skate/worlds

new pedagogies for skateboarding

Edited by Sander Hölsgens and Adelina Ong

University of Groningen Press

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Chapter 1

"We belong here": Lessons from skateboarding

Sander Hölsgens

Growing up in The Netherlands in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I stumbled upon skateboarding everywhere. MTV broadcasted *Jackass* and Avril Lavigne's *Sk8er Boi*, while *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* was a sleeper hit on Sony's PlayStation. All major cities – including Maastricht, Eindhoven, and Rotterdam – had one or more skate shops where you could hang out after school. My friends and I each purchased VHS tapes of skate videos, which we then converted to digital files and exchanged on CDs and USB sticks. Bookshops sold copies of *Transworld Skateboarding*, *Thrasher* and *Sidewalk Magazine*, international publications that portrayed professional skateboarders as god-like figures. Gradually, city councils started to install "No Skateboarding" signs, attempting to restrict the use of streets for urban play. The sign in my hometown came with a sense of pride: we as skateboarders actually changed the city of Kerkrade. We were seen. And yet: as ubiquitous as skateboarding was, it gained little public credibility. If anything, this rise in popularity coincided with a public animosity towards skateboarders, including hostile architecture

such as skate stoppers and related tactics to keep us off the streets.

What a difference a few years can make. In the fall of 2023, I travelled to London to visit the Design Museum. On display was a show called *SKATEBOARD*. By this point, I had conducted research on skate culture for over a decade. I had also witnessed skateboarders make their Olympic debut in Tokyo, while NETFLIX documentaries on skateboarding became a trope. Still, it felt unreal to enter a vast exhibition space tailored to something as offbeat as skateboarding. Suddenly, the particularity of my experience was something to reflect upon, to take seriously, to *preserve*. Upon entering the exhibition space, I noticed a museum label: "The exhibition recognises that the story of skateboarding is a recent one, made by skaters. There is no single version of events so memories may not always align" (Design Museum, 2023). I wondered whether this curated version of skate history would resonate with mine, or my friends', or any other skateboarders' for that matter. I walked up to a looped video essay, narrated by professional skateboarder, Olympiad, and architect Alexis Sablone. She chronicles a story all-too familiar to skateboarders across the globe: the skateboard started as a post-war toy for children (1950s), gained traction in the United States as an alternative to surfing (1960s-1970s), generated a street culture with its own aesthetics and anti-establishment politics (1980s-2000s), and culminated into a diverse, globalised phenomenon sensitive to sportification and Olympification (2010s-now).

My youth, my upbringing as a skateboarder, neatly fits the categorisation of the 1980s-2000s: my bodily presence in the

city center was one of deviance, representing a "subculture" that challenged any kind of hierarchy and rank. But there was more to the exhibition than resemblances of my own youth. In the 1970s, for instance, plastic-based materialities – usually associated with children's toys – were replaced by wooden, concave boards tailored to use cases of transportation and athletic excellence. During this transitional phase, designers experimented with the board's look and feel, from eight-wheeled devices to triangular shapes and the use of carbon fiber. Speculating what (else) this wheeled activity could be, the 1970s are skateboarding's most experimental phase, if not its coming of age. At this critical moment in time, technological and socio-material developments would coincide.

This quickly changed. As soon as skateboarding moved from emptied pools to hardpan streets in the 1980s, homogeneous design principles started to gain traction. Fixated on a symmetrical board, flexible aluminum trucks, and small-sized polyurethane wheels, skateboards became a uniform tool affording trick play in the built environment. Design-wise, not much has changed since: the boards achieved an optimum between ingenuity, maneuverability, and affordability. This is the look and feel of a board most current skateboarders fell in love with. Board graphics soon became the main differentiator, speaking to the appetite of late capitalism. From brand logos and photographs to satire and political commentary, graphics are now harnessed to communicate aesthetic and ideological preferences, becoming a tool for self-expression. This reverberates the commodification of leisure in the late twentieth century. Consider how, in nearly all video games on skate culture, new graphics are unlocked

upon player progress: it's peak individualism. What's at stake is not necessarily the best-performing board, but rather a pictoriality that represents the skateboarder's (or player's) core values or affiliations.

As I walked towards the exit of the exhibition, I noticed the excitement of a couple of men about my age. They were running from one cubicle to the next, pointing out boards they used to have or recognised from skate videos. They, too, glared at the graphics and accessories at display – by American brands like Zero, Real, and Krooked. Then, a long pause. One of the men began to shake. He put his arm around his friend's shoulder and said: "Mate, this is us. Not the artists, not the designers, us… We belong here. We finally belong".

Perhaps, this is the point of the exhibition: to chronicle how skateboarding transformed its deviant urban play into an accepted medium. While city councils still resort to hostile architecture and policies to remove skateboarding from the streets, there's an increasing acknowledgment of its positive contributions. "We belong here" not only means a negative liberty, or an absence of hostile interference, but also a presence of skateboarders in the public sphere. In the 2020s, skateboarders are politicians, lawyers, social workers, planners, designers, psychologists, managers, and teachers – all working towards a fairer, safer, and more democratic use of public space. Put differently: "we belong" echoes with "our presence matters".

Skate studies: an origin story

Skateboarding's societal position is changing for the better. This shift is reflected in skate scholarship, too. What started off as an eccentric research subject has grown into a thriving area of inquiry. Globally, students are writing their thesis on topics adjacent to skate culture, while dozens of academics embrace research on urban play, lifestyle sports, and street art. Within the skate studies community, I've also heard multiple people say that "we finally belong". Gone are the awkward moments that talks on skateboarding at academic conferences are met with patronising comments. Disciplines like anthropology, performance studies, sociology, film and media studies, fine art, pedagogy and education, urban studies, and the psychology of sport now accept articles on skateboarding as valid contributions to research. Considered a societal phenomenon to reckon with, the bibliography in skate studies is growing on a weekly basis – offering radically new insights and pushing the field in unforeseen directions.

Skate studies took off in the mid-1990s with the publication of works by three researchers: Becky Beal, Iain Borden, and Ocean Howell. Although they fostered an entire generation of skate intelligentsia, their idiosyncratic relationship to skateboarding sparked a range of distinct insights. During his teens and twenties, Ocean Howell skated for H-Street, a San Diego-based skateboard brand, only to become a professional skateboarder for Tony Hawk's Birdhouse a few years later. These experiences punctuated his early academic work. This includes an inquiry into the urban developments and everyday experiences of Philadelphia's LOVE Park, an architectural marvel and prototypical skateable space. His writing

works towards a poetics of security, tracing the effects of exclusionary urban policies and hostile architecture on skateboarding (Howell, 2005; 2008). Howell is especially well-known for his idea that skateboarders are used as "unwitting troops" for gentrification, by deterring "vandalism, drug use, prostitution, and homeless encampments" (Howell, 2008, p.485). Like artists, Howell claims, skateboarders are part of the neoliberal toolkit and tactics municipalities use for urban renewal.

By contrast, sports sociologist Becky Beal decided early on in her fieldwork that she would rather observe than skate:

> This is what happened when I first started interviewing skateboarders in 1989. It was mainly boys and they'd say: 'oh do you want to be a skater? Is that why you're interviewing us?' And I just decided right there: I'm not going to… I'm just going to be interested in you and I'm going to learn about your life, but I'm not trying to be a skater, I'm not trying to use you to become a skater. So that's where I just split. and that's why I never did it and now I'm old and I don't want to hurt myself (Pushing Boarders, 2018: online).

Beal's PhD thesis, completed in 1992, proved to be a starting point for long-term research into the gender dynamics and subcultural values in skateboarding, including how male skateboarders express non-hegemonic masculinity (Beal, 1992). Relatedly, Beal claims that skateboarders oppose competition, commerce, and hierarchy, such that the "internalization and personalization of the core values were central to being accepted as a legitimate member" (Beal and Weidman, 2003, p.340). Beal identified how societal value systems inter-

sect with or counter skateboarding, suggesting that it operates as a subculture of sorts. This argument was advanced by researchers including Tyler Dupont (2014), Bethany Geckle and Sally Shaw (2022), and Chuang Li (2022), who developed site-specific studies into gatekeeping and authenticity.

