried and crushed and buffeted by those mighty monsters, but standing above them all, calm and superb, poised on the giddy summit, his feet buried in the churning foam, the salt smoke rising to his knees, and all the rest of him in the free air and flashing sunlight, and he is flying through the air, flying forward, flying fast as the surge on which he stands. He is a Mercury – a brown Mercury.[24]

Breathless, ecstatic, triumphant: never before or perhaps since has the surfer been so exalted. His daring amidst the menace of the waves, a persistent theme throughout Western accounts of surfing, is here elevated to new heights. The surfer is no longer a savage, nor even a man. Instead he becomes god, a brown god. It marks a radical departure. Such a description would not have been possible in the previous century: to the explorer and colonist it would have seemed illogical; and to the missionary it would have been blasphemous. London's Mercury represented a new kind of surfer, one who emerges amidst the declining influence of the church in Hawaiian society and a reorientation of the islands' economy towards tourism.

London's surfer draws upon the power of Hawaiian mythology, the "old gods and geniuses"[25] of the sea and of the body, reconfiguring the ancient surfer to fit within the Western paradigm. It wasn't Lono riding upon the billows but a god of the classical pantheon, and not Venus but Mercury, whom the breaking wave carries ashore. In fact, throughout London's narrative the woman, native or otherwise, is conspicuously absent. In nearly all of the previous accounts the surf was populated by both sexes, but with London the waters seem bereft of even a single female surfer. The feminine does not concern him. Instead he transforms the traditional eroticism of surfing, which had always tacitly or explicitly been inseparable from the feminine powers, into a masculine domain. The surfbreak,

[24] Jack London, The Cruise of the Snark (London: Seafarer Books., 1971) 76.
[25] Paz, 35.

once a place of fecundity and sexual transgression, becomes the scene of battle. Waves become wild (male) animals to vanquish or subdue:

> … he has leaped upon the back of the sea, and he is riding the sea that roars and bellows and cannot shake him from its back… There is a wild burst of foam, a long tumultuous rushing sound as the breaker falls futile and spent on the beach… He has 'bitted the bull-mouthed breaker' and ridden it… He is a Kanaka [native Hawaiian] – and more, he is a man, a member of the kingly species that has mastered matter and the brutes and lorded it over creation.[26]

The big-wave surfers of the 1950s and 60s, who rose to prominence again in the 1990s, are descendants of London's vision. The destructive element in which the surfer had once immersed himself becomes an object to be conquered rather than a threshold to be inhabited. By giving the practice an identifiable goal London attempts to align surfing with Western society's conception of sport, whose purpose is to domesticate the restless or destructive instincts of its citizens through conventionalized struggle. London initiates a process whereby the persona of the athlete begins to subsume that of the earlier surfer. Soon thereafter this vision is distilled in the archetypal Hawaiian surfer: the 'powerful, noble, handsome, philosophical, eloquent, solitary,' Duke Kahanamoku.

Born and raised in Honolulu, Duke would have been a teenager when London arrived in Hawaii, and it's not inconceivable that the two may have crossed paths on the beach. But even if they'd met it's unlikely that Duke would have appeared in London's narrative. In truth, though it was a story of Hawaiian surfing, it was not a story about Hawaiian surfers. London doesn't engage any natives and the 'brown Mercury' remains an anonymous symbol for what the piece is really about: the emergence of the white or *haole* surfer.[27] Though he admires the skill of the native, London's narrative revolves around his own experience of surfing, and that of his instructors, Alexander Hume-Ford and George Freeth.[28] If Duke was the father of modern surfing, Ford and Freeth were its pioneers. Like Twain, London would also attempt surfing, but in contrast to the former's opinion that 'none but the natives ever master the art of surf-bathing,' London saw surfing as a domain to be subdued:

> It is all very well, sitting here in cool shade of the beach, but you are a man, one of the kingly species, and what that Kanaka can do, you can do yourself… Get in and

[26] London, 77-8.
[27] Originally 'haole' meant all foreigners, but towards the end of the nineteenth century it came to mean Caucasians exclusively. It means 'without breath.'
[28] Freeth's mother was half-Polynesian, but his fair skin and blue eyes identified him as haole.

> wrestle with the sea… bit the sea's breakers, master them, and ride upon their backs as a king should.[29]

Not surprisingly London's first attempt at surfing was marked by clumsy failures and mishaps. But with Ford's help his fortunes improve, and he is quick to extol his newfound abilities and the talents of his tutors, particularly Ford. Although at times London's piece can seem pretentious, he remains, for surfers at least, a sympathetic figure. After being carried ashore by his first wave, London expresses what so many surfers have echoed: "From that moment I was lost..." What is more, London was attentive to the details of the practice, as revealed in his insightful reflections on the motion of waves; and he also exhibited a subtle understanding of surfing's finer points, made clear in his Zen-like rumination on the surfer's movements and techniques. In fact, the passage would seem to almost contradict his earlier characterization:

> The whole method of surf-riding and surf-fighting, I learned, is one of non-resistance. Dodge the blow that is struck at you… Never be rigid. Relax. Yield yourself to the waters that are ripping and tearing at you. When the undertow catches you and drags you seaward along the bottom, don't struggle against it… it is stronger than you.[30]

The real subjects of his admiration, however, were Freeth and Ford. He referred to Freeth as a 'bronzed' rather than brown god, and in Ford he found a kindred spirit, "a globe trotter by profession, bent ever on the pursuit of sensation."[31] Ford was the scion of a South Carolina plantation family and was the first to recognize the economic potential of surfing: namely, its ability to draw tourists to Hawaii and Waikiki. When he heard of Jack London's arrival, Ford made a point of introducing himself, not casually on the beach as London implies, but the evening before in London's Hotel.[32] Ford knew London's celebrity would significantly increase surfing's exposure. Ford was the first surf-promoter, and he also established surfing's first institution, the Outrigger Canoe Club. It was indicative of a shift: the once-strange customs of the native had become a valuable commodity and another territory for colonization. Ford used surfing to draw tourists to the beach and to Hawaii, while the Freeth would later introduce the practice to mainland America with his surfing-demonstrations.

Another reason why London was so impressed with Ford's surfing was the fact he'd had 'no one to teach him'. According to London, Ford had to learn the

[29] London, 78.
[30] London, 88.
[31] London, 81.
[32] V. Noble, Hawaiian Prophet: Alexander Hume Ford (Smithtown: Exposition Press, 1980) 45.

difficult and dangerous practice on his own, which re-enforced another powerful American myth: the self-made man. Of course, it wasn't true– not exactly. Surfing may have reached its lowest ebb at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it had not disappeared entirely. Ford and Freeth did not discover surfing in a library or museum. They learned to ride waves by emulating still-practicing Hawaiian surfers. For London and Ford, however, and for many who came later, the actual state of surfing at the turn of the century was less important than creating a powerful story. Both were myth-makers by profession: as a writer London's livelihood depended on good copy and as an entrepreneur Ford's depended on effective advertising.

In the case of surfing, the theme of 'death and resurrection' served a dual purpose: on the one hand, it linked the modern practice to the ancient, giving surfing authenticity and mythic import; on the other, it broke with the past, distancing surfing from undesirable elements of Hawaiian culture and history, namely the more gruesome aspects of early life in Hawaii, as well as the genocide brought on by colonization. It was necessary for the old tradition to die out so that a new surfer could emerge from the ashes, and so a new narrative could be built amidst the hotels and tourists. Accordingly, the persona of the modern surfer was dual, part haole and part native. If Ford represented the Hawaiianized American, then his compliment was Duke, who became the National Hawaiian, an embodiment of the American desire for progress coupled with the need for legitimacy and authenticity. Though it would later be transplanted to the shores of California, the essence of the modern surfer has its origins in the mythic waters of Hawaii.

* * *

ON KUHIO BEACH IN WAIKIKI there is a bronze statue of Duke Kahanamoku, erected on the hundredth anniversary of his birth as a tribute to the man and his legacy. The statue greets visitors with its arms outstretched, over which flowers are perennially draped, welcoming them to the beach that he helped to make famous. Thousands flock past the statue each year that stands, oddly, with its back facing the waves.

Duke is inarguably the most well-known and revered surfer in modern history. But he not only defined what it was to be a surfer. He also came to represent the essence of what it was to be Hawaiian, not only in the eyes of outsiders, but for many Hawaiians as well. At times this twofold aspect of his persona resolves into

a single, clear reflection; other times these two identities interfere with one another, and the image blurs. Duke lived in two worlds: a Hawaiian past and an American future, with one driven irrevocably into the other. Sometimes, impossibly, he appears the master of his circumstances; other times he appears as their pawn.

Born in 1890, Duke grew up during a time of intense political upheaval, marked by the end of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the overthrow of the monarchy, and finally, Hawaii's annexation by the United States in 1898. Little has been said about this period of Duke's life, either by Duke himself in his semi-autobiographical *World of Surfing,*[33] or by his later commentators. His recounting of the nineteenth century is terse and, not surprisingly, focused on the subject of surfing. He laments the general decline of Hawaiian culture, but his tone remains somewhat ambivalent while describing the effects of colonization or the influence of the missionaries. On the subject of annexation there is a single enigmatic line: "Things had been in a state of flux for too long."[34]

Duke began surfing at an early age, meeting on the beach with his friends to discuss waves, their boards and techniques. Later this group would form the *Hui Nalu* surf-club as an alternative to the mainly haole Outrigger Canoe Club founded by Ford, whose initiation fees and monthly dues put membership beyond their means.[35] During the early part of the century Waikiki was undergoing an economic shift, and Duke, in his characteristically upbeat manner, partly credited the resurgence of surfing with the success of the pineapple and sugar plantations, which, "along with the improvement of the Islands' economy, [brought] the inevitable increase of interest in sports."[36] About the steady increase of tourists and visiting surfers from the mainland he was similarly magnanimous: "Welcome competition was here in a large way."[37] Such was the strength of his 'aloha spirit'.[38]

By his twenties Duke had already established his reputation as a preeminent surfer and 'waterman,'[39] but it was his medal-winning performances at the Olympics (in swimming) which would earn him national acclaim and international celebrity. In total he would claim five medals for his country, three gold and two silver. Duke translated his fame into greater exposure for his surfing, which he promoted in

[33] Duke Kahanamoku with J. Brennan, World of Surfing (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968).
[34] Kahanamoku, 30.
[35] Kahanamoku, 32.
[36] Kahanamoku, 31.
[37] Kahanamoku, 33.
[38] 'Aloha' is a Hawaiian term for welcome, hospitality or good will.
[39] The term 'waterman' describes the surfer who is accomplished at a number of surfing-related activities: principally swimming, bodysurfing, canoe-surfing, and ocean-rescue work. Depending on the definition, only native Hawaiians are eligible for the title.

the United States and abroad, introducing the practice to the east coast in 1912 and later to Australia and New Zealand. He also popularized surfing in Southern California, beginning in 1915 and continuing into the 1930s.[40]

In the American imagination Duke epitomized the noble savage*,* the mythic or literary Indian of the nineteenth century remodeled for a new era. The heroic Indians of the past, the Chingachgooks or Hiawathas,[41] had fought in wars alongside Americans. Now they competed in sports. Duke represented a physical and moral ideal: he was tall, muscular and good-looking; and as a competitive athlete he exemplified discipline, hard work and sportsmanship. As an Olympian he was also a symbol of the United States, and so his success became a communal possession and source of national pride. His victories made him a patriot. Competitive sport legitimizes activities that might otherwise be perceived as frivolous and serves society by re-enforcing the ethic of competition, a keystone of modern civilization. It is not difficult to imagine how history would have treated Duke if he had only been a surfer and remained on the beach, if he had not also been an Olympic athlete and if he hadn't won medals.

