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# Surfing Films and Videos: Adolescent Fun, Alternative Lifestyle, Adventure Industry

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For 50 years, surfing culture has represented the style, taste, aspirations, and behavior of millions of middle- and working-class Western youth. Film has been a critical ingredient in this culture; some 200 surf films and dozens of videos have popularized surfing fashions, values, and mores. One can discern three genres of surf film: Hollywood “beach stories,” aficionado “pure” surfing films, and surfing industry videos. Hollywood and aficionados began producing surf films in the late 1950s as the first generation of post-Second World War baby boomers reached adolescence. Surfing symbolized carefree fun in a period of economic prosperity and political idealism, and Hollywood and aficionados captured it all on celluloid. Hollywood ceased production in the mid-1960s as surfing became an alternative, opt-out lifestyle known as soul-surfing. Aficionados, however, continued to film, making surf movies that resonated with the “subversive” philosophy of the counterculture and soul-surfing. Surf films essentially died along with the counterculture in the mid-1970s. A decade later, surfing industry manufacturers began to fill the void with videos. Today, surfing appears on video as a form of commercial adventure.

## **Hollywood, Surfing, and Adolescent Fun**

Surfers and filmmakers have always shared a close relationship. As early as 1898, Thomas Edison filmed surfboard riders at Hawaii’s Waikiki Beach. It was around this time that young European-American Hawaiians discovered the ancient Polynesian art, nearly a century after it was banned by Protestant missionaries. They considered surfing an “evil and immoral activity,” allowing as it did unrestrained intermingling of the sexes.<sup>1</sup> Although travelogues and documentaries about the Pacific almost invariably included surfing scenes in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was only in the 1950s that two distinct genres of surf film emerged: Hollywood-produced beach stories and aficionados-made “pure” surfing films.

It was hardly surprising, given its location, that Hollywood would attempt to capture the growing interest in surfing. Southern California, and the Malibu region in particular, was an early center of modern surfing. Indeed, the Malibu board derived its name from the beach where it first became popular. Many actors, screenwriters, and producers lived at Malibu, and some—like Johnny Weissmuller, Jackie Coogan, Richard Jaeckel, Peter Lawford, Gary Cooper, and James Arness—took up surfing. Surfers also became Hollywood actors. Duke Kahanamoku, the “father” of surfing and dual Olympic swimming gold medallist, played Polynesian, Aztec, and Indian chiefs for four decades in Hollywood films. One of his more notable performances was the Polynesian chief Ua Nuka (“Big Rain”) opposite John Wayne in the South Sea adventure *The Wake of the Red Witch* (1949). Kahanamoku also appeared in *Adventure* (1925), a Victor Fleming film partly based on Jack London’s novel *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911). During a visit to Hawaii, London wrote an eloquent description of surfing that appeared in the popular magazine *Woman’s Home Companion*. Leonard Lueras credits that 1907 article, which became a chapter in *The Cruise of the Shark*, with introducing Americans to surfing.<sup>2</sup> After the Second World War, Hollywood producers accepted surfing as an integral part of Pacific life. For example, lush Hawaiian vegetation and surfing are the backdrop when a white man (Louis Jourdan) marries the daughter (Debra Paget) of a South Sea island chief in *Bird of Paradise* (1951).

The advent of the 1950s Hollywood surf film genre began when Columbia Pictures recreated Frederick Kohner’s *Gidget* stories, originally published by Putnam Books. In the mid-1950s Kohner’s teenage daughter Kathy discovered a burgeoning surfing subculture while holidaying at Malibu. Kathy learned to surf and mixed with the local surfers, including Mickey Dora, Terry “Tubestreak” Tracey, Billy “Moondoggie” Bengston, and Bill Jensen. “Tubestreak” gave her the sobriquet “Gidget”—girl midget. Kathy regaled her author father with stories about life on Malibu beach and the surfers’ antics and pranks—the hidden surfboards, the disconnected distributor wires—of which she was often the “victim.” Starring Sandra Dee as Gidget and James Darren as Moondoggie, *Gidget* (1959) reproduced the idyllic fantasy lifestyle of California surfers and spawned the Hollywood surf film genre in American popular culture. Columbia followed the film’s success with two *Gidget* sequels, *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961) and *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963), as well as *Ride the Wild Surf* (1964).<sup>3</sup> American International Pictures produced five beach story films: *Beach Party* (1963), *Muscle Beach Party* and *Bikini Beach* (1964), and *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965). Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, and American Academy produced one each: *Surf Party* (1963), *Beach Ball* (1965), and *The Beach Girls and the Monster* (1965). All celebrated endless summer parties,<sup>4</sup> cars, surfing, youth, and girls. As the poster for *Muscle Beach Party* advised, “when 10,000 biceps go around 5,000 bikinis you know what’s gonna happen.” In addition to surfing and sexual attraction, the genre contained “melodrama” with teenage surfers and “greasers” battling each other in gang wars. In *Beach Blanket Bingo*, the surfers led by Frankie (Frankie Avalon) and Dee Dee (Annette Funicello) confront Eric Von Zipper’s (Harvey Lembeck) motorcycle gang; a highlight of *How to Stuff a*

*Wild Bikini* (Funicello, Dwayne Hickman, and Mickey Rooney) is “the wildest motorcycle race ever run.”