A first-generation British skateboarder, Iain Borden primarily skates bowls, not street – which is the main topical focus of this volume. Still, his main arguments revolve around street skating and found urban space. As an architectural historian influenced by Henri Lefebvre, Borden (2019) is specifically interested in how skateboarders represent, perceive, and produce found architectural space. Most critically, Borden argues how skateboarders "analyse architecture not for historical, symbolic or authorial content but for how surfaces present themselves as skateable surfaces". Put differently, skateboarders develop a unique skill set for navigating the city: they reconfigure the common meanings of urban space through play. By rendering space as *skateable*, skateboarders also offer an embodied critique of the functionalist design principles of the modern city. Even though street furniture like ledges, benches, bollards, and litter bins have specific use-cases, skateboarders imagine what else these objects could be (and mean). This, to Borden, is a way for skateboarders to push back against the increasing neoliberalisation of modern cities. Borden's argument is recently taken up by researchers including Luke Cianciotto (2020, p.680), who suggests that skateboarders produce *common* space – or a spatial typology that is "constantly in the process of becoming, brought into being through social practices". Relatedly, Åsa Bäckström and Anne-Lend Sand (2019, p.122) argue that skateboarders

"imagine and make new material encounters" through their bodily practice.

Finally, and crucially, Borden's work offers the first and most thorough historical analysis of the sociocultural, geographic and architectural developments of skate culture. Borden's more recent writings, including an updated re-issue of his 2001 seminal text, explore how skateboarding has moved beyond being a predominantly Northern American (and Western European) phenomenon, with social skate organisations and communities on the rise. This reverberates with the narrative presented at the SKATEBOARD exhibition described above: from deviant to socially conscious and societally accepted.

The three Es: the environmental, ethical, and emic turns

Inspired by the first wave of skate researchers, current scholarship orbits around three intersecting turns: the environmental, the ethical, and the emic. The first – the environmental turn – took off at Pushing Boarders, a conference tracing the social impact of skateboarding. During a workshop, scholars, industry leaders, and critics got together to discuss where skateboarding stands in terms of sustainability. As much as the skate industry is slowly moving towards ethically produced attire and boards made with renewables, another concern was raised: skateboarding depends on the polluting spaces of the built environment, including city centers, harbours, brownfields, and industrial areas. The hardpan surface of the city – and tarmac in specific – fumes with toxins and chemicals, not to mention the close prox-

imity of cars, landfills, and factories. Put differently: skateboarding relies on the modern city, or precisely the kind of poisonous environment known to cause thousands of deaths per year. One of the scholars attending the workshop was Clifton Evers, who had just coined the concept of "polluted leisure" to understand how surfers learn to live alongside marine pollution. This conceptualisation proved relevant to urban practices as well, resulting in a co-authored piece about skateboarding and the Anthropocene (O'Connor et al., 2023). Framed as "grey spaces", these authors identified how socio-material detritus punctuates the everyday practice of skateboarding.

This environmental take on skateboarding implicitly builds upon Actor-Network Theory and related social theories interested in constantly shifting networks of complex relationships between people, other lifeforms, things, and environs. What's more, this foundational paper kickstarted an entire strand of 'chromatic' research, from an interest in brownfields (Glenney, 2023), grey sites of skate tourism (Buchetti and O'Connor, 2024), green skateable spaces (McDuie-Ra, 2023), greyness and masculinity (Chan, 2023), the joy of using polluted skate spaces (Hölsgens and Glenney, 2025), and the convergence of social and material pollution (Hölsgens, 2024). In this collected volume, Noah Romero and Douglas Miles advance this genealogy by researching the relationship skaters of the Apache Notion have with land. Indigo Willing, Sanné Mestrom, Lian Loke, and Nadia Odlum point to more sustainable ways of building skate spaces. While pollution is not the topical focus of this volume, the environmental turn

has influenced many of its contributors in exploring the relationship between skaters and their surroundings.

In 2023, sociologist Indigo Willing and journalist Anthony Pappalardo observed that a growing number of skaters are change-makers. Aiming to transform society for the better, skaters increasingly turn to social and humanitarian issues of gender inequity, racism, mental health, consent culture, unsafe cities, and climate change. As much as skateboarding has historically developed into an unorganised, individualist, and male-dominated practice, the tide is turning. Women-led organisations are pushing for equal pay among professional skaters (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018; Abulhawa, 2020); conferences and festivals tackle problems in skate culture from within (Hölsgens, 2021); industry leaders raise awareness on suicidality (Pushing Boarders, 2019); skateparks organise skate sessions for women, non-binary, and queer skaters (Bäckström and Nairn, 2018; Dekker, 2023); and design and construction companies use more durable and ethically produced materials for the production of skateable space (Kuipers, 2022). Willing and Pappalardo (2023) identify this trend as an "ethical turn" in skateboarding – an indication that it is no longer just a youth culture tailored to play. Skateboarding is developing into a self-conscious, reflexive, and multifaceted network of communities, some of which align themselves with or parallel broader social movements. This ethical turn includes both a critique of skate culture itself and a resistance to harmful societal issues. Increasingly, this includes intersectional and decolonial approaches (Sueyoshi 2015; Atencio, Romero, 2020). Many of the chapters in this

book reflect this ethical turn in understanding skateboarding as a learning tool.

Finally, and relatedly, research on skateboarding includes a growing group of skate practitioners, who use their insider's positionality to validate their knowledge claims. Social scientists denote this as an *emic* perspective. This approach generates detailed (auto-)ethnographic accounts of skate culture, including communities in Japan (Marlovits, 2024), Palestine (Abulhawa, 2017), China (Li, 2022), Sweden (Book and Eden, 2021), South Korea (Hölsgens, 2019), Dubai (McDuie-Ra, 2021), Jamaica (Critchley, 2022), Indonesia (Artosa, 2022), Afghanistan (Friedel, 2015), and many more. It also engenders insights into how socio-political dynamics play out in the microcosm of skateboarding, including motherhood (Sayers, 2023), racial politics (Williams, 20211), queerness (Geckle and Shaw, 2022), and media representation (Willing et al., 2020). The wide majority of these studies speak to the researcher's involvement in skateboarding. Conceptualised as a "rolling ethnography" (McDuie-Ra, 2023), researchers regularly use their own sensory practice to gain access to a community and offer a more trustworthy alternative to the unfamiliar observer. Such an immersive approach and embedded positionality enables a research typology that foregrounds the experiential, affective, and emotive, rather than locating knowledge primarily in discursive exchanges and quantitative analysis.

However, uplifting sensory data does not necessarily mean a researcher has to be a practitioner themselves. Åsa Bäckström (2014), one of this volume's contributors, has written extensively on the sensory and kinaesthetic experience in

skateboarding, without actively partaking in the practice during her research projects. Similarly, Greg Snyder (2017) traces the socio-emotive dimensions of being a professional skater from an etic, or outsider's, perspective. Analysing a practice one is not part of can help identify routines, tendencies, and structures that may otherwise be taken for granted. This volume features skateboarders and non-skateboarders alike, advancing the notion that a focus on merely insider's or outsider's perspectives alone is insufficient for understanding the depth and scope of a practice.

If anything, all these studies show the multiplicity of skateboarding today. As much as the SKATEBOARD exhibition at the Design Museum boosts a hegemonic history, the factual origins of skateboarding remain nebulous. The most dominant story – the one presented at the exhibition – takes place in Southern California, in the early 1950s (Borden, 2019). There, young kids modified scooters in such a way that they eventually ended up with a wooden plank, four wheels, and two axle trucks, without any kind of handlebar. However, a similar story exists about the coasts of postwar Japan. Here, kids were also making new wheeled tools, as much as surfers transformed surfing to a form of urban play (Glauser, 2016). These academic uncertainties play out on different levels, too. Is skateboarding truly salubrious, bettering practitioners' mental and physical health? Is it really as progressive as some of its community leaders want us to believe? And is it actually unique and incomparable, *sui generis*, as some researchers have suggested over the past few years (Glenney and Mull, 2018)? These are exactly the kinds of questions that the contributors of this edited volume grapple with – through

the lens of education and pedagogy. The outcome is not a general story about skate culture, but rather a collection of situated studies that broaden and deepen our insights into the kinds of forms and effects skateboarding may have in specific contexts. As such, this volume proposes that there is no such thing as a *skate world*, but rather a diversity of interconnected *skate worlds*.

