



Pierce Flynn

Surfers and Their Symbols

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This interview is comprised of written answers to the questions on page five, with guidepost questions inserted as appropriate.

A follow-up interview took place at Pierce's house and on a walk down the back path to Upper Trestles on January 30, 2000.



Fair warning: the going gets pretty heavy in several sections of this interview with Pierce Flynn. His is definitely not the 'hey bro' syntax that you would associate with a guy who surfs as much as Pierce, who hangs with ska bands and surf metal guitarists and who knows every honcho and surf star in the industry. However, it is well worth the effort to work through the tough sections because for me, Pierce is like Albert Schweitzer, the famed doctor who left his practice in Europe to treat the diseased in Africa. Instead of staying cloistered in an academic ivory tower, Pierce has used his scholarly skills to bring the message of environmentalism to the world of modern surfing.

Pierce has used the theories and facts developed for his doctoral thesis to the benefit of surfers everywhere. In a sense, he is living his field of research 24/7 by being one of the most prolific communicators of surfing's environmental and cultural connection in the past decade. He worked for Transworld, then as communications director for Surfrider, then as Surfrider's executive director, and now at SurfDOG Records. His production of the MOM albums and positioning surfers as eco-warriors with the national media have resulted in Pierce's version of surfing going out to probably more people than any other single person in the surf industry.

So when I asked Pierce to do an interview, we decided that presenting a PhD's perspective with all the density of thought normally found only in papers published for other PhDs would actually be pretty bitchen, since surf stoke is not only the underlying principle behind not only his daily work product: it is what the guy lives and breathes every day. G.H.

Above: The cover art for MOM III.

Right: Portrait by Art Brewer for the Surfing and Yoga series.



Leadership

Pierce Flynn
Surfers and Their Symbols

A Surfer's C.V.

August 27, 1953 - Born, Camp Roberts, CA.
Summer, 1958 - Started riding waves on a raft, Surfside Beach, CA. Started skateboarding.
Easter, 1967 - Rode first surfboard, Mazatlan, Mexico, with younger brothers Bill and Art. Joined local Audubon Society. Got Sargent Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band, Surrealistic Pillow and The Doors albums; first kissed a girl.
Summer, 1968 - Received Eagle Scout Award and first surfboard, a Hobie Positive Force Model, 8'6", San Bernardino, CA. Surfed Doheny and San Onofre. Covered bedroom walls with SURFER Magazine pictures. Saw Jimmy Hendrix and The Doors live.
1969 - Elected Sophomore Class President, Aquinas High School, San Bernardino, CA. First surfed Beacon's in Encinitas, CA, 7'8" Petrillo round tail. Starting wide receiver and safety on J.V. football team.
September, 1970 - June, 1971 - Elected Senior Class President, Aquinas High School, San Bernardino; surfing Leucadia fairly regularly; starting defensive linebacker on varsity football team; joined Clean Air Now environmental organization; rode bicycle to school to cut down on smog; carried lunchpail to save trees, began eating health food based on article in Surfing Magazine; returned to surf Mazatlan; organized student protest of school dress codes; read *The Prophet*; graduated Validictorian.
1971 - Entered Pomona College, Claremont, CA. Helped organize student anti-Vietnam War protest with Tom Hayden at Claremont Colleges. Narrowly escaped military draft. Surfed Huntington, Swami's and Jalama.
1973 - Surfed Maui (Lahaina, Mala Wharf, Olu Walu, Kehei), and Baja, 7'6" Rick, read the Bible, had mystical experience at Jalama.



Top: Cloudbreak, Tavarua

Bottom Left: on the North Shore with environmental activists Larry McElheny and Peter Cole.



With Dave Kaplan and Tom Whalley of Interscope Records as a "check" for \$100,000 is presented to Surfrider from the MOM II CD.

Below: the cover art for MOM II.

1974 - Moved to San Diego to enter University of California, San Diego, marine biology, pre-med. Started surfing Black's and Table Top. 6'10" Aipa stinger, Hynson 8'2" gun.

1975 - Surfed Kauai (Pakala's, Hanelei Bay, Waiohi, First Break). Read *Dune*.

1976 - Changed major to Sociology of Knowledge. Began studying ethnomethodology, phenomenological philosophy, sociology of scientific knowledge.

1977 - First trip to surf North Shore, Oahu. Paid for trip working at a deli in Solana Beach, Ca. Surfed small Pipeline, Waimea Bay, Off the Wall, Velzyland, large Sunset Beach, Backyard Sunset, Laneakea, Avalanche, Jocko's). Got injured at Backyard's: serious staph infection, hospitalized. Read Carlos Castaneda, Tao te Ching, Tibetan Buddhism texts.

1978 - Entered Graduate School in Sociology at UCSD. Hired as research & teaching assistant. Surfed Black's.

1985-86 - Awarded Chateaubriand Fellowship for research and teaching in Paris, France. Studied and wrote on sociosemiotics.

1987 - Founding member of Semiotics Research Group, UCSD. Published "Waves of Semiosis: Surfing's Iconic Progression" in American Journal of Semiotics.

1988 - Awarded Doctorate in Sociology specializing in semiotics, ethnomethodology and the sociology of knowledge. Joined Surfrider Foundation-surfed Black's.

1989 - Turned down tenure track teaching position in Queens, New York to stay in California.

1989-91- Taught university and started own media business. Had book published, *The Ethnomethodological Movement: Sociosemiotic Interpretations*: Mouton de Gruyter Press: The Hague, 1990. Met Guy Motil, worked in editorial and advertising at Breakout Surf Magazine, Transworld Skateboarding and Snowboarding Magazines, Transworld Art & Design Agency, Burton Snowboards. Entered the Surf Industry. Met Tom Pratte at the Long Beach ASR Trade Show at the Surfrider booth.

1992 - Joined Surfrider Foundation Staff as a consultant in communications, programs and marketing.



1995 - Became Executive Director of Surfrider Foundation. Immersed in conservation, activism, research and education. Traveled, surfed, researched Baja, California (Southern, Central, Northern) the Ranch, Hawaii, US East Coast, Puerto Rico, France, Brazil, Japan, Fiji.

1999 - Moved on to Surfdog Marketing. Remains as Chairman of Surfrider's National Advisory Board and member of the Environmental Issues Team.

2000 - Turned over Advisory Board chairmanship to Shaun Tomson. Still active on Advisory Board issues; working on MOM IV CD and concert series

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The Challenge of Combining
 Intellect with Stoke

Describe your best surfing experience ever.

My best surfing experience ever was actually yesterday. I had gone to San Onofre at 5:30 in the evening on a Monday after working at Surfdog. I had missed the weekend SW swell while up fishing in the High Sierras with friends. The weather at the beach was hot October Country Santa Ana's, the swell was 3-4' and lined up, the surf uncrowded, and you could see Santa Catalina Island it was so clear. I guess it was the enhancement provided by the expansion of my perceptual context from the juxtapositioning of the High Sierra geography and the beach that permitted an unusual meditation of appreciation for where I was and what I was doing.

I was thankful for getting to surf and be immersed in this ocean water and waves that had origins in the snow melt of the Sierra peaks. My surfing became freer on my 8'0 midsize noserider. I reflected on the similarities and differences between the East Walker River waterfalls and the cascading surf. I saw the cliffs and beach of San Onofre as an integral extension of the Minaret peaks and the high desert hills of Bodie. I was truly happy to be surfing and paddling and I continually dove off my board to swim to the bottom with my eyes open to study the reef. I saw Santa Catalina Island as a one-time California shoreline and I felt the Chumash Ancestors present somehow. I felt appreciative to be alive. As I rode beautiful, rolling waves I noticed the moon starting to reflect in the wave faces and even on the droplets of my board. I felt stoned as a gopher, but it was a natural high, I hadn't smoked anything! I joked pleasantly with the other surfers in the water and it felt like aloha ohana.

For me, my best surfing experiences are those ongoing moments, like this one, where I feel and intuit/think everything together and the eternal now emerges. I think this is what the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger was writing about in his book "Being and

Time". I want everybody to somehow receive the benefits of this experience, it is so rare. That becomes my meditation and that enhances my surfing experience because it is now somehow shared with everything and everyone. I think this is the essential idea behind the Surfrider Foundation and what provides for its real greatness. Sharing the positive force that you have been given by the waves. Living aloha.

What have you learned from this experience?

I know these ideas may sound crazy and mystical, but that is how it is for me. It is what keeps me surfing through life as well as through the physical ocean waves. Surfing teaches me about unity, about change, about character-building, about transcendence of adversity, about flow. Also about unadulterated natural fun. Fun that restores and heals and energizes. Fun that enlightens. Fun that can be somehow shared with others. I think this is what the Hawai'ians, the Chumash, and other indigenous surfers and peoples have seen. We post-moderns can effectively learn from this attitude and philosophy of living and surfing. As the Tibetans say, "energy follows thought" and that certainly applies in living and surfing. We are what we think. Positive or negative.

What's been the challenge for you as a surfer vs. the expectations of your family, friends, employers, etc?