Duke had a natural inclination towards competition. It was reflected in his conception of surfing, which was, for the most part, consistent with that of Ford and London. Duke often describes surfing in competitive terms, both against nature and other surfers. He was an early proponent of surfing as an organized sport, believing it should be included in the Olympics, [42] and he advocated for the creation of surf-clubs and professional organizations: "Competitive surfing," he stated, "is without a doubt one of the biggest contributions to the popularity of surfing…"[43] He likened modern competitions to those once held during the ancient Makahiki, although modern surfers, he speculates, "with today's faster and more maneuverable boards,… must be milking bigger and better results from the waves than did their predecessors."[44] Duke believed in progress, as he did in rules and standards:

> It has often been said that there is no universally accepted definition of a good and a bad surfing style. That isn't quite so; we all know decidedly what a bad surfer does and looks like, for his class simply is not there. But a good surfing style is *class* itself.[45]

[40] Matt Warshaw, The Encyclopedia of Surfing (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003) 309.
[41] King,
[42] Kahanamoku 108.
[43] Kahanamoku, 108.
[44] Kahanamoku, 109.
[45] Kahanamoku, 111.

For Duke 'good surfing' was also synonymous with big-wave riding. He was himself a prodigious surfer in large surf and a celebrated protagonist of big-wave lore, an event known simply as the 'Legendary Ride'. It's here, in his reverence for the big-wave surfer, that Duke comes closest to London's vision. It's difficult to know how Duke viewed his own exploits (how much of the book was influenced by its co-author is unclear). But his esteem for the early big-wave surfer was unreserved:

> There can't be too much said about the surfers who ride the more mammoth surfs with their Elephant Gun boards. Those out-sized boards [Guns] are a lot to handle. The Gun guys are heroic, gutsy, canny and talented… they surf for themselves – to master all that the sea throws at them. Pride enters it. Vanity is there. It becomes something of an obsession, a mania, almost a crusade. They feel like a god when they take charge of a giant wall of water that could crush them… To beat that kind of a wave gives a man a lot of self-respect and a feeling of belonging.[46]

The popular image of the 'valiant' surfer did not, however, come from competition or big-wave daring. Rather, it came from surfer's persona being wedded with that of the lifeguard, an esteemed occupation that lent surfing a noble and heroic aspect. In 1925 and in dramatic fashion Duke saved the lives of eight fisherman whose boat had capsized in a stormy seas off Newport Beach. He used his surfboard to ferry the men from the upturned vessel to safety. Of the twenty-nine onboard seventeen drowned. In his own account, Duke emphasized the cooperative aspects of the operation, a fact often omitted from other descriptions of the event, "in a matter of minutes, all of us were making rescues," and he concludes by extolling the virtues of the paddleboard as a means for saving lives. Herein was a quintessential part of his charm and enduring appeal: he was unpretentious and affable throughout his life, despite his celebrity and numerous accomplishments.

Duke spent a number of years in California where he tried to parley his fame into a film career. During his time in Hollywood, however, he was only able to land small roles, and "always as an impassive foreigner."[47] After retiring from competitive swimming Duke returned to Hawaii where he was given the ceremonial office of 'Sheriff of Honolulu,' a largely symbolic position where he acted as the city's 'official greeter,' welcoming celebrities and dignitaries. He held the post for over twenty-five years,[48] earning him the title 'unofficial ambassador of Hawaii' and 'Ambassador of Aloha'. Towards the end of his life Duke was the "frontman for a small commercial empire," a restaurant, a surf-contest and a raft of merchandise

[46] Kahanamoku, 111.
[47] Warshaw, 309.
[48] Warshaw, 309.

bearing his image and name, "including floral-print tennis shoes, aloha shirts, surfboards, bellyboards, skateboards, ukuleles, and table glasses."[49]

In the twentieth century tourism transformed Hawaii into America's playground. It became an escape, a break. In many ways this conversion built on the prejudices of the colonial era: the Hawaiians were 'naturally' lazy, categorically welcoming and predisposed to sensual indulgence. The promise of tourism served two purposes. First, it turned these 'natural' tendencies into a useful and productive vocation: who better to run a resort than those already inclined to relaxation and physical pleasure. Second, it mitigated the threat of insurrection by making the Hawaiian economy dependent on the United States.

The islands became a resort and the Hawaiians were encouraged to become its staff, and in particular, to become a kind of entertainer, from tour-guides to hula-dancers. In the colonial era the Hawaiians had been taught to eschew their traditional customs or risk spiritual and economic ruin. In the modern era they were encouraged to salvage them, not because of their intrinsic worth, but because tourism had given them 'cash-value'. Their culture became valuable for its ability to create atmosphere, to lend an air of mystery or exoticism to the tourist's vacation. It added local flavour to the *experience* of Hawaii. And the surfer was part of this too. In his role as 'Ambassador of Aloha' the Duke became a concierge. As a surfer he became entertainment.

Like any serious athlete, the term 'entertainer' has been judiciously avoided in reference to Duke's surfing. Within the surfing world Duke's occupies a sacred space, and there is an unspoken taboo on making comments that may be perceived as negative. For surfers it threatens to complicate a dearly-held myth. For the Hawaiian it strikes more deeply, threatening to cast a shadow on a cultural hero. Nonetheless, the fact remains that surfing entered the fabric of American society as entertainment, through public demonstrations and tourists taking lessons. In fact, the sole purpose of the modern surf-industry (besides making money) is entertainment, whether it is surf-contests, the professional tour, films, magazines– even the 'surfing-lifestyle,' which has become a valuable commodity in and of itself. Loathe as many are to admit it, if surfing ceased to be entertaining the sport would vanish. Surfers would of course remain, as well as those who supply them with their basic equipment, but the industry would collapse.

[49] Warshaw, 309.

Most if not all of the conflicting identities of the twentieth century surfer can be traced back to Duke: he was the first to link the persona of surfer with that of competitive athlete and lifeguard; he was the first surf-celebrity; and he was the original big-wave rider. He was a Hawaiian and an American, and he used and was used by the new tourist-based economy. He also prefigured the professional surfer: as competitor, entertainer, sex-symbol and brand. Indeed, even though he established a masculine archetype, the female pro-surfer that emerged in the 1980s and 90s still follows the same established model.

In the early part of the century, Duke, together with the enterprising Ford and mythologizing London, provided the basic elements out of which the shape of modern surfing would develop, giving rise not only to the prototypical modern surfer, but to the surf-industry as well. In whole or part each player within the surfing establishment can be seen foreshadowed by these three: from the surf-writer and historian, pro-surfer and board-shaper, to the surf-photographer and filmmaker, surf-promoter and contest-organizer; even the first resort-developer, surf-tourist and tour-guide. Whether intentionally or not, they are responsible for the image of the modern surfer upon which the surf-industry depends.

Of the three, Duke remains the most famous, and even though he tends to be treated most simply, his story is the most complex and compelling. Ford promoted surfing and London wrote about it: but Duke was first and foremost a surfer; and he was the first to confront the paradoxical identities that the term would later come to include. It's unlikely Duke was ever able to reconcile them. But in this he was the consummate surfer. Rather than a story of triumph or heroism, Duke's was of a more equivocal kind: that of survival in hopelessly compromised circumstances.

* * *

Haole Go Home

Why do I feel like stomping the haole? Well, look at my side of things. Suppose I came over to your house and said you weren't dressing right, and you weren't living right and this and that. You'd get mad and sock me, too. It's a lot deeper than that I guess, but that's the way we feel. You Mainlanders come over here and try to run the show, and we are supposed to be your servants. The trouble is we are slaves to your system. You've taught us to need your money and your conveniences, but we'll never respect you. I get plenty burned up when I think of what's happening to my brothers and our Island. But we still have our pride… It makes my blood boil when I see all the hotels, stores, ships in our harbors, servicemen on our streets and tourists jamming up everything. Until a few years ago, we could still get away from all of this by going surfing. Now even that's been taken over by the haole… So once in a while when I get a few good blasts of beer going, I get to thinking of all these things, and some haole acts up; well, I just bust him a good one, and I feel a little better.

Anonymous
Originally published in 1969, *Surfer* magazine[*]

[*] Matt Warshaw, ed. Zero Break (Orlando FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2004) 312

Anarchist

THE VISION OF SURFING promoted by London and Ford at the beginning of the century located the surfer within the moral compass of mainstream American society, confirming his allegiance to its values and goals. As the embodiment of this conception, Duke turned the surfer into an American icon and established surfing as a legitimate cultural institution. In the twentieth century the spotlight has fixated on Duke, first as prodigal son and then as patriarch, and has thereafter been focused on his prolific and distinguished heirs within the surf-industry: the professional surfer, the big-wave rider, the pin-up. But the story of the modern surfer is not defined by this limited pedigree alone. In the shadow of the icon there is another, less apparent surfer, one who does not seek to reconcile surfing with the institutions and values of modern society, but rather, uses surfing to confront them: surfing becomes an alternative way of being in the world.

For the most part, the story of the *other* surfer has unfolded beyond the institutional structures of surfing, away from the camera's glare and the industry's constructed idyll. It has occurred on the outskirts of history. Duke's ambiguity was a function of profusion and overexposure. The opacity of the *other* is one of paucity. Mostly, the estrangement of the *other* has been self-imposed, the expression of an ethos common among surfers to be unacknowledged, not to be understood or seen, and a consequence of the surfbreak's seclusive nature, its unwritten codes and local traditions, orally or non-verbally communicated. It is a symptom of the hope that one's home break remain undiscovered. But this obscurity is also a consequence of how the *other* surfer has been represented in the twentieth century: almost exclusively as a negation, flattened by hyperbole or discernible only as an absence.