Skate pedagogies

These new directions in skate scholarship display a shared interest in learning and teaching practices. Ethically, skateboarders co-develop emancipatory sensibilities to become a better person. Environmentally, skateboarders must learn to live with pollution. As a global community, skateboarders cultivate a common frame of reference for urban play. This volume, *Skate/Worlds*, seeks to advance this intersection of skateboarding and learning. Can skateboarding be a school subject and contribute to people's personal development? Is it therapeutic? Why do skaters learn to move sideways? What do you learn from falling and failing (Tae, 2011)? And how can skateboarding help parents with raising newborns? The volume chronicles how we can learn to skate and learn from skateboarding, zooming in on topics including gestalt therapy, high school education, open-source learning communities, DIY peer support, care work, motherhood, anticolonial pedagogy, and grassroots advocacy. These topics speak to the ethical and environmental concerns at the heart of today's societies.

One of the aims of *Skate/Worlds* is to break down decades-old assumptions on skate pedagogy. Most persistently is the idea that skateboarding advances an antirank, informal, and horizontal pedagogical approach: a beginner does not learn to skate by taking lessons from a coach or instructor, but simply *by doing*. This includes carefully observing peers (but never asking for help); watching skate videos on repeat (but never instructional videos); performing a Sisyphean form of trial-and-error (but never quitting). Attending a skate class, let alone wearing a helmet or joining an association, goes against the grain of this normative ethic of self-schooling (O'Connor, 2016). Taken to the extreme, some skateboarders – generally labelled as "core" – may take pride in the unending frustration of learning tricks by themselves. Akin to martyrs or meritocrats, such practitioners honour the code of being an autodidact, preferring the idea of hurting themselves over asking for a little help. Despite these "core" sensibilities, skateboarding has a convoluted historical relationship with formalised education and institutional sports. There have always been skateboarders who mentor their peers, enjoy school, wear protective gear, and watch instructional videos. Learning to skate and taking lessons from skateboarding have socio-historically oscillated between informal and formal education, between the self-actualisation of individuals and the emancipatory forces of the collective.

Learning processes are always situated, meaning that skateboarding can be more DIY in some places and more regulated and institutionalised in others. *Skate/Worlds* acknowledges this spectrum by zooming in on specific contexts, showing how skateboarders across the globe learn about, from,

through, or in spite of skateboarding. This approach is further substantiated by recent publications on skate pedagogy, most notably Robert Petrone's *Dropping In: What Skateboarders Can Teach Us about Learning, Schooling, and Youth Development* (2023). Petrone considers skateboarding a possibility model for developing more equitable education for all youth, in part because it is such a fluid and ever-changing practice. The fact that *Skate/Worlds* and *Dropping In* were produced along similar timelines is not a coincidence: there has been an increase in scholarship on adjacent topics. This includes insights into youth skateboarding programmes (Sorsdahl et. al, 2024), play therapy among skateboarders (Norman, 2024), spiritual development (Shoemaker and Bernal, 2024), and the educational practices of healing and care (Clark and Sayers, 2023). Besides presenting new and original research, one of the aspirations of *Skate/Worlds* is to draw attention to recent scholarship on skate pedagogy.

Co-editor Adelina Ong and I brought together writers, educators, researchers, and social workers who use skateboarding as a learning tool. We invited these authors to share their perspectives on skateboarding and education: where does it flourish, why does it falter, how can it improve? We hope that this encourages readers to explore the liberating potential of moving sideways on their streets, as well as to find or create learning communities that speak to their emancipatory aspirations. We do not argue that skateboarding plus education is an equation with a singular outcome. Rather, we provide case studies that amplify the meanings and interpretations of learning practices across specific geographic, social, and historical contexts. The reader will also notice that several authors

share a commitment to critical and engaged pedagogy. This is especially noticeable in the cross-textual references to Paulo Freire. By attending to the socio-economic, cultural, and political realities of those involved in learning and teaching, Freire (2003) considers it possible to develop emancipatory and liberating educational practices. Learning to skate goes beyond the immediacy of skill acquisition: it is not just about the tricks. Many of the chapters in this volume attest to the need for a pedagogical liberation and an emphasis on practitioners' wellbeing. What aligns these chapters is an intersectional approach to research. The authors discuss how skateboarding (still) is gendered and racialised, at times bordering on classist and ableist ideologies, and encapsulated in colonial trajectories. The work of Dani Abulhawa (2017; 2020) and Neftalie Williams (2021) is instrumental for multiple authors to develop such a situated critique.

The volume's second chapter, by Rhianon Bader, chronicles the emergence of social skateboarding. Based on research by the Goodpush Alliance, Bader traces how social skate and educational initiatives exchange knowledge and best practices through open-source learning communities. The chapter gives an overview of the various ways in which skate collectives – especially those operating outside the global north – build and share teaching strategies, as much as it addresses pressing critiques on skate philanthropy and the broader formalisation of skateboarding. John Dahlquist turns the latter point into a detailed case study: what is it like to have skateboarding as a school subject? As a teacher and vice principal at Bryggeriets gymnasium in Malmö, Dahlquist reflects with former students on the joy and challenges of a skate-in-

fused high school. The chapter's empirical insights show how skateboarding can help students with other subjects, while the formalised setting of a school can simultaneously feed and limit students' interest in skateboarding. *Skate/Worlds* fourth chapter, by Esther Sayers, reflects on her research at Bryggeriets gymnasium by asking: what if a skate pedagogy has the aim of learning-for-life, rather than for a profession or constrained skill set? Precisely by developing social, symbolic, and embodied ways of knowing, skateboarders can build meaningful connections and shape empowering communities. Advancing the notion of a public pedagogy, Sayers argues that skateboarding can be an emancipatory tool for acquiring agency and a community-wide sense of belonging.

Arianna Gil and Jessica Forsyth explore how socially engaged skate crews in New York City deal with structural oppression. Grounded in research by the Harold Hunter Foundation, Gil and Forsyth point out how skate crews have the capacity to challenge the urban politics of wealth and welfare distribution, making visible the city's socio-economic and racialised segregation. Here, DIY acquires a political meaning. Indigo Willing, Sanné Mestrom, Lian Loke, and Nadia Odlum also delve into peer and community support among skateboarders. Attending to women and non-traditional skateboarders in Australia, these authors highlight sociological, design-based, and artistic projects that reconsider what skate spaces can be. Initiated by the authors themselves, these projects push for gender equity and social inclusion in urban play. Åsa Bäckström connects such urban play to movement literacy by asking a crucial chapter: how does teaching and learning in skateboarding happen? Taking Oyvind Standal's phenomenological insights

into physical education as a starting point, Bäckström positions embodied skill-acquisition as a crucial variable in community-building. What's more, the learning process of skateboarding speaks to issues of social inclusion, hegemonic norms, and categories of difference.

The volume's eight chapter, by Sophie Friedel, scrutinises movement literacy in a therapeutic setting. Based on Friedel's own gestalt therapy, this chapter points to the divergent ways in which skateboarding can be generative in terms of mental health, personal development, and lifelong learning. In the two case studies presented, Friedel identifies how skateboarding can be interwoven into professional therapeutic practices. For Adelina Ong, moving sideways is equally transformative. Reflecting on motherhood in Singapore, Ong argues that skateboarding with a baby in a stroller can challenge both gendered expectations of parenting and the carefully monitored choreographies of urban space. Here, the skateboard and the stroller become pedagogical tools for raising a newborn *and* unlearning normative approaches to motherhood. Finally, Noah Romero and Douglas Miles build upon this discourse of resistance by drawing upon the anti-colonial skate pedagogy of Apache Skateboards. A Native-founded skate company, Apache Skateboards is a model for informal and non-scholastic learning through which to advance Indigenous struggles and reject colonial mandates. Romero and Miles demonstrate how skateboarding as a modality for learning can push for collective liberation. This, co-editor Adelina Ong and I believe, brings together all chapters: how can we build new, and expand on, existing pedagogies that speak to the needs of a multiplicity of skate worlds?