I have been extremely fortunate to have been able to become involved with the Surfrider Foundation when I did. It allowed me to find a well-suited vehicle from which I could contribute something of my particular expertise back into surfing and the ocean environment which have given me so much. I am a hybridized bundle of skills, talents, and visions, like all of us are, and I have been able to integrate these somewhat in my focussed service and work as a staff member and as Executive Director of the Surfrider Foundation for the last six and a half years. It would take too long to tell the story of all that has happened during my tenure as a Surfrider staff: incredible things, positive things that, I am proud to say, through the combined synergy of many, many people, have constructively changed the history of surfing and its effect, image and relevance to the modern world.

You've got a doctorate, yet are as surf-stoked as any gremmie I've ever met. Talk about your academic background.

I was trained professionally in both the academic and private sector worlds. My professional academic training was as an "ethnomethodologist" and a "semiotic" researcher at the University of California, San Diego. I received a Ph.D. there from the Department of Sociology. I was really lucky that we were located right above Black's, one of the most challenging and perfect waves that I have ever surfed. My training has been in a relatively new interdisciplinary field that studies the social and cultural contexts of different "signification systems". That is what semiotics is.

We study the social construction of signification and meaning systems like languages, sciences, religions, beliefs, political systems, art, musics, literatures, historical and mythic narratives, poetics, communicative media, economic systems, human-computer interaction. We then try to apply that knowledge in the world through consultation, publishing, and teaching within universities, private business, and the media. I studied, researched and taught semiotics and the social construction of scientific and social scientific knowledge, cross-cultural religious belief systems, and a general analysis of social languages, symbols and signs within popular culture and the media.

I did research for the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, among others, at Hubbs Research Institute at Sea World, at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, at UC San Diego, researching a number of things including African cinema and computer use, classroom interaction, scientific knowledge building practices, Pentecostal glossallia, and surfing's neo-tribal organization. Pretty heady stuff but with its definite real-time applications.

Before I came to Surfrider Foundation, I was a researcher and a university lecturer. I then turned my attention progressively to working in private enterprise and the media, outside of academics. I did this out of both interest and economic necessity. Lucky for me, I happened to make the right career choices that allowed me to "work within my passions". I declined a tenure-track job offer at a university in Queens, New York, so

that I could stay on the West Coast and keep surfing in my lifestyle. I simultaneously was teaching at the university and doing my own media consultation business.

How did you get involved with the surf industry, and then Surfrider?

Because of these surfing-related fundamental lifestyle/orientation choices, I was enabled to eventually enter the “industries” of surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding, when I started working with Breakout Surfing Magazine, Transworld Publications, and Burton Snowboards in their advertising, marketing and media departments. Surfing, skateboarding and snowboarding were the “geographies” of my deepest passions, and these were geographies that were exerting an increasingly immense power on the popular culture and imagination. I felt at home and I learned a lot of new skills. This period of work led to my discovering the Surfrider Foundation and beginning as a consultant there.

What did you do at Surfrider?

I started working first a consultant, and then as a staff member and then Executive Director at the Surfrider Foundation National Office in San Clemente, California, from the years 1992-1999 is an experience I will never forget and for which I am very appreciative.

Surfrider provides a grassroots vehicle from which anybody can serve and put something back into what they love and derive essential life energy from: surfing and the sea. That basic activity of “returning the favor” is tremendously rewarding. Psychologically, physically, spiritually. Charitable, compassionate endeavors with passion integrate the best qualities and skills in people and take them to a higher level. I have seen this time and again in Surfrider Foundation around the world. Surfrider, in my opinion, has the potential to be a unique and persistent social movement, like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. It represents a new blend of socially conscious, non-dogmatic ideology and, what William James in “Varieties of Religious Experience” called, “pure experience” or surf stoke. This creates charitable passion.

Surfrider has also introduced me to a global network and group of some of the finest, smartest and coolest people that I could ever imagine meeting and that continue to be my friends and associates. Readers of this article should check out the Surfrider Foundation’s Strategic Plan, on the web site at www.surfrider.org, and the collected editions of “Making Waves” for clues to the work that this organization of people has accomplished and will keep accomplishing because it is following and preserving a passion for surfing.

Well, that’s a nice blurb for the Foundation, Pierce. But what did Surfrider do for you?

Surfrider allowed me to use and expand my semiotic skills through applying them in a context of needed action in the face of ecological crisis and a crisis of values. A remarkable, integrated group activity is demanded from everybody in the Surfrider Foundation groups, locally, nationally and internationally, to respond effectively and proactively to the serious kinds of issues Surfrider faces up to: long-term pollution of surfing waters, protracted loss of natural surfing habitats, large scale erosion of beach environments, and the never-ending process of communication and a new style of education for both the different surfing generations and the mass public about “what it’s all about” from the unique perspective and vantage point of enlightened surfers.

My job and opportunity was to participate with others in allowing and directing all this communicative, effectual activity, all over the country and world, in courtrooms and classrooms, on the beach and at the bank, on television and on t-shirts, with Senators and surfers, with the megaphone and with music, with corporations and children, in the heart and in the mind and in the barrel.

You make Surfrider sound almost messianic. What’s been the downside? All that nobility must have been costly in certain ways. What’s been the personal price?

As in anything in this life, surfing being a prime exemplar, working at Surfrider Foundation was full of daily challenges, dangers, closeouts, wipeouts, mistakes, and stresses, as well as spectacular rides and victories, due to the high energy situations you are in, both

externally and internally. That is the mythology of life. We can choose to resist or follow it when it opens up to us. I’m glad I had the chance to ride those swells with the equipment that I had to offer at the time!

But being involved in social change and education of the mass mentality towards our planet’s ecology and wave environments, which many people take for granted, can be a daunting, rough task. I take it very seriously, and try to use my semiotic training to get inside peoples’ minds and actions.

However, it can be very slow and frustrating. Changing corporate behavior is a long, slow process at times. Only five cents of the philanthropic dollar comes from corporate coffers in the U.S. And sometimes it takes a lawsuit to change corporate environmental practices, as we have done with Louisiana-Pacific, Arco, and the Obayashi Corporation. And government agencies can be just as recalcitrant: we’ve had to go after the cities of Honolulu, San Diego, Deal (New Jersey), the U.S. Marine Corps, and others.

These kinds of actions can be excruciatingly difficult for you on a stress level professionally. And the commitment (to protecting waves and beaches) can certainly take its toll on one’s personal life, not to mention the fact that working inside a non-profit organization with traditional Board of Directors decision-making processes and politics can be very difficult, too. But this all has to be put up with and overcome in order to achieve the bigger vision and quest.

Going from Surfrider to Surfdog sounds a bit odd for a PhD. on a vision quest. What’s the deal?

I am really excited about my new work with Surfdog, Inc. in Encinitas, California. Here, with my business associate and surfing friend Dave Kaplan and our other staff, we are actively involved in helping to compose the direction of modern popular culture through the mediums of music, performance, television, movies, internet, and action/extreme sports such as surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding and others. Our business specialty is to bring these things together in a meaningful way.

Pierce Flynn
Surfers and Their Symbols

Semiotics and Riding Waves

Is there any connection between Surfrider and Surfdog?

We are a unique recording, publishing, management and marketing company whose motto on the letterhead is "Please Help Preserve Our Oceans". Surfdog, Inc. is a professional company with a heart that puts back significant amounts of its success (from managing the Brian Setzer Orchestra and Butthole Surfers to doing movie soundtracks and music supervision for different media and action sports) into supporting environmental work by producing special "edutainment" projects like the MOM: Music for Our Mother Ocean benefit albums for Surfrider Foundation.

Why did you take the job?

I see working with Surfdog, Inc. as another extension of my semiotic work with popular culture in the private and public sectors now. And I am continuing to serve Surfrider Foundation as the Chairman of the National Advisory Board. And I get to surf alot. Our Surfdog offices are right next to Swami's.

Interview 1/30/00 in Pierce's living room, and then on the walk to Upper Trestles and back.

Do you miss the life of a PhD, doing the kind of work people would normally associate with somebody who has a doctorate?

No, I don't. I feel like I am 'in application' right now. My day-to-day analysis and application of what I do now, what I did at Surfrider Foundation, equals or surpasses what I would do in the university. The reason I wanted to hybridize my career out of the university was actually because the university life, being a full-time academic, is a bit stultifying. And the politics are horrendous in academic departments. Woody Allen said he's never seen worse politics anywhere. In an academic department, they are fighting more and more for less and



Above: Locked in on the streets of Tokyo.

Above left: w/ Surfrider Japan activists.

Middle left: w/ Perry Farrell and Dave Kaplan for a Surfrider P.S.A.

Bottom Left: w/ No Doubt on the set for a MOM III video shoot.

less stakes besides ego. In academics there's always insecure funding because of government budgets. Of course, it is even worse for non-profits. But at a non-profit you can at least go out and raise money from various sources. In academics, you are constantly scurrying for grants.

Looking for funding, dealing with politics - - -
That sounds like Surfrider! (laughs)

(laughs) A comfortable transition! Now you came to Surfrider under Jake Grubb - -

Yes, I came from my own business. I was an adjunct professor at Cal State San Marcos, a half-time instructor, and I had my own business, Pierce Flynn Media Communications, where I did media and marketing for, at that time, Transworld Publications. I also worked for Burton snowboards and for a company called Etnies when it had just come over from France before it became the skateboarding giant that it is now.

