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Our Kook: Surfing and the Political Economy of Place in Cardiff, California

by Shivaun Watchorn

Introducing the Kook

Magic Carpet Ride towers over the street in front of it, a sculpted adolescent surfer riding the crest of a bronze wave, mounted on a large granite pedestal that elevates it above the coastal highway that fronts Cardiff-by-the-Sea, California, a surf community located about a half an hour north of San Diego. The statue, which has been described alternately as “a classical ocean sprite riding a wave of granite, kicking up brass foam” (Jenkins, 2007), “effeminate, inauthentic and an embarrassment to the local community” (Melekian, 2008), and “dorky” (Perry, 2007), was intended “to celebrate the surfing zeitgeist of this San Diego suburb, home to some of the region's best surf breaks” (Perry, 2007). With \$90,000 privately raised by the Cardiff Botanical



Society and another \$30,000 contributed by the City of Encinitas, the sculpture drew upon taxpayer funds as well as the coffers of private donors for its construction. In the three years since its 2007 completion, public attitudes and resultant actions towards the sculpture have questioned its artistic merit and representational purpose, with residents of the coastal community of Cardiff rejecting it outright through reinterpretation of its

physical form. *Magic Carpet Ride*, now known locally and throughout the surfing world as the Cardiff Kook, has shifted from a well-intentioned but poorly executed public monument into the site of political protest, grassroots resistance to overcrowded surf breaks, and an example of the mutation and reinterpretation of public monuments.

Surfing has long been a cornerstone of Cardiff's cultural and community life. The town has predicated its identity on its location near Cardiff Reef, a prominent local surf break at which unique geographical features form ideal waves. For surfers, the location of Cardiff Reef is not interchangeable—the reef is a site of place-based identity, with a shared experience and concern cropping up around a specific site. Localism and territorialism have cropped up in response to encroachment on this site and these identities. The Cardiff Kook enters into the conversation as a flagrant affront to place and identity. It has become a public space for local surfers to voice the issues and concerns relevant to their community, as well as a means to legitimize surfers as an active and engaged political body. Simultaneously, the Cardiff Kook has illustrated the conflicts of identity within and without the surfing subculture and prompted investigation of the actors and structures at play in the creation of local identity. Using the tools of analysis articulated by geographers such as Kevin Cox and Harvey Molotch, this case study posits that the Cardiff Kook can be read as a space of engagement in a place-based struggle for identity and environment in the globalized, increasingly capitalist sport of surfing.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Political Economy and Dialectical Spatial Theories

I became interested in this case study through an intimate connection to it. I grew up in Encinitas, an upper middle class coastal, suburban community, immersed in its

beachfront identity and attentive to the interplay between locals and outsiders. As a high school student, I saw the ways in which teenagers from inland communities latched onto Encinitas and Cardiff as a place with a definite identity: these teenagers' personal identities as alternative or oppositional relied on the time they spent within Encinitas and Cardiff and how they presented this experience in the context of their own communities, often also upper middle class suburban communities. This occurred both inside and outside of the surfing world, though I claim no expertise within surfing—I have hardly surfed in my life and do not claim to be any sort of insider. Instead, I became fascinated with the Cardiff Kook as commemoration from the moment of its completion. In July 2007, I attended its unveiling, ushering in an era of feverish attention to the local news, scouring the pages of the *Coast News* and *North County Times* for coverage of swift and harsh reactions to the sculpture. Through this experience, I began to consider the means by which place and identity had played out within the conflict over the sculpture.

A note on terminology: kook, a term to denote a surfer whose representation of their own abilities are disparate when compared to their actual prowess at the sport, is commonly employed among the “locals” at Cardiff Reef to identify and criticize outsiders and wannabes. Its use in the context of *Magic Carpet Ride* indicates a reclamation of the sculpture by local surfers, many of whom criticized the sculpture's name in addition to its artistry and the seemingly undemocratic process of its construction. Throughout the remainder of this case study, I will refer to *Magic Carpet Ride* as the Cardiff Kook in an intentional move towards recognizing it as a project larger than just art. The Cardiff Kook has emerged as an important political site for the community,

coalescing meaning and conflict around a single site. In light of this, its popular name is more in line with its current incarnation than the name bestowed upon it by its artist.

Discussion of place in geographical thought has been informed by multiple theoretical perspectives, uniting disciplines and subdisciplines to articulate the abstract notion of place. Culling together Marxian political economy, sociology, and urban studies, Harvey Molotch and John Logan discuss the political economy of place, a theoretical framework that they lay out in 1987's *Urban Fortunes*. Political economy of place posits that the built environment and landscape is the result of capitalist growth, with actors working deliberately to enunciate their vision of landscapes and place-based identities in the pursuit of profit. The theory also proposes a disconnect between exchange value—the value of a place on a market—and use value—the meanings and usages of a place derived by users in the course of day to day life—in the production of place, with places shaped by actors in opposition to the exchange value demanded by capitalist development. Political economy of place can be useful in understanding the motives and capabilities of capitalist developers and those in opposition to this development. The Cardiff Kook illustrates this conflict of interest, as a small beachside suburban community has attracted attention and development (unwanted by some residents, especially surfers, a large and substantial social group in the community) as a result of a project undertaken by its Chamber of Commerce at the expense of its citizens and its natural and built environments.