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Chapter 2

Open-source learning communities for social skateboarding

Rhianon Bader

Introduction

As the reach of skateboarding continues to extend around
the world, over the past 20 years there has also been an expo-
nential growth in skateboarding-based social and educational
initiatives globally. There are now more than 750 social skate-
boarding initiatives operating in more than 100 countries
around the world (*About Us*, n.d.). While the scale, aims, and
activities of these initiatives vary greatly, the social skate-
boarding initiatives are founded on an "increasingly glo-
balised belief that skateboarding is a beneficial activity for
society, and youth in particular" (Beal et al., 2017, p.12). In the
most recent annual Survey of Social Skateboarding Projects
Worldwide, responses were received from 134 initiatives who
collectively reach more than 14,300 participants weekly, and
have a combined annual budget of approximately 12 million
USD (Skateistan & Goodpush Alliance, 2024). Almost all of
the initiatives surveyed work with children and youth (96%),

50% work with adults, and regular participants include 44% female and 4% non-binary/trans participants. The majority of these projects also aim to serve other "non-traditional" skateboarders, which is a term chosen by skateboarders themselves to encompass those who have historically been excluded from power, influence, and representation within skateboarding and wider society (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023; Delardi, 2021).

Over the years there has been substantial academic critique of sport for development and peace (SDP), as well as more recent/related critiques of social skateboarding. However, social skateboarding organisations and practitioners have demonstrated a self-reflective, growth-mindset that seeks to address the reasons for these critiques head-on. One of the key drivers for making positive changes has been the frequent collaboration – both formal and informal – among the vast majority of social skateboarding initiatives worldwide, in order to share their best practices and knowledge with each other.

This chapter will give an overview on the scale and focus topics of open-source learning communities that social skateboarding practitioners are engaging in both regionally and globally to increase their collective impact. I argue that this knowledge-sharing is challenging the asymmetrical power relations that often underpin the non-profit sector and development industry, as the social skateboarding community walks the tightrope of trying to build a global network that simultaneously rejects hierarchical power relations and institutionalisation. This chapter will also provide recommendations for further collaboration approaches and opportunities

to increase the social, educational, and inclusion outcomes achieved through skateboarding-based programmes.

Background on Social Skateboarding and Education

There are now more than 750 social skateboarding initiatives ranging from tiny, grassroots community projects to large official non-profit organisations (*About Us*, n.d.). The skateboarding community is quickly becoming more diverse and inclusive, and social media is allowing new and long-existing diversity to be represented in a way that mainstream skateboarding media failed miserably at. Alongside these exciting changes is a simultaneous "boom in 'change-makers' in skateboarding who are pushing for positive social change" (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.6) and pursuing projects with varying levels of formality and sustainability. These range from less formal activities like one-off events or inclusive skate meet-ups, to purpose-built skateparks with learning facilities and curricula that focus not only on skateboarding skills but also larger life skills (Abulhawa, 2020; Abulhawa, 2022). A growing number of social skateboarding initiatives are collaborating directly with public school systems and "educational and cultural institutions are beginning to engage with skateboarding in new ways" (Corwin et al., 2020, p.3).

Certainly, not all social skateboarding initiatives have an educational component, and skateboarding overall "has traditionally not placed much emphasis on education" or seen education as fitting into the image of what's considered "core" skateboarding (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.203). However, within the social skateboarding sphere, formal and informal

educational components have increasingly become the norm, with 48% of projects offering "education, mentoring or arts" programming according to a 2023 survey of more than 130 initiatives (Skateistan & Goodpush Alliance, 2024, p.9) and 60% of respondents in 2019 working with youth who are affected by "barriers to education" (Skateistan & Pushing Boarders, 2020, p.6). The survey results also demonstrate a broad range of needs that social skateboarding projects work towards meeting, including improving mental health, social inclusion, gender equity, and youth leadership.

What is clear about the educational approaches of social skateboarding projects is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution and that there is great value in having a diversity of both structured and unstructured approaches that demonstrate what's possible for the entire community to benefit from. Each approach has its own benefits and drawbacks, and these will look different depending on the given context. The development of open-source knowledge-sharing communities within social skateboarding that will be discussed in this chapter allows others who want to introduce skateboarding-based social programmes to adapt a variety of approaches and design initiatives that are tailored to the participants and context they are working with.

Critical Reflections on Social Skateboarding

Just as the growth of social skateboarding organisations has been exponential, so too have the related scholarship and academic critiques. While some of the more established critiques are extensions of those brought upon sport for devel-

opment and peace (SDP) more broadly, there are numerous critical perspectives on how skateboarding-based non-profits, or what Paul O'Connor terms "skate philanthropy" (O'Connor, 2020), are specifically problematic. One of the most long-standing criticisms of SDP is that it supports a neoliberal shift away from public investment in youth programmes and sport infrastructure towards privatisation. Skateboarding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their corporate funding partners are also seen as contributing to these neoliberal trends (Beal et al., 2017, p.12), with skateboarding NGOs now engaging "in activities as diverse as clothing the homeless, bringing fresh water to communities, or educating youth in a war-ravaged nation" (O'Connor, 2020, p.264).

While Becky Beal et al. (2017, p.14) argue that despite the economic interests of stakeholders, "the vast majority had sincere commitments to some forms of social justice, especially creating safe spaces for traditionally marginalised youth", O'Connor (2020) argues that at the base level the main beneficiaries of skate philanthropy are the skate industry, sponsoring agencies, and skateboarders – rather than the particular individuals or communities they purport to serve. While this perspective would likely be seen as cynical by social skateboarding practitioners, who often highlight the lives changed through their activities, it ties into a related critique of the evangelistic "echo chamber" tendencies of both SDP and skate philanthropy, with skateboarding portrayed as a cure-all despite the limited empirical evidence for the claims made (O'Connor, 2020, p.272).

A more specific shortcoming that has been identified of skateboard philanthropy is that the ongoing exclusionary influence of "core" skateboarding has tended to reproduce power dynamics in social skateboarding so that most of the power (and money) sits with male, heterosexual, and white individuals based in the Global North (Abulhawa, 2020, p.99; Beal et al., 2017; Critchley, 2023; Friedel, 2015; Willing & Pappalardo, 2023). Although likely unintentional, this gate-keeping means "there are still many ways that skateboarders promote hierarchical relationships and practice exclusion" (Abulhawa, 2020, p.83). This can play out in who feels comfortable coming to skate spaces, who is invited to join in the DIY (do-it-yourself) skatepark builds, who can access funding or sponsors, how diverse the staff and volunteers of skate NGOs are, and whether the staff come from the communities they are working in. Although there have been more recent conscious efforts to shift this, as social skateboarding grows from grassroots to mainstream, there is the risk of increasing overlap with the culture of the greater non-profit and development sphere, particularly related to engaging in archaic, top-down fundraising, programmes, and staffing practices that reinforce asymmetrical power relationships.

One particularly common example of this in social skateboarding is skateboarders from the Global North leading on social projects taking place in the Global South, or going abroad as volunteers "who travel like missionaries" for skateboard charities, at the risk of cultural imperialism (O'Connor, 2020, p.270; Friedel, 2015). Having foreign volunteers or cultural exchange among skateboarders is not always inherently bad, as pointed out in Dani Abulhawa's

(2022) writing on the skateboarding NGO Skatepal, which has relied on dozens of foreign volunteers each year to run its skateboarding programmes and provide international connection for young people in Palestine, and Tom Critchley's (2022) research on the Planting Seeds skatepark construction apprenticeship programme for youth in Jamaica. But there are certainly risks of a white saviour complex underlying social skate activities, and of the positivity of skateboarding being used to blanket-endorse all activities and people who claim to be using skateboarding for good (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.251; O'Connor, 2020).

In order to avoid the pitfalls facing the larger SDP sector, such as too much donor control and a "deficit mode" that views participants as victims who need empowerment (Abulhawa, 2020, p.81), the key, according to Abulhawa (2022, p.196), is to pursue decolonial "solidarity" with existing community builders rather than a "change" agenda. This requires greater "self-reflexive criticality" (Abulhawa, 2020, p.81), such as paying attention to how power operates (including one's own organisational or individual power) and a commitment to change at a personal level (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023). Some academics have argued that skateboarding has demonstrated greater self-awareness and critical reflection than SDP at large, with skateboarding often considered to be outside the realm of sport by skateboarders themselves (Thorpe, 2016; Abulhawa, 2020; Friedel, 2015).