When Duke began surfing in the waters off Waikiki he was not alone, but it was his persona that became the public face of surfing. Today it is the professional surfer who appears in magazines and on film. Duke's image was the umbrella under which modern surfing came of age. It was the filter through which the surfer was introduced to the American public and the screen that separated the present from a somewhat checkered past. At first the identity of the surfer suffered little variance. They were bronzed or brown gods, lifeguards and athletes, noble and productive roles within society. They belonged to reputable clubs and associations, legitimate extensions of the community. They surfed for competition or leisure, concepts linked to surplus and affluence. Duke's smile exuded optimism and the promise of a broad and immanent prosperity; and for awhile it seemed to efface the black marks on the surfer of the previous century. But the stigmas of the past were not so easily erased, nor the circumstances out of which they emerged. As the number of surfers began to increase, and as the image of the surfer began to diversify, blemishes appear on the smooth surface of the icon. The 'idlers, loafers and vagrants' of the previous century reemerge, colonizing the beaches of Hawaii and California, then Australia and beyond.

In the United States during the 1930s and 40s surfing communities and clubs began to form up and down the coast of Southern California. Advances in surfboard design and construction, as well as the first commercially available boards, made the practice more accessible. In Hawaii, small groups of surfers began to branch out from Waikiki, by then an "international vacation spot of choice for the wealthy and glamorous."[1] They used their new boards and techniques to distance themselves from the crowds and ride more challenging waves. Surfing made brief appearances in Hollywood films, the first books were published, and articles along with photographs began to appear in widely circulated magazines like *National Geographic* and *Popular Science*.[2] This limited but steady exposure increased the profile of the practice, but not enough to propel surfing into the mainstream. Associations were formed and competitions were held, but the real growth and innovation still emanated from outside the expanding institutional sphere: surfing spread by word of mouth and by the first-hand experiences of its new adherents; experimental boards were developed in the garage and tool shed.

The development of surfing in Australia, however, followed a very different pattern. In contrast to America, surfing in Australia had developed almost exclusively

[1] Matt Warshaw, The Encyclopedia of Surfing (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003) xii.
[2] Warshaw, xiii.

within an institutional framework.[3] By and large the practice had been restricted to members of the Surf Life Saving Association (SLSA) and limited to beaches with active life-saving clubs. It was regarded as a natural extension of and compliment to the lifeguard's activities, to which it was subordinate. In part it was a function of Australia's isolation, its distance from the changes occurring in the spiritual and practical centres of modern surfing, Hawaii and California respectively. But it was also an expression of Australia's own historical and cultural particularities,[4] which isolation only magnified. The situation produced a uniform vision of the Australian surfer that was without rival until the 1950s; and when change came it was sudden and profoundly divisive.

The landscape of Australian surfing was transformed almost overnight with the introduction of a lighter, more maneuverable surfboard in 1956, combined with more affordable cars and lower gas prices following the end of the war. By ending the surfer's dependence on the life-saving club as a base of operations, the practice was wrested from the SLSA's control.[5] These new surfers were uninterested in using the surfboard for life-saving. Instead, they were intent on surfing for its own sake. It was anathema to the established order of surf-lifesavers. The rupture polarized the persona of the Australian surfer, setting the two extremes in opposition. On one side there were the surf life-savers: paragons of masculinity and nobility, respectable and productive citizens settled within a community and politically enfranchised; the SLSA was an influential advocacy group and it effectively lobbied local governments against the new interloping surfer. Then there was the *other* surfer: a loafer and vagrant, hedonistic, solitary or anti-social and essentially nomadic. These opposing identities had already come into conflict in America, as they later would elsewhere. But nowhere was the split as pronounced or abrupt.

As it was in Australia, the 1950s were a time of transformation for American surfing. After the end of the war California became the 'workshop' of modern surfing and places like Malibu and San Onofre took on the status once reserved for Hawaiian surfbreaks. The decade witnessed many technical innovations, two of which would change the course of surfing in the latter half of the century: the polystyrene and fiberglass surfboard and the introduction of the wetsuit. There were also substantial changes in the culture of surfing. As the numbers of surfers increased, so too did the number of surf-related articles and imagery,

[3] Kent Pearson, Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand (St. Lucia [Australia]: University of Queensland Press, 1979).
[4] For an detailed exploration see Pearson's book.
[5] Pearson.

which appeared with greater frequency in the popular media. The first novels and films with surfing as their primary subject emerged. But the most dramatic transformation came with the release of *Gidget* in 1959, which, more than any event before or since, thrust surfing into the cultural mainstream. It brought the multitude to the beach: before the film, surfers numbered in the thousands; by the mid-sixties they could be counted in the hundreds of thousands.

On the surface *Gidget* is a simple, if not simplistic, story about surfing and love. A young, middle-class girl growing up in suburban Southern California discovers surfing at Malibu and a handsome young surfer with whom she falls in love. After the requisite trials and tribulations she is eventually 'betrothed' to him. Significantly, this doesn't occur on the beach but only after they have returned to her parents home in the suburbs. In truth, of course, it is much less a story about surfing, or love for that matter, than a lesson on social and economic morality in post-war America dressed as a coming-of-age fable with surfing as its backdrop. The two male protagonists are both surfers and self-proclaimed 'surf-bums' at the outset. But by the end of the film they have both renounced their rebellious ways and returned to society's bosom. The younger of the two, Moondoggie, returns to his academic pursuits and to Gidget. The elder and once defiant Kahuna, now subjugated and humiliated, must abandon the beach and return to his foresworn career. Adapted from the best-selling book of the same title, the darker overtones of the original narrative are absent in the film.[6] The ennui and meaninglessness haunting the suburban landscape of the book, which had contextualized the 'beach' as its alternative, are omitted in favour of a glossy, Technicolour idyll.

The surfbreak, however, is fairly consistent in both. If it does not actually fall outside society's bounds, it nevertheless exists at society's extreme edge. As it has been throughout history, the surfbreak becomes the scene of transgression, the place where social conventions break down and taboos are breached. Initially the eroticism of the beach is latent, shrouded by daylight, but after night falls its infernal character becomes clear. The film builds towards the midnight beach party, a primal bacchanalia replete with torches, the throbbing sound of drums, alcohol, dancing, and women being dragged off to grass huts.[7] The scene, intended to invoke surfing's South Pacific origins, or perhaps recall the Makahiki, also confirms an enduring Western fantasy: the exotic and licentious nature of Polynesian culture. And it bestowed these qualities on the surfer. At the film's climax, Gidget leaves the party with Kahuna, ostensibly to have sex;

[6] M.A. Reed, Waves of Commodification: A Critical Investigation Into Surfing Subculture (Master's Thesis, San Diego State University, 1999).
[7] Reed.

only to be ‘saved’ by the intervention of her parents, the police and the now errant Moondoggie. The lesson is straightforward: the subversion represented by the surfer and life on the beach– promiscuous sexuality, substance abuse, shirking of social and economic responsibility– is rectified by the authority of the family and the state. In the end, *Gidget* is most revealing for what it leaves out.

Gidget was the first film of its kind and it established a vision of the surfer that has had surprising longevity. Since its release the cinematic surfer has appeared, almost without exception, in one of two guises: as a thoroughgoing malcontent, like Kahuna, or as a provisional rebel, like Moondoggie. In the first case, the renegade is always male and his fate is usually tragic. He tends to be older, often a vagabond with a criminal past, and in the end he is lost or destroyed. In the second, the surfer is predominantly but not always male– Gidget herself belongs in this category– and his or her fate is usually one of redemption. This is the reformed surfer, who exhibits some of renegade’s qualities but only temporarily. He or she may dabble with the hopeless course of the outsider, but in the end they always reconcile themselves with and within society.

In *Gidget* the modern surfer’s anarchical aspect makes its first mainstream appearance, along with the first attempts to mitigate its subversive potential. Kahuna is the prototypical surfer-cum-anarchist, a caricature who rejects authority and the social contract in favour of destructive hedonism. “I’m a surf bum,” he says, “You know, ride the waves, eat, sleep, not a care in the world.” Kahuna is the catalyst for the orgiastic beach fiesta, and what represents the most subversive and provocative of all social calamities: sexual chaos, the libido freed from the restraints of moral authority.

But the real threat posed by the surfer is not violent or a negation. Instead it stems from the *actual* community founded by surfers, both in and out of the water; one whose coherence flows from the conditions of the surfbreak and mutual agreement among surfers, and one which implicitly rejects the imposition of outside authority. Herein lies surfing’s truly subversive potential: the surf-colony rejects authority because it is unnecessary. About this, in the film as elsewhere, there is silence. Instead, it trivializes the relationship of the surfers to one another, particularly the relationship between Kahuna and Moondoggie, and it shows the bonds of their community to be weak and unreliable. In the mythos of *Gidget* the grass shack was a symbol of the surfer’s rebellious and bankrupt philosophy, and the film ends with Kahuna tearing it down. But the palm-frond shack possesses a different

meaning for the surfer, and its destruction signifies something more complex than what was intended by the film. Aside from the surfboard, the grass shack is perhaps surfing's only architectural typology.

* * *

BEFORE THE RELEASE OF *GIDGET* the palm-frond shack had already become an emblem of the California surf-scene. San Onofre and Malibu, two of California's most famous surfbreaks, each boasted their own surf-shacks with attendant creation myths. In 1956 the surfer after whom Kahuna was modeled, Terry 'Tubesteak' Tracy, lived for the summer on the beach at Malibu in a shack made of palm-fronds. The next year, at the end of the summer, Tracy set fire to the shack during the inaugural Malibu 'luau'. At San Onofre the shack was scavenged from a film set, purportedly left behind by a Hollywood production company. The film was to have taken place in the South Pacific. At a number of breaks the shack became a focal point and a yearly tradition. In a pattern reminiscent of surfing's cyclical nature its construction marked the beginning of each summer and its destruction marked the end.

Despite its simple appearance, and besides providing basic shelter for the surfers and their boards, the shack also expressed the desire of California-based surfers to align themselves with their Hawaiian counterparts. The same impulse would lead to the proliferation of ukuleles, floral-print shirts, and leis among surfers throughout Southern California during the 1950s and 60s. Mostly they were appropriating a fantasy created by Hollywood and the tourist industry, rather than actual Polynesian culture; but however superficial, it was nonetheless indicative of an authentic desire to break with certain social conventions and traditional American values.

In the 1940s and 50s many young surfers had grown disillusioned with the future promised by mainstream America. To them the institutions of work and the family seemed insipid and meaningless, and a betrayal of their natural instincts. Instead they turned their attention to surfing, which became the focal point around which all other activities and concerns revolved. To some extent it was a reflection of their adolescence. But it was also indicative of a cultural change that would transform the decade to come. Before the flower-children and joyful rebellions of the 1960s, surfers had been living communally on the fringes of society for years.