I had worked at Transworld Skateboarding full time for a while a couple of years before that, and it was a great training ground for me in magazines and publications, the advertising world, and most importantly, immersion in the action sports industry. Before that I worked at *Breakout* magazine for Guy Motil and Chris Aherns. That's where I got my first immersion. I went right from getting my PhD. to teaching and working part-time for *Breakout*. I wanted to apply my semiotics to, basically, publishing and advertising.

What is a semiotic? What is semiosis? And how does it relate to surfing?

You want me to jump into it? (laughs)

Well, you just had a good breakfast. Call it an outside set, and we're paddling out.

(laughs). Well, semiosis is, according to people like Humberto Eco, the study of signification and signification systems.

Meaning how things are assigned significance, how things become significant, how people will reinforce a pattern of significance, and how significance falls away?

Absolutely. Rise, sustainability, and fall. Margaret

Mead called semiotics the study of communication in all modalities. It is trafficking in meaning and symbols and signs. Looking at it that way, the heart of all human experience is semiosis. It is communication through meaningful form.

Is this loosely parallel to Jung's "Man and His Symbols"?

Yes. I think the study of symbols, folklore, linguistics, psycho-history (which he was concerned with) is all part of the historic development of semiotics. People aren't quite sure when semiotics started. It's been studied forever, especially in terms of symbols and hieroglyphics, but it became a more formal academic discipline only recently.

It began in Europe in the 30s and 40s in Germany and France with Charles Sanders Peirce and Saussure. Jung was part of that movement. There was a linguistic and symbolic trend that was going through Europe after World War I. It was called the Phenomenological Movement out which eventually came existentialism. Phenomenology was all about the subjectivity of human consciousness, humans willful construction of reality -

As opposed to Freud's views on the unconscious?

Well, the unconscious is weaved in, but the emphasis is more on looking at the creative work that humans do with their consciousness in building cultures and societies through their own creative work, whether is writing, art, science, through meaning systems, through knowledge practices. We look at that a lot. Of course, Freud was doing that on the unconscious level. But I think it (semiosis) is more in juxtaposition to older human science where humans were thought to be mere pawns of larger forces, social and historical forces, and we were just moved around with no voluntaristic input.

It was a revolution in thinking, and it is really in vogue now in academics. Michel Foucault, post-modernism studies, that all came out of semiotics.

So being a surfer, you must have had a field day applying all this to surfing.

Absolutely, because surfing defies description by any other system. Surfing is such a rich field of motion, intentionality, the unity of a human moving with a natural

force, surrounded by a cultural context with historical depth with lots of symbols and signs and color.

And yet most of the time, the surf is flat!

(Laughs) So it is in everybody's minds all the time, both consciously and, for a lot of surfers, unconsciously.

In your 1987 paper (see page 196), you presented five ways to analyze surfing's iconic activity: 1 - the cultural contradictions, 2 - how temporary it is (actually riding a wave), 3 - the folklore of surfing, 4 - the text of surfing, and 5 - surf films. Talk about that progression as you saw it in 1987 and where it is now thirteen years later.

Well, what I did then was to look at the field of surfing and put it on a five-point axis, to kind of facilitate the analysis, the interpretation. I looked at five different *semiotic planes*, as we call them, of the affirmative act set within a larger historical and cultural context, circles around circles. We call it embedded analysis. You can do it with anything. You can do it with your relationship with your girlfriend or your wife.

With surfing, I started out first placing it in history. I looked at where we came from: Polynesia and Peru, and then looked at the cultural contradictions of surfing. It is a contradictory form, as many artistic sport forms are in late capitalism. It came from an early, indigenous pagan formative root in Hawai'i: surfing as ritual, involving art and death, pure pleasure, warfare, and shamanism. Now it, like a virus, has infected a non-indigenous culture, our white culture. It caused a movement, like beats or the 60s hippies. It created strong forces and it liberated people. I'm talking coming from the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s at San Onofre and Malibu to now: I call it a cultural contradiction because out of an earlier pure state, it has been, I don't want to say co-opted, but it has been integrated into late capitalist economic forms and semiotic forms where basically you have a pure experience of man and nature, woman and nature, that has been joined at the hip to a capitalistic machine of selling surf trunks and surf contests and the cultural simulation of surfing, whether it is a Honda ad or an IBM ad.

What about the Flowrider?

That one begs for analysis as a simulation.

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Heidegger and Tube Riding

So the idea of the transformation from something soul-felt to something that has become a commodity -

Yeah, the commodification of surfing, that's another great way to say it. That's the contradiction. I look at that a little bit in this paper. I've gone into detail on that in other areas.

Basically, as the surfer moves from the shore to the ocean, in that spacio-temporal localization we call it, moving through time, leaving the shore to go surfing in the water, he/she potentially strips cultural boundaries and rules, discards them as he does his clothing. As he gets into the water he basically has stepped outside of society's social rules and he is free.

If he's the only guy out - - -

(Laughs) IF he's the only guy out. And that is also socially symbolized by people wearing less clothes at the beach. Seen semiotically, people are stripping culture and going back to a native state. You are going back to that kind of Edenic state in the water, which is a core experience.

The contradiction comes with the commodification, when you are wearing jerseys, logos - - -

Or wearing the wrong colored wetsuit or getting hassled by locals - - -

All that. That brings in a cultural component to what is an acultural experience. There's lots of great oppositions you can look at to see that play out. They correspond uniquely to surfing, and they correspond with bigger pictures of what is happening in late 20th century U.S. and the world. The patterns that surfing fits into, being a part of larger movements. We call it *Weltensang*.

Then I looked at the temporal order of surfing's water performance. There I attempted to use some semiotic tools to actually look at what's happening psychologically and physically and narratively. Semiotics

uses narrative a lot: telling a story when you are riding a wave. And I used Martin Heidegger's ideas of *prolepsis*, the idea of creative anticipation.

Imagine yourself screaming down the face of a lined-up Rincon wall. The biomechanics that are going on, what is going on in the surfer's "bio-computer" at that time is fantastic. So I used *prolepsis*. *Prolepsis* is living in the present moment as if the future is already existing. *Analepsis*, the opposite, is living in the present as if the past is existing.

This was what Heidegger was talking about in Being and Time?

Absolutely. In the act of surfing, the performance, the surfer is actively using his/her intention to project into the future, to anticipate the moving medium of energy, which is unique, awesome. Drawing on past experience of what had happened in similar situations: is this section going to barrel, or do I pull high and float over it, do I arc around it? And that is unifying time in that moment. Shaun talked about when you are in the tube, time slows down - -

Yeah, I think the reason it happens is that when you are inside a tube, your frame of reference is close and spinning all around you.. If the wave starts going faster than you are, and you get deeper into the tube, your only other frame of reference, the mouth of the tube, can seem to move away from you. So you could be going 15-20 miles an hour forward, and yet because your frame of reference is moving a little faster, the illusion is that you are standing still, or even going backwards.

Einstein's general theory of relativity.

Exactly. He explained relativity in terms of a glass of water on a moving train vs. an observer standing by the side of the tracks. Who's moving, you or the train? From the point of view of the glass, it is standing still and you are moving. Frame of reference is everything.

So I look at that, I call it surfing's iconic wave dance, these different strategies that a surfer uses and put together different corporeal narratives, body stories that are unique to the surfer just like they would be unique to a mountain climber or - -

A dancer - -

Yeah, specifically a dancer. Dance theory and description has developed a vocabulary, probably more developed than any other field, to talk about intentional human movement placed with rhythmicity, which, of course, describes surfing.

With surfing, there is an auto-choreography, yet it is not completely free form. You don't have a Balanchine or Aileen Ailey moving you through a bottom turn, a tube ride, a cutback, and how to hold your hands, position your shoulders, hold your head, your fingers. There isn't that kind of other-structured choreography in surfing, except of course the moves that the waves demand. They are our choreographers, in a sense.

Diana Vreeland, founder of Vogue Magazine, said that having learned ballet in Russia, she saw surfers as dancing with the waves.

Auto-choreography - that's a good phrase. There's a bitchen philosopher-anthropologist named Suzanne Langer who analyzed and described various Native American rain dances. She said that the Native American rain dancer danced with the rain, became the rain in the dance. As surfers, we dance with the wave, we become the wave in a very intense, self-choreographed way.

That's what Mati said. He said that when you watch a (Chumash) dance, you aren't watching somebody do a dance. He is the dance.

Then came verbal, folkloric performance. Surfing has a rich culture with embedded ways of talking, embedded ways of description. The San people in South Africa have that, for example. They are bushmen. Did you see, "*The Gods Must be Crazy*"? That was the San people. Surfers can be looked at with a concept called *phatic communication*, which Melanowsky, the anthropologist, used to describe intense indigenous magical religious rituals of people in tribes.

Nat Young was on when he talked about the tribal nature of surfing. Tribal people share a phatic communication: they have what I call a dexical vocabulary, where the intensity of the experience drives the language and the language is constantly referring to a core experience.