Open-Source Knowledge-Sharing within Social Skateboarding

With more social skateboarding initiatives operating in more locations than ever before, a range of formal and informal knowledge-sharing spaces have developed to facilitate collaboration, self-reflection, and mutual aid. The open-source aspect of this knowledge-sharing is unsurprising, given the "collectivist and non-competitive values" of skateboarding (Lawton & Critchley, 2022, p.33). Many social skateboarding organisations are aware of the shortcomings reviewed in the previous section and aim to address them. However, they need to focus on the day-to-day reality of running a social organisation with limited resources. While there are numerous overlaps with SDP and many existing resources that could benefit social skateboarding, there is also value in creating specific spaces for social skateboarding practitioners to connect through a shared language and passion. Even though each context is different, and not all practices are transferable without suitable adaptation, the global knowledge-sharing that takes place among social skate practitioners mirrors the organic learning that happens among skateboarders, where "movements performed by other people and performed elsewhere in the park or spot can spark lines and tricks in others" (Abulhawa, 2020, p.96).

Despite some social skateboarding organisations being quite large, with dozens of staff and strong donor support, the vast majority are "skater-started grass-roots initiatives" (O'Connor, 2020, p.265). Social skate projects usually have small, volunteer-run teams that need to quickly and continuously learn a wide array of topics and skills such as land-own-

ership laws, grant applications, stakeholder engagement, brick-making techniques, and Suicide First Aid (Critchley, 2023). Results of the first annual Survey of Social Skateboarding Projects Worldwide in 2018, revealed that only 28% of the 101 projects had one or more full-time paid staff members. Similarly, 79% of the organisations in 2018 had an annual budget of less than $50,000 USD, or did not know what their budget was (Skateistan & Pushing Boarders, 2019). And while the 2023 survey saw an increase to 44% of respondents having at least one full-time paid staff member, those with an annual budget of less than $50,000 USD have virtually stayed the same (Skateistan & Goodpush Alliance, 2024). Even Skateistan, which is now the largest social skateboarding organisation globally, in both its reach and its budget, began in 2007 as a grassroots organisation relying on volunteers who "were all novices in our field but with a big heart for skateboarding" (Friedel, 2015, p.70).

A decade later, Skateistan set up one of the main knowledge-sharing platforms for the social skateboarding community, called the Goodpush Alliance, which "encourages a variety of groups, from grassroots and industry levels, to come together to create best practices in skate culture" (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.215). Skateistan's Founder and Executive Director Oliver Percovich explained the reasoning behind this: "Over the years, so many other social skate projects had asked us for help. We started to think about a way that we could lift up the whole sector, instead of keeping what we'd learned to ourselves" (Faulkner, 2020). The Goodpush Alliance provides open-source events, online resources, e-courses, and funding for social skateboarding

projects worldwide, and coordinates various campaigns and joint projects related to inclusion and collective impact (*About Us*, n.d.).

In the late 2010s and early 2020s, many other social skateboarding organisations have been actively contributing to open-source knowledge sharing, such as: The Skatepark Project, which provides online guides and advising on public skatepark advocacy because "there is more power in working together" (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.223); Skate Like a Girl, which shares their programme toolkit and runs an inclusive leadership programme for other social skate projects; Push to Heal, which creates videos and webinars on the science-based connection between skateboarding and neuroscience/trauma; Christian Skaters International, which provides resources, guides and events for skate ministries worldwide; and Concrete Jungle Foundation, which has trained others through their Planting Seeds Apprenticeship Program and their EduSkate curriculum. There are also topic/campaign based initiatives such as the Ben Raemers Foundation, which raises awareness of mental health and suicide prevention among skateboarders, and Consent is Rad, which aims to bring attention to rape culture in skateboarding and shift to cultures of consent (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023). And finally, there have been a number of conference-style events in recent years for social skateboarding practitioners, skate industry staff, and academics. These include Pushing Boarders, which fosters "discussion around inclusivity and social justice in skateboarding" (Abulhawa, 2020, p.83); Slow Impact AZ in the USA, which features panel discussions and

art; and US Skateboard Education Association, which hosts online summits for skate programme managers and coaches.

While so far a majority of the formal knowledge-sharing activities are taking place in, or initiated by organisations in, the Global North, a notable exception is Confederação Brasileira de Skateboarding (CBSK), which has been the Brazilian national governing body (NGB) for Olympics skateboarding, and has partnered with the long-established ONG Social Skate from São Paulo to register and map the more than 140 social skateboarding initiatives taking place across Brazil. CBSK and ONG Social Skate have also collaborated to create non-profit guidelines and skate games booklets, run events for the social skateboard community, and distributed hygiene supplies to skate programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic (*Mapping and Supporting Brazilian Social Skate Projects*, 2021; *Projetos Cadastratos*, n.d.). Another large social skate event that took place in the Global South was a four-day Goodpush Summit in Johannesburg in 2019, hosted by Skateistan South Africa (*2019 Goodpush Events*, 2019). The rise of online events since Covid-19 has also provided more global access to formal knowledge-sharing spaces, and informal knowledge-sharing between social skateboarding practitioners also happens organically, with 77% of initiatives connecting with other projects around the world (Skateistan & Goodpush Alliance, 2024).

Since one of the main strategies for avoiding "sport evangelism" is for programme deliverers to have a detailed understanding of the contexts they are working in (Abulhawa, 2022, p.196), open-source learning communities can contribute by providing free, accessible support to local social

skateboarding practitioners who are operating on the ground with very few resources. As a further step, more social skate organisations based in the Global South should be supported with funding and travel opportunities so they can actively contribute to resource-creation and global networks that are collecting and disseminating best practices. We are already seeing this inclusion-focused approach for women and gender-diverse skateboarders in Skate Like a Girl's Skateboarding Inclusivity Cooperative (sic) in North America and the ROLL Models Leadership Program in Europe. However, the powerful phrase "nothing about us without us", which originated in the disability rights community (Charlton, 2000), is a reminder of the need to ensure active inclusion of people with disabilities, as well as Global South leaders, displaced skateboarders, LGBTQI+ skateboarders, and skateboarders of colour in formal knowledge-sharing platforms.

Key Thematic Areas for Knowledge-Sharing

The topics addressed through the various knowledge-sharing platforms in social skateboarding range from the practical aspects of establishing and running a non-profit skateboarding organisation, to how skateboarding initiatives can contribute to larger social justice issues. On the more practical side, there are now numerous online resources and webinars related to capacity development for skateboard NGOs, for example in fundraising, child protection, skateboard programmes, measuring impact, staff training, and skatepark construction/advocacy.

While the Covid-19 pandemic compelled the pausing or closing of many social skateboarding projects and programmes, many projects also reported unexpected positive effects at the organisational level in 2020-2021, such as: "more people interested in skateboarding; new and improved safety precautions; more time for organisational and curriculum development"; more innovative programming; and more openness to collaboration (Skateistan & Pushing Boarders, 2021, p.16; Skateistan & Pushing Boarders, 2022). When the first Covid-19 lockdown hit, the Goodpush Alliance facilitated a series of monthly webinars, on topics suggested by the social skateboarding community. Several gatherings covered the practicalities of programme adaptation, mental health and safety during Covid-19 lockdowns, with more than 50 people attending some webinars (*Covid-19 Sharing Responses Webinars*, 2020). Athens-based Free Movement Skateboarding was one of the regular organisations in attendance, and shared on their blog about the webinars: "This mutual aid has been greatly helpful in these times of uncertainty – with so many different voices and perspectives we were able to share concerns, resources and knowledge; coming to productive conclusions together" (Mateja, 2020).