Hollywood beach stories were characteristically musical adventures that boosted the emergent popular surf music. Surfing writer Lee Wardlaw calculates that more than 800 surf bands recorded one song or more in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> A simple beat, uncomplicated lyrics, and easy harmonies characterized surf music<sup>6</sup> and complemented the simple plots of the surf films. Jan Berry (of Jan and Dean fame<sup>7</sup>) and Brian Wilson (Beach Boys<sup>8</sup>) wrote *Ride the Wild Surf*; the theme song for the movie of the same name:

In Hawaii there's a place known as Waimea Bay  
where the best surfers in the world come to stay  
and ride the wild surf they come to try  
to conquer those waves some 30 feet high.

Ride, ride, ride the wild surf  
ride, ride, ride the wild surf  
ride, ride, ride the wild surf  
gotta take that wild last ride.

*Beach Party* featured Dick Dale, the “father of surf music,” “king of the surf guitar,” and inventor of a surfers’ dance, “The Stomp.” *Beach Ball* included songs by The Supremes, The Four Seasons, and The Righteous Brothers; Stevie Wonder performed in *Muscle Beach Party*. For a few years the surf sound defined mainstream popular music in America.

Hollywood beach movies and surf music were, in Lueras’s words, “commercial monsters”<sup>9</sup> *Beach Party* (Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello) grossed \$3.5 million and set box office records nationwide; *Surfer’s Choice*, the first album produced by Dale and the Del-Tones, sold 75,000 copies in southern California in three months.<sup>10</sup> Both propelled surfing “into a state of mass consciousness”<sup>11</sup> and introduced a new style to American youth. Bleached blond hair and goatees, T-shirts and striped Pendleton shirts, narrow white Levi jeans and Ray-Ban sunglasses replaced greasy hair and pegger pants; “like wow,” “daddy-o,” and “strictly squaresville” became vogue phrases.

Paul Kent, an historian of popular music, says that the “preoccupation with surfing, cars, and girls, usually in that order, reflected middle class affluence and the freedom it offered.” It blended perfectly, he adds, “with the idealism of the Kennedy administration that had just taken office and the carefree sounds of the Beach Boys.” Southern Californian resident Renee Wexler agrees. She recalls the early 1960s as “a great time to be a teenager—it was fun.”<sup>12</sup> Surfing and the beach symbolized freedom, idealism, and fun, and Hollywood beach movies captured it all; the poster for *Bikini Beach* describes it as the place “where the girls are bare-ing...the guys are dar-ing and the surf’s rare-ing to go-go-go.”

Despite the popularity of its new genre, Hollywood abruptly ceased production of beach story films in the summer of 1965. Wardlaw argues that “surfing was just a fad, like Hula Hoops, Slinkys, or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and like all fads, it disappeared as quickly as it came.” He says that “kids forgot

about surfing and were ready for another fad to take its place."<sup>13</sup> Wardlaw's explanation, however, overlooks those critical social changes in the mid-1960s that transformed surfing's cultural meaning.

Andrew Milner describes the *Zeitgeist* of the period as a form of "apocalyptic hedonism"<sup>14</sup>; it evinces a strikingly different picture. On the one hand, "commodity cultures of affluence" produced a feverish lust for pleasure. Hollywood beach films helped satisfy that lust. On the other hand, feelings of normlessness arose from "the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods, at ever greater rates of turnover" and a "recurring apocalyptic motif" of nuclear war and environmental deterioration.<sup>15</sup> The apocalyptic motif engendered a debilitating and disorientating nihilism that accounts for the emergence of the counterculture and surfing's shift from a happy, fun activity into an opt-out lifestyle called soul-surfing.<sup>16</sup> Surfers became both subversives and outlaws, and as the social distance between surfers and the mainstream public widened, the market for films about carefree, fun-filled days at the beach vanished.

Surfing aficionados, however, never embraced the Hollywood genre. Pete Peterson, who doubled for Cliff Robertson (Moondoggie in the *Gidget* sequels), dismissed the technical proficiency of Hollywood producers by suggesting that "the surfing and the photography never really came up to what we were doing [even] in the 1930s."<sup>17</sup> Screenwriter Marc Rubel denounced Hollywood's philosophy, which he said reduced surfing to "total adolescent pastime." Among the older generation, he complained, surfing was much more: it was "something that kept us sane."<sup>18</sup> Surfer, screenwriter, and director John Milius attempted to break the mold and "probe the depths of something I really loved" in *Big Wednesday* (1978). But critics rejected his "serious statement" and low box office returns confirmed that the public did not want "pure" surf films, however technically sophisticated.