In Hawaii and California they had been sleeping in their cars and following waves in defiance of their social and economic obligations– as many continue to do. They turned leisure, the apparent goal and reward of progress, back upon itself. Surfing placed the end at the beginning and the centre at the periphery.

The surf-shack marked the entrance to another realm: the surfbreak, a shared space outside conventional authority, governed instead by social conventions determined by surfers themselves. Although every surfbreak is linked by the universal quality of waves and by certain shared practices, each is also unique. Every break expresses the genius of the local, of both the people who surf there and the place itself. In surfing, the term 'local' refers to those who surf regularly at a given spot, the ones who define custom and establish order at any break. Invariably, locals must live in close proximity to their 'home' breaks, since the only means of establishing oneself as a local is by consistently surfing in the same place, and so they tend to form tight-knit groups, often spanning generations, with many having surfed the same break since they were youngsters. In the early days, when the number of surfers was few, the attitude in the water was generally welcoming. But after surfing entered the mainstream, locals began to grow increasingly territorial, and as many breaks were overrun by the tide of newcomers, more unfriendly towards outsiders. This pattern of hostility is called 'localism' and it has done much to perpetuate the surfer's misanthropic reputation. To be sure, there is something inherently solitary about the practice, which is undoubtedly part of surfing's allure; but it is also a social exercise, and has been from the very beginning.

To some it would seem that localism belies this assertion, particularly in its more extreme forms: namely, at those xenophobic breaks where surfers have resorted to intimidation, vandalism and occasionally violence to enforce the 'rule of the local' and maintain the pecking order.[8] Localism is an undeniable part of modern surfing. Indeed, some of the most hallowed surfbreaks have also been the most localized. Windansea in La Jolla, for instance, home to one of the oldest and most iconic surf-shacks, first erected in 1946 and designated a San Diego Historic Site in 1998, was also renown for its virulent localism.[9] In its more rabid form, localism betrays a side of surfing that many would prefer to ignore; and yet it is a similar impulse to that which defines and maintains the coherence of surfbreak and its surrounding community. The surfbreak's autonomy and the almost tribal quality of its social conventions depend upon similar instincts to those which give rise to localism, instincts that respond to the precarious nature of the modern surf-community.

[8] Warshaw, 340.
[9] Warshaw, 700.

From the 1960s onward, as the popularity of surfing grew and the numbers of surfers began to increase, what had once been peripheral was drawn into the mainstream. Surfing become a widespread cultural phenomenon: the first surf magazines were founded– in Southern California at least three in 1960 alone;[10] surf music emerged– in 1962 the *Beach Boys* and *Dick Dal*e both released hit-albums, *Surfin' Safari* and *Surfer's Choice* respectively; surf-related products like surfboards, boogeyboards, wetsuits entered mass-production; and the 'surf-lifestyle' became a preeminent brand, with surf-imagery being used to sell anything from cigarettes to automobiles. Depictions of this lifestyle also proliferated in film: in 1963 *Beach Party* with Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello was released, the first in a string of Hollywood 'beach' movies, including *Muscle Beach Party* (1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965) and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965). The *Gidget* franchise also expanded: *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961), *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1962), *The Affairs of Gidget* (1963), *Gidget in Love* (1965), *Gidget Goes Parisian* (1966).[11]

In 1966 Bruce Brown's *Endless Summer* was released, perhaps the most influential surf-film after *Gidget*. It was a "surprise critical and commercial hit,"[12] and in time would become the most profitable surf-film ever made. It was the first film made by a surfer about surfing that was widely successful throughout the country and among surfers and to prove the film's appeal beyond California's beach communities Brown "test-screened the movie in Wichita Kansas, in the dead of winter."[13] The decade also witnessed the expansion of surfing competitions, the consolidation of surf-clubs and the founding of administrative bodies, like the *United States Surfing Association*. Amidst the swirling changes a number of surfers recognized the emergent 'surf-industry' as an opportunity to transform surfing into a livelihood, or at least as a means of supplementing their income so they could spend more time in and near the ocean. Some worked in Hollywood as extras and stunt-doubles; others made and sold surfboards. Some become filmmakers or surf-photographers. It was also the beginning of the competitive circuit and what would become the increasingly lucrative path of the professional surfer.

For many surfers, however, the commodification of surfing was the worst kind of betrayal since it was perpetrated by their own. The development of the surf-industry represented everything they had taken up surfing to oppose or imagined it to be an alternative to. As surfing became more commercialized a new, critical dimension of localism began to materialize. A number of surfers began to grow

[10] Warshaw, xiv.
[11] Warshaw, 225.
[12] Warshaw, 183.
[13] Warshaw, 184.

contemptuous of the surf-industry in any of its forms. Not only was the non-local surfer unwelcome, but anyone who might jeopardize the secrecy and thus autonomy of a surfbreak became a target: in Santa Cruz during the 1960s local surfers sabotaged a surf competition by pushing the judges' stand (unmanned) over a cliff, "reasoning that the contest and ensuing media coverage would bring new surfers to the lineup."[14] This was not the first conflict of its kind, nor would it be the last. Instead, the event powerfully illustrated what is perhaps at the heart of localism and at the heart of surfing itself: an intrinsic anarchical spirit. Not because it was an act of destruction, but because of what was destroyed. It embodied the belief that no authority, not even one emanating from within the surfing community, supercedes the autonomy of the break or the freedom of the local surfer to ride waves.

* * *

THE FIRST CHALLENGE in describing the anarchical aspect of surfing derives not from surfing but from the subject of anarchy. As George Woodcock has remarked in his extensive historical overview: "Few doctrines or movements have been so confusedly understood in the public mind, and few have presented in their own variety of approach and action so much excuse for confusion."[15] With respect to the use of violence, for instance, there has been considerable misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Although there have been violent anarchists (assassinations and bombings) not all anarchists subscribe to violence–a commonly held belief. Nor is violence integral to anarchism. Gandhi was a self-described anarchist.[16] Also, contrary to the popular assumption that anarchism and chaos are homologous, there are numerous methods of organization promoted by anarchists: "At one extreme, the individualists distrust all cooperation beyond the barest minimum for an ascetic life; at the other, the anarchist communists envisage an extensive network of interconnecting mutual-aid institutions as a necessary safeguard for individual interests."[17] But despite what appears to be a considerable discrepancy in what anarchists believe, there is nonetheless "a group of common assumptions which form the kernel of their philosophy." Woodcock:

> These begin with a naturalistic view of society. All anarchists, I think, would accept the proposition that man naturally contains within him all the attributes which make him capable of living in freedom and social concord. They may not believe that

[14] Warshaw, 340.
[15] George Woodcock, Anarchism (Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 2004) 11.
[16] George Woodcock, Mohandas Gandhi (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1971).
[17] Woodcock, Anarchism 21.

> man is naturally good, but they believe very fervently that man is naturally social… expressed [by] an immanent sense of justice, which is wholly human and natural to him.[18]

Implicit in these assumptions and at the core of any anarchist doctrine is the fundamental rejection of authority. As Woodcock points out, this is not the same as saying that all those who deny authority are necessarily anarchists:

> Historically, anarchism is a doctrine which poses a criticism of existing society; a view of a desirable future society; and a means of passing from one to the other. Mere unthinking revolt does not make an anarchist, nor does a philosophical or religious rejection of earthly power. Mystics and stoics seek not anarchy, but another kingdom. Anarchism, historically speaking, is concerned mainly with man in his relation to society. Its aim is always social change, its present attitude is always one of social condemnation, even though it may proceed from an individualist view of man's nature; its method is always that of social rebellion, violent or otherwise.[19]

Following from an understanding of anarchism informed by these basic precepts, the connection between the anarchist and the surfer begins to seem less strange. Their correspondence, however, is obscured by the fact that the most anarchical element within surfing, embodied by the persona of the *other* surfer, is also the most diverse and elusive. The spotlight offers little attraction for the *other* surfer, who instead chooses to remain in shadow. By far the majority of surfers remain unseen in their pursuit of waves. The popular image of the surfer, on the other hand, derives mostly from the professional surfers featured in magazines and in film, a small cadre numbering a few thousand out of an estimated 15 to 25 million surfers, or less than one tenth of one percent.[20] Indeed, the connection between most surfers and the dominant institutions of surfing, from organized competition to the various segments of the surf-industry, remains limited and somewhat tentative. For many the connection is maintained strictly on the need for equipment or information.

Despite the heterogeneity of the actual surfing community, however, surfers often hold certain values in common. Most would agree, for instance, that simplicity of life and nearness to nature are virtues at the heart of surfing, just as the prominent anarchist Peter Kropotkin found them to be, at the heart of anarchism.[21] In a similar vein, it is difficult to imagine any surfbreak functioning if surfers didn't also

[18] Woodcock, Anarchism 22.
[19] Woodcock, Anarchism 11.
[20] Using an estimated average of 20 million total surfers worldwide and approximately 5000 active professional surfers.
[21] Woodcock, Anarchism 24.

share Kropotkin's belief in the capacity of human beings to regulate themselves, "not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between the members of that society."[22] The codes which govern the surfbreak are still predominantly oral and locally determined. So too is their enforcement. In fact, at most breaks actual 'enforcement' is impractical if not impossible and adherence to any code is ostensibly voluntary.

The anarchical nature of surfing can be traced to the conditions of the break, to surfing's medium, the sea, and its mercurial object, the wave. Both subvert the imposition of human order, be it the schedules and structures of life in the modern world or the social hierarchy of the ancient Hawaiians. Insofar as surfers wish to engage this realm, they must inevitably confront and accept this reality, a reality which places them at the physical and psychic nadir of human authority. And yet, although the sea often erupts into violence and chaos, its movements are not for the most part chaotic. They are rhythmic, although these rhythms may exceed our comprehension.

The wave itself is a phenomenon of astonishing subtlety, as much for the sheer scale and complexity of factors which lead to its creation as for its evanescence– and timelessness. The large ocean swells sought by surfers are produced by wind blowing over vast stretches of ocean, the result of seasonal storms sometimes thousands of miles wide, which create waves that can make landfall half a world away. Waves tend to arrive in similar geographic locations from year to year, following seasonal patterns dictated by the solar cycle and planetary weather systems. But on any stretch of coast they will also be subject to local geography and weather, the rhythms and interactions of the tides, the time of day and the type break, as well as multitude of other factors. Waves are extremely impressionable: a cluster of rocks may cause the waves to stand up or hollow out; a kelp bed will dampen chop on a windy day.