Beyond the practical topics related to organisational operations, social justice is a growing area where social skateboarding practitioners are connecting, sharing, and taking joint action. These include themes related to inclusion, gender equity, anti-racism, mental health, and environmental sustainability (O'Connor, 2020; Willing & Pappalardo, 2023; *sshred*, n.d.). A catalyst for many of these discussions was the Pushing Boarders conference, first held in 2018 in

London, UK, and in 2019 in Malmö, Sweden. The conferences included smaller academic-focused presentations, and publicly-accessible panel discussions, with hundreds of attendees coming from around the world to these first-of-a-kind events. The momentum of in-person sharing on these themes was ultimately cut short by the Covid-19 lockdowns, however the threads were picked up by online events post-2020. These included: a webinar series on adaptive skateboarding and accessible skateparks (*Accessible Skateparks Event*, 2021); the creation of the Open Boarders Network focusing on skate-based programmes for displaced youth (*Open Boarders Network*, 2022); and the formation of the Pushing Against Racism (PAR) working group, comprised of a dozen representatives from social skateboarding and the skate industry (*Pushing Against Racism*, 2021). In 2021, PAR launched an online *Commitment to Anti-Racism in Skateboarding*, and in 2022 announced an annual Pushing Against Racism Fund to strengthen diversity and inclusion within skateboarding worldwide (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023).

While most of the platforms and events mentioned so far have focused on an audience of social skateboarding practitioners and skate industry staff, global campaigns for Pushing Against Racism and Consent is Rad aim to reach the general skateboarding population as well. These social skateboarding-led campaigns seek to bring about changes to skate culture when the industry and power holders are not willing to confront sensitive topics like sexual violence or racism (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023). One of the most recent social justice campaigns is the Skateboarders for Palestine Alliance (SPA), established in late 2023, which has created an *Open*

Letter for people to sign on to and hosts a Discord server for skateboarders to "connect, organize, act" (SPA, 2024).

A final key area that knowledge-sharing actors are working in is measuring the collective impact of social skateboarding worldwide, as well as the overall aims, activities and number of actors working in this space. In 2018, Skateistan and Pushing Boarders launched the first Survey of Social Skateboarding Projects Worldwide, which has since been run annually, with the combined results published online. Each year more than 100 initiatives from dozens of countries contribute their data. While there is not yet a collective theory of change or logic model for the social skateboarding community, this is a project that the Goodpush Alliance is working on, together with a working group of social skateboarding initiatives (Goodpush Alliance, 2023). While it remains to be seen if such an impact measurement framework can be agreed upon by the community at large, this would be an important step towards addressing the common critique that there is a lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of skateboard NGOs.

Tensions Between a DIY Ethos and Formalising Social Skateboarding

As social skateboarding organisations grow larger and more numerous, some skateboarders have concerns that outside actors will "institutionalize the once rebellious art of skateboarding to fuel their own political interests" (Friedel, 2015, p.74), with greater formalisation contributing to the loss of "skateboarding's punk and subcultural approach of less

managerialism and more DIY approaches" (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.276). Social skateboarding organisations and change-makers tend to operate, intentionally or unintentionally, outside of the dominant development paradigm (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023), however "the formalisation of 'skateboarding training' raises a point of tension between organisational bodies on the one hand and art-making/lifestyle skateboarders on the other" (Abulhawa, 2022, p.199). This is linked to the growing tension among the wider skate community since skateboarding became an Olympic sport in 2021 – between the non-competitive ethos of skateboarding historically and the recent growth of structured coaching programmes and training regimes (Abulhawa, 2022). This balance between formalisation and more informal, DIY approaches is also a challenge that open-source learning communities in social skateboarding must navigate, so that organisations and social justice movements can become more stable and sustainable without losing the benefits of informality, such as agility and creativity.

Skateboarding has deep subcultural roots, and even in the United States, where it originates, it continues to receive less resource allocation than other sports by municipalities and cultural and educational institutions (Corwin et al., 2020). Up until recently, the lack of overarching governing bodies and rule books has been a liberating aspect of skateboarding, contributing to its DIY ethos and a "radical empathy" that emphasises "sharing over possessing power" (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.272). DIY practices are based on "open sharing, learning, creativity over profit and participation of the 'non-expert'", emphasising learning-by-doing and low

barriers to participation (Critchley, 2023; 2022, p.34). DIY practices allow the "resource-weak to set new realities in motion" – as witnessed at DIY skateparks – and adapt quickly in times of uncertainty (Critchley, 2022, p.28; Critchley, 2023). These DIY principles and approaches also shape the knowledge-sharing communities that have emerged among social skate practitioners. These communities aim for accessibility, inclusion, lack of hierarchy, and open-source sharing by peers. Yet, since most social skateboarding initiatives rely on donations to run sustainably, there is a simultaneous push by some more-established actors to build legitimacy for skateboard philanthropy among mainstream funding sources and donors, without losing legitimacy among the skateboarding community in the process.

In certain circumstances, the tendency of skateboarders to be insular and take action "without the help of sanctioned experts" (Corwin et al., 2020, p.25) runs the risk of social skateboarding initiatives being less effective than they could be, even potentially putting their staff and participants in danger. One example is the prevalence of burnout and vicarious trauma of social skateboarding staff and volunteers when they are not equipped professionally or personally to handle the challenges and traumas they may encounter, particularly in impoverished and conflict-affected contexts (O'Connor, 2020). Conversely, Push to Heal and the Ben Raemers Foundation provide resources and events related to mental health in skateboarding and have found a way to successfully integrate the inputs of outsider experts, while weaving in the unique perspective and cultural identity of skateboarders. Two other prominent areas where external expertise could

help to fill the gaps for social skateboarding learning communities are diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), and environmental sustainability (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023).

At the same time, many of the social issues that skateboarding "change-makers grapple with are seen to have relevance and can be entangled with wider society" and thus many insights, resources and collective efforts from skateboarding can offer useful guidance to other communities, subcultures and sports (Willing & Pappalardo, 2023, p.224). There is potential for skateboarding to capitalise on its influence and share its wisdom beyond the skateboarding realm, with campaigns such as *Pushing Against Racism* and *Consent is Rad* providing inspiration for how to address and bring attention to sensitive social justice topics within other sporting communities. Likewise, Olympic skateboarding NGBs which support social skateboarding initiatives as part of their regular activities, like CBSK and SkateboardGB in the UK (Lawton & Critchley, 2022), could serve as a model for other Olympic sporting bodies to promote social initiatives alongside competitive sport. While social skateboarding practitioners and learning communities have only had a "tangential connection to the SDP sector" (Abulhawa, 2020, p.84), there are opportunities to share knowledge with the wider SDP sector while remaining vigilant that the informal strengths of social skateboarding are not compromised. A promising example of this was a 2022 panel discussion by the International Olympic Committee (IOC)-supported Sport for Refugees Coalition about mental health through sport for displaced youth, which was moderated by Skateistan staff member and Afghan emigrant Noorzai Ibrahimi (Sportanddev, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Collaboration

As the number and reach of social skateboarding initiatives around the world increases, we will no doubt see a range of new knowledge-sharing spaces emerge as well. However, in order to increase the social, educational and inclusion outcomes of social skateboarding, there need to be more pathways for underrepresented communities to share their experiences and knowledge. The social skateboarding community should continue to be mindful about proactively challenging the existing power structures within skateboarding, non-profit/development work, and broader society overall. Social skateboarding organisations and practitioners collectively have significant influence on the culture and direction of skateboarding around the globe – particularly since social skate projects are often key actors in introducing skateboarding to countries or communities where skateboarding is relatively new, and because the staff and volunteers of these projects serve as role models for impressionable children and young people.

One of the biggest inclusion gaps within the social skate knowledge-sharing communities is establishing more ownership and accessible platforms for social skate projects led by people from the communities they are working in, especially in the Global South. This aligns with trends within social skateboarding organisations themselves to move away from foreigners managing and running projects abroad, towards solidarity with and funding for locally-led initiatives. There are many practical factors that limit the ability for social skateboarding practitioners from the Global South to col-

laborate equitably in open-source knowledge-sharing. These factors include the ability to afford traveling, visa restrictions, access to affordable and fast internet, and most events and resources being in English. Much like the extra efforts needed to make physical spaces accessible for people with disabilities, there is a need to make platforms and resources accessible to more members of the global skate community. Some practical steps would be to not only extend invitations to practitioners from the Global South, but to also: give stipends/compensation for their time and knowledge shared in webinars and working groups; to support regional gatherings in the Global South; to provide funded travel and visa support to larger events happening in the Global North; and to provide more events and resources in languages other than English.