Hollywood also came under criticism for exploiting surfer extras and doubles. Mickey Dora and Phil Edwards doubled for James Darren (Moondoggie), and Mickey Munoz, in wig and bikini, appeared for Sandra Dee (*Gidget*) in the original *Gidget*; Dora, Edwards and Greg Noll rode for Fabian Forte (Jody Wallis), Tab Hunter ("Steamer Lane"), and James Mitchum ("Eskimo") respectively in *Ride the Wild Surf*; David Nuuhiwa surfed for Michael Sarrazin in *The Sweet Ride* (1967); Ian Cairns, Bill Hamilton, and Peter Townend doubled in *Big Wednesday*, Shaun Tomson appeared in *Surf II* (1983); Darrick Doemer performed the horrendous wipeout at Waimea Bay (Bells Beach, Australia) for Patrick Swayze (Bohdi) in *Point Break* (1991). Rubel charged Hollywood producers with "treat[ing] surfers about as well as...the American Indian."<sup>19</sup> A cynical, embittered Mickey Dora was even more scathing, with comments that raised the specter of anti-Semitism: "The jews came down to the beach, they shoot their movie, sell it to the kikes and they all make a pile of money. I didn't [get paid]. You know what plagiarism is? Well, that's what it was all the way through. It's the same deal for the surfers now."<sup>20</sup>

## “Pure” Surf Films: From Innocence to Subversion

“Pure” surfing films focused on wave locations, board designs, riding styles, and cultural trends. While Californian surfers, including Doc Ball, John Larronde, and Don James, began filming themselves for “home movies” in the 1930s, commercial production only began in the 1950s. By the end of that decade, however, thousands of enthusiasts were watching “pure” movies on the private club and public hall circuit.

Bud Browne was the first serious producer. A lifeguard at Venice Beach, teacher, diver, and surfer, he began filming surfers in 16mm color in the late 1940s. In 1953, at the invitation of fellow teacher and surfer Dave Heiser, Browne showed *Hawaiian Surfing Movie* to an audience of 500 at the Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica.<sup>21</sup> Over the next two decades Browne produced more than a dozen films.<sup>22</sup> Paul Holmes credits him with pioneering water cinematography by putting his 16mm movie camera inside a waterproof rubber bag; Lueras nominates Browne’s *Surf Down Under* (1958) as the “first truly international surf film.”<sup>23</sup>

Browne inspired others including big-wave rider and southern California lifeguard Greg Noll and Australian Bob Evans. A member of an American lifeguard team that introduced the Malibu surfboard to Australia during a tour there in 1956,<sup>24</sup> Noll “thought it would be fun to show everybody back home what Australian surf looked like,” and so he took along a movie camera.<sup>25</sup> Noll showed this film in high school auditoriums and made a good profit, charging eager viewers a dollar each.<sup>26</sup> In 1958, Noll spent several months in Mazatlan, Mexico, and produced another film. He repeated the exercise elsewhere; all his films were entitled *Search for Surf*: Evans and Browne developed a rapport during the latter’s visit to Australia in 1958. Evans screened Browne’s movies at surf lifesaving clubs in Sydney before producing over a dozen himself.<sup>27</sup> Noll and Evans influenced a second generation of producers including Bruce Brown,<sup>28</sup> Alby Falzon,<sup>29</sup> David Sumpter,<sup>30</sup> Rodney Sumpter,<sup>31</sup> and Paul Witzig.<sup>32</sup> Other early producers included John Severson,<sup>33</sup> Jim Freeman,<sup>34</sup> Dale Davis,<sup>35</sup> Walt Phillips,<sup>36</sup> and Greg MacGillivray.<sup>37</sup>

Like Hollywood producers, aficionados discovered the “formula” for making successful surf films. According to producer David Elfick, good films featured “hot” surfers riding perfect waves in either the surf mecca of Hawaii or new, exotic locations such as Bali or Africa; they incorporated “local color and the excitement of young guys traveling”; and they included a “sports film type commentary.”<sup>38</sup>

In the early 1960s, Hollywood and aficionado productions both conveyed the prevailing mood among youth and their search for freedom and fun. Hence, the *Zeitgeist* alone does not explain either the success of “pure” surf films or why Hollywood, with its economic muscle, did not simply appropriate the “pure” genre. In order to ensure financial viability, Hollywood, with its elaborate sets, specialized and hierarchial labor systems, multiple cameras, expensive developing techniques, sophisticated advertising, and complex distribution networks, had to

appeal to universal audiences. Hollywood thus focused on beach life, which it correctly saw as more “accessible” to both sexes and a wider age range. In short, the big Hollywood film houses were too cumbersome and inflexible to satisfy relatively small subcultures.

“Pure” surf movies catered primarily to young male surfers and their preference for “authentic” cultural objects and experiences. Producers of these films employed small-scale, flexible production techniques—they had little equipment, low overhead, and showed their films in churches, schools, and public halls. Browne, for example, introduced his films from the stage, rushed “to the projection room to join the operator of an arc projector,” and watched the screen with “a microphone in hand and a tape player with music.” He recalls advertising his early films with “handmade posters nailed to telephone poles near popular surf spots.”<sup>39</sup> These simple techniques allowed producers to respond quickly to consumer dictates, and rapid changes in style and taste, and to exploit gaps in the market.

Many captains of the contemporary surfing industry earned livelihoods as film producers while pursuing their surfing lifestyles. In the process, they transformed themselves into entrepreneurs.<sup>40</sup> Several producers of “pure” surf movies in the 1960s, such as John Severson, Bob Evans, Alby Falzon, and David Elfick, also took this route, progressing from artisan filmmakers to media entrepreneurs.