A surfer's vocabulary: "awesome", "dude", "barrels", "shacking", using "gnarly" or "intense" in response to "how's it going?", is constantly relating to, and interpenetrated with, the experience itself. That creates a communion of communication.

Philosophically, that's a really important thing, the relationship between language and experience. Cultural commodification - advertising - is a huge application for it. The application of it in the ad world results in people getting six figure salaries to constantly play that line of how to combine language and experience. When you are talking to someone trying to buy a computer or a Latin American ad, again, playing language is key to symbol making. Ads are a great way to look at that play. The guy on the beach in his Honda with a beautiful blond...

What about the play on surfing's language/experience on the web?

People are spending tons of time "surfing" through the ethereal space of the net. Yet, what are they really doing? Sitting in a room looking at a plastic box that has a piece of glass on it displaying a bunch of stuff - and they call it surfing. You are not going anywhere, yet you are going all over a space, as it were. It is traveling without moving.

The rest of my paper included my analysis of surfing's folklore, its written text, and film.

So you established what the icons are and their progression thirteen years ago. What can you say about that progression in the year 2000? What would be your analysis of surfing over time given your benchmark ideas in 1987?

The key to the analysis is time - -

Heidegger's time, a string of proleptic decisions?

Yeah, and so surfing's cultural time sense is key. What I'd say is critical to cultural iconic progression now in 2000 is what we as a surfer's culture are doing in terms of time in all its dimensions. Specifically, how we are integrating surfing into the various components of our lives. How we have families, jobs, working for the environment, how are we integrating surfing into everything we do.

(At this point Mark Cousineau and Kevin Ranker, Surfrider Board members, showed up after just surfing Trestles. So we stopped our phenomenological analysis of the iconic progression of surfing and went surfing. Pierce lives near a trailhead to Uppers, so we continued the interview walking down to the beach.)

So in those five areas, when you looked at surf films vs. videos, you said that you'd like to see surf films come back. What happened there, the transition to video, what did that mean? What has it done to surfing? From a semiotician's point of view, did it dilute the visual iconization process of surfing?

I don't think so. It gave a greater perceptual point of view. It decentralized the vision and let everybody get a camera and put their view of the surfing world on tape. In the interim, the quality may have suffered, but the diversity increased.

So instead of us all going to church at a surf movie at the Santa Monica Civic together, we can all now pray in the privacy of our own home.

It diluted the community. You don't have the community event of a surf film, the anticipation. You sit on your couch with a clicker. I think it totally parallels what is happening in late post-capitalist society with the Internet: rampant decentralization of technology creates a diffusion of cultural family. But it is moving us towards something bigger. I think we are making the family bigger, eventually. We're redefining the auditorium. We're making it bigger, we're re-connecting locally, like Mark (Cousineau, who organized some surf film showings in San Clemente last year). We're bringing movies back and bringing people together locally. And not to sell videos: people want to experience the 'meeting'.

Once again, from a semiotician's point of view, the idea of dilution vs. the coming of swell.com, defining surfing instantly to thousands at a time. Did Surfrider do that? And did it dilute surfing's core identities?

I like to think it was decentralizing, but not diluting.

As the guy responsible for the MOM albums, you probably put surfing in the thinking of more people than just about anybody in modern surfing today. How many

MOM albums have you sold?

Hundreds of thousands.

So hundreds of thousands of people put on a set of headphones and get your version of surfing as defined by the songs you picked, the artists you worked with, and the artwork that you put together. All for a really good cause, I might add. What are you doing when you are doing that, vs. what a Swell.com is doing? How does that work from a semiotician's point of view?

From the semiotic point of view, it all boils down to intentionality. What's behind the action.

(Time to surf. The rest of the interview was done walking back up the trail to Pierce's house.)

You left the world of professional scholars and you decided to apply your academic talents in the world of surfing because there was such a rich and varied canvas to approach. How did you come to work at Surfrider?

In the early 90s I had my own business and was consulting to Burton Snowboards on international media and communications. I was teaching at Cal State San Marcos and got a call from Gail Motil, who was working at the National Office under Jake Grubb: could I come up and meet with Jake and see what we could do. Long story short: I ended up getting hired by Jake as a consultant to the National Office for communications and program development.

At that time, the situation was the icon of Surfrider desperately needed molding. It was unfocused all over the map. It was post-Humboldt: this was May of 1992 and there was widely disparate public perceptions of Surfrider and internal perceptions of Surfrider by the surfing industry, the media, the donors, the politicians.

I once asked Corb Donahue, the PR guy who wrote stockholder speeches for Quiksilver, what was the industry's take on Surfrider. I said, "Here's the industry defining a lifestyle, here's Surfrider trying to inject some altruism and responsibility into that lifestyle. How does the industry see the Foundation?" He looked at me kind of wryly and said, "Well, it guess it's 'Cut 'em a check for a grand and let's get back to business'".

(Laughs) Yeah, that was definitely an indication of the times. But it was a great opportunity, because

Leadership

Pierce Flynn
Surfers and Their Symbols

The Surfrider Years

Surfrider, when I came in, I perceived it as doing fantastic work, the seminal time of the beginning of the chapter network, and there was like five chapters then, couple on the West Coast, couple on the East Coast - -

(Walking on the trail we came to a warning sign for mountain lions.)

What a sign! You told me about the bobcats you've seen, but mountain lions?

Yeah, they could eat you.

So you mean walking from your house to Trestles, you could be eaten?

Absolutely. That's what the sign is about. And that was Dave Foreman's definition of wilderness: it is a place where something could eat you.

That's what Shaun said when talking about localism: how can anybody be a local when we all could be eaten?

(Laughs). Yeah, in a way, surfers enter a wilderness every time they paddle out. In fact, you have to!

Getting back to molding the icon of Surfrider: coming out of the Humboldt tumult, you worked with the industry and the chapters for two years under Jake. Then you got his job.

Yeah, that was a rush. It was a tremendous opportunity. I am thankful to the Kahunas for that barrel time. It worked out great. It was a 'molding of the icon' time. A lot of people from around the industry, from Yvon Chouinard to Bruce Brown to Tom Curren, wrote letters supporting me as a candidate for executive director. It pulled all the troops together, because I was coming from the trenches, and yet I brought the industry contacts that I had developed. It just all worked because I could talk to all the different constituencies of Surfrider: to our scientists, the lawyers, the grassroots people, musicians like Eddie Vedder, about Surfrider. It was a real congealing time as we focused the icon.



Above: Polynesian hospitality.

Right: A Polynesian welcome of a different variety: a reef tattoo.

Below: Making a great wave at Cloudbreak.



And what was the icon's final shape after your first year as executive director? I think the term 'eco-warrior' became operative.

That was Dave Foreman's term. Bottom-line, focusing the icon was getting back to our vision and the mission. I credit Jake Grubb immensely for beginning that process: going back and bringing you strongly into the picture, Glenn, and Tom Pratte. And in my early days, and in Jake's last days, we talked repeatedly about needing to stay intimately close to the root vision, the core seed vision of Surfrider, through your articulation.

How hard was that to do given the fact that you were trying to sell altruism to a tribe that was being commodified?

It was really tricky. As Hegel and Marx talk about the dialectic, you had thesis, antithesis, and synthesis going on all the time, with mistakes and failures and successes and accomplishments. It was crazy, and it was great. Getting the mission focused from the roots was the first thing. The first thing was to realize that we needed to do that, and to do that within the context of the board of directors who all had different visions. So when I became executive director, our first project was to try to get a strategic plan on the table that we could then coherently, synthetically, and enthusiastically present to Surfrider's varied grassroots and corporate constituents as well as politicians, water boards, polluters, and everybody else.

You couldn't really represent Surfrider in terms of the temporal dance of surfing. There's no strategic plan when you are riding a wave, per se.

Well, as Mozart said in "Amadeus" when asked, "Where is the score for your next symphony?" he said, "It's all up here." And certainly when you are riding a wave, it is all up here: it is flowing. But for purposes of an international environmental organization, you have lots of people involved -

Including people who don't surf that much. I bet you no more than 15-20% of the membership have ever seen the logo for real inside a wave.

You know, that's a debatable question, but the point you are raising is really interesting.

Back to your focus. You had to translate the temporal dance of surfing, married with altruism, into something that people in a post-capitalist society could get their arms around.

Yeah, that was the opportunity, and that's what gave Surfrider its unique power. It took a certain type of semiotic work to choose the right communications and say the right things in the magazines through the right surfing spokespeople to the surfing community - and then beyond.

How did you pull together a group of people when basically it is a sport where its every man for himself?

Surfrider is basically an oxymoron. You have a wild tribe, so how do you string together the coconut grapevine and make it real? That was the first challenge: preaching to the converted, so to speak.

Then there was the other side, moving out, broadcasting and making the message inviting beyond the inner circle. And there was power there, as well. One of the first things we did was hook up with MTV in 92-93. I saw that as a very strong opportunity: we could reach tens of millions of young people, young minds, with Surfrider's message that's sexy, that's positive, that's rad, but that's right on the mark.

A values-based message?

