



# GOING IN

KAI NEVILLE'S MODERN COLLECTIVE IS BRINGING  
SURF MOVIES INTO THE PRESENT TENSE

BY TRAVIS FERRÉ

WORKING ON THE SOUNDTRACK NOW AND WE HAVE SOME EXCITING NEW SONGS IN THE MIX. WE WANT TO INVOLVE A WIDE VARIETY OF MUSIC GENRES AND WORK AT KEEPING ALL YOU VIEWERS HAPPY. SO DROP A TUNE IN OUR SOUND CLOUD DROPBOX TO THE RIGHT... IT COULD BE ANYTHING: TROPICAL, INDIE, ELECTRO, REVIVAL, FOLK. IF YOU SUBMIT A TRACK WE LIKE AND USE, I'LL SEND A MODERN COLLECTIVE TEE AND DVD YOUR WAY. LOOK OUTSIDE THE BOX...

[POSTED BY MODERN COLLECTIVE AT 7:04 PM 7 COMMENTS HERE](#)

THAT'S YESTERDAY'S POST ON KAI NEVILLE'S *MODERN COLLECTIVE* BLOG. They're starting to edit what might just be the most groundbreaking surf film to date — Dane Reynolds, Jordy Smith, Dusty Payne, Dion Agius, Mitch Coleborn and Yadin Nicol — and they're asking if you want to help.





So, do ya? Yeah, we do, too.

However, by the time you read this magazine, “yesterday” will probably be about three months ago. By then, they’ll be halfway through *Modern Collective II* and you’ll be blogging about your favorite sections. If you weren’t following this film on a day-to-day, trip-by-trip basis, then you’re merely living in its past.

The world moves fast these days.

And sometimes it moves slowly, too.

Keeping pace is all about doing the opposite of whatever seems right.

Which, we know, seems all wrong.

**DOWN IN BAJA, SURFING PHOTOGRAPHER ROB GILLEY WAS UP AT DAWN.** Ready to go. Drinking black coffee and timing intervals on the perfect offshore pointwaves firing out front while *Modern Collective* surfers Dusty Payne, Mitch Coleborn and Yadin Nicol slept off jetlag beneath a jigsaw of Mexican blankets and boardbags.

Gilley, an old-school surf photography workhorse and legend in his own right, had no problem cracking the whip on these hotshot youngsters. He knows exactly what sorta conditions produce mag-quality photographs, and these are them: warm light, offshore winds and roping righthanders.

“Let’s get on it, boys,” he says like a T-ball coach on opening day. “It’s offshore and the light is perfect.”

Yadin and Mitch groan and roll around a bit. Neville is completely comatose in the corner.

Dusty throws a pillow towards the window. “Close the curtain,” he snarls. “Wake us up when it’s onshore.”

**GILLEY OBVIOUSLY HASN’T BEEN READING THE MODERN COLLECTIVE BLOG.** Otherwise he’d know: “onshore = offshore.”

Everything’s backwards now. Upsidedown and in reverse...with a method grab. The future already happened and the rest of us are just watching the replay.

If you weren’t following this film on a day-to-day, trip-by-trip basis, then you’re merely living in the past.

The MC crew initially selected five surfers for the film and left the sixth invite open. This is how Dusty Payne raised his hand. Getting called on somewhere way out west. SEQUENCE: TOM CAREY







Director Kai Neville is living in this future. He's forward thinking. Forward-moving. He's even forward *looking*. He's like the new Taylor Steele, but with more V-neck and less shampoo; all post-mod hipster threads and loose Aussie slang; all flair and showmanship to Steele's understated Big Bang theory. While Kai came up under Steele's tutelage, filming and editing *Stranger Than Fiction*, he's also taken Steele's biggest lesson to heart:

You've got to keep evolving.  
Like how these aerial acrobats approach crumbly lips these days, you've got to keep pushing the medium forward. And sometimes that means going backwards. Or sideways. Or upside down. Or even over-rotating.  
Whichever direction they're headed, the Modern Collective guys won't be filming any skits. They *are* a skit.

**“YOU SEE THAT LEFT?”** Mitch Coleburn says to Rob Gilley.  
“Left? This is a righthand pointbreak,” Rob says, getting ready to set up his tripod and unpack his film equipment.

“OK, great, but we're going to go surf that left reform down the beach,” Mitch shouts back, already trotting down the beach.  
Rob's just shaking his head.  
Neville walks up behind him, snaps open his tripod and pops a Corona. In his digital reality, shooting is instantaneous, candid, an afterthought. While Gilley's waiting for his film to develop, Kai's already posted clips on the blog.  
For a moment, the two lensmen stand side by side. The Future is paddling out.  
An hour later, a commotion ripples up the beach. Mitch has just stomped a proper

flip — the first during the filming of *Modern Collective*. Kai puts his hand up to Mitch, signaling he nailed it and the boys rejoice. Stoked.  
Another clip is in the bank.  
Before they're even back in California, Kai has the frame grabs from the clip posted on moderncollective.tv, next to YouTube promos for Spike Jonze's *Where the Wild Things Are*, Travis Pastrana doing a flip on a big wheel and the trailer for the new *Bruno* movie. There are also six free music downloads and this photo of a chick showing great side boob.