Severson, a high school art instructor drafted into the army and posted to Hawaii, shot 16mm movies with a Keystone camera and in 1957 spliced several bits of film together under the title *Surf*. The following year Severson made *Surf Safari*, which he claims was “the first [surf] film with continuity, a score, sound effects, animation, and optical effects.”<sup>41</sup> In 1960 Severson produced a black and white promotional booklet *The Surfer* to promote his movies. It proved so popular that Severson developed the booklet into a quarterly (then bimonthly and now monthly) magazine called *Surfer*.<sup>42</sup> By 1970 *Surfer* had a paid monthly circulation of 100,000.<sup>43</sup> Bob Evans, Alby Falzon, and David Elfick followed similar paths in Australia launching *Surfing World* and *Tracks* respectively. Surfing magazines became the principal means for promoting surf movies.

Structurally, the early “pure” surf movies were little different than Hollywood’s “prefab shit...complete with Mom, Dad, and the teenagers who sounded like they stole their scripts from [the kindergarten television series] *Play School*.”<sup>44</sup> Joan Ellis’ review of Bruce Brown’s *The Endless Summer II* (1994) aptly summarizes the structural quality of the whole genre:

[Surfers Pat and Wingnut] move from beach to beach through a worldwide network of passionate, eccentric surfers who welcome them as one more reason to jump on their boards. All this is spellbinding enough to hold an audience for an hour, but the connective tissue of the film stretches it to almost two and is wretchedly thin. The film fairly screams for some verbal commentary...Instead, sophomoric visual jokes and dialogue...fill the empty spaces. Whenever our heroes are on land they are embarrassing caricatures of the sunbaked airhead. Pat walks through the land segments cackling as if his thumb is stuck in a wall socket. Perhaps it was an act of mercy to withhold commentary after all.<sup>45</sup>

Visually, the early movies were just as bad. Bruce Brown met Greg Noll during filming in Hawaii and asked him what f-stop he was using. "What's that?" Noll queried. When Brown informed him that the f-stop referred to the lens setting, Noll admitted, "I don't know. The guy at the store where I bought the camera set it up for me and I just left it there!"<sup>46</sup> It wasn't until the 1970s that a new generation, including Greg MacGillivray and Jim Freeman,<sup>47</sup> George Greenough,<sup>48</sup> and Dick Hoole and Jack McCoy,<sup>49</sup> committed themselves to visual quality.

It is important, however, not to overemphasize visual and structural quality. Like the Internet and punk rock "fanzines," "pure" surf films functioned primarily as forms of communication: they "explain[ed] surfing and surfers to themselves"; they showed different riding styles in Australia, California, and Hawaii; they gave surfers a reason to congregate on land; and they were critical to diffusing surfing around the world.<sup>50</sup> Peter Wilson claims that Bob Evan's *Family Free* (1971), Alby Falzon and Dave Elfick's *The Morning of the Earth* (1972), and Dick Hoole and Jack McCoy's *In Search of Tubular Swells* (1977) introduced surfers to Indonesia.<sup>51</sup>

Surfers behaved like "animals" during the films, flipping bottle-tops, throwing ice cream cones, rolling cans down the aisles, and tearing up seats. Sonny Vardeman vividly remembers the reaction to one screening of Nell's *Search for Surf*.

Greg rented the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, which held about 5000 people. We had a pressure-packed, raucous crowd...Greg had the music going before the film started. People got even more worked up. Prior to the film, Greg would usually go up on stage, introduce himself and tell about where the film was taken. This evening, the crowd was just going crazy, and Greg was up on stage, getting pelted by beer and soft-drink caps. He finally retreated and turned on the film and...everyone settled down.<sup>52</sup>

Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer* (1964) marks a turning point in the content of "pure" surfing films.<sup>53</sup> Still regarded by some as "the" surf movie, *The Endless Summer* follows two Californian surfers as they travel around the world in search of the perfect wave. Encouraged by the film's popularity, Brown asked several Hollywood and New York companies to distribute it on the commercial circuit. They refused, claiming that it "would wipe out in any city farther than 10 miles from a beach." To prove them wrong, Brown screened his film in Wichita, Kansas, in mid-winter, and for two weeks more people filed through the doors in Wichita to watch *The Endless Summer* than either *The Great Race* or *My Fair Lady*. Brown enlarged the film to 35mm and sold it worldwide. It grossed \$8 million.<sup>54</sup> The commercial cinemas learned their lesson; 30 years later they snatched up Brown's *The Endless Summer II*.

*The Endless Summer* was the ultimate "surfari" and unlike Hollywood films was "potentially subversive." Surfing was no longer innocent adolescent fun. As surfer journalist Damien Lovelock explains, surfing had become "the real thing" in alternative lifestyles: surfers "neither worked nor worried," they "just surfed and traveled."<sup>55</sup>

In the second half of the 1960s, “pure” surf films increasingly reflected counterculture themes. Paul Witzig led the way. His trilogy, *Hot Generation* (1967), *Evolution* (1969), and *Sea of Joy* (1971), together with John Severson’s *Pacific Vibrations* (1970) and Alby Falzon and Dave Elfick’s *The Morning of the Earth* (1972), are the classic visual records of soul-surfing with their “images of communal living, country farms, vegetarianism, ritualistic inhalation of the herb, yoga, meditation, and the majestic poetry of uncrowded light and space.”<sup>56</sup>

Like the Hollywood beach stories, music was an essential ingredient of counterculture “pure” surf movies. But the music was more sophisticated, the lyrics more philosophical. Compare the words of Jan and Dean’s “Ride the Wild Surf” above to those of “The Morning of the Earth,” G. Wayne Thomas’ title song for Falzon and Elfick’s movie of the same name:

The forces of the universe and the elements of space  
conjured up your being, your sight, your time, your shape  
you were created with all the beauty they could call  
and earth you surely are the measure of them all.