It's completely values-based. And that just struck the youth of America and the world in a strong way. And we know for a fact that beginning at that time, and continuing now, Surfrider - - -

It was as if Hell's Angels suddenly started lobbying for stronger traffic laws, driving their hogs up the steps of the capitol.

An extremely powerful combination. It fit Sigmund Freud's description of the components of a good joke. Which means in a good joke, you have to unite two seemingly opposites together, and that's what makes you laugh. And taking surfers and linking them up to strong social causes: people would laugh at first, but then they would GET it.

You had the background to be able to stand back from this frame and look at its composition and keep things moving as you attempted to combine the opposites of surfing and structure. Doors started opening as you positioned Surfrider with major media outlets using the eco-warrior theme. What did you run into that tripped you up?

Well I think there were constant daily trip-ups, like paddling out into a lineup, and constant wipeouts along with the rides. The daily trip-ups were my own learning curve, because I had never done anything in this capacity before. And learning to focus the icon for such a group in movement as well as working within a compliant non-profit organization as well as raising daily funds to keep the doors open, with the membership believing in the cause: it was a huge task.

And far be it from me to say that I had anything to do with it solo, because the success of Surfrider is due to so many passionate people directly involved in keeping all those day-to-day things focused, something that just required constant work. It is really beyond specifics. It was like surfing or fly-fishing: you are getting snags every other cast, your leash is breaking, you are getting slammed by a close-out set. There was so much learning to be done.

There were a lot of good people there to help. Terry McCann - he came from Toastmasters International as part of the new school board of directors. He became our president, and he became vital to me.

Terry McCann, 1960 gold medal winner in Olympic wrestling - - -

He was on the Wheaties box, yet an avid surfer who surfs almost every day at San Onofre. Terry runs Toastmasters International, one of the largest non-profits in the world.

He helped with governance, focusing the icon by making us a completely legitimate and credible non-profit that could stand up next to the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, etc. in terms of taxes, by-laws, and all that infrastructure which is so key.

After the vision, which is step one in the semiotic progression of Surfrider, you've got to have the infrastructure in place. You see a perfect Trestles wall

Pierce Flynn
Surfers and Their Symbols

The Future with Surfdog

right there, you have to have the right equipment, or else you are going to be flailing.

Just to wrap it up before we go in the water, where was Surfrider when you left and why did you leave?

First of all, I haven't gone anywhere. I was the chairman of the advisory board until Shaun took over recently. I worked a lot with the new executive director, Chris Evans, on downloading and strategizing. We're constantly on the phone, having lunches, things like that. I was involved in raising \$2,300 earlier this year in a Surfrider benefit.

But I moved on from the executive director role because it is a lot like holding political office. You are in the barrel, you are under intense pressure from all sides, and I knew this was going to be the case, and that it wasn't going to be a lifelong position for me as E.D. I would do it and strive to set it up so that the next person could come in on solid ground. And I waited until that was done before I made any kind of a move.

Your involvement with Surfrider has just changed: chairing the advisory board, working closely with Chris Evans, and maintaining a presence with the organization and focusing the icon. What do you think Chris Evans has inherited?

It is what Jake Grubb gave me in his way: it is a template for a surfboard, but a template for a future surfboard, like your Surf-Sword. To have a base on which to riff, and I think it is solid. The mission is clear and focused, the plan is strong and focused, the finances are strong and focused. The chapters: forty-five in the US, five other countries, all form a base for a new launch to make it even better. And given that, I was stoked not to be leaving or going anywhere. I get to play yet another strategic role, but I get to work in the private sector again to marshal support and focus the icon from that angle.

Tell me about Surfdog Records and surfing's iconic progression. I don't think there's ever been a label called 'Surfdog', run by surfers, and that has put as much effort as you have into creating CDs of surfing.

I tell ya, it is unique. Surfrider Foundation is unique, Surfdog Records is very unique. Its official corporate motto is, "Please help preserve our oceans." and it is trademarked. It is run by Dave Kaplan, who surfs, myself and others who surf, and it is known within the music world as being a unique professional record label, management company: we manage Brian Setzer Orchestra, Butthole Surfers, Pato Banton, Gary Hoey. We are a music publishing company and a music media company.

How many dollars a year may I ask?

All told, it's a couple million, all things combined. Touring, record sales, publishing. We put our music in television shows, commercials, and movie soundtracks.

So when people want to use something by Brian Setzer, they call you.

Absolutely. We do music supervision, synchronization, matching music to images.

How did you synchronize sound to surfing and Surfrider in the MOM albums? What were you trying to do, over and above a benefit album trying to raise some money? What else went into your thinking?

Well, it seemed like such a natural because music and surfing have a core rhythmicity that go hand in glove. There was a swell of interest as Surfrider, in our grassroots efforts, began to utilize popular culture as device for positive social change. We went on the Lallapalooza tours, the HORDE tours, doing tables and petitions. And it was there that we started to realize the power of artists like Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam, Perry Farrell, Red Hot Chile Peppers. They came to Surfrider's booths and were stoked: they helped get petitions signed, they announced our name from the stage. So we thought, let's use this, let's run with it, and that's where Dave Kaplan and I and others got together: to marshal this passion that is connected from these surfing/musical artists and the vehicle of popular culture like MTV and the music industry, to reach people with *edutainment*.

What's that?

Music and surfing together with an environmental message. It gets the message in kids minds in way that they are accustomed to. You aren't beating them over the head with a doom-and-gloom environmental message -

Yeah, the dead seagulls, the choking sea lions -

They won't listen if it is not presented the right way. Because they know that stuff, but you have to speak their language, and entertain them while you are educating them. So we thought, let's take a vehicle which kids are inclined to use - listening to music and buying it and watching it - and package it with the real participation of the artists involved. We had a whole bunch of them, Eddie and Jewel and Chris Isaak, who surf and are passionate about the environment. Let's make them spokespeople through their music, politicize and energize them and get the message out there.

And that met Surfrider's mission of education from the mission motto: conservation, activism, research, and education. And we reached millions of kids. MTV did two half-hour specials that they aired over ten times each in prime time. They said they had twenty-five million viewers per viewing. We ran PSAs on MTV. We got Perry Farrell to do a Clean Water Act PSA which came out of his involvement with the MOM records.

We got over ten thousand phone calls over a three week period at Surfrider asking for the President's e-mail address and the phone number of the White House. It was insane.

I once asked Paul Holmes, after he left his position at SURFER and went to Gotcha, "Which position gives you a better platform for influencing the future of surfing?" He was kinda struck by the question and couldn't really answer it. Let me ask you the same question. In terms of surfing's iconic progression, which is more powerful, the executive directorship of Surfrider, or putting together music for edutainment purposes?

For me, for my progression as a surfer, I am doing the right thing where I am right now, no question. One definition of evolution is progression in which you include and transcend. You include everything was done before, and then transcend it, move up another rung in the spiral. So what I'm doing now is basically everything

I was doing at Surfrider, and I can tap into the Surfrider machine and system, and now I am able to bring in even more reach with my involvement in media and entertainment.

What are the numbers for the MOM CDs? What's been the reach?

We're constantly asking that, what is the real reach of the projects. As far as sales are concerned, MOM I and II sold between 250 and 300,000 copies. MOM III is still selling, at about 100,000 internationally. Those are Soundscan figures. Every copy has a SF membership application as well as our Web-site address.

Then the marketing program of each, MOM I, II, and III, included millions of dollars of donated radio and TV public service announcement ad time with environmental messages from various artists like Farrell, Jewel, and No Doubt, that reached twenty-five million people during each broadcast. The reach was extraordinary for our mission, and it did a lot for the legitimacy of our organization. To have people like Paul McCartney, James Taylor, Eddie Vedder saying, "We support Surfrider Foundation - its mission, its people" - that has helped our donations and membership rolls extraordinarily because of the credibility. And basically, Surfrider's budget, since MOM I, went from about \$700,000 to \$1.6 million. And that's a combination of many factors, but the core of it is the credibility and legitimacy that has increasingly been built through the associations and endorsements of everyone involved in the MOM projects. The money that was raised allowed us to improve our infrastructure, hire better people, get better computers, membership data systems, etc., etc. It created a snowball effect.

In working for Surfdog, how much time do you spend on stuff that has nothing to do with surfing?

Well, I don't know. That's the magic, that's the semiosis: I can make it all to do, I can make my job to do with surfing as much as I want. You see, the mission of Surfdog, especially the division that I run, Surfdog media and marketing, is to facilitate music and surfing, music and what we call, for lack of a better word, the action sports. That includes snowboarding and skateboarding

which right now are prime activities of Generation Y. People are saying there are sixty to seventy million of them. It is the biggest generation since the baby boomers.

The baby-boomers' kids.

Absolutely. Now, whether the baby-boomers, when they were young, favored baseball or football, Generation Y's favorite activities are skateboarding, surfing, BMX, and the Internet. And music. It is a huge semiotic field again in which to play and to mold.

You talk about Surfrider as an icon of surfing, a value structure and an internal absorption of everything that the ocean gives you. How do you talk to skateboarders and snowboarders about that stuff?