Kai Neville's like the new Taylor Steele, but  
with more V-neck and less  
shampoo; all flair and showmanship to  
Steele's understated Big Bang theory.

This is Yadin Nicol's futuristic ode to the past. Six feet out. No grab. PHOTO: TOM CAREY





THE FUTURE ISN'T WHAT THE FUTURE USED TO BE. TODAY VAST POOLS OF YOUTH ARE TAKING THE POSSIBILITIES OF SURFING INTO A NEW ERA. GONE ARE THE DAYS OF PUNTING AN AIR REVERSE STRAIGHT INTO THE PIGGY BANK. UNLESS IT'S A FULL ROTATION, A TWEAKED GRAB OR A GOD DARN FLIP IT'S NOT GOING TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY. WE HAVE FOUND A MODERN TREND IN SURF FILM PRODUCTION: ONSHORE = KEEPERS  
POSTED BY MODERN COLLECTIVE 3/23/09 AT 6:43 P.M.  
12 COMMENTS

**THAT LAST POST IS DATED MARCH 23.** Which, at this point, might as well be the '80s. Kai's already changed his hairstyle five times since then, though he's been wearing the same tee shirt continuously. (It's evolving too: the V gets deeper, the aroma gets...well, aromatic. It's all "progression.") After Baja, he and The Collective blast through San Diego just long enough to crash-land a brief tornado of trade show shindigs. Posh socialite bars with bright cocktails and doe-eyed honeypots in



Denim yoga with Dion. PHOTO: DJ STRUNTZ



Dion Agius: Postmodern sea art in North Africa. PHOTO: DJ STRUNTZ

striped leggings. Swirling lights and slurring rumors. The wild nights are all part of the ride. The experience. The moment. But in the morning, the moment is still there with 'em, ordering Grand Slams at a downtown Denny's breakfast meeting. Neville wears his hangover on his sleeve as he discusses the future of the film with various partners. The Atlantic was turning purple, and Africa

was going to be on fire, like, tomorrow. Could they make it? "We'll have to leave tonight," Kai manages. He barely made it to this Denny's, but he's pretty sure he can get Dion, Dusty and Mitch to Africa by tomorrow.

**SO FAR THEY'VE MADE FLYBYS IN EUROPE,** the glittery coast, way out west,





deep in the south and have probably flown over your house once or twice since then. Dane pulled some full rotators. He crushed his ankle. Some hot chicks kissed each other. Dion spray-painted MC logos on his boards. And various tourist attractions. Dane's ignited dance floors in three hemispheres. They sample new dishes. They haven't removed their shades in months. Or put their green bottles of beer down even once. An Old World house party. A New World discothèque. It's all just blogstalgia in a world that's constantly racing forward, but the photos are fun to scroll through.

Wish you were here.

At some point, Kai premiered *Days of Strange*. Despite the film being entirely his own production, Neville still doesn't quite count it as his directorial debut. That's because *this* is his debut. This is the film he's been working towards all his life. All those years of producing Aussie surf mag DVD insert videos. Of filming for Taylor Steele. Of editing *Stranger Than Fiction* and *Days of the Strange*. It was all a path to now.

This is the NOW he's been working towards.

And the NOW after that too probably.

And right now three months ago, The Collective found themselves in a dilapidated Suburban racing down the coast of Africa somewhere staring out at huge, offshore, righthand pointbreak freight-trains. Which, in this car, is a bad thing.

"Can't we just find a beachbreak?" Dion Agius complained from the backseat.