Logan and Molotch draw upon Marxian political economy to describe and define the processes enacted by actors in the commodification and exchange of place. Central to

the political economy of place is the notion that place is a commodity with special use values. Place does not conform to typical laws of supply and demand, as it is imbued with locational meanings and values that extend beyond the scope of a definable economic relationship. With this in mind, rentiers and place-based entrepreneurs can demand higher monetary value from renters in exchange for access to other amenities, including sentimental attachment to place and proximity to family and localized experiences that have informed and shaped a person's sense of place and identity. Logan and Molotch further explain that place is a monopoly, with rentiers exercising total control over the exchange and use of land. Moreover, they identify the special place-based existences that people lead, and posit that capitalist landowners can exploit this for profit and desert certain places for other places, which to landowners may be equally as useful and valuable financially. For rentiers, attachment to place only extends so far as it is financially amenable. For residents, attachment to place is a deeper process, producing sentimentality and location-based life chances that come to bear on day-to-day realities. The power of developers and their ilk come to bear in the creation of the growth machine, which demands endless expansion for endless profits. The idea of the growth machine is particularly useful in the study of American suburban and urban growth, which has been predicated on greenfield development and constant expansion, enabled by multiple actors working with distinct but enmeshed goals of capital gains through the construction of homes and infrastructure for a booming population (Hayden, 2004:38).

A distinct but related theoretical basis for discussion of place comes from Kevin Cox. Cox articulates two crucial elements of the politics of space, spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement. Spaces of dependence are "defined by those more-or-less

localized social relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests and for which there are no substitutes elsewhere” (Cox, 1998:2). These places furthermore exist in a global political economic system that upholds the vagaries of capitalism, with these spaces of dependence and the actors who rely upon them negatively impacted by the mechanisms of the growth machine. Cox’s formulation includes spaces of engagement, which he defines as “the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds” (1998:2). In other words, in order to attain the necessities for daily existence in a particular place, a space for contestation of place and its meanings and material form must also exist. Both spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement can be multiscalar. For example, a space of dependence may be broadly defined as the entire natural environment on earth, as the health of the natural environment is required for the existence of all life on earth. However, a space of engagement for an environmentalist might be on a much smaller scale, as in the codified representational spaces of a government body such as the United States Senate. On another scale altogether, a space of engagement for an environmentalist might be a treesit, occupied to simultaneously protect a single tree and to symbolically draw attention to the environmental damages wrought by loggers.

Discussion of space and scale in the articulation of place demands a look at the relationships between society and space. Social scientists have taken multiple approaches, including articulating a socio-spatial dialectic (Soja, 1980), the three components of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). Logan and Molotch’s discussion of place as commodity follows Soja’s pioneering work: the social uses of space produce the space itself, while space reproduces social norms and the

everyday actions and practices of citizens of those spaces. For developers and capitalist entrepreneurs, the ability to simultaneously exploit the social meanings of space for profit and the placelessness of late capitalist development allow for the unfettered rise of the growth machine. Dolores Hayden's *Building Suburbia* details the socio-spatial dialectic through examples pertaining to the reinforcement of gendered space in early American suburban architecture. In these early suburban homes, women's spaces such as kitchens were amply supplied with technologies and products to improve the lives of women, offering a social benefit, yet the codification of kitchens and other domestic spaces as feminine provides a mutually informative counter to emerging domestic feminisms (2004:38). The socio-spatial dialectic has also been enacted in conflicts over the Cardiff Kook.

Theoretical debates in the social sciences have long centered on the relationship between structure and agency. Do individuals exercise agency, or do the systems that make up contemporary society disallow any individual actor to enact change? Structuration theory, first articulated by Anthony Giddens (1984) and geographically elaborated by Allan Pred (1984), grounds its analysis in the debate over structure and agency to provide a valuable angle of analysis for space and place. Structuration theory posits a middle ground, where individual agents and structures are mutually created, shaped, and maintained. In the theoretical framework of structuration theory, human agents both shape and are shaped by structures, with the same true of structures. Social reproduction occurs on multiple time scales, with some social practices and structures produced through day-to-day actions, other over longer periods. In structuration theory, power lies with knowledgeable agents, whose actions are enabled by their familiarity

with resources available to them. In my case study, structuration theory points to the actors who lie at the center of conflicts over the politics of representation: the surfers who use and derive personal identity from the spaces of the ocean and the beach, as well as the city bureaucrats and boosters who derive profit and power from manipulating its landscape.