As touched on earlier, social skateboarding learning communities should also be more open to collaborating with practitioners and experts beyond skateboarding to both learn from and share best practices – while making sure to hold onto the positive elements of skateboarding's DIY culture. Inspiration can be found in skateboarding itself, for example "the semi-structured, supportive space of the skatepark provides safety and appropriate social conditions for participants to play, interact socially and show their abilities to one another" (Abulhawa, 2022, p.202). As the social skateboarding community seeks greater sustainability, impact, and inclusion through knowledge-sharing, it should aim to mirror the informality, creativity, and fun of skateboarding while providing semi-structured spaces for both outside expertise and social skateboarding practitioners at all levels to come together in a meaningful way.

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Chapter 3

Skateboarding as a school subject: Pros and cons

John Dahlquist

Little has been written in detail about Bryggeriets Gymnasium and the effect skateboarding as a school subject has on our students' school experience. Skateboarding is part of the curriculum and high school diploma. The emphasis on skateboarding makes the skateboarding grade an essential part of the university application. The school's goal is not primarily to create successful athletes but rather to use skateboarding as a means for learning. As a teacher I can only see from the outside what this approach *seems* to be like for students. The perspective of students who have gone through the programme is a valuable starting point for understanding our teaching practice. I hope that first-hand stories and reflections can give insightful perspectives on what parts of the school subject should be emphasised for a better teaching practice and what parts might be good to change for the better.

Perspective, by definition, requires distance. Therefore, I have asked alumni, rather than current students, to discuss the pros and cons of skateboarding as a school subject. The

discussion was summarised on a mindmap evolving in real time as the group spoke. I recorded the talk as a means to remember, but also to find quotes to illustrate their points. The two-hour panel took place at the school. The open interview revolved around the question:

> What are the pros and cons of skateboarding as a subject in high school?

My positionality as a teacher, skater and researcher

My role in this text has to be understood through my different roles and the effect they have on both the possibility to create and facilitate the focus group, as well as the outcome of the conversation. As a teacher, vice principal of Bryggeriets, and to some extent a (former) authority on skate culture it is plausible that the answers have a more positive tone than if the questions were asked by someone else. My relationship with the group is now that of a *friend*, as we sometimes skate, compete or make skate videos together. The above, on the other hand, could also be understood as a basis for making the conversation possible. It is impossible to fully know the effect this has on the outcome, but it should be used as a lens to interpret the answers.

The focus group

All alumni are between 25 and 34 years old. My ambition was to create a group that could meet in person, meaning that they had to live in or close to Malmö. The group was drafted

via my skateboard network. All are still active skateboarders in some capacity. They either work in the skate industry or have skateboarding as a major interest in their life.

Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously said that you can never step into the same river twice (Lübcke et al., 1988). In the same manner, a memory is ever-changing. Perhaps Heraclitus would allow me, as a teacher, to rephrase his sentence to: "You can never walk into the same school twice". The result of this research project would differ if the interview was done during the participants' high school education. It seems like any school experience is always filtered through the life situation and age the person is at the time.

When I had managed to book five skaters for a meeting, I hoped that the group would be big enough to get complementary perspectives, but also small enough to make everyone's voices heard. Even if we are no longer in a teacher-student relationship, it should be considered that the setting (meeting at school) and my role (their former teacher) had an impact on the answers. The group's loyalty towards me and the school shows in the fact that they are willing to take time to join the project. This in itself could point to the conclusion that the members of the focus group have a positive attitude towards skateboarding in school. Still, I hope that their reflections hold value and can be used in a critical analysis.

Everyone in this study has been guaranteed anonymity. The group consists of both men and women, but I have decided not to disclose anyone's gender. At the time they went to the school there were so few women that a reader in the Malmö skateboard scene could identify certain participants.

The story of Bryggeriet

The following is a brief history of how the Bryggeriet skateboard organisation, skatepark, and school came to be. Sweden has a long tradition of voluntary organisations. There is an infrastructure in place for supporting these associations. Economic support is given by the municipality based on the amount of members and the total time spent engaging in the given activity. In this tradition, the system was already in place for skateboarders to organise and eventually get funding for an indoor skatepark. This was timely for us skateboarders, as we were entering our late teens and early twenties: we were able to organise and gain the support from local youth organisations and politicians that saw value in our cause. This motivated the municipality to support the skateboarders with a more permanent space. Bryggeriet was founded in 1998. During that year, the construction of the park started.

A big leap was made for skateboarding in Malmö when Bryggeriet acquired the support from the City of Malmö to construct the city's largest concrete skatepark, Stapelbäddsparken, in the newly developed area Västra Hamnen (the Western Harbour). A hot summer and a major international contest attracting thousands of visitors gave skateboarding and Bryggeriet a place in the local consciousness. In the following decades, this has evolved into a unique partnership, broadcasting Malmö as (potentially) the world's most skate-friendly city (Book & Svenborg-Edén 2021). During the same period the city's skate scene got international recognition through its do-it-yourself efforts.

Next to Bryggeriet skatepark, in the same building, was a row of classrooms first used for different projects, not directly related to skateboarding. The board of Bryggeriet saw the potential for combining education and skateboarding: the thought of using the premises for a school started brewing. A policy reform in Sweden opened up the previously public-only school system for private and not-for-profit organisations (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1993). This meant that Bryggeriet had an opportunity to combine skateboarding with education. An application was granted and the school started to form. The skateboard infrastructure with both a strong connection to the city council as well as the grassroot skate scene created an educational platform to work from.

Bryggeriets Gymnasium started in 2006 as a non-profit NGO. By 2024, the school has grown to 170 students and 30 staff members. The school provides the aesthetic programme, one out of six Swedish high school programmes preparing students for university studies. High school runs from grade ten to twelve. The aesthetic programme teaches the traditional and mandatory high school subjects including Math, Science, Swedish, English, Religion, and History. The school also provides four so-called *profiles*: specialisations within the aesthetic programme. These include Photo-Film, Fine Art, Cartooning, and Skateboarding. The programme results in a high school diploma that can be used to apply for university degrees. The skateboard profile is built around two physical educational courses (and a design course) over a three-year period.

Skateboarding class takes up one afternoon a week. The goal for the course is to further the students' skateboarding

skills, but also to focus on meta learning processes: individual goal setting and organising training. Understanding and coping with psychological processes such as motivation and fear are also covered in skate education. All courses are graded according to national requirements. Other subjects include aspects of skate culture, such as film, design, and an individual research project. What's more, the skatepark is located in direct connection to the school. There is always an opportunity to skate during breaks.

The pros

When summarising the pros of skateboarding in the curriculum, the group focused mostly on stories of fond memories. Many of them were skate-related and had to do with friends or events during skate class. On the one hand, it is easy to interpret such stories as a fact that skateboarding makes school enjoyable. It is obvious that their shared experiences build bonds and create comradery. On the other hand, it can also be a nostalgic trip down memory lane, and a sugarcoating of one's youth. Still, there are a few themes that stood out. Below the themes are listed, in a ranked order based on their importance to the group.

Joy

First and foremost, skateboarding made the school experience more fun. Some pointed out the stigma around traditional forms of schooling, which they connected to negative experiences and connotations. There were several anec-

dotes of former negative school experiences that resulted in skipping classes and conflicts with teachers and authorities.

> My old teachers wouldn't believe their eyes if they saw me during my first year here. For the first time in life I enjoyed going to school.

The participants often got caught up in nostalgic anecdotes, comparing events during skateboard class, guest lecturers, and assignments. Things that stood out were sessions when someone did something good or characters and events that added humour to the classes.

> Remember when Sam in our class finally got his first rock'n roll after years of failing? The cheers were heard all over school!

One person pointed out how unaccustomed it initially felt to enjoy school and to long for a class. The fact that parents reacted and pointed out to them that they talked more about school at home and longed back to school after weekends and breaks came up numerous times during the discussion. The group discussed whether meaningfulness and fun should be separate themes. The discussion revolved around how important progression at skateboarding was during the high school years and how fun it was to get better. At the time of the discussion the group agreed that progression felt meaningful and even gave meaning and purpose to the education as a whole. Yet, they also agreed, they mostly viewed it as fun. The insight that fun and meaning can be two sides of the same coin seem to be constructed after graduating.

> Our Friday sessions are some of my most fond memories in life so far. We also did a dance at the beginning of class to celebrate our class.