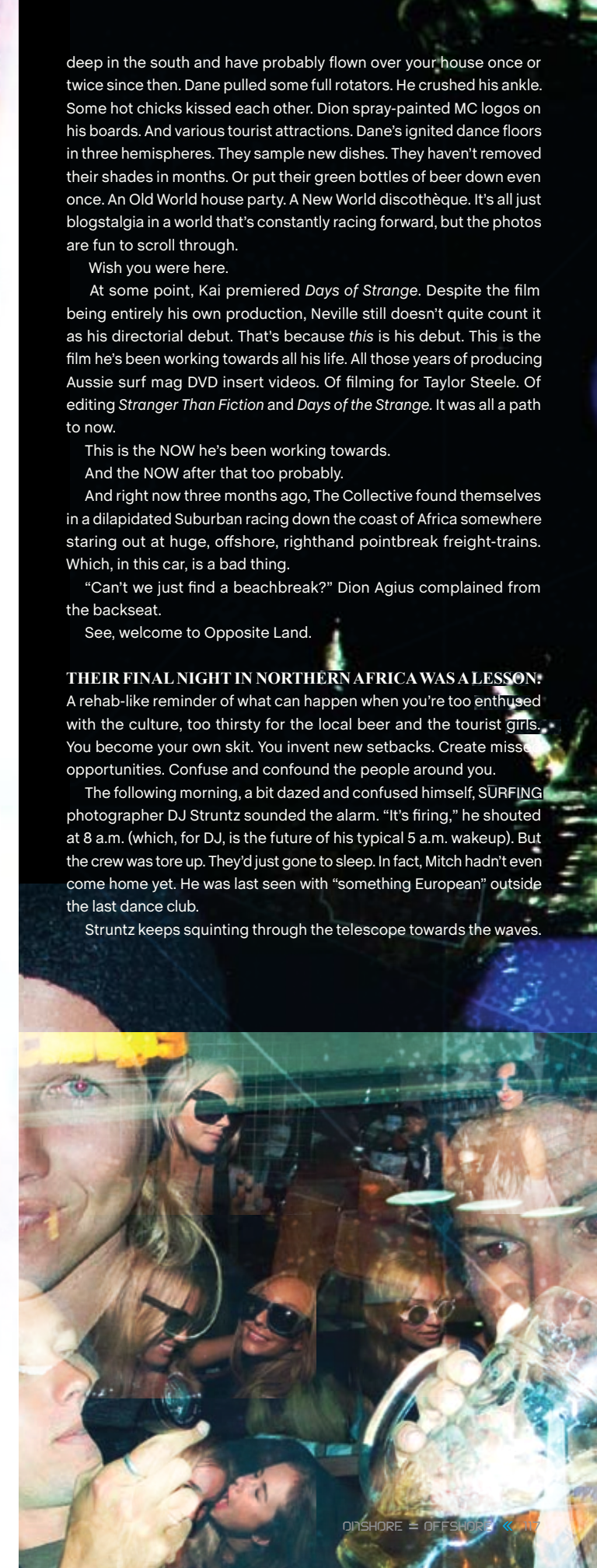
See, welcome to Opposite Land.

#### THEIR FINAL NIGHT IN NORTHERN AFRICA WAS A LESSON:

A rehab-like reminder of what can happen when you're too enthused with the culture, too thirsty for the local beer and the tourist girls. You become your own skit. You invent new setbacks. Create missed opportunities. Confuse and confound the people around you.

The following morning, a bit dazed and confused himself, SURFING photographer DJ Struntz sounded the alarm. "It's firing," he shouted at 8 a.m. (which, for DJ, is the future of his typical 5 a.m. wakeup). But the crew was tore up. They'd just gone to sleep. In fact, Mitch hadn't even come home yet. He was last seen with "something European" outside the last dance club.

Struntz keeps squinting through the telescope towards the waves.



"First thought, best thought." Mitch Coleborn free thinking south of the border. PHOTO: ROB GILLEY





Roping walls. Offshore plumes. Eight-foot sets. He's in a state of near panic.

"We're over it," one anonymous heap of hangover from the floor announces. "These waves suck."

With The Collective, every missed opportunity creates a newer, more unique opportunity. A change in scenery. A bend in the road. A zig to the usual zag. So when Mitch finally found his way home, the crew found an onshore beachie, paddled out into the heaving mess, and still managed to pull out a few clips.

Onshore = Offshore. Get it?

**DUSTY PAYNE IS COVERED IN FOAM.** A Middle Eastern man holds a sword-like razor to his neck. It's their final day in Africa, so the boys decided to take in a bit of culture. Payne decided to check out the barber.

"You haven't been that smooth since you were 8 years old," Kai tells Dusty. "I've never seen a closer shave."

They troll the streets with childlike wonder. Buying trinkets. Hagglng vendors. Snapping photos.

"You guys sure are into all your photos and gadgets and girls, aren't you?" says Struntz,

amused by the scene they're creating in the dusty roads of northern Africa. He doesn't quite get it. They're building something he can't even see. No one can. The moment you try to look, it's already somewhere else.

Like some alien rock group, Mitch, Dusty and Dion rebound the energy of the bustling street markets. Kai slinks along like a shadow, haphazardly documenting. Behind the scenes and living in the frames. Visions from the roads. Most of which appear online the very next day. Nearly live, but already too late.

Every missed opportunity creates a newer,  
more unique opportunity. A change in scenery.

A bend in the road. A zig to the usual zag.