With these theoretical tools laid out before me, I am able to engage the case study of the Cardiff Kook to examine the power of place and the contestation of meaning. As I will illustrate in the ensuing pages, the struggle for place and identity is predicated on the relationships between spaces and the people who use, depends on, and engage with them. In the case of the Cardiff Kook, corporeal resistance and the concretization of a polity has been manifest as the primary methods of the struggle for authentic place-based identity.

The History of a Kook: Cardiff's Movers and Shakers in the Creation of Place

Installed in July 2007 at a ceremony attended by almost 200 people, the backlash to *Magic Carpet Ride* was swift and harsh. Teenagers panned it as “embarrassing,” and local surf shop owner Josh Hansen rescinded approval of the statue that he helped to finance, deriding it in the *Los Angeles Times*: “We wanted something cool and beautiful that would unify the community. I guess art isn't always what people think it should be” (Perry, 2007). Surfers from Cardiff criticized sculptor Matthew Antichevich, himself a surfer, and organizers and boosters from the Cardiff Botanical Society as “people with money who wanted to make their own artistic statement, which didn't involve seeking input from the surfing community” (Rushing, 2007). Cardiff Botanical Society members

and Antichevich defended it, placing the blame for its deficiencies on a limited budget, but Antichevich also defended the adolescent boy's form, claiming that it depicts an expert move. Cardiff Botanical Society chairman Mike Clark took a different approach, stating that "we purposely didn't want to make it an Olympic Adonis. We wanted the everyday kid who uses the reef to surf" (Rushing, 2007). Other criticism was directed solely at Antichevich. Though Antichevich is a surfer, he originates in the Inland Empire city of Hemet, far from Cardiff's contested waters. As will later be discussed in a section on territorialism and localism, Southern California's inland regions and the surfers from these places have been subjected to physical and verbal violence from coastal locals, supposedly with intentions of securing a pristine natural environment or an uncrowded surf break.

The Cardiff Botanical Society has been an enigmatic group, its constituents and directors only becoming apparent in the controversy over the Kook. For years, throughout the city of Encinitas cars have carried stickers that say simply "CBS," denoting an affinity or appreciation for the work of the Botanical Society. Yet the group was only concretized in 2001, with its incorporation by the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce "for the purpose of beautifying our community through the volunteer efforts of its interested citizens" (England, 2006). The Cardiff Chamber of Commerce is one of the principle actors in the Kook controversy, emerging as a player in the construction of the Kook and its maintenance. Its directors and chairpeople draw from a wide swath of the local business community, including real estate and design firms, a company called Biosculptures which also creates metal sculptures and public art, and landscape gardeners. The Chamber of Commerce's website lists its stated mission as "promot[ing] small town

friendliness within the community towards local residents and visitors alike” (Clark, 2010).

Beneath the seemingly benign objective of promoting small-town community lies a larger goal, as the website goes on to explain:

In December of 2005 the Chamber general membership endorsed the Board's recommendation to pursue California Main Street Certification. The program was established in 1985 as a means to help community organizations enhance the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of historic and traditional commercial districts. This approach to commercial district revitalization is effective because it is comprehensive and community-driven. Merchants, property owners, and residents become partners and take action on a wide variety of community issues. Everyone benefits from an increased sense of pride and place, safer and cleaner neighborhoods, a variety of products and services, and community-oriented events. (Clark, 2010)

The California Main Street Program is an initiative by the state's parks department aimed towards “reinvigorating the economic health of ... historic Main Street central business districts ... [through a] public-private partnership of private investment, local government support, and local non-profit assistance to revitalize historic commercial districts” (CAMSA, 2009). The program also calls itself “locally-driven, grass roots, [and] self-help” (CAMSA, 2009). The Cardiff Chamber of Commerce's involvement in this program indicates a desire for economic revitalization, though its actions in constructing the Kook indicate that its methods were not in line with the California Main Street Program's goals.

Cardiff has since attained California Main Street Certification, but the Cardiff Kook and its attendant controversies points to an undemocratic process by which place has been constructed not by the residents but instead by developers and boosters. The mere goal of “commercial district revitalization” demands weighted input from the

developers, excluding those whose vision of Cardiff's future is a less developed place that retains the oppositional spirit of surfing's past. For Cardiff's boosters and developers, the Cardiff Kook is a tool for increasing exchange value of place: by articulating a specific identity for the town through built form, Cardiff's boosters are able to solidify an image of the community that can be employed to rein in tourism and business. Residents, who derive use value from the ocean and the beach, hope to retain that use value with minimum invasion or alteration that could draw more users and attendant built forms to the beach.

The Cardiff Botanical Society's intentions in erecting *Magic Carpet Ride* have not been a prominent topic of public discourse, though a 2010 YouTube documentary by Chad Richmond contains an interview with two of the project's promoters and builders that reveals their harmless intentions, as Brad Maassen, a general contractor working on the project states, "It's just an idea that came to us while we were working. ... It was just decided, it was everybody's... it's a huge surfing community here and it's something we should all recognize and that's the best way we could think of doing it" (Richmond, 2010). In the immediate aftermath, the surfers' verbal repudiation and physical reinterpretation of the sculpture indicates a distrust for the Cardiff Botanical Society and its intentions as the placemakers and developers of Cardiff transparently push for further development.