In addition, the direction of a particular swell may change over the course of a week or a day, the frequency of the sets can change by the hour, and the size and speed of each wave can vary from wave to wave. Although it's possible to predict the general pattern at a given surfbreak, the precise location where individual waves will *actually* break, or how they'll break, is considerably more equivocal: a sandbar that causes waves to curl perfectly in the morning may be gone by afternoon; a long succession of similarly-sized waves may be interrupted suddenly by a rogue wave; or clean, finely tapered surf can become closed-out and unridable

[22] Woodcock, Anarchism 22.

in a matter of hours, ruined by a shift in the tide or wind. In surfing timing is everything.

The capricious nature of the wave compels the surfer to submit to the ocean and the genius of locality, the function of needing to be in the right place at the right time. Once there, however, the difficulty of negotiating this fluid landscape arises, and one that has become increasingly populous. The codes which coordinate surfers in the water, despite the fact that there is no governing body or canonical set of rules, are surprisingly consistent throughout the world. They remain largely unspoken, minimal and pragmatic, and are reflective of the inherent desire for simplicity that seems to permeate the practice of surfing. Although much is made of localism, particularly the more pugnacious variety, in the end there is little to stop someone from dropping in or otherwise endangering other riders.[23] Localism is less about 'enforcing' order than it is about keeping non-locals from surfing.

In the water coherence depends on mutual trust and respect for other surfers. Without agreement and cooperation surfing would become exceedingly treacherous given the inherent power of the waves and the natural dangers of the surfbreak– currents, rocks, sharks, etc. At most locations newcomers are greeted by indifference or mild suspicion and, although the reception may be icy, they are for the most part tolerated. As a rule the local is privileged and although the arrangement is not egalitarian most breaks are not extremely hierarchical either. Ability counts, but so does courtesy; and if a visitor is respectful and competent he or she won't generally be harassed. Depending on the break, although locals might not welcome a newcomer into their circle, after a couple weeks or months they will generally come to accept his or her presence.

Of course, there are places where it all breaks down, where locals act with impunity, dropping in repeatedly on non-locals or resorting to violence and vandalism to keep outsiders at bay. Elsewhere, crowds and inexperience actually do create chaos in the water. But these are still the extremes, despite fears that they are becoming the norm. And there are other exceptions too. Rare as they may be, usually in remote and unfrequented places, there are surfbreaks where new faces are still greeted with genuine hospitality.

In part, the anarchist spirit in surfing arises out of necessity, out of the need for cooperation created by the dangerous and mutable conditions of the surfbreak. It also stems from the desire of locals to maintain autonomy against encroaching

[23] 'Dropping in' refers to "the act of taking off on a wave in front of another surfer who is closer to the curl, and thus thought of as having first claim to the wave." (Warshaw, 165).

crowds and the specter of development. But there is another source, which springs from perhaps the most basic instinct of all. At its core surfing is play, and play is inherently anarchical.

Sports or games are governed by fixed rules, defined goals and objectives that are known to their participants beforehand. Even 'leisure' has a purpose in modern society. Play obeys no such apriori conventions or restrictions, and none is as masterful at play than the child. Play is boundless: it is without beginning or end, nothing is impossible. Play does not require the involvement of others, but frequently it is a communal activity, and one which necessitates coordination: when children play together it is not random or chaotic, though it may appear that way to the outside observer. But neither is it predetermined. There is always logic to play, even if that logic is to emulate chaos. Unlike sports or games, however, it is improvised, the collective and ephemeral creation of its participants; and crucially, play depends on the agreement of *all* those involved, otherwise the illusion falters. This doesn't mean that play cannot change, take on new shapes or directions; it means only that such changes be mutually agreed upon, so as to keep the fantasy aloft. Since everyone depends on one other, and since the desire is to continue playing, older siblings must accommodate younger siblings; stronger players must be mindful of weaker ones; sisters and brothers must come to consensus. Play has to remain fun for everyone, lest there be no one to populate the tea party or fight in the war.

Like play, surfing inhabits a fleeting domain, and like the imaginary world of the child, it flashes brightly and is gone. The anarchist, as he is framed by Woodcock, seeks to change the future. The surfer seeks a return to the present.

* * *

OUTSIDE IN

Although Tofino is known for rain it can get dry and hot in July and August, and during the summer it can be flat for weeks. Sometimes a whole month can pass without any sizable swell. Still, the warm temperatures bring crowds of visitors from the mainland, many of whom come to try surfing. On the weekends, whether there are waves or not, the line-up at Long Beach and Cox Bay will be filled with beginners on their cumbersome, blue soft-tops. From season to season there is little variance in the water temperature, but the warm weather takes the edge off the cold, and so does the sun. Combined with the gentle surf, the summer is an inviting time for those just starting out. The winter in Tofino is often less hospitable. For months the coast is battered by storms, which bring enormous waves, vicious winds, rain and snow. In fact, the storms are so spectacular they have spawned a new kind of tourism in Tofino: 'storm-watching'. For this once obscure town at the end of the Trans-Canada Highway it has brought the possibility of year-round tourism one step closer.

Tourism has caused an economic boom in Tofino unparallel anywhere else on Vancouver Island or even on the already-booming mainland. For those who own businesses or land in Tofino it has been a windfall. Real-estate prices have soared, as have the numbers of tourists passing through each year. But growth has not come without costs. The boom has forced some of Tofino's long-time residents to sell their homes because they can no longer afford the taxes. For many others it has made owning land an impossibility. For the hundreds who work in the hotels and restaurants during the summer it has made the difficult task of finding a place to live even more so. In this group there is a more polarized view of the tourist.

Many revile the tourists who are not only ruining the natural beauty of the place, but have also destroyed the close-knit community that once existed. Still, tourism is also the reason why many are able to stay in Tofino at all.

Whether they own businesses in Tofino or just work in them the summer season is a mixed blessing for the town's residents: most support themselves on what they make during the summer, but from May to August the town ceases to be theirs. The streets are crowded with a constant stream of visitors and cars, and the restaurants and bars are filled with strangers. Familiar faces become rare amidst the multitude. As such, many locals keep to themselves during the summer, in part because of the long hours they tend to work but also because of the tiresome rituals of the hospitality industry. Most look forward to the September and October when the crowds begin to disperse and the town assumes its quieter persona. The summer is another storm to be weathered.

There are two kinds of people in Tofino: those who surf and those who do not. And in town there are two languages. Beneath the chatter of everyday business local surfers are engaged in quiet conversation about the ocean, what it's like or going to be like, how it was that morning. At the supermarket or hardware store checkout, in line at the post-office or bakery, knowing looks and half-muttered code slip unnoticed by most non-surfing resident or tourists. After a long stretch without surf the arrival of waves raises the pitch of the usual hum.

* * *

FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS the 'wet' coast has been hot and dry and predictably calm. But something's different today. Below the ordinary bustle there's a buzzing anticipation: the swell is coming. All day there've been murmurings: 'Have you been out today?' 'I hear it's picking up;' 'I've heard it'll get good tonight, after the tide turns'. On and on it goes, the conversation below the conversation. On the surface it's just another Tuesday, quiet, calm, the bulk of the tourists having left the day before. The whale-watchers get their coffee and shop for souvenirs, the employees smile and take their money. Everything continues as usual. But there is a restlessness in some, those who are checking their watch and tapping the counter. They're waiting for their shift to end, waiting to close up early. They're thinking about quitting: it's been flat for weeks.

In the parking lot all the familiar cars and trucks are already parked. Rubbermaid bins are tucked under the back axles, clothes hang from side-mirrors. Board-bags are strewn on the gravel. Mostly the cars are older and rusting, and most are unlocked. Surfers leave their cars unlocked so they won't have to replace a broken window along with whatever was stolen. Most pullouts are out of the way and tend to be deserted. If someone wants to break in they will– karma. Partly this is why most cars here are old and rusting, and because surfing tends to preclude a high-paying career. Despite the cars there's no one around. They're all in the water. Nor is anyone on the path, another sign that it's probably going off.

The sun is dropping quickly over the water, throwing the backlit figures into high relief. Clean six-foot swell is barreling through the lineup. There are about thirty or forty surfers in the water, comfortably spread out in loosely clustered groups of three or four. They rise and fall as the sets come through. The sections are steep and closing-out, making for short, fast rides. As each set arrives a few surfers detach themselves from their companions. They paddle into position, turn, take one or two strokes, pop up and drop into a wave. They speed along its face, their dark forms almost disappearing in the fading light. They slip over the lip of the wave and paddle back.

Out in the line-up the black shapes resolve into faces, all familiar. It's a rare moment in the middle of summer. Most locals have resigned themselves to working long hours, choosing to avoid the crowds and typically mushy surf. Some wait for the fall, when the tourists thin out. Others are saving up for winter and trips down south. But tonight they're all out.

The line-up is full of voices: snippets of conversation float on the air, interrupted by bursts of laughter, like the bubbling sounds of small towns in the summer, where people still keep their windows open and eat dinner at the same time. New arrivals are greeted with big, wide-open smiles and boisterous shouts. Surfers call out to one another, friendly taunts and catcalls. They drift from group to group, catching up with friends they haven't seen in weeks, legs dangling as the waves rumble through the lineup. They trade waves and stories, hooting for one another's rides, grinning as they slip off the backs of the waves. The air is loose and relaxed, the heat of the day dissolving into evening.

The sun has set and the light is fading quickly. But no one is anxious to leave the water. And its not just because there hasn't been surf in awhile. Had the swell arrived on the weekend things would have been different. But it didn't. I came tonight, on Tuesday, after the town had emptied out. For locals today is the end of the week at this time of the year. Out amidst the waves it's their town still, their home. Tofino is slipping out of reach for many, becoming too expensive and overrun. The town they had known is gone and many won't be back next season. So no one is anxious to return to shore, no one is ready to leave this just yet.

Time is the only currency in surfing. Learning to surf is a lengthy and difficult process, just as watching and waiting for the right conditions to coincide. It takes time to understand how a break works, to understand what the waves do and when. And becoming part of a place happens slowly. Newcomers are accepted gradually over weeks and months if not longer. Surfbreaks still belong to the people who spend time there, although this too is perhaps changing. But for the moment the dark silhouettes huddle together, smiling and laughing with one another, the occasional figure dropping into a folding wave.