Your rocks all turned to gold and your tidying stones to jewels  
and when this world and mists had cleared you stood so pure  
and placed so carefully each and every thing that belonged  
earth you were magnificent through the pain of being born.

It was the morning of the earth  
it was the morning of the earth.

Counterculture “pure” surf movies didn’t seduce all surfers. Former world champion, Australian Bernard “Midget” Farrelly accused film (and magazine) producers of betraying the sport. Surfing movies and magazines, he said, “tried to make surfing into a cult,” but they “didn’t really care much about surfing.”<sup>57</sup> The promotion of drug culture (*Hot Generation*, for example, shows Nat Young and Wayne Lynch “ritualistically inhaling the herb”) particularly concerned Farrelly. He charges surf film producers with conveying “a bum set of values” and misleading many people, some of whom even “died on the needle.”<sup>58</sup>

There is almost unanimous agreement that “pure” surf films expressed the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. As Young says of *The Morning of the Earth*, it “captured the feelings of the period with an emphasis on alternative lifestyles, the taking of psychedelic drugs, and letting tomorrow’s problems take care of themselves. It was an approach that appealed to nearly every surfer.”<sup>59</sup> But did scenes of surfers taking drugs adversely influence surfing culture? Yes, says Farrelly; no, says journalist Nick Carroll. Surfing, Carroll claims, were no different than other youth, and the media “can’t have pushed it along *that* much.”<sup>60</sup>

Historians must be wary of “total pictures.” Films invariably offer audiences multiple, inconsistent, and contradictory images. Interpretations constantly shift, and to blame surfing’s drug culture solely on films and magazines is as deterministic and reductionist as rejecting all influence.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the producers of “pure” surf films were perspicacious individuals who recognized that the 1960s was an era of profound change, and they simultaneously presented *and* stimulated those



changes. While they recognized that the *Zeitgeist* encouraged individuals to pursue their own styles and tastes, they also implicitly knew that their careers as filmmakers depended upon staying up with, and ahead of, trends, including recreational drugs. The evidence presented here suggests that films popularized and helped determine all aspects of surfing culture.

## Home Surfing Videos: Advertising Adventure

“Pure” surf films died along with the counterculture and soul-surfing. Carroll argues that “theaters weren’t interested, the veteran filmmakers were growing older, and their proteges saw little point in spending years of work on something that, if they were lucky, might break even.”<sup>62</sup> But he ignores four facts. First, most surf films are produced on small budgets in months—sometimes weeks—rather than years. Second, Hollywood resumed production of surf movies and reincorporated surfing into adolescent theme films in the late 1970s after soul-surfing declined. “Revisionist” beach party movies, such as *Big Wednesday*<sup>63</sup> and *California Dreaming* (1978), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Surf II* (1983), *Surf Nazis Must Die* (1987), *Point Break* (1991), and *Surf Ninjas* (1993), contain more drama and less romance and music than the first generation. Admittedly, neither critics nor surfers have shown much enthusiasm for these productions. Third, surfing itself changed diction in the late 1970s with the emergence of a professional circuit. Despite Carroll’s contention that Bill Delaney’s *Free Ride* (1978) “did for professional surfing what [*The Endless Summer*] did for surfing’s romantic face,”<sup>64</sup> most ordinary surfers accuse professionals of abandoning the hedonistic ideals of surfing. Nor has professional surfing assisted the surf film industry. The reasons are self-evident: professional contests are typically held in sloppy surf, uncondusive to spectacular riding, while the logic of competition means that surfers refrain from risky maneuvers that may cause them to fall and lose points.

Carroll also ignores the impact of the personal video recorder and the home video player on surf films. Cheap, small, easy to use recorders allow almost anyone to make surf videos, while the proliferation of home players provides the market. Surfboard, surf clothing, wetsuit, and accessory manufacturers identified videos as a cheap and effective way to advertise their products. In 1990, for example, Quicksilver signed a sponsorship deal with American Kelly Slater. (Since then Slater has won three world titles.) Quicksilver immediately produced the video *Kelly Slater in Black and White* (1991), which it sold for just \$10. Mostly the videos feature sponsored surfers (including active, retired, and semi-retired professionals) wearing/riding/using their sponsors’ products. Surfing industry manufacturers now “organize” film production.<sup>65</sup> Few independent producers survive; Taylor Steele is one of the exceptions.<sup>66</sup>

Manufacturers do not actually produce their own videos, nor do they subcontract or employ video companies in the traditional sense. Rather, they have established a special set of collaborative relations with surf film producers, which flatten traditional labor hierarchies and kindle innovation and flexibility. The marketing and sale of surf videos further illustrates the “cooperative” nature

of the industry: manufacturers' retail outlets sell all videos, even those which feature surfers sponsored by direct competitors and which advertise competitors' products.

From the home viewer's perspective, manufacturers' surf videos fall into one of two broad categories. The first consists of radical surfing maneuvers choreographed to music. Lueras' assessment of Scott Dittrich and Skip Smith's *A Fluid Drive* (1974)—a "hard core, rock 'n' roll presentation of surfing as primal drive"<sup>67</sup>—describes well this category. The second category features higher quality, more technically sophisticated visual images of waves and riders. Jack McCoy's productions for Billabong and Alby Falzon's *Can't Step Twice on the Same Piece of Water* (1992) are good examples of the latter. But both categories communicate cultural and technical trends and styles to devotees around the world; most importantly, they portray surfing as a form of modern adventure.