J.P. St. Pierre, a blogger and surfer from Leucadia, another seaside community near Cardiff, has recognized the Cardiff Kook as an inevitability and a fitting encapsulation of the state of surfing in Cardiff, stating that the statue "somehow is a

fitting representation of what surfing has become: corporate and gentrified, where unskilled riders on plastic boards from China help themselves to the best waves” (Kaye, 2007). I would further argue that this criticism is generalizable to the community as a whole, as local businesses have been supplanted by retailers such as Patagonia, displacing local flavor with large corporations positing an environmentally friendly or outdoorsy business model in identical stores across the country. St. Pierre further states, “When Sadaam (Hussein) [*sic*] took over Iraq, he put up statues of himself saying he's in charge. Now the kooks are in charge of surf culture. In a way, the statue's genius” (Kaye, 2007).¹ St. Pierre’s comments are downright progressive when compared to others, which often elicit a notion of static, unchanging sacred surf culture, under siege by newcomers and corporate interests. His acknowledgement—albeit wistful—of surfing’s transition from unique, grassroots subculture to corporate lifestyle sport hints at some of the principal controversies of surfing today: who can lay claim to it? Whose lifestyle is it? Whose sport is it? Who stands to benefit from a monument, and what is it commemorating in the first place?

“We Want Clean Beaches”: The Natural and Built Environments in Dialogue

While the background for my case study reaches back hundreds of years and thousands of miles to the waves of Polynesia, where surfing first originated as a central

¹ Curiously, there have been echoes of Iraq and public monuments to Saddam Hussein in numerous bits of commentary on the surf sculpture, as *San Diego Union-Tribune* columnist Brad Melekian has written, “Blog posters threatened to tie a chain to their pickup trucks and drag the statue down, drawing overwrought mental parallels to the iconic fall of the Saddam Hussein statue in central Baghdad five years ago,” among other comments by J.P. St. Pierre in posts on *Leucadia Blog*.

sporting activity and social practice in the lives of Polynesians, the intensified conflicts start with the importation of surfing to Southern California in the middle of the 20th century. Surfing and surf communities have long been subjected to commercialization, beginning with films of the 1950s and 1960s. These films portrayed surfers as outsiders and outlaws, living on the fringes of society and pursuing a totalizing, alien lifestyle (Reed, 1999; Rutsky, 1999). These cultural notions of surfing as resistance to the status quo appeared in fictional depictions like *Gidget*, as well as in Bruce Brown's much loved documentary, *The Endless Summer*, which depicts two surfers traveling around the world in search of the perfect wave. The commercialization of surfing has continued with the professionalization of the sport and the industry in the 1980s, wherein "the competitive, conformist spirit—the more dominating approach to surfing—can be seen as a direct product of the growing consumer culture of the 1980s, mirroring the widespread capitalist growth of the United States" (Hill and Abbott 2009:277; see also Ford and Brown, 2006). During this period, the traditional venues for surfing became overrun with competitions that doled out prize money and transitioned surfing from a totalizing lifestyle to a sport, what Ford and Brown (2006) call sportization. Yet despite the commercialization and professionalization of the sport, the growth of surfing communities such as Cardiff is not inevitable—the communities have long been exploited by capitalists who want to use the identity of the towns and the appeal of the sport for the purposes of development or growth, abetted by the prevalence of mediated images of surfing as oppositional, dangerous, or simply exciting and fun. Additionally, mediated representations of surfers portray nature, race, class, and gender in alternately challenging and reifying ways, but the result of mediated images of surfing is often an

increase in surfing's popularity, with coastal landscapes fundamentally reshaped by the boom in use (Reed, 1999).

Surfers, whose lifestyle choices depend on the presence and health of the ocean and its waves, have long held deep attachment to the ocean. For some surfers, this is manifest in a vocal concern for the ocean environment. Hill and Abbott (2009) offer that surfers are able to articulate changes (primarily negative) in the ocean environment by nature of their frequent and intimate interaction with the water, but this interaction poses a uniquely troubling bind, as surfers and the surfing industry has skyrocketed in popularity, bringing more surfers into the water and further fueling the profitability of surf competitions and other industries that yield environmentally taxing externalities. Hill and Abbott write, "Although surfing itself may not be an inherently ecologically destructive act, many externalities of surfing, as a modern capitalist endeavor, are manifestations of the ethics of consumption and accumulation, which tend to negatively affect the environment" (2009:282). They specifically mention surfboards and the materials used to create them as a harmful externality. Furthermore, they explain that "the act of modern surfing requires a level of consuming nature in order to be closer to it" (2009:283), positing that the nature and culture are in constant contact and dialogue and discounting surfers' claims that surfing puts them in an authentic or unspoiled nature or makes them at one with the ocean waters.