* * *

Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues

When you're lost in the rain in Juarez
And it's Eastertime too
And your gravity fails
And negativity don't pull you through
Don't put on any airs
When you're down on Rue Morgue Avenue
They got some hungry women there
And they really make a mess outa you

Now if you see Saint Annie
Please tell her thanks a lot
I cannot move
My fingers are all in a knot
I don't have the strength
To get up and take another shot
And my best friend, my doctor
Won't even say what it is I've got

Sweet Melinda
The peasants call her the goddess of gloom
She speaks good English
And she invites you up into her room
And you're so kind
And careful not to go to her too soon
And she takes your voice
And leaves you howling at the moon

Up on Housing Project Hill
It's either fortune or fame
You must pick up one or the other
Though neither of them are to be what they claim
If you're lookin' to get silly
You better go back to from where you came
Because the cops don't need you
And man they expect the same

Now all the authorities
They just stand around and boast
How they blackmailed the sergeant-at-arms
Into leaving his post
And picking up Angel who
Just arrived here from the coast
Who looked so fine at first
But left looking just like a ghost

I started out on burgundy
But soon hit the harder stuff
Everybody said they'd stand behind me
When the game got rough
But the joke was on me
There was nobody even there to call my bluff
I'm going back to New York City
I do believe I've had enough

Bob Dylan*

* http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/tomthumb.html

THE SURFBOARD

When building tradesmen are used for construction of most dwellings, we may arbitrarily say that primitive building gives way to *preindustrial vernacular.* Even in this case, however, everyone in the society knows the building types and even how to build them, the expertise of the tradesman being a matter of degree. The peasant owner is still very much a *participant* in the design process, not merely a *consumer*… The vernacular design process is one of models and adjustments or variations, and there is more individual variability and differentiation than in primitive buildings; it is the *individual specimens* that are modified in primitive buildings, not the *type*. When a tradesman builds a farmhouse for a peasant, they both know the type in question, the form or model, and even the materials. What remains to be determined are the specifics…[1]

[1] Amos Rapoport, House Form and Culture (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969) 4.

IN THE BEGINNING every surfer was a shaper, both when surfing initially began in ancient Hawaii and during its resurgence in the twentieth century, the 'golden age' of modern surfing when boards were being built and modified in the backyard and garage. But the shaper would soon emerge in his own right, first in Hawaii and then again in America, as the specialist does in all civilizations. Like the story of the earliest Hawaiians, that of the earliest shapers or *kahunas* remains unknowable.[2] Whatever of its origins, the shaper's craft is undoubtedly surfing's oldest profession.

In ancient Hawaii the number of surfboards fashioned by the shaper was small, since the expertise of the *kahunas* was reserved for the surfboards of the elite, leaving the bulk of the population to ride boards they had made themselves. In ancient Hawaii all surfboards shared a similar form: they were cigar-like in outline and ovoid in section, with a rounded nose and squared-off tail. But just as commoner and chief were distinguished from one another in Hawaiian society, so too were their boards. Differences in size, shape and material construction established two distinct types of ancient surfboard which, like the divisions of the social hierarchy, were easily recognized and invariable: the *olo* was reserved for the *ali'i* class;[3] the *alaia* was the board of the commoner.[4]

The *alaia* was smaller and thinner, usually between six and eight feet in length, whereas the *olo* was larger and more robust, sometimes reaching upwards of

[2] The term 'kahuna' included any type of specialist, from priests and healers, to craftspersons and artisans.
[3] Ben Finney and J. D. Houston, Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996) 46.
[4] It would have been possible for the *ali'i* to ride an *alaia* board, but for the commoner it seems the *olo* was taboo.

fourteen feet. The board was reflective of the chiefs' preeminent status, but also their larger physical stature.[5] Both types of board were fashioned from the trunk of a single tree, the basic shape was roughed-out with stone adzes and then refined, rubbed with coral to erase the adze marks, polished with stones, and, finally, stained and sealed with oil.[6] The *olo* was made from the lighter and more buoyant *wiliwili*, which was technically superior to heavier wood of the *koa* out of which the *alaia* was made.[7] As Duke acknowledged, while writing about the ancient surfboard, "commoners had to do without– and that was their lot in most things of life."[8]

But the two types of board were not only distinguished from one another by their physical differences. Like all things in ancient Hawaii the creation of the surfboard was not merely a practical undertaking but a symbolic act: it was always accompanied by prayers and ritual offerings, from the initial selection of the tree, consecrated by incantations and offerings of fish,[9] to the dedication rites of the finished board. The rituals attached to any surfboard were also proportional to the rank of the board's recipient. Those of the commoner were more modest and performed by the surfer himself;[10] those of the highest chiefs were the most elaborate and were mediated by the *kahuna*, who was as much a shaman as artisan.[11] The *kahuna* bestowed his mythic power on the boards of the *chiefs*, elevating them above those of the commoner.

Whether ancient or modern all surfboards share the same basic form, since every board is a response to the same irreducible and timeless elements: the wave and the irrevocable fact of the human body. Surfing is a minimal practice and so there is little room for the superfluous on a surfboard. This has led to a degree of consistency among all surfboards, both past and present, and to its enduring appeal as an aesthetic object, the simplicity and necessity of its form. But uniformity has never been a mark of the surfboard, even in its original tradition-bound context. As the ancient surfboard clearly illustrates, despite its practical purpose the form

[5] It has been purported that due to their lifestyle and more substantial diet the *ali'i* and warrior classes were generally taller and more muscular than the commoners.
[6] Kahanamoku, 20-21.
[7] Duke Kahanamoku with J. Brennan, World of Surfing (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968) 19.
[8] Kahanamoku, 22.
[9] Kahanamoku, 20.
[10] Since the lives and activities of commoners in ancient Hawaii were not regarded as significant, the making of the common surfboard is largely unrecorded, thus it must be inferred. However, it is almost inconceivable, given the nature of Hawaiian society, that any act of creation, even the most humble, would not have been accompanied by some ritual acts.
[11] It is not entirely clear whether the 'priest' and 'artisan' were different individuals, or different offices of a single *kahuna* whose specialty was the creation of surfboards.

of any surfboard is not determined by environmental or utilitarian factors alone. Nor is it merely an aesthetic object. A beautifully crafted board upon which a surfer cannot catch and ride waves isn't a surfboard at all: it's a sculpture or a prop. Like a work of architecture, though a surfboard cannot be separated from its utilitarian functions, it cannot be reduced to them either.

The ancient surfboard was a telling reflection of the world from which it emerged. Its dual quality embodied the dual character of Hawaiian society and the unchanging form of each type epitomized the traditional nature of Hawaiian society. Like the renewal symbolized by the Makahiki, each new surfboard was a return to the beginning, a repetition of an original and invariable form: the ancient surfboard was intended to resist change. In addition, the role of the *kahuna* expressed the mythic consciousness of the Hawaiian people, illustrative of the belief that ritual and technique are inseparable. Here as perhaps nowhere else the gulf between the ancient and modern world is widest. As noted by William Barrett in his book *The Illusion of Technique*, in the whole spectrum of human cultures there are perhaps none save our own where ritual has become "more perfunctory and external in relation to its technology."[12]

Like its predecessor the modern surfboard also embodies a world view, and like the persona of the modern surfer the story of the modern surfboard has been one of heterogeneity and contradiction. The modern surfboard has been an image of paradox. On the one hand, the modern shaper is a continuation of the tradition begun by the first *kahunas*. But he is also the cause of rupture, the constant breaking away that defines modernity: the 'tradition of the new,' the desire for perpetual change.[13] In the modern age the shaper is an agent of progress, whose innovations and experimentation have driven the development of the modern surfboard. Each new design breaks with the past, rendering its predecessors obsolete. But the physical elements to which the surfboard is a response are unchanging. In this respect every modern surfboard denies as well as affirms its modernity. As the shaper Dave Parmenter has written, while surveying one of his just-completed boards: "Its shape was a new thing, and yet every bend, every race of curve, could likely be traced back 1,500 years to the koa forests of Hawaii."[14] Like the story of the modern world, that of the modern surfboard is inextricably linked to the question of technology, and in this respect it is a story of technological progress.

[12] William Barrett, The Illusion of Technique (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1978) 18.
[13] Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985).
[14] Dave Parmenter, "A Shaper's Fugue," Surfer's Journal 2004 vol.13 no.4: 32-41.

The first modern surfboards, ridden by the likes of London, Ford and Duke, were modeled on the original surfboards of the ancients. They were solid planks of redwood, measuring upwards of ten feet in length and weighing between sixty and eighty pounds.[15] During the 1930s and 40s two new types of board emerged: the 'cigar box' developed by Tom Blake, the first hollow board,[16] and the 'hot-curl' board,[17] invented by John Kelly in 1937.[18] They were the first to break with the traditional form and construction of the original boards and they signaled the beginning of the modern era. They were also the innovations of individual designers: the kahunas had been anonymous, but the shaper was known. Indeed, if the shaper's name isn't actually written on a modern surfboard then it bears his signature in its form.

The cigar-box cut the weight of the surfboard in half, making it easier to handle in the water and more attractive for beginners. But it was less durable than the standard planks or 'slabs' and it could also be 'tippy and skittish' on the wave.[19] The hot-curl board was a modified plank and so it was heavier than the cigar-box, which made paddling and catching waves more difficult. But it was also more resilient than its hollow counterpart and the modified tail section provided better handling on the wave, particularly when the surf was larger. Unlike the flat-bottom boards of the period, which had a tendency to slide laterally, called 'sliding ass,' the hot-curl could hold a tighter angle while moving along the face of the wave.[20] As such it was the preferred choice of the more advanced surfer at the time.

The problem of sliding-ass was ultimately settled by the introduction of the fin, also credited to Tom Blake, who bolted a keel to the bottom of his board in 1935.[21] When it caught on in the 1940s the impact was profound. Prior to the fin most surfing was done perpendicular to the breaking wave. Only more advanced surfers could ride along the face and only by gradually easing their board into a new trajectory. As such, up to a dozen surfers could ride upon a single wave at the same time, as surfers had done in ancient Hawaii, and most surfing was done on gradually breaking, mushier waves. With the introduction of the fin, however, riding along the face became a common practice. The new technology greatly extended the length of the ride and the range of waves that could be ridden,

[15] Matt Warshaw, The Encyclopedia of Surfing (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003) xii.
[16] Warshaw, 269.
[17] The name 'hot curl' does not refer to how the board was made, but apparently comes from a comment made by fellow surfer Wally Froiseth, who exclaimed after using the board: "Hey, these things really get you into the hot curl." (Warshaw, 275).
[18] Warshaw, 275.
[19] Warshaw, 269.
[20] This tapered profile is the precursor of outline used by the big-wave 'gun'.
[21] Warshaw, 198.

opening up steeper, faster breaking waves. It also signaled a cultural shift away from the group mentality of surfing, setting the stage for the 'one-wave one-surfer' standard that has become the modern norm.

In the mid-1940s another new board emerged, the 'Malibu chip' created by Bob Simmons. The board's balsa-wood core made it lighter than any of its predecessors which, combined with the newly introduced fin, gave surfers an unprecedented degree of maneuverability. Not only could they hold their line more easily but they could execute tight radius turns as well, allowing them to travel up and down across the entire face of the wave. As the name implies the board also belonged to a specific place, and until the mid-1950s Malibu served as the primary testing ground for subsequent refinements and variations on the original design.[22] With the introduction of the Malibu chip, the hot-curl and cigar-box were rendered obsolete. After the Second World War, however, the emergence of polyurethane foam as a core material marked the beginning of the end for the Malibu Chip and by 1960 it had become an anachronism.[23] The pace of change was accelerating.