## Conclusion

Are surf films and videos historically significant? For surfing enthusiasts and historians of surfing the answer is a resounding yes. Films and videos affirm what it means to be a surfer. They are cultural artifacts that bring the legendary and the memorable to life. Bud Browne's *Locked In* (1964), for example, shows Greg Noll wiping-out on a 25-foot wave at Outside Pipeline (Hawaii). They provide a visual record of the past and connect the past to the present through personalities and events. Alby Falzon's *Crystal Voyager* (1973) records George Greenough's influence on the shape of short boards; Eric and Lowell Blum's *The Fantastic Plastic Machine* (1969) traces the development of one early style of short board. Both films offer surfers the chance to mediate the controversial "new era" debate.

In 1966 *Surfing World* (Australia) announced the dawn of a new era. According to staff writer John Witzig, the aesthetic grace and poise of the first period of modern surfing had been swept away by "the onslaught of impetuous youth" and replaced with aggression, power, and radical (creative) maneuvers on short boards.<sup>68</sup> Charting the new era were Australians Nat Young and Bob McTavish. Several months later Young won the third world surfing championships at San Diego, California. The question of the new era and Nat Young's status as the most creative surfer in the 1960s remains a source of contention, spurred on by the intense rivalry between Farrelly and Young. Farrelly decries the new era as a "falsehood of history"<sup>69</sup>; Young is ambiguous. In one place he says, boldly, "I won the '66 [world] championship as vanguard for the new era. The board I was riding was radically different. My approach...was going for more blatant direction changes and more radical maneuvers closer to the curl."<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere, however, doubt creeps in: "looking back on [the new era] I wonder how much was hype and how much was real progress."<sup>71</sup>

Paul Witzig's *Hot Generation* (1967) provides some answers. The film shows several surfers, including Farrelly, experimenting with new maneuvers and riding new parts of the wave. But there is no evidence of a revolution. On the contrary,

not even the best editing efforts can disguise the fact that, in the winter of 1966-67, Hawaiian surf got the better of Young's "radical maneuvers" and McTavish's short boards.

But how important are surf films and videos as social historical sources? Do poor quality, minority audiences, and sectional interests mitigate surf films and videos? Ellis makes the point that surfers are so "obsessed with physical thrills" that they ignore all else. While she concedes that such single-mindedness contains certain virtues, she also sees a "downside": "the thought that meeting one of them in any place other than under the curl of the wave holds all the promise of a conversation with a fish."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, one could argue that contemporary Hollywood's surreal portrayal of surfing has not assisted the social historian. *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a Vietnam War film, is a classic example. Surfing fanatic Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) orders Lance B. Johnson (Sam Bottoms), Mike from San Diego (Kerry Rossall), and Johnny from Malibu (Jerry Ross) into the surf while helicopter gunships raze an adjacent Vietnamese village. When, in an earlier scene, one of his men warns against surfing that part of the coast, Kilgore explodes, "Charlie don't surf." In *Point Break* the surfers sustain their thrill-seeking lifestyles by robbing banks while wearing face masks of United States presidents! Bodhi's (Patrick Swayze) rationalization is as fatuous as Kilgore's:

C'mon, think about it. This was never about money for us, it was about us against the system—the system that kills the human spirit. We stand for something. To those dead souls inching along the freeways in their metal coffins, we show them that the human spirit is still alive.

Yet, for all this, surf films and videos offer social historians useful visual images of the *Zeitgeist* experienced by Western youth. More importantly, they force social historians to ask questions about the social and economic impact of new forms of communication. Feelings of normlessness and apocalyptic fears pervaded Western youth in the mid-1960s. These feelings and fears contributed to the reorientation of surfing as a revolutionary opt-out lifestyle. Hollywood's interpretation of the beach scene became obsolete and it ceased mass production of surf movies. More flexible aficionados and small-scale producers, however, continued to make surf films for the niche surfing market. John Clarke et al. argue that the counterculture assisted capitalist production:

...the revolutions in lifestyle were a pure, simple, raging, commercial success...the counterculture explored, in its small scale artisan and vanguard capitalist forms of production and distribution, shifts in taste which the mass consumption chain-stores were too cumbersome, inflexible and over-capitalized to exploit.

They conclude that "when the trends settled down, the big commercial battalions moved in and mopped up."<sup>73</sup> But this is not true in surfing where consumption emphasizes distinctive, "authentic," tastes and appearances and where small, flexible, innovative, and trend-setting manufacturers still produce nearly all equipment and accessories, clothes, magazines, and films. "Small-scale artisan"

production was not the precursor of big capitalism but a distinctly new post-Fordist form.<sup>74</sup> Even mass produced video recorders and home video players and a steadily growing demand for videos have not enticed big capitalists to produce surfvideos. They are very much the domain of small producers who simultaneously cater for a niche market and help define the content of that market.

Surf films and videos are invaluable sources for historians of sport subcultures. Like all sources they have the potential to reveal aspects of the past and present. Of course, that potential depends upon how thoroughly social historians interrogate them and the type of questions they ask.