In the case of the Cardiff Kook, long-held sentimental attachment and use of the natural environment by the surfing subculture was threatened by the statue and its attendant ocean traffic, spawned by the statue itself. In response to what they perceived

as ramped up exploitation of their surf breaks, some surfers questioned the very idea of the sculpture as a monument to surfing. One local surfer named Patrick Bennett wrote:

Most surfers are trying to slow the exploding [*sic*] of surfing popularity to protect the population of their home break. We don't want to see statues erected to celebrate the sport of surfing; we don't want more parking lots paved to near our favorite spots. We want clean beaches; we want the environment to stay intact [*sic*]; we want our good waves in our favorite spots to stay good. Surfers are probably mostly upset at the fact that they paid \$120,000 for that piece of ~~crap~~ metal. They could have done a mass cleaning of the Cardiff water; or a huge beach sweep of pollution; or maybe use that money to stop companies along the coast from putting pollutants into the water. (Bennett, 2007)

Bennett's analysis posits that the Cardiff Botanical Society not only exploited taxpayer money and the place-based identity of Cardiff surfers but also ignored pleas from the surf community for improvements that would affect their lifestyle. Moreover, one could argue that the introduction of a beach clean-up program would be in line with the Botanical Society's mission statement and stated goals of improving Cardiff's environmental health in light of its goals in the California Main Street Certification program. However, Bennett's statements also demand a discussion of NIMBYism and territorialism. Surfers have long employed the rhetoric and attendant practices of localism to protect their breaks, and "while many surfers are disgusted by the cultures of localism, other surfers defend localism in the name of 'cultural preservation'" (Scheibel, 1995:255). Bennett's comments can be read as a manifestation of localism for the purpose of self-interest, veiled by environmental rhetoric.

The crux of Bennett's statement raises questions about the very nature and purpose of monuments. Bennett refutes the statue as a fitting monument or celebration of surfing and suggests that a "living tribute" may be more appropriate, reminiscent of

“living” memorials and monuments to wars and battles. In David Glassberg’s inquiry into the doughboy World War I monument in Orange, Massachusetts, he recounts proposals to create a living memorial in the form of a school or park—a format later adopted for a World War II veterans memorial in the same town—thus saving competing local interests a battle over representation and physical form. For surfers at Cardiff Reef, Bennett suggests, a more effective and meaningful gesture would be to improve the actual conditions of the beach and the ocean, thus working both to protect local beaches from degradation and to allow Cardiff Reef to remain under the radar, unmarked by a much-maligned statue. Glassberg further suggests that Orange’s doughboy, a statue mired in controversy from its conception to the present (as it historically has and currently does enjoy multiple uses by parties with conflicting interests), “may have come to represent not only the promise of the safe return of local residents in the service but also the continuity of the town itself” (Glassberg, 2001:50). As a meditation on monuments in general, this may hint at the Cardiff Botanical Society’s intentions in erecting the statue in the first place.

Molotch and Logan’s political economy of place can be employed as a tool of analysis for the Cardiff Kook in regards to the environmental impact of growth and development. Molotch and Logan (1987) name the *growth machine*, the snowballing coalition of growth and development interests that produce and reproduce demand for growth and expansion. The Cardiff Kook can be viewed as a crucial component of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce and the Cardiff Botanical Society’s growth machine, wherein the promotion of the town’s identity circulates income by bringing in visitors,

who in turn patronize Cardiff's new businesses and cottage industries in its walkable downtown, the physical form a product of the growth machine as well.

Discussions in the growing body of literature that constitutes surfing studies has paid special attention to the "dream wave," a mythical formation only brought about by perfect conditions and an absence of crowding at beaches (Ford and Brown, 2006). For surfers the dream wave has proven to be the ultimate ephemeral pleasure, unobtainable to many, whose primary access to it is through mediated images of other surfers. Surfing photography and videography has emerged as a primary marketplace for these images, with certain classical surfing images inspiring the behaviors and actions of other surfers (Ponting 2009, Ford and Brown 2006). The Cardiff Kook has been criticized by surfers for its pose, which local surfers claim to be an unrealistic or inexperienced pose, but the statements of a local surfer interviewed in the newspaper has brought to the forefront other issues of representation and memorialization. Evident in Bennett's appraisal of the monument is a recognition of a sculpture as both damaging and painfully unfit for the purpose of representing what surfers themselves see as an indefinable, ephemeral passion through a constructed monument. Unlike photographs of dream waves, the Cardiff Kook fails to convey the transcendent moments of surfing.