At the end of the 1950s most surfboards were still around ten feet long and weighed about 30 pounds. The 'shortboard' revolution of the mid-1960s dropped this length to seven feet and the materials, foam and fiberglass, dropped the weight in half again. By the end of the decade the 'longboard' had virtually disappeared (the term 'longboard' was itself a product of the shortboard revolution since prior to the mid-60s every board was a 'longboard'). But it was not merely the size of the new boards that set them apart. The new materials were relatively inexpensive and polyurethane foam was much easier to shape than the wooden boards of the past. This led to a wider range of forms. Experimentation flourished over the next two decades: new outlines and bottom contours were tested; alternative nose and tail shapes were proposed; the number, size and configuration of the fins oscillated. Some design innovations caught on: the dropped-profile 'down- rail,' for instance, or the 'Thruster' fin configuration. Others were discarded or ignored.

The trend towards shorter, thinner and lighter boards has continued, such that six-foot boards weighing less than ten pounds are now common. But there has also been a resurgence of older surfboard designs, particularly the longboard. Also, although new materials have emerged, namely epoxy and carbon fiber, most boards still use foam and fiberglass. Since the end of the 1970s the changes in surfboard design have been less obvious, focused instead on more subtle refinements. And there have also been changes in the role of the shaper.

[22] Warshaw, 121.
[23] Warshaw, 601.

The first commercially produced surfboards appeared in the 1930s, but it was not until the 1960s that manufacturing began in earnest. Capitalizing on surfing's sudden rise in popularity several 'large-scale' board-makers emerged and by the middle of the decade roughly 20,000 surfboards were being commercially manufactured each year.[24] During the late 1960s and 70s, however, the shift towards shorter, lighter boards was largely ignored by the larger board-makers. Instead, the so-called 'shortboard' revolution was driven by small-volume shapers. Since the 1980s, however, there has been a steady consolidation in the manufacturing of surfboards, from the production of the foam blank, until recently monopolized by a single firm,[25] to the increased size of board-making companies and their areas of distribution. Some fear the days of the board-shaper are numbered.

Like the relationship of most surfers with society, that of the shaper to modern technology has been somewhat tenuous. This uneasy coupling can be seen embodied in the modern surfboard itself, many of which still rely on both the handcraft of the shaper and the manufacturing processes of modern industry. On the one hand the introduction of foam and fiberglass liberated the modern shaper. The new materials were inexpensive and easier to work, which was partly responsible for the profusion of new designs. They also increased the economic viability of the backyard shaping business. But there can be no end to progress and it would seem that technology is now poised to render the shaper obsolete: many small-volume shapers are being pushed out of the market as milling-machines become more precise and the mass-produced board becomes less expensive and more customizable. And yet the board-shaper's craft continues to endure despite this mounting pressure:

> "[Although] machine assistance comes into play to one degree or another during the board-making process… surfboards as of 2003 are still by and large hand-made… Molded surfboards, a once-disgraced idea, began gaining popularity in the early 2000s, and may eventually make boards as interchangeable as tennis rackets. But until that time, as California-born surfboard shaper Dave Parmenter once phrased it, "each board is mortal and completely original."[26]

In part, this resilience stems from the fact that surfboard design is not a progressive process but is driven instead by the more complex concept of *performance*. Certain improvements can be calculated, like a decrease in the weight of a surfboard or

[24] Warshaw, 601.
[25] Clark Foam was supplying the majority of foam blanks in the U.S. until it closed suddenly in 2005, apparently in anticipation of regulatory action. The production of polyurethane foam is extremely toxic.
[26] Warshaw, 600.

an increase in its speed; but with respect to surfing performance is not ultimately a measurable quantity. There have been repeated attempts to objectify surfing, the most obvious being organized competition. In professional contest points are awarded for how many waves a surfer catches or maneuvers he executes, or for how long he spends in the tube. Similarly, the big-wave surfer also seeks an objective goal, namely to ride the largest waves, the height of which can be measured. But both competitive surfing and big-wave riding only demonstrate the futility of such quantification: the judging of surf-contests is perpetually a topic of controversy, with constant disagreement on how scores are calculated; and among big-wave riders it's acknowledged that the 'heaviest wave ever surfed'[27] was not in fact the tallest.

Among most surfers the question of performance is highly subjective, and usually it can only be described by how a board *feels* more than anything else. Indeed, for many surfers what makes a great board is seemingly intangible or even mystical:

> Looked upon as a sleek repository of function and design, built to exacting measurements taken from a set of hydrodynamic principles, the surfboard nonetheless continues to have an element of mystery or alchemy; longtime surfers will look back and often pick out just two or three nonreplicable 'magic boards' owned over the course of their surfing lives.[28]

Most modern surfboards are designed with general conditions and users in mind. Larger, chunkier boards are more stable and easier to paddle, and tend to be ridden by beginners or older surfers. Whereas thinner, shorter boards which are faster and more maneuverable are used by more advanced surfers. Longboards tend to perform better in smaller, mushier surf, shortboards perform best in mid-sized, steeper waves, and big-wave 'guns' are needed when the surf gets up over fifteen or twenty feet. Beyond these basic differences, however, there are a myriad of subtle adjustments that will alter how a board performs. A rounded rail will make the board easier to handle; a thinly tapered edge will carry tighter turns.[29] More curvature in the surfboard from nose to tail or 'rocker' will provide greater maneuverability; less rocker will make the board faster. Fin placement, as well as the size, shape and configuration of the fins, will significantly effect how a board turns or holds its line. On a surfboard little things make a big difference. In fact, much of what distinguishes an exceptional board is barely perceptible to the

[27] The wave was ridden by Laird Hamilton at Teahupoo.
[28] Warshaw, 600.
[29] Warshaw, 492.

untrained eye, and then only in the right light. Sometimes the nuances of a board are only appreciable by touch. As such, many surfers prefer custom surfboards because of the shaper's ability to cater to their specific needs.

> Many serious surfers simply don't buy boards out of shops; they develop a relationship with a particular shaper in their town and have every board made slightly differently in an ongoing search for the perfect combination of elements. The endless play with length, thickness, bottom contour, outline curve, fin placement, and other considerations gives the surfer, over time, a phenomenally complex relationship to his tool.[30]

The most expressive surfboards are those which are custom-made. Not only are they indicative of a surfer's particular style of surfing, or a shaper's handiwork, but they are also the reflection of a particular stretch of coastline or surfbreak. In this sense, each surfboard tells the story of a particular place, what the waves do and how the surfer rides them. But often relationships between surfers and shapers stretch over the course of a lifetime, and then each board becomes a chapter in much longer story. It reflects the trends of the day and typical conditions of the break, but each board also becomes a record of a surfer's progression: from the razor thin, performance boards of youth, to the more stable shapes of the middle-aged surfer, and finally to the fatter, rounded longboards on which most surfers begin and end their surfing lives. Every surfboard tells a story.

* * *

[30] Daniel Duane, Caught Inside (New York: North Point Press, 1996) 52.

Dawn Patrol

5:56 Dreaming

It's begun already
in sleep,
in warm unconsciousness,
beneath the comfort
of being alive
and dead.
Breathing out
and in,
blood transmitting
oxygen
silently
through muscles and marrow,
through the finger's arc
and outlying toe,
rhythms that
rise and fall
even here.

Lightness and darkness
multiply,
warm and cold divorce,
flesh and bed flesh unravel.
An eyelash
flutters.
A coral tongue
uncoils,
tasting the air.

6:15 Waking

Preparations are made
in darkness
where the shape
and feel of things
resurface:
hard-formed handles
of the rubbermaid bin,
yielding, soggy wetsuit,
film of salt and wax.

In the morning
chasing light,
relieved to be hungry again,
the mind stretches out.

Through the open window
the temperature drops.
Rushing air
puddles and swirls
in the couplings
of the palm and finger.

6:40 Arrival

An estranged second skin
hangs algid and grainy,
still heavy with yesterday.
On the shoulder
shivering snakes
unmolt
and multiply.
Rubbery layers of neoprene fat
cleave black
to gooseflesh
and the cold ground
presses
pale feet:
pebbles and asphalt,
tufts
of wet grass.

The board slides free
glowing
or humming
beneath a thin skin
of glass,
offering
buoyancy and friction,
the sharp smell
of wax, and steady
accumulation.

Gravel gives way
to sand
giving way;
the long grass
shudders.

7:02 Inside

In the distance
the ocean cracks,
blossoming white.
Arms rise
and fall
in wide
unhurried arcs,
heat spreading
across the skin.

The waves gather
close,
stumble
and collapse.
Foam billows,
hard-swallowed
over a knuckle of salt.
The ocean swells,
gains weight,
detonates.

The universe shatters,
spinning and
tumbling.

Dark shapes
detach from the horizon,
bearing down.
Acid spreads
through straining
muscles.
The ocean lifts
hesitates…
and the board slips down
into the darkening hollow.

7:15 Underwater

Silence descends
like a door
sliding shut,
across the mouth
of a still and
empty room.

The wave passes
overhead,
dragging
for a moment
the ocean
in its wake.

Far away
the low rumble
of waves
fans out
into the depths.
Suspended,
lungs murmur for air.

The board
nuzzles upwards
ascending through shades
of green
and blue
as through sleep.

7:16 Outside

Stetched out
smooth
and untroubled
the ocean
rises
and falls.

Spray lifts off the backs
of the breakers,
raining down
sheets of salty drizzle.
Bubbles effervesce
across the surface.

In the drifting current
legs dangle,
swirling
calm and expectant.

7:36 Taking Off

The ocean slumps;
the wave lifts
precarious,
swelling.
Water pours into the hollow.

Drawn now
irresistibly
the spring uncoils.

Board spinning,
arms plunge through the surface,
quick powerful strokes.
Sliding
up the face,
the cords of inertia snap:
body and wave coincide,
strained muscles
snap upright,
the rail catches,
slides
into the fold.

7:37 Surfing

A thin
blade of glass
cuts the surface,
stays aloft.

The wave curls,
overstretching itself.
Legs pump,
ascending and
descending,
outpacing collapse.

Air and water rush,
blur;
water droplets hang
suspended.

A loosened weight
hurtles
beneath the ocean's
hem,
descends again,
then slips
inside:
a flash,
then nothing.