Jordy Smith's onshore extension. PHOTO: TOM CAREY





Dion scours the slums with his rusty Nikon. Mitch carves “MODERN COLLECTIVE” into this rock:



Dusty rubs his baby-smooth face and smiles into the sun. A cold beer is sounding good — then maybe a surf.  
Moment to moment...Yep, that's what we'll do now.

THE RIGHT POINT OUT FRONTSKI IS WHAT WE CAME DOWN FOR BUT FOUND A CRUSTY LEFT RAMP OF DOOM JUST AROUND THE CORNER. THE BOYS DID SURF THE POINT ON OCCASION AND MITCH LOCKED AWAY THE FIRST FLIP IN THE MODERN COLLECTIVE PIGGY BANK!  
POSTED BY MODERN COLLECTIVE 1/22/09  
AT 8:58 P.M. 23 COMMENTS

**NOW KAI'S IN BALI**, supposedly starting the editing process for *Modern Collective's* October release. By “now,” — of course, we mean a few months ago — relative to this out-dated print medium's too-slow frame of reference. But in fact, as we print this, he's not even there yet. We just told you that to try and keep up. But by the time you read this, he's not even there anymore. He's probably in outer Indo with the complete Collective crew filming the final trip. Which probably isn't the final trip at all.  
Confusing, we know.  
Technically, they should have been finished by now. Which, in *Opposite Backwards Land*, means you should keep working. Film more. Surf better. Change everything. So, instead of announcing a release date, Kai booked



They found themselves staring out at a huge,  
offshore, righthand pointbreak.  
Which, in this car, is a bad thing.

Mitch Coleborn grinds the high wire somewhere in the Atlantic. PHOTO: DJ STRUNTZ



a boat and started dreaming up new cinematic stunts for the film.

Those will probably change, though. They'll probably change the release date on us again, too. They'll change the title, the surfers, and the whole premise and we'll just read about it on the blog and cry. Stupid *paper* magazines.

The Collective just isn't ready to stop. They *can't* stop. This is their lives. This is what they do. As the film premieres, a new film will already be rolling. The premiere night might even turn into a section. Now. And Now. And Now.

**NOW FORGET THE LATE NIGHTS AND LONG FLIGHTS.** Forget hot chicks and aerial twists. The busted camera art-weirding and exotic market wanderings. At some point in the future, Kai Neville will be forced to pay his debt to the past. For his crimes, he'll have to lock himself in a dark sweaty dungeon and start editing this movie into existence.

It's going to hurt. Like crashing a car and giving birth at the same time. But this is Kai's moment.

For a while, The Collective crew will probably hang around the studio, commenting on clips, spinning out new ideas, but they'll eventually wander off and Kai will be alone to shape the vision.

The Collective will scatter back into the onshore winds. Profile films. ASP events. Photo trips. While Kai settles in his darkened edit cave, the Collective will scatter back into the onshores. Jordy doing tail chucks you'll learn about yesterday. Dion's postmodern boardsprays fading into history. Mitch landing flips he hasn't even thought of yet. Dane still deciding if he's over it, but already knowing he isn't, which is weird cause tomorrow he'll maybe say he is...

This is their time, and they have to keep chasing it. You can't keep up, but you won't be left behind.

**EVEN AS WE WERE WRITING THIS ARTICLE,** the first sentences fell out of date. The soundtrack is done. Don't bother submitting tracks. If you weren't following this film day to day, trip to trip, you're merely living in its past.

Don't feel bad. We blinked too. These guys move fast. They also do full-rotation aerial flips that previous generations didn't dare dream of. So what's next?

We'd ask Kai, but he's already gone. Disappeared into the darkness of an editing studio. And for the moment, the future is speeding ahead without him. Five years from now, *Modern Collective* will be as outdated as *Momentum*. This magazine will be yellowing in some garage sale "Free" box. And we'll all be downloading some new digital hot yoga to cure our old-school back problems.

So forget the future. Forget the past. *Modern Collective* is here to inspire you to try something different right now. To get on board and be part of their live moment in time. Backwards. Upside down. With method grabs. It's never too late to try something new.

The beauty of Now is that it never stays, and it's always right here. 🇲🇦

FOR MORE FUTURISTIC CLIPS, GO TO [SURFINGMAGAZINE.COM](http://SURFINGMAGAZINE.COM) OR CHECK THE MC BLOG AT [MODERNCOLLECTIVE.TV](http://MODERNCOLLECTIVE.TV)

SPECIAL THANKS TO DENNY AND CREW AT MOROCCAN SURF ADVENTURES. FOR MORE INFO, GO TO [WWW.MOROCSURF.COM](http://WWW.MOROCSURF.COM).



Dusty Payne kicks the crumble somewhere in North Africa. PHOTO: DJ STRUNTZ