Discontent around the Kook has played out in an increase in localism and territoriality. Angry about crowded waves and environmental degradation, surfers have moved to aggressively ostracize and intimidate the so-called kooks, in an effort to reclaim the local beaches for their own use. *Magic Carpet Ride*, a project requiring massive funding and which did not call upon the local surf community as source of preliminary

advice or critique, has been perceived by local surfers as a further invasion of their community and an unfit monument to the local surf culture. Indeed, the creation and erection of the Cardiff Kook provokes questions about who is protecting and presenting surf culture and their motivations for doing so. In an essay on Mexican monuments, Nestor Garcia Canclini writes,

Monuments are almost always the result of an imposition on the part of political authority. The simultaneous control over public finances, urban space, and official interpretation of history turns the state into the exclusive (or almost exclusive) trustee of the consecratory enterprise involved in erecting these monuments and the capacity to carry out the project. (1989:217)

The Cardiff Kook conforms to this statement: erected by a civic semi-authority to engender community pride and a sense of place, with a strong public presence by nature of its location, the statue is an organ only of its donators and executors, intended to reflect a constituency it did not consult in the process of its creation. In this case, both the surfers and the Cardiff Botanical Society are knowledgeable agents, enacting a local politics that they have affected in spatial and social dimensions. Surfers, however, have been able to enact a visually enforced local politics with various scales in material protests against the sculpture, illustrated in the next section of this paper.

Crowns and Crucifixes: The Cardiff Kook as a Space of Engagement

Since its installation in summer 2007, the Cardiff Kook has spawned a veritable media storm, bumper stickers demanding its removal, and even t-shirts with “the sculpture ... pictured in the center of a nuclear bomb blast” imploring residents to “nuke the kook” (Frank, 2009). In fact, since almost immediately after its installation, the

sculpture has been the subject of creative reinterpretation through the use of costumes. The Cardiff Kook has been dressed up consistently, donning a regal costume with crown and scepter, a flowing white dress, a colorful Mexican *lucha libre* mask, copious sunscreen applied to its bronze nose, and a diaper.



For Easter 2009, its attire strayed into the realm of the overtly controversial, with a crown



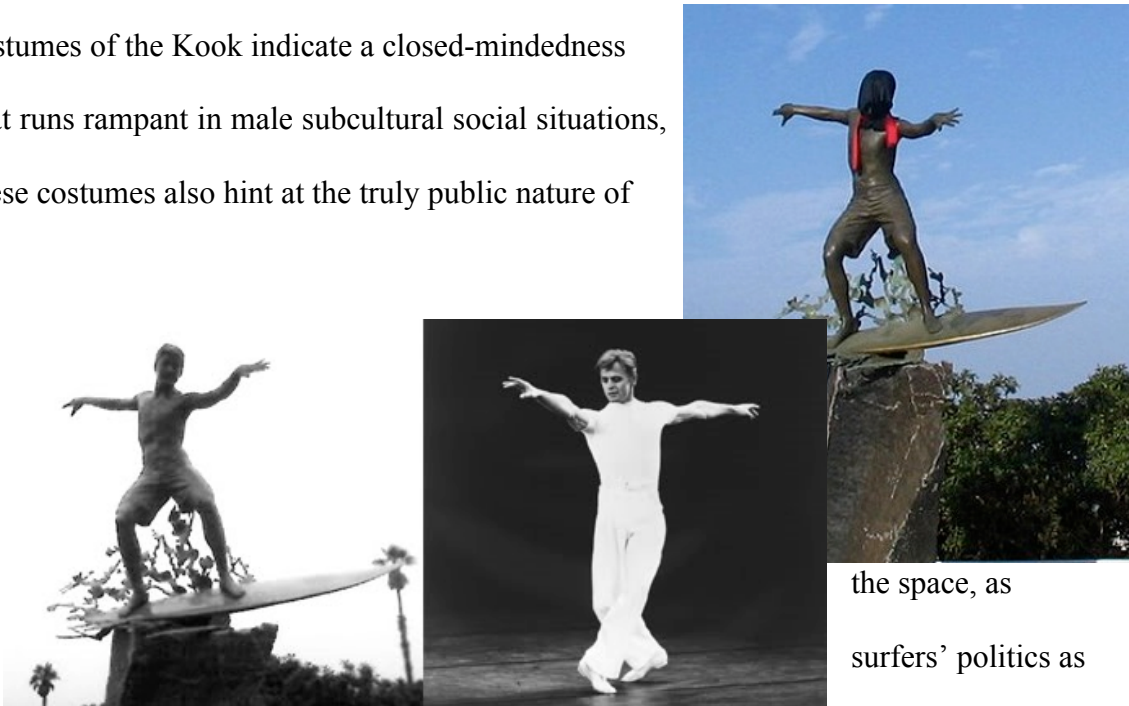
of thorns and a cross attached to its back, reminiscent of Jesus on the cross. Costuming has also been directed inwards, illustrating the discord within the surfing world. One costume ridiculed stand-up paddle surfing, in

which surfers propel themselves into waves with a broom-like device that they carry as they stand atop their board. The Kook donned a broom, sunscreen, and a hat to mock this trend, seen by some surfers as inauthentic and selfish because of stand-up paddlers' ability to gain a speed advantage while dropping into waves.

