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**“Who Needs Money When You Can Go Windsurfing?”:
The Paradox of Resisting Consumerism Through Consumption in a Lifestyle
Sport Subculture.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in
Visual and Material Culture at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Peter Francis Wilkinson, 2010.

Abstract

Lifestyle sport has become a significant sociological phenomenon, with millions participating worldwide. Using windsurfing as a case study, this thesis focuses on core members of this subculture to discover their motivations for involvement and the degree to which they are willing to sacrifice other areas of their lives in order to participate. The thesis explores the contention that this level of sacrifice amounts to resistance to the dominant consumerist culture of our society. The study examines the way subculture members manifest an embodied critique of urban experience that takes place outside of that environment in natural spaces, using time that consumerist imperatives would have them in the earn-spend spiral dictated by that ideology. It does this through a twelve month ethnographic study, with the author as a complete participant, then as a participant observer, completing formal interviews with a number of selected core members of the subculture.

Through interviewing and observation it became clear that it is only possible for subculture members to participate through the consumption of considerable quantities of the material objects associated with the activity. This means that participants are resisting consumerist culture through the consumption of consumer goods. This contradiction goes to the heart of the ways that consumerist ideology co-opts resistant behaviour.

The study shows that windsurfers are resistant to consumerism in a number of ways. The rejection of traditional sporting values, the use of time in opposition to dominant practices, the rejection of wealth as the primary measure of success, and resisting cultural expectations are all manifestations of this resistance. The niche visual media of the subculture creates a dreamworld of natural perfection and freedom. The way that the visual culture mediates the paradox central to my thesis is by valourising a lifestyle, and those who adopt it, rather than selling consumer goods.

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I dedicate this work to the memory of Jude Green, who died windsurfing on the southern lakes while I was conducting this research.

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The Researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), phone 06-350-5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz”.

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