I think they (skateboarding and snowboarding) are the bastard children of surfing. They are part of the *ohana* for better or worse. Skateboarding was first called sidewalk surfing: a board to ride on when it was flat. Snowboarding: same thing. It was created by surfers, Tom Sims and Jake Burton, two hardcore surfers - -

Doyle and Cabell tried to apply surfing to skiing.

That's right, the big mono-ski in the 60s. It was all done by surfers. It was all 'surfer vision'. They belong to our family: they are simulations of riding a wave, part of the proleptic performance. Although each one has its own ins and outs, its inherited relatives, they are all board sports based on the 'surfer-vision'.

Look at the vocabulary of snowboarding and skateboarding. They have their own glossaries, but their core terms came from surfing.

Being one of the most stoked surfers I've ever met, and being able to reach more people than probably just about anybody else that I can think of in the world of surfing, do you ever get scared that you are not living up to your responsibilities?

Yeah, I do. It's my constant mediation, contemplation. "To whom much is given much is asked", and energy follows thought. I feel I can constantly become the progression, and keep it happening all the time.

Are you becoming a better surfer out of all this?

Absolutely. I am enjoying surfing more than I ever have since I was a grommet. I surf more, I enjoy it more, and that's the karma of it all. It's part of becoming the process, becoming the progression.

In becoming the progression, in defining a leadership role through maintaining the environmental icons of surfing, you are figuring out how to evolve the icons of the sport - -

Living them. Not just following them and using them and molding them, but being them all the time in everything one does in putting something back into positive cultural service. Surfers have a helluva lot to contribute to the globe, to global society. That's what I want to do.

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WAVES OF SEMIOSIS: SURFING'S ICONIC PROGRESSION

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Introduction to surfing as a semiotic system

A cultural semiotic of the surfing world is bound to be multiform in order to capture the flow of surfing's endless semiosis. In this paper I present five "waves" of analysis of surfing's iconic activity: (1) a socio-semiotic of the cultural contradictions of surfing's post-modern simulation as cultural mythology; (2) the temporal order of surfing's water performance; (3) surfing's verbal and folkloric performance; (4) surfing's written texts; and (5) surfing cinema. Such an "iconic metadescription" of surfing cultural semiosis attempts to locate surfing's sign production activity through dual methodologies: the first is the surfing member/

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performer's indigenous conceptualizations and representations of cultural performance; the second is the sociosemiotician's translation and representation of that performance. This descriptive intertwining provides an analytical link between surfing's own cultural categories and practices and the ethnosemiotician's descriptive analytical schemes.¹ This metadescription of surfing is based on my participation in and ethnography of diverse surfing cultures in the United States, Hawaii, Mexico, and Australia.

Sociosemiotic delineation of surfing's cultural field

A surfer begins to paddle his surfboard towards the shore, directly in line with the wave's onrushing mass. Deftly and smoothly the surfer strokes once, twice, three times as the now cresting wave catches him and begins to throw him over and down. The surfer leaps to his feet on his surfboard and plunges straight down the steep, hollow, tubelike waveface just as the wave crest where he was perched only seconds before throws out into empty air, falls, and explodes in a burst of turbulent white water, spray, and foam. Quickly, in a blaze of speed, the surfer reaches the bottom of the wave just ahead of the falling curtain of water and leans hard on the right edge of the surfboard. With a burst of acceleration he *bottom turns*, his board edge sinking deeply into the wave trough, his knees almost touching the water. He rockets straight back up the wave face, a wild grin on his face as the wave *lines up* and shapes itself into a long wall in front of him, presenting him with a moving, open canvas for expression.

The surfer weaves the board up and down the wave in a smoothly rhythmic blend of surfing maneuvers; the unique combination and execution of the maneuvers constituting this surfer's finely developed style. As the wave speedily changes and plunges towards the shore, the surfer rhythmically responds. A *cutback* sends him in a sweeping turn back towards the breaking part of the wave or the *tube*, the wave form he has been attempting to outrun. An arcing bottom turn, and the surfer now experiences one of the ultimate situations for riders: he becomes *tubed* or locked inside the curling, hollow, breaking crest of the wave. Motionless, he stands inside the hollow cavernous section of the large breaking wave, as in the center of a cyclone, while crushing, thundering aqueous chaos roars all around him.

Suddenly it is all over. As quickly as the wave rhythm and cycle began, the wave expends its energy on the shore, and the surfer,

having performed this watery ritual with nature, exits the wave and begins to paddle his board back "outside" towards the point. An onlooking surfer exclaims to another, "Gnarly wave, dude! Awesome tube!"

Since the Hawaiians and Polynesians originated the art of surfing, at least 1,000 years ago, surfing culture has flowered as an indigenous water sport, once nearly disappeared after Captain Cook's and the Christian missionaries' arrival in Hawaii in 1778, experienced a revitalization movement with the Hawaiian originators in the late 1800's, and spread to California, Australia, South Africa, South America, Europe, Japan and other local surfing centers (c.f. Finney, 1966; Young, 1983; Lueras, 1984). There are now an estimated two million surfers in the United States alone (Doheny, 1987). The modern growth of the surfing sport/art among devotees and practitioners has been accompanied around the world by various *commercial simulations* of the surfing experience marketed to millions as the Blond California surfing myth and culture replete with images of surfer girls, beach boys, surf music, and rubber beach sandals sold to those seeking a digestible endless summer. In spite of the general "innoculation" of post-modern world culture by the commercial simulation and mythology of surfing (in a manner not different from sociology's innoculation by semiotics as Dean MacCannell (1986) has so keenly observed), there has developed a vital *alternative culture* dedicated to the essential, "hardcore" practice of riding waves that is both local and global in scope and shared semiosis. This alternative surfing culture can be found at many beaches world-wide. Serious cultural members consciously differentiate themselves from non-surfing cultures and the many commercial simulations of the purist surfing experience through ingeniously created sociolectal devices of surfing stylistic performance, verbal and written folkloric artistry, innovative surf photography, films, and the local production of "custom" surfboards, clothing and social organization.² Surfing's semiotic objects directly express the "hardcore" surfing aesthetic and a general resistance to the contradictions posed by capitalist culture and its culturally restrictive temporal order.³ The message on a popular T-shirt reads "Real surfers don't have real jobs". A bumper sticker says, "I'd rather be surfing". Everyday, surfers around the world make conscious choices to organize schedules around ocean swells and tides, relegating other social responsibilities to a secondary priority in order to go surfing amidst the ocean's waves.

Surfing culture and performative activity has been studied infrequently outside of surfing's own circles of representation. There has been a surge of a new reflexive awareness by surfers of themselves as a subculture. This indigenous conceptualization is evidenced in the appearance of recent surfing histories written by surfers, artfully edited surf magazines like *Surfer* and *Surfing*, and the development of "high performance" surfing videos available in all surf shops and many video stores. Despite these developments, surfing has been lightly treated in the sociology and anthropology of sport (c.f. Finney, 1959, a, b; 1960; Irwin, 1973; Lane, 1984; Scures, 1986).

A semiotics of sport has been suggested by Kovecses (1976, 1979) that would explore sport as local domains constituted by specific activities performed at a distinct level of being or reality (1979:535). Using Kovecses' categories of sports activities, surfing can be semiotically described as a *locomotion sport*, modeled on changing location or movement in the actual world, like running, swimming riding, and skiing. Also, surfing is an *aesthetic sport*, embodying a human desire to control the body under extreme conditions, such as gymnastics, figure-skating, diving, and synchronized swimming. My present analysis is an attempt to extend findings in the ethnography of sport, narrative semiotics, verbal folkloric performance, and the semiotics of the cinema in a direction that aligns them with an analysis of some dimensions of surfing cultural performance.

Surfing's iconic wave dance

The artistic performative act of surfing along and *with* a moving wave is most often described by practitioners by reference to *free flight* or a *radical dance* to and directly with a natural energy form. Contemporary surfboards, six feet long and using three fins instead of one, are built to become extensions of the body and mind, responsive to the slightest thought and movement of the rider, allowing an unprecedented freedom of movement on and with the wave.