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1. Leonard Lueras, *Surfing: The Ultimate Pleasure* (New York: Workman International Publishing, 1984): 54.
  2. *Ibid.*, 68.
  3. Television followed suit, producing five different Gidget series over the next 20 years: *Gidget* (1965), *Gidget Grows Up* (1970), *Gidget Gets Married* (1972), *Gidget's Summer Reunion* (1985), and *The New Gidget* (1986).
  4. Hollywood also made other non-surfing teenage party films. American International Pictures, for example, produced *Pajama Party* (1964) and *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (1966). Many actors, including Annette Funicello (see below), Harvey Lembeck (see below), and Deborah Walley played in both. Walley played Gidget in *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* and started in *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini*.
  5. Lee Wardlaw, *Cowabunga* (New York: Avon Books, 1991): 52.
  6. Paul Kent, "Big Surf," *The BBC History of Pop* (London: BBC, 1992). Part nine of a 52-part series of audiotapes narrated by Allan Freeman.
  7. Best known for "Surf City" and "The Little Old Lady from Pasadena."
  8. Their surf song hits included "Surfin'," "Surfin' Safari," "Surfin' USA," "I Get Around," "Fun, Fun, Fun," and "California Girls."
  9. Lueras, *Surfing*, 119.
  10. Wardlaw, *Cowabunga*, 48.
  11. Lueras, *Surfing*, 119.
  12. Kent, "Big Surf".
  13. Wardlaw, *Cowabunga*, 52.
  14. Andrew Milner, "On the Beach: Apocalyptic Hedonism and the Origins of Postmodernism," in Ian Craven, *Australian Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 190-204. See also Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988).
  15. Millner, "On the Beach," 199.
  16. For elaboration see, Douglas Booth, "Ambiguities in Pleasure and Discipline," *Journal of Sport History*, 22:3 (1995): 189-206.
  17. Brian Gillogly, "Surfing Sunset and Vine," *Surfer*, 23:9 (September 1982): 57. Hollywood acknowledged the deficiency and later employed producers of "pure" surf movies (see below) such as Greg MacGillivray, Jim Freeman, Bud Browne, George Greenough, and Scott Dittrich as advisors, technical assistants, and assistant producers.
  18. *Ibid.*, 58.
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. Interview, *Tracks* (October 1975): 13.

21. "Surf movie pioneer," *Surfing World* (March 1963): 32; Gordon McClelland, "Scenes from the life and times of Bud Browne," *The Surfer's Journal*, 4:4 (1995): 36.
22. *Hawaiian Holiday* (1954), *Hawaiian Surfing Movie* (1955), *Trek to Makaha* (1956), *The Big Surf* (1957), *Surf Down Under* (1958), *Cat on a Hot Foam Board* (1959), *Surf Happy* (1960), *Spinning Boards* (1961), *Cavalcade of Surf* (1962), *Gun Ho* (1963), *Locked In* (1964), *Going Surfin'* (1973), *The New Going Surfin'* (1977), *Surfing the '50s* (1994).
23. Paul Holmes, "Surf Culture," in Nick Carroll, *The Next Wave* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991): 203; Lueras, *Surfing*, 150.
24. The Surf Life Saving Association of Australia invited the Americans to participate in its Queen's carnival to coincide with the Olympic Games in Melbourne. "Olympic surf men thrilled 70,000," *The Argus* (Melbourne) (November 26, 1956). Nat Young's *The History of Australian Surfing* (CBS/Fox, 1986) shows Noll and fellow team member Tommy Zahn riding Malibu boards in Australia. Hollywood actor Peter Lawford in fact took the first Malibu board to Australia in 1952, four years earlier than the lifeguard team, while filming for *Kangaroo*, an outback pioneer movie. However, Lawford did not actually ride his board in Australia. "History rewritten," *Tracks* (January 1996): 19; Nat Young, *A History of Surfing* (Sydney: Palm Beach Press, 1983): 88.
25. Greg Noll and Andrea Gabbard, *Da Bull: Life Over the Edge* (Bozeman, MT: Bangtail Press, 1989): 71.
26. *Ibid.*, 85.
27. Including, *Surf Trek to Hawaii* (1960), *Midget Goes Hawaiian* (1961), *Surfing the Southern Cross* (1962), *Hawaiian Thrills* (1963), *The Young Wave Hunters* (1964), *Long Way 'Round* (1965), *High on a Cool Wave* (1966), *The Way We Like It* (1967), *Splashdown* (1968), *Family Fret* (1971), *Drouyn* (1974).
28. *Slippery When Wet* (1958), *Surf Crazy* and *Barefoot Adventure* (1959), *Surfing Hollow Days* (1962), *Waterlogged* (1963).
29. *Morning of the Earth* (1972) co-produced with Dave Elfick, *Crystal Voyager* (1973), *Surfabout* (1974).
30. *On Any Morning* (1974).
31. *Freedom* (1970), *Oceans* (1971), *Hawaiian Safari* (1978).
32. *A Life in the Sun* (1966), *Hot Generation* (1967), *Evolution* (1969), *Animals* (1971), *Sea of Joy* (1971), *The Islands* (1972), *Rolling Home* (1974).
33. *Surf Safari* (1958), *Surf Fever* (1960), *Going My Wave* (1962), *Surf Classics* (1964).
34. *Let There Be Surf* and *Outside the Third Dimension* (1964).
35. *Strictly Hot* (1964), *Walk on the Wet Side* (1965), *A Place Called Malibu* and *Inside Out* (1966).
36. *The Waves* (1964), *Dr. Strangesurf* (1965).
37. *A Cool Wave of Colour* and *The Performers* (1965).
38. David Elfick, "Interview Bob Evans," *Tracks* (February 1972): 13. Falzon and Elfick's *Morning of the Earth* (1972), for example, contains footage of Balinese cock-fighting.
39. McClelland, "Bud Browne," 36.
40. Krishan Kumar, *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995): 38; McClelland, "Bud Browne," 50; Bruce Brown cited in Noll, *Da Bull*, 90.
41. John Severson, "In the beginning," *Surfer*, 26:1 (January 1985): 110.
42. *Ibid.*, 110-113.
43. Lueras, *Surfing*, 133.
44. Damien Lovelock, "Cult History," *Tracks* (April 1995): 114.
45. Joan Ellis, "Endless Summer II," (Nebbadoon Syndicate, 1994). [http://movie.infocom.net/docs/joined\\_review/ENDLESS SUMMER I](http://movie.infocom.net/docs/joined_review/ENDLESS_SUMMER_I)