While the costuming has been derided by media and law enforcement as mere vandalism, the use of costumes and props is a method of embodying protest, shifting what is widely considered by surfers to be a disgrace to their culture into a means of critique and humor towards the commodification of surfing in Cardiff and a perceived threat on their lifestyles. By dressing the Cardiff Kook in costumes and modifying its built form, surfers are using it as a space of engagement. If the ocean, the beaches, and the small-town atmosphere of Cardiff, undisturbed by curious tourists or local booster capitalists, are their spaces of dependence, then protest action and reinterpretation of the Kook is a means of engagement for a political body that has historically been ignored or marginalized. The fact that the sculpture has come to embody protest to the commodification of surfing and other issues including the Iraq War is an example of the interscalar relationship between dependence and engagement.

Analysis of these costumes must be subject to discussion of some of the central issues in the representation of surfing. Narratives of masculinity, mobility, and class privilege have been historically important to the representation of surf culture and the growth of the sport (Reed, 1999). Threats to masculinity in the statue's finished form are evident in concerns of locals interviewed in newspaper articles or on message boards, who have criticized the sculpture as effeminate or gay. One such article includes a brief interview with Steve Pezman, who publishes *The Surfers' Journal* out of San Clemente, California. Pezman declares: "The pose is just dorky. Even a gay surfer would say the same thing" (Stetz, 2007). This homophobia, deep seated in the surfing community, has origins in the homosociality of the sport, which includes a strong association among men, who spend their time together in a quasi-spiritual engagement with the water and each

other. Waitt argues that “Homophobia helps to (re)constitute a masculine orthodoxy within surfing sub-culture to prevent homosocial bonds becoming interpreted as homoerotic, and affirming the supposed heterosexual preference of male surfers” (2008:87). Other costumes have included dresses and bras, and one image from the Cardiff Kook’s MySpace page consists of an image of the Kook next to a picture of the Russian male ballerina Mikhail Baryshnikov, associating the Kook with the feminine activity of ballet dancing. Though the homophobic costumes of the Kook indicate a closed-mindedness that runs rampant in male subcultural social situations, these costumes also hint at the truly public nature of



the space, as
surfers’ politics as

well as their neuroses have been projected at the Kook.

Resistance to the Cardiff Kook has primarily taken the form of vandalism towards the physical sculpture itself, and critical discourse about the statue (albeit often couched in surf slang and wholly indulgent of homophobic slurs) has had limited effect in removing or permanently changing the statue. Indeed, some surfers have begun to identify the Cardiff Kook as their own, both as a vessel for protest about representation and commercialization of surf culture and for broader political issues. In Chad

Richmond's YouTube documentary, even the two boosters who were instrumental in its construction identify it as "our Kook," regardless of its derogatory nomenclature.



Beyond mere vandalism, the Kook has served as a space for jumping scales, wherein political bodies can voice their politics on scales ranging from the beach at Cardiff Reef to the global geopolitical milieu. The statue and its manipulators have treaded into mainstream political commentary, with one vandal dressing the Cardiff Kook up as a prisoner at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, with a bag over its head. Again, St. Pierre:

It's interesting that the Cardiff surfer statue is now being used as a form of mainstream political protest (I could argue that the earlier pranks were also political protest but not too many non-surfing statue pundits want to entertain that the local surfing scene is a legitimate subculture that has a legitimate gripe against the statue). I wonder if these war protesters are also surfers or if they are non-surfer using the statue for it's *[sic]* prominent location? (St. Pierre, 2007)

Other documented instances of mainstream political protest at the Cardiff Kook have included adornment with a Ron Paul sign. Primarily, the statue has been a site of self-referential or surf-oriented protest, which St. Pierre acknowledges as a form of legitimate political protest, as the totalizing experience of surf culture for those who surf Cardiff Reef is reminiscent of the concerns of Native Hawaiians on the North Shore, albeit under different circumstances.

Despite notable differences between Hawaiian and Southern Californian surf cultures, an examination of Native Hawaiian surfing practices and politics yields points of comparison about legitimacy, ownership, and protest politics. In Hawaii, where the native sport of surfing has been subsumed by white settlers who have colonized Hawaiian land and life and commercialized its surf breaks, native protest has assumed a number of forms. On Oahu's North Shore, commercial surfing enterprises, the professional surfing industry, and the presence of surfers from around the world threatened native claims to the waves. In response to the threat, surfers indigenous to the North Shore bonded together to resist "another wave of colonialism in a fight to preserve a significant culture space, *ke kai* and *ka nalu* (the ocean and the surf)" (Walker 2005:579). As surfing is a central tenet of the Native Hawaiian culture and spirituality, resistance to commercialized surfing constituted more than an act of defiance from angry locals. Indeed, white surfers' usurpation of waves on the North Shore was a violent affront to "a pre-colonial sense of self" and the "cultural sanctuary, the ocean waves" (Walker 2005:580-1). In 1976, a group of Native Hawaiian surfers called Hui 'O He'e Nalu formed on the North Shore to organize against professional surfing competitions, with club meetings becoming "both a forum for voicing Native concerns over threatened cultural space and a setting to plan effective resistance struggles" (Walker 2005:583). In the late 1970s, the group took direct action against International Professional Surfing (IPS) events, paddling out to the middle of a break and directly obstructing the competition until they were arrested and their surfboards confiscated. Using their bodies as means to disrupt corporate and colonial control over Native land, the protests and resultant coverage enabled Hui members to

demand employment opportunities as lifeguards from IPS, thus creating more Native control over the North Shore's beaches within the newly entrenched corporatized space.