Dance is the pure expression of internal states, an organic unity between man and nature that is mediated by cultural processes (c.f. Spencer, 1985). Surfing prowess consists of the surfer's ability to instantaneously interpret a natural aesthetic sign system: a breaking wave. Interpretation is translated into movement.⁴ A wave's ride by a proficient surfer can be studied using *narrative*

semiotics such as Genette proposes (1982). The trajectory of the ride is constituted by the surfer's *improvised rhythmicity* and dance along the moving wave which forms a narrative field. The surfer's act of dynamic performative semiosis as he or she composes an iconic narrative with the wave involves the use of distinctive temporal strategies. Genette (1982:33) argues that oral narratives, cinematic narratives, and here I suggest surfing's corporeal narratives, are characterized by double temporal sequences: story time and narrative time. Christian Metz (1974:18) also describes narrative as a system of temporal transformations that creates a sequence of signifiers that has a certain duration. Metz writes:

A beginning and an ending—that is to say, the narrative is a *temporal sequence*. A doubly temporal sequence, one must hasten to specify: There is the time of the thing told and the time of the telling (the time of the significate and the time of the signifier). . . . More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to *invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme*. (italics mine)

The act of surfing with a moving ocean wave is an *iconic narrative invention* that aligns the surfer's performative time scheme in terms of the moving wave's time scheme.⁵ Surfing's iconic performance is created through the surfer's embodied use of the temporal strategies of *prolepsis*, the act of invoking a future state as if it exists now (Genette, 1980:67–79), and *analepsis*, the act of invoking past experience as if existing in the present moment (Genette, 1980:48–67). The surfer's embodiment of inventive narrative anachronies in unison with the constantly changing temporality of the aesthetic field of the wave creates the unique stylistic performance of surfing. The surfer's bodily expressed temporal strategies artfully accomplish what Greimas and Courtès term the "spatio-temporal localization" of the surfer's narrative progression along the wave's trajectory.⁶

Plate 1 shows a surfer surfing a wave at Black's Beach in La Jolla, California. The ride can be analyzed as a narrative progression accomplished by the rider's series of temporal performative strategies. At the beginning of the surfing sequence the surfer *takes off* on the wave. S/He employs perceptive prolepsis and analepsis to unify past surfing experience, present immediate interpretation, and projections of possible future unfoldings of the wave based on a reading of natural signs, such as the wave's speed, shape, degree of breaking angle, steepness, and local contingencies, like other



surfers on the wave or in the wave path. The surfer dances *with* the wave in a state of what Heidegger (1962:324) calls "anticipatory resoluteness" (past, present, future are unified). Manoeuvres and stylistic improvisations are accomplished in synchrony with the wave's movements, linked together artfully to create a completed narrative or a spatio-temporally synchronized "radical ride"—e.g. a skilled *cut-back* is executed at the precise moment when the wave's speed begins to slacken. A *tube ride* is achieved by riding as far back as possible in the breaking wave. An *off the lip* manoeuvre is carried out just as the breaking lip comes down. Contemporary "radical" surfing is the result of the surfer "pushing the limits" of performance while achieving semiotic synchrony with the wave's flow as it is perceived and interpreted by the wave rider. Surfing's distinctive stylistic corpus consists of what Bakhtin (c.f. Ivanov, 1973:311) calls "body signs" that are codified movements and evocative gestures produced in response to and in synchrony with the perception of the moving and changing energy field that is an ocean wave.⁷ Surfers' sociolectal categorizations of these movements include the terms *bottom turns*, *tube riding*, *trimming*, *rebounding off of the lip*, *snap back*, *vertical re-entry*, *S-turning*, *speed skating*, *Schralping*, *getting air*, and *floaters*.

Susanne Langer (1948:138) has argued for a semiotic theory of performance rather than a merely pragmatic theory when we view natural rituals such as North American Indian rain dances. Like rain dancing where the dancer dances *with* the rain, the surfer surfs *with* the ocean wave, reading the wave's movements semiotically and improvising a dance narrative in synchrony with that reading. What Hornby (1986:51) calls "the ceremony within the play" is carried out by the surfer, in spite of serious physical hardship, in order to achieve a meaningful order and understanding of humanity's balance with natural life.

Surfing's folkloric verbal and written artistry

Surfing culture's expressive language has evolved locally and globally primarily as a means of communicating and articulating the pure, direct experience of riding waves. The fundamental surfing experience is a silent dialogue or "monologue" (c.f. Cohen, 1985) between surfer and the moving wave. Surfing's cultural language has served to create a basic "*phatic communion*" (Malinowski, 1956) or "*phatic intention*" (Greimas and Courtès, 1982:231) by which intersubjective cohesion, solidarity, and confirmation is built between surfers communicating the fundamental wave riding experience and its myriad social inflorescences.

Surfing's artistic verbal performances are animated social events utilizing a full range of iconic words and gestures that create an instantaneous, verbalized reality. These iconic gestures and expressions were originally modeled and adapted by Californian and Australian surfers from the traditional Hawaiian surfing vocabulary introduced by Duke Kahanamouku and others in the 1920's. Expressions like *Kahuna* (a surf deity), *haole* (a non-Hawaiian), and *paipo* (a short surfboard) were intertwined with classic Hawaiian surfing styles, hand gestures and philosophies. Modern and post-modern surfers since the 1950's have developed sophisticated verbal performances that have been influenced by the appearance of surfing magazines, surf films, and surf music. These have been productive of a global surfing linguistic system that includes terms like *gnarly*, *intense*, *shredding*, *schrapping*, and *stoked*, (which are descriptors of wave riding prowess). Hawaiian Pidgin-English expressions like *Howzit brah?*, *bruddha*, and *primo* have been quickly adapted by California surfing culture into vernacular surf jargon. "Valspeak", fashionable in the early 1980's, was a California simulation of hardcore surf-talk devised by "inland" teenage youth.⁸

Speech, linked by syntactical and grammatical relationships, composes and segments time. Surfing speech uses words and gestures to *cancel* and *break* the bonds of time. Surfing verbal artistry is composed to simulate the instantaneous and integral surfing experience, where time becomes unified and is effectively cancelled. "Time stops when you are in the tube" is an often repeated surfer slogan. Leslie Kane (1984:105-131) has described how Samuel Beckett used language to cancel time by creating special "simulations of the instantaneous" by slipping and shifting tenses, using the infinitive which defies tense, and employing a "nonprogressional repetition" of dialogic words. In a similar manner, surfing culture uses the nonprogressional repetition of ecstatic adjectives and expletives in phatic communication. In taped conversations like the following, surfers simulate the obliteration of the word and time in communicating instantaneous surfing experience. Verbal folklore and iconic hand gestures signifying the waves' and surfers' movements formulate a linguistic subcultural dialect:

- (1) Oz: Howzit? How are the waves, brah? (Uses Hawaiian "shaka" hand gesture: little finger and thumb extended on right hand.)
- (2) Richo: Blown-out now, but ya *shoulda* been here an hour
- (3) ago!
- (4) Oz: Offshore barrels?
- (5) Richo: *Right!* The waves were nectar! *Awesome!* Total
- (6) barrels! (Uses hand gestures to mimic circular shape of a wave.)
- (7) I drove to the bottom of this *perfect* six-foot face,
- (8) threw an S-turn, and got *totally* tubed! (Hand gestures create S-motion and then a circular wave shape.)
- (9) Oz: *Intense!*
- (10) Richo: It was *awesome* out there! Yes, I'm *stoked*, dude!

Deborah Tannen (1984:30-32) defines a "high involvement" conversational style as characterized by an enhanced conversational flow expressive of a strong degree of involvement or rapport. A high involvement style consists of features such as (1) highly personal topics; (2) a fast pacing of speech, turn taking, and participatory listenership; (3) dramatic narrative strategies; (4) highly expressive paralinguistics such as expressive phonology, marked pitch and amplitude shifts, and marked voice quality. The surfer conversants in the transcript display a high involvement style of speech typical of much surfing speech genres. Topical

choice is organized around direct and personal experiential contours. Speech pacing is very fast, faster than average Californian speech rates. Conversational turn taking (c.f. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974: 696-735) is rapid, with a minimum of inter-turn pauses or gaps of silence. There is a high degree of participatory listenership in the form of rapt attention, mutual orientation, and concentrated gaze (c.f. Goodwin, 1981:55-93). Narrative strategies consist of iconic descriptions of the surfing narrative program itself (7-8), and use of indexical words charged with contextually specific meaning. Both surfers employ colorful expressive phonology in their marked intonations of expressions like "*Awesome!*," "*totally!*," and "*stoked!*" Marked use of hand gestures function as iconizations of the changing, tumultuous wave form itself.⁹

Elizabeth Fine (1984) describes a "performance-centered text" as an intersemiotic translation of indigenous performance into verbal, printed, or filmic media. Complete studies of surfing communicative performance require adequate reference to the experiential contours underlying both verbal and gestural communicative forms. The translation of member's tacit meanings into analytical representations by the ethnosemiotican requires detailed ethnographic observation. Surfing verbal folkloric artistry is rooted in surfers' social membership in surfing's technical, esoteric, but nonetheless natural language community (c.f. Garfinkel, Lynch, and Livingston, 1981:131-158).

Surfing folklore is also expressed in written form through the medium of contemporary surfing periodicals, magazines, and a recently emerging genre of surfing novels. Surfing monthly magazines such as *Surfer* and *Surfing* in the United States, and *Surfing World* and *Tracks* in Australia create written textual representations of surfing experience and culture by surfers, for surfers. [See Plate 2] Surfing instructional manuals like Gary Filosa's (1977) *The Surfer's Almanac* and George Orbelian's (1984) *Essential Surfing* present detailed written instructions on the technicalities of surfing performance. Surfing novels such as *Surfing in Hawaii: A Personal Memoir* by Desmond Muirhead, *Paunalu* by Rustom Calisch and *The Impact Zone* by Ray Maloney await semiotic analysis in terms of how narrative strategies such as discursive figurativization and iconization (c.f. Greimas and Courtès, 1982:118-120, 147-148) are used by surfer writers to produce the "referential illusion" of direct surfing experience (c.f. Barthes, 1975:237-272).