46. Noll, *Da Bull*, 89. In the early 1950s Browne attended cinema school at the University of Southern California but says he learned little. McClelland, "Bud Browne," 36.
47. The pair teamed up in the late 1960s and produced *Waves of Change* (1970), *The Sunshine Sea* (1971), *Five Summer Stories* (1972). Lueras claims that "the water photography at Pipeline (Hawaii) [in *Five Summer Stories*] set the standard for every movie that followed." Lueras, *Surfing*, 219. These films included Bud Browne footage; the pair also distributed Browne's *Going Surfin'* and *The New Going Surfin'.*
48. *The Innermost Limits of Pure Fun* (1970), *Echos* and *Crystal Voyager* (1973). Alby Falzon coproduced the latter.
49. *In Search of Tubular Swells* (1977), *Storm Riders* (1982), *Kong's Island* (1983).
50. Nick Carroll, "Subculture," in *Next Wave*, 208.
51. Peter Wilson, "Indonesia," in Carroll, *The Next Wave*, 189-91.
52. Noll, *Da Bull*, 87. Former Australian champion Peter Drouyn similarly recalls the nervous energy and excited expectations that the early films generated. Carroll, "Subculture," 208-9.
53. Greg Noll introduced Brown to the surf movie business in 1958. Noll, *Da Bull*, 83.
54. Wardlaw, *Cowabunga*, 45.
55. Lovelock, "Cult History," 114.
56. *Ibid.* Witzig was an assistant photographer in *The Endless Summer*.
57. Interview, *Track* (June 1971): 25. Farrelly also charges producers of "pure" surf movies with exploiting surfers: "You were there to be used but not to receive anything from being used." He is especially critical of Bob Evans: "Evo was an entrepreneur, Evo was an ex-bra salesman, an ex-insurance salesman. An opportunist." Nick Carroll, "Midget Farrelly and the great nostalgia wave," *Tracks* (October 1990): 46.
58. *Ibid.*, 47-8.
59. Young, *History of Australian Surfing*.
60. Carroll, "Midget Farrelly," 47.
61. See for example, Keith Windschuttle, *The Media* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); Mark Crispin Miller (ed.), *Seeing Through Movies* (New York Pantheon Books, 1990).
62. Carroll, "Subculture," 209.
63. Released on television as *Summer of Innocence*.
64. Carroll, "Subculture," 209.
65. The major "organizers" are Rip Curl—*The Search* (1992), *The Search II* (1993), *Beyond the Boundaries* (1994); Billabong—*Bunyip Dreaming* (1991), *The Green Iguana* (1992), *Sik Joy* (1994), *Sons of Fun* (1995), *Challenge* (1995); Quicksilver—*All Down the Line* (1990), *Gofigure* (1992), *110/240* (1993), *Surfers of Fortune* (1994), *The Mondo X-treme X-periment* (1995), *Tim Curran and a Few of his Friends Here and Now* (1996); O'Neill—*Jacked* (1996); Hot Buttered—*Smoke on Water* (1995); Brothers Neilson—*Get the Feeling* (1994); Gorilla Grip (manufacturers of a non-slip adhesive for surfboard decks)—*Gripping Stuff* (1991), *Gripping Stuff 2* (1992).
66. *Momentum I* (1992), *Momentum II* (1993), *Focus* (1994), *Good Times* (1995).
67. Lueras, *Surfing*, 220.
68. "A new era! McTavish and Young discuss," *Surfing World* 8: 1 (1966): 23; John Witzig, "An end to an era," *ibid.*, 37-41.
69. Carroll, "Midget Farrelly," 47.
70. Young, *Australian Surfing*.
71. Young, *History of Surfing*, 99. McTavish also presents different pictures. Compare his comments on Young's *Australian Surfing* with his recent article, Bob McTavish, "So how come no one asked sooner?" *The Surfer's Journal*, 4:3 (1995): 44-54.

72. Ellis, "Endless Summer II."
73. John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class," in Hall and Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 67.
74. Kumar, *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society*; David Harvey, *The Condition of Post Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).