9:37 Neap Tide

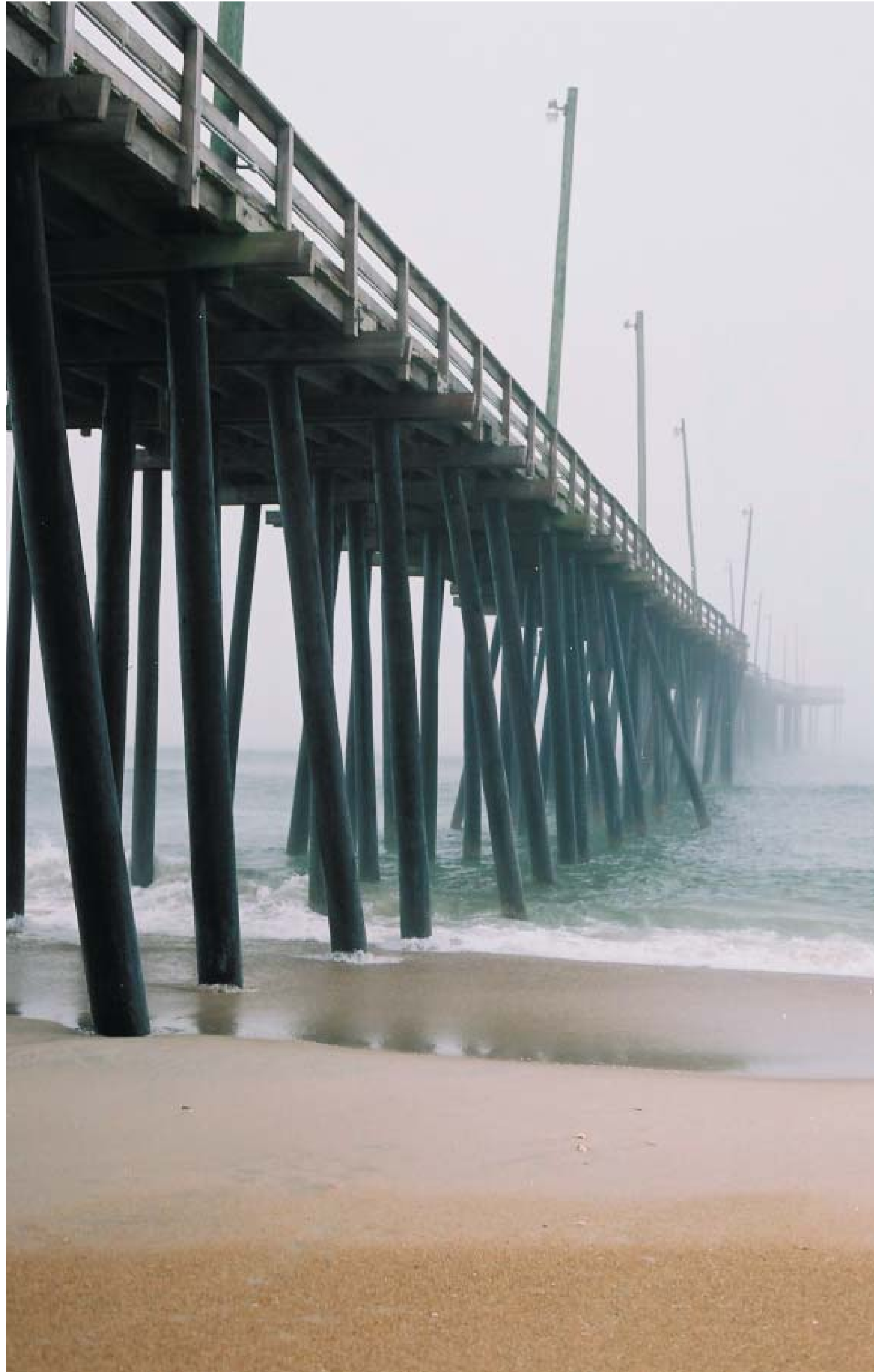
Once more,
just one more,
wave,
ride,
trip outside.
This next one,
this last one.

There's nothing left
to resist.
Cold tightens
stubborn muscles,
infatuated by inertia
and clothing's loose
promise.
Hunger drifts,
aimless.

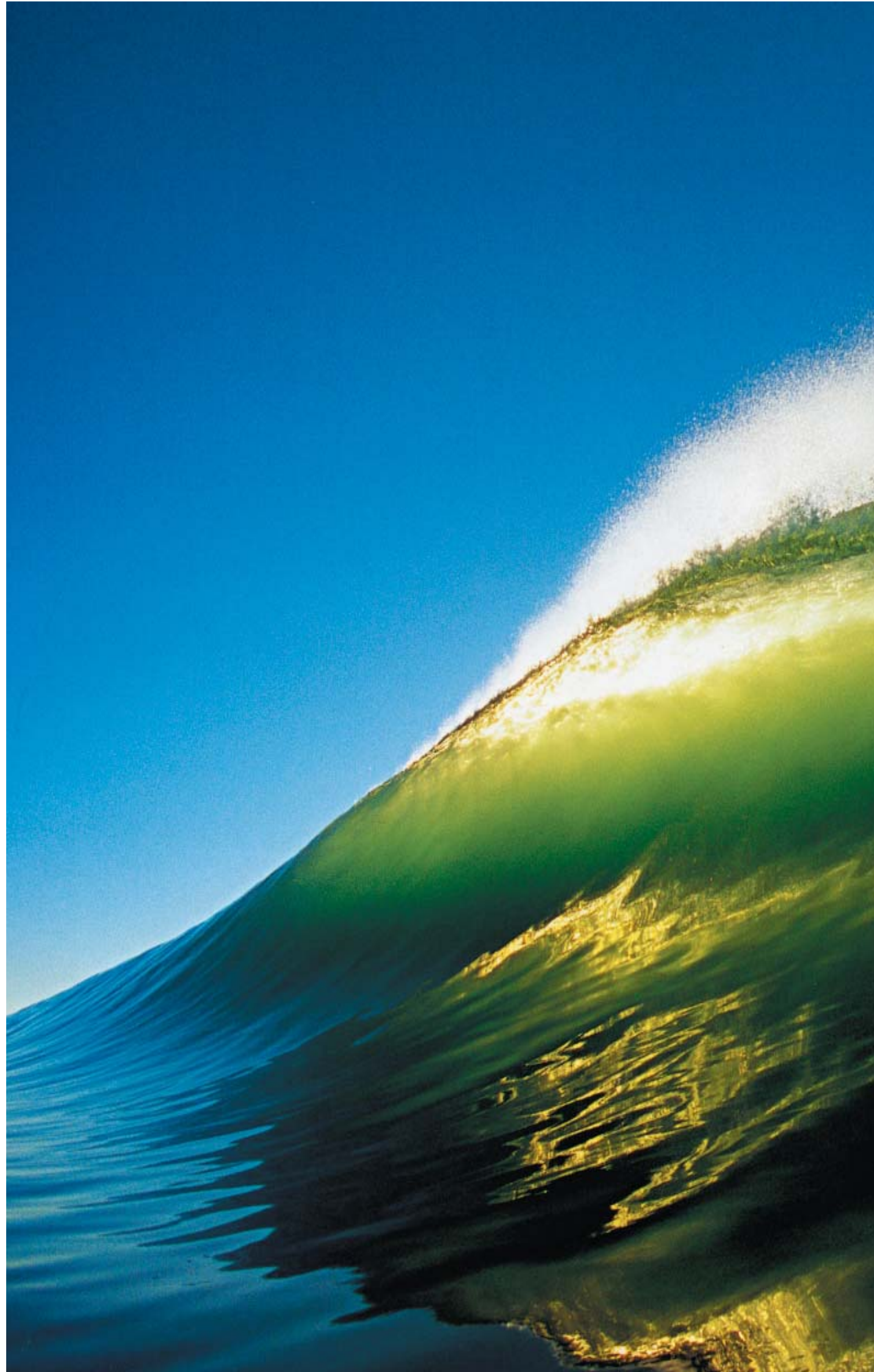
This could be the last wave.

Close to the earth,
fingers drag
along the surface
of broken waves.

The Pier



EPILOGUE



THEY WERE LATE. It was already half-past and the light was fading quickly. The car skidded to a stop, doors flew open and we packed up with purpose. We threw our gear in the back, strapped the boards to the roof and sped down the gravel road to the highway. The beach was still twenty-minutes away.

It was past nine when we pulled up. A few stragglers were still in the water, but most were leaning against their cars, half-out of their wetsuits, smoking joints, loose and content. The pavement was warm and welcoming under our feet. The sun had dipped past the horizon and the wind was starting to die. The waves were small, four-foot and glassy and beginning to closeout with the dropping tide.

We brushed the sand from our wetsuits and fought our arms and legs through the coarse neoprene. We waxed our boards and scrambled over the logs, down the beach into the wet sand. We slipped into the cold water with a half-hour still of light. The remaining surfers exchanged amused looks as we paddled past.

The three of us traded waves, fast rides on short, steep sections. Drifting in the line-up, we talked quietly between sets, watching the sky turn orange and pink and from purple to blue. We hadn't been out together for months. Stars came out as the blue sky deepened into black. Our eyes strained against the gloom as the sets grew harder to read, the dark line of each wave blending into the lengthening shadows. The last of the stragglers made their way to shore.

Our take-offs got later and later. We'd turn at the last minute, the lip of the wave fluttering white. Paddling back outside, the ocean disappeared beyond the foam, dissolving into darkness. Just one more wave. This next one and then we'll head in. We floated in the night, feeling for the waves before we could see them.

Finally we could only make out the waves once they'd broken. We let ourselves drift inside, choosing to ride the re-form instead. And then we noticed. The foam wasn't white: it was glowing. It must have been happening for a while, but so gradually we didn't see it at first. As the light faded completely, the waves became brighter. Each closeout glowed like a long, fluorescent tube, showering the inside with light.

The red tide had begun a few days earlier, an algae bloom that had filled the water with billions upon billions of microorganisms, bioluminescent plankton that glow when agitated. Each disturbance caused a response, the more violent our movements the brighter the flash. At first we stared at one another in silence, stunned as we panned our hands through the water, watching trailers of light follow in their wake. Our legs swirled beneath the surface, sending blue-green streamers into the blackness. And then there was laughter, bubbling up from some forgotten place. We slapped the surface like children, splashing water around us that scattered into sparks. We dove like otters, surrounded by glowing galaxies. The years fell away, light sparkling on our skin.

And then we surfed. The sets broke, spreading light across the reforming waves. We paddled, and when the waves began to lift us, popped to our feet and dropped blindly down the face. The rails of our boards slashed bright lines through the water and were then consumed in a nebulous glow. The hours stretched out. We forgot the cold and how to speak. We laughed, surfing long into the night. We hurtled across the black waves, light shimmering beneath our feet, cold and alive.

* * *

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