Resistance and protest directed at the Cardiff Kook, sometimes puzzling in its intensity, depends on strong identification with an oppositional subculture as a means to elucidate the vigilance and enthusiasm of the opposition. Though separated by thousands of miles and an ocean, the surf cultures of Southern California owe ideology, practice, and tradition to those of Native Hawaiians, engendering a sense of identification with "the exoticized appeal of 'other,' non-Western cultures ... drawn in large part from surfing's Pacific Island origins ... as well as a more general exoticism" (Rutsky 1999:19). Opposition to the Cardiff Kook demands that Cardiff's surfers posit themselves diametrically opposite the kooks and yuppies that they blame for the degradation of the natural (ocean) and built (statue) environment. Cardiff surfers have provoked a public discourse around the statue that, not unlike the Hui 'O He'e Nalu on the North Shore of Oahu, a social group of surfers who created a visual identity with shared attire and enforced—sometimes harshly—their territory in the face of colonial settlement and encroachment by white surfers, requires a constant, repetitive stream of actions against the statue, "a form of guerrilla resistance, a rebuff in this laid-back beach town to outsiders who try to claim surf culture as their own" (Rodgers, 2008). Though colonial settlement by white settlers and surfers in Hawaii is an issue with significant bearing for livelihoods while the Kook symbolizes the physical transformation of an unwanted public monument, the comparison indicates the potential for resistance in place-based conflicts for resources, identity, and meaning.

Hui 'O He'e Nalu's story illustrates the possibilities and spaces of resistance based around place and identity. Surfers at Cardiff Reef have been able to enact similar resistance at the site of the Cardiff Kook, their concerns about identity, place, and environment coalescing into a single site of opposition, with protest enacted in varying forms and for various purposes. Through sartorial sabotage, they have been able to articulate a politics of resistance to exploitation of their communal identity, while also exhibiting diversity within the surfing world and positing an idea of authenticity within the sport and lifestyle.

Some Final Thoughts

The completion of the Cardiff Kook project and resistance to it has provoked questions scale as well as space. If the Cardiff Botanical Society has erected the sculpture to put Cardiff on the map, how are spaces of engagement and spaces of dependence altered? If Cardiff is aspiring towards a more public future—to attract development or more money-making surf competitions—can it possibly serve the needs of its surfing residents? I would argue, as would Cardiff's surfers, that the spaces of dependence—individual surf breaks already taxed by the sport's sustained popularity—cannot handle more traffic, thus justifying the actions undertaken in spaces of engagement. Indeed, the spaces of engagement were also a site of jumping scale, inviting larger political concerns and positioning surfers as a specific political body claiming space for discourse about pertinent issues.

In Cardiff, an act of interscalar striving by a civic authority endangered and continues to threaten the lifestyle of a prominent subculture on which the community predicates its identity, as well as the very place created by and creating that same identity. Despite the ill will engendered by it, the Cardiff Kook has served as a platform for the grievances of local surfers as well as a means to legitimize surfing-related concerns, while simultaneously revealing discourses of identity—especially masculinity and sexuality—within the surfing subculture and prompting investigation of the actors and structures at play in the creation of local identity and the exploitation of that identity in the pursuit of profit. Indeed, I would argue that the Cardiff Kook, despite its constructors' intentions, has become a full-blown material public space, wherein surfers have been able to voice their concerns to a much broader audience, following Don Mitchell's assertion that "oppositional representations expand beyond the confines of the local struggle" (1995:123) with the reinterpretation and control of public space. The Cardiff Kook has served just this purpose, though its fate remains to be seen.

The controversy surrounding *Magic Carpet Ride* lies not only in the physical form of the sculpture but in the difficulty of pinpointing surf culture, a fragmented and multitudinous entity that includes both fierce locals infuriated by posers crashing their breaks and those posers themselves, whose investment in and connection to surfing may come through other channels or whose involvement in surfing takes a less territorial or elitist stance. *Magic Carpet Ride* and its second life as the frequently adorned Cardiff Kook, made world famous in the pages of *Surfer Magazine* and *TransWorld Surf*, looms over the Pacific Coast Highway, drawing a line in the sand between locals and outsiders.

Drawing upon Native Hawaiian surfing culture and Cardiffians' identities as territorial beachgoers, local surfers have emphasized surfing's oppositional culture and critiqued the purpose of commemoration more generally. The Cardiff Kook is a powerful example of the intersection of identity, place, and politics. At the site of a statue assumed apolitical by its creators, a veritable firestorm of opposition has sprung up, coalescing multiple issues and discourses at a single site.

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