Surfing film, photography, and music as iconic representations

All filmic art thrives on the perennial tension between illusionism and reflexivity (Stam, 1985:1-27); between what Andre Bazin calls "phenomenological integrity" (1971:52) and what Christian Metz describes as the state of all filmic images and meanings being mediated by signification (Metz, 1974). This semiotic tension between the unmediated sensation of the filmic image as direct model of the world and the filmmaker's imposed cinematic language creates a signified "illusion of reality." Surfing films, beginning with Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer* (1966), McGillivray and Freeman's *Five Summer Stories* (1972), the 1978 classic *Free Ride* made by Bill Delaney, and Bob and Ron Condon's *Shock Waves* (1987), have utilized a distinctive filmic semiosis, narrativity, and conceptualization. Surfing films' semiotic constructions have distinctively confronted film's perennial tension between unfettered realism and composed representation. Surf filmmakers have innovated new filmic techniques whereby the essence of the surfing act is conceptualized and made into a filmic event that involves and teaches the hardcore surfing audi-

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ence. The best surf filmmaking transcends mere recording of surfers riding waves from the perspective of a stationary camera on the beach. "Radical surf film" as a film genre has innovated original filmic approaches that allow the cameraperson and camera to capture and present the full variety of perspectives and experiences of the surfer in the water.



Plate 3. Surfing cinematography and the performance-centered view.

A difference exists between surfing films and the new wave of surfing videos now on the commercial market. Generally, surf films are cinematic conceptualizations that create a guided experience that highly involves the viewer. In the last five years surfing cinematographers and photographers such as Bob and Ron Condon, Don King, and many others have innovated new techniques to represent the surfing art on film in a manner that captures a performance-centered view. Pole-cam photography uses poles of 3, 5, or 8 feet and achieves the vantage point of a surfer who has paddled up the face of the wave and turned around just as the other surfer is launched into the air by the wave. Split-wave photography provides a simultaneous view above and below the water line. The jet-camera which is used on a jet-ski moving in the surf line behind the moving surfer achieves the perspective of someone riding a wave below and behind the other surfer. The new surf videos have up until now utilized an "on the beach" camera perspective only. The aim of surf films is to deeply involve the audience in the act of surfing. This filmic involvement corresponds to what Lotman has called an "aesthetics of identity" (1976:408-419). Good surf film encourages *iconic reception* and *participation* by the hardcore surfing audience. In the words of Bob Condon, filmmaker/producer of the new surf film *Shock Waves: The New Art of Surfing*, the intent of his film is to:

... get the people in the seats to throw their turn when the rider does, and to get people leaning for a bottom turn and pushing back in their seats for a cutback. (*Surfing Magazine*, May 1987:88).

This type of audience perception in which the audience immediately transfers the perception into movements of their own bodies has been described by ethnochoreologist Moira Szentpál (1984:6-8), as "perception from body-to-body." This active perception can be observed at public screenings of "hardcore" surf films to contemporary surfing audiences, where the participating audience of surfers hoots and screams their approval of and immersion in the wave riding that is unfolding on the screen. The surf film

audience typically move their bodies in unison with the surfers on the screen in a state of aesthetic identity. This audience reaction is comparable to Pfeleiderer and Lutze's (1985:13) observations of contemporary Hindi film aesthetics. Hindi films are not based on cognition but on *recognition* of mythic cultural themes. The audience knows what to expect: he/she is *im bilde*, "in the picture."

Various messages are usually communicated through filmic juxtaposition and editing, messages like goodwill in the water, ecological awareness, the possibility of searching for and finding the perfect wave, bemused sarcasm towards *grommets* (novices) and non-surfing cultures, etc. But the overarching message is always the centrality of the surfing experience. Narrative structure often follows what de Certeau (1986:137-149) has called a "circular exodus" in his description of the literary travel genre exemplified by Jules-Verne. In surf film narrative, often the surfer traveler circumnavigates the globe in search of perfect waves returning to the point of departure bearing new experiences and knowledge. Surfing films' narratives often possess an "order of knowledge" that is circular in structure. Surf film attempts to manifest the *perceptible order and distinctive rhythm* of serious surfing lifestyles, practice and experience to hardcore receptive surfing audiences.

Plate 10. Surfing's iconic progression.

In most surf films, contemporary surf music, with electric chord changes iconically resembling interpreted wave rhythms and surfing styles, is composed and overlaid onto the film. Surf music creates a "secondary modeling system" (Sebeok, 1976:23) that is chosen to guide the viewer's perception. Surf music was made popular in the sixties by bands such as Aki ALeong and the Nobles, Dick Dale and the Del-Tones, the Ventures, the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean and others. Contemporary surf music from surf bands like The Surf Punks, Lawndale, Evasions, and the Surf Raiders, while not enjoying such commercially homogeneous sounds as the sixties bands, is a synthesis of new wave, punk, and instrumental jazz music arranged to create a simulated background for the wave riding experience in the 1980's.

Conclusion: Surfing's alternative cultural rhythmicity

Surfers as a folk culture share a distinctive cultural semiosis that is constituted by a distinctly alternative cultural rhythmicity or temporal order. Surfer's *cultural time-sense* is composed by a detailed alignment with the moods and temperaments of the ocean, its swells, waves, tides, and other movements. Serious "hardcore"

surfers show great innovation in creating alternative lifestyles, expressive forms, and careers that produce sufficient temporal flexibility for getting to the beach and practicing their art. Surfing's forms of wave dance, verbal and written performance, and cinematic representations signify an iconic progression in modern surfing culture that serve as guideposts for the sociosemiotician who attempts to describe this unique human cultural activity.

NOTES

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¹Such an intertwining of member's cultural categories and semiotic analysis has been variously described as "ethnosemiotics" (MacCannell and MacCannell, 1982:68-83; Greimas, 1987:214-221); and "sociosemiotics" (Greimas and Courtès, 1982:302-304; Jules-Rosette, 1986, Gottdiener and Lagopolous, 1986). Similar social science developments include Tedlock's (1979) "dialogical anthropology"; and ethnomethodology's "unique adequacy of methods" (Garfinkel, 1985).

²Greimas (Greimas 1987:186; Greimas and Courtès, 1982:301-302) defines a *sociolect* as a form of "society as signification" or a sub-language indigenous to a linguistic community that forms the specific way, distinctive for each cultural group, of interpreting and assuming both the collective semantic universe and the individual semantic universe (i.e. how each social group defines what it means by culture and nature, life and death, etc.).

³Hargreaves (1986) and Guttman (1986) both present arresting analyses of modern sport as simultaneously promoting strategies for emancipation from bourgeois hegemony and functioning as mediated spectatorship that reproduces class based power relations within societies.

⁴Fellner (1985:18) describes the movement genre of mimic performance as the point where dance becomes a personal, silent narrative. Surfing's iconic dance is a similar silent, solo art set to a natural narrative composed by the dialogue between the ocean's energy forms (the wave) and the individual kinetic artist (the surfer). Marcel Mauss (1987:111), though, claims that the point where dance becomes narrative remains forever unclear.

⁵Umberto Eco (1976:245) describes semiotic invention as a "mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose." Surfers see waves as an expressive, material continuum where others see only a moving ocean.

⁶Greimas and Courtès (1982:182) describe "spatio-temporal localization" as an interpretive act that "consists in interpreting every presupposed narrative program as anterior and every presupposing narrative program as posterior."

⁷In a way similar to Japanese swordfighting's principle of "Iai-Do," proficient surfing depends on the surfer's cultivation of a purposeful will: a will that is at

once devoid of fear and the expectation of failure (Warner and Draeger, 1982:96). Therefore, as in Iai-Do, the physical positions of the surfer's body represent and signify a flow of physical action in fulfillment of a portion of life's natural functions: the flexibility of the mind united with the body. This flexibility allows the exponent to harmonize physically and mentally with nature and fellow humans. ⁸"Valspeak" was a sociolect developed by "Valley Girls" in San Fernando, California and was popularized by the media and singer Moon Zappa's song "Valley Girls" in 1983. Valspeak's dialect is traceable to California surf culture's adoption of Hawaiian Pidgin-English encountered by traveling surfers. The cultural permeation of Valspeak can be seen even in English academic culture as evidenced by Gavin Ewart's poem that appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* (11 February 1983, No. 4, 167).

Love in a Valley

(Valkyrie's Valspeak in Awesome Valhalla)
I useta think Wotan was vicious
in all that gear, a real soc, a mega hunk

We flew high, a bitchen sesh,
it was radical!

Those pointy things on his helmet
were truly gnarly, the Heinies were
tubular.
And the Lowies.

Totally!

The bud was caj
we scarfed out. It was hot.
He maxed OK

OK!
How come he get so gross?
such a zod, so nerdy?
a shanky spaz?

OK!
Now I wanta say:

Gag me with a spoon!
What a geek!
You were mondo cool
but now you're grody
you make me barf
you're not buf any more. . .

Oh my God!
Kiss my tuna!
What a nerd!
Get away!
Your fat butt disgusts me!

⁹Surfers' gestural tropes and expressions signify by a process of ostentation. Eco (1976:110) defines ostentation as the most elementary form of performance that signifies by showing. Surfing's semiotization in conversation and in film involves displaying essential features of the surfing experience through ostensive gestures and filmic representation, rather than describing, explaining, or defining.

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