This tradition was a secret to me and done before I entered class until I unknowingly walked in on the class early. It was referred to as a joyful thing, which by all means it seemed, but to me it also indicated trust, safety, and comradery. All these are qualities that I could gain from in my pedagogy work as it lays the groundwork for education: creating a safe environment where it is okay to fail and go outside your comfort zone. There seems to be an interaction between the different qualities, even if joy is the most obvious, loud, and memorable.

From a teaching perspective, I also note that enjoying going to school is not the same as enjoying studying. The fact that the students enjoy the environment and feel safe is foundational, but by no means an acknowledgement of the quality of education. But it lays the foundation for the possibility to create a good education.

Identity

The older students pointed out that they had to convince their parents to let them study at Bryggeriets Gymnasium. People in their surrounding doubted they would get a legitimate education at a high school tailored to skateboarding. For the younger alumni, the school was more established and verified by a better reputation and, by then, a well-renowned

school in the skate scene. Nevertheless, the group agreed that the school gave them a strong sense of identity and pride.

> I have seen plenty of memes on social media writing the school up. That made us proud. Someone once called Brygge [Bryggeriets gymnasium] Skate Hogwarts. That was sick!

As the first alumni started to turn pro skateboarders and the media attention grew (especially among international skateboard media) it gave status in the skateboard community to be affiliated with the school. One pro skater in the group told of their travels around the world and gave several examples of skateboarders in both the USA and around Europe who were recognised as a former student of Bryggeriets gymnasium, rather than being a professional for a certain skateboard brand.

> It's kind of sick that core skaters around the world think our school is cool, when it could be the other way around. Who even thinks of a high school as "cool"? That makes me proud to be part of this place's history.

These are examples that create a sense of identity. The wall of fame (a wall at school with all alumni signature models of skateboards) and the return of alumni as guest lecturers seem to work as ways of manifesting the school's identity among new students. The sense that Bryggeriets gymnasium is perceived as *alternative* seems to enhance this sense of identity, too.

As a teacher I am often asked about former students who have turned pro. Jokingly I sometimes remind my current students that they are standing on the shoulders of giants. I use this loyalty and sense of belonging by asking alumni to come back to guest lecture or attend skate class. This gives valuable insights to current students, as well as offers valuable input to the education.

Movement

Three of the five people in the focus group admitted to having difficulties concentrating on traditional school work or listening to long lectures. The whole group agreed that skateboarding adds movement to a school day of sitting still. One pointed out the fact that no-one in their class was obese, a common health problem in Swedish society (The Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2019). Another person noted the difficulty of studying or doing office work and integrating movement without creating an unnatural element to it, such as going to a gym or taking a walk for the sake of walking. At Bryggeriets Gymnasium, they argued, all skateboarders had exercise as a side effect of doing something they enjoyed. They all laughed at how absurd it would be to skate for exercise. That is not how any of them view the act of skateboarding, even if it is an obvious side effect.

> I can say with 100 percent certainty that I would not have graduated without skateboarding in school. My ADHD was way too gnarly to sit down during a whole class back then.

Skateboarding and movement as a way of coping with the more static part of the school day was pointed out by everyone with a concentration issue. There were plenty of anecdotes of classmates for whom skateboarding was essential: the group could not see them succeed in any other environment. To me as a teacher it underlines the importance of both catering to different learning styles, as well as various personalities. Opening up to physical activities seems like a good and healthy start.

Friendship/relationship

Many of the stories told revolved around the characters in the class and the friendship that the mutual interest in skateboarding enabled. It was pointed out that skateboarding influenced everything during a major part of high school, the school day, nights out skating, working on video projects, traveling, and spending weekends together skating.

> The people I both work and skate with to this day mostly sprung out of my high school friends.

Everybody in the group was convinced they have made friends for life via skateboarding in school. The fact that about one third of the students at Bryggeriets gymnasium move away from their parents to attend school was pointed to as a reason they became close friends. One argued that "one has to be a good friend, because everyone is in need of belonging to the group and you cannot be an asshole then. It would never work".

Social skills are important but rarely taught or mentioned in education. I can see that the extended network that skateboarding and our school can give can be used in many walks of life, even if it has no direct connection to school results in relation to the courses' grading requirements.

Learning

On a meta level the group reflected on the dynamics of skateboarding and how it, in some cases, created motivation and understanding for the learning process. The group agreed that the dedication, stamina, and goals needed for skateboarding can and are useful in other areas of life. It could oftentimes be used in other subjects, too. One argument was made that some of these insights came long after high school and that they wished they could see the advantages by using a "skateboarding mindset" in other subjects while still attending school. This effect seems to be closely related to the alumni's level of maturity. One pointed out that they had a sharp learning curve in skateboarding, but a very hard time in all other classes.

Still, it was mentioned in various ways that skateboarding had a positive effect on learning as a whole, whether it was using the same techniques for learning or using skateboarding while learning photography or the option to write skateboard-related texts in the subjects of Swedish or English. One person pointed out that traditional school is structured around beginners evolving into the next step of learning, while many of the skateboard students got to be masters

while still in school. This can, according to the alumni, lead to enhanced self-confidence to excel at other things too.

> Even if I turned pro after high school and had many good skaters in my class, it was still the unsponsored classmates that made skateboarding fun. Even if it sounds like a cliché, I think the fun part was what helped me get really good. If I just skated with other pros, I think it would be a lot of pressure and stress.

Swedish has two words for education, *utbildning* (formal education with the aim to teach skills) and *bildning* (education to further the whole person). When skateboarding is used in the best of ways I interpret that the group see skateboarding both as a way to learn skills and to grow as humans.

Support/understanding

The sponsored skateboarders mentioned the fact that the school understood and supported their engagement in skateboarding as something positive. Being able to take time off school to travel or go to contests was perceived as not only supportive, but also created loyalty toward the curriculum as a whole. Some reflected on how surreal it felt to be noticed by other teachers, outside of skateboard class, for results in contests or media coverage.

> When I had to go to hospital and my teacher took me it made me realise how supportive this environment was. Of course, they had to help but symbolically it also showed that they are here when we fall. Kinda poetic!

The connection and camaraderie the students felt in relation to teachers who also skated was mentioned as a positive. The friendship and bond skateboarding created made school easier. One person mentioned that the skate teacher also functioned as a mentor and general support.

> Just that we sit here today is a testimony to what this place means to us. When I come back to Malmö I always check in and visit the school. This will always be a place that I associate with support and security.

One pointed to the mere fact that they were all attending the panel discussion as an effect of that kinship. Of course, the sense of belonging has intrinsic value, but more than anything it holds potential to further the bond between school and student. This can then be used, if cultivated right, as a mandate to teach and push the student in the right way.

Health

The group discussed at length how unhealthily many students ate and lived during the high school years. Examples focused on the students (including two in the panel) that moved to attend Bryggeriets gymnasium. Still, it was through skateboarding and sometimes skateboard-related injuries that they started to reflect on their lifestyle and slowly transitioned into a more healthy lifestyle. They concluded that it was not necessarily skateboarding that was unhealthy, but the mere fact that they were "young and dumb" and had too much freedom away from their parents.

To be honest I didn't understand it until afterwards. My routines and sugar intake were a disaster. Skate education always stood for something sustainable and healthy. In the end that made an impact. I understand, and live by, that now.

The conclusion of the group was that skateboarding in school enhanced their health, both physical and mental, as a whole. As a teacher I can see this as an energy that buzzes in class sometimes. The fact that sport and healthy habits create a better life is a given, but from a pedagogical viewpoint I think it is most important to try to channel the energy into something meaningful and constructive.

Cons

Listing the negative aspects of skateboarding in school took the form of not only criticism towards the school, but also self-reflection. Below are some of the things that recurred in the discussion.

Lose interest in skateboarding, lose interest in school

Skateboard students who apply to Bryggeriets Gymnasium are expected to have a strong enough interest in skateboarding, take skateboard classes, and spend substantial part of their education skating. As with most interests during the teenage years, their relationship to skateboarding changes form and motive. Even the keenest skateboarders have periods when skateboarding is not the main focus in life. The group had either gone through periods of less interest,

or had close friends that lost their interest in skateboarding. When that happens, one consequence could be that students distance themselves from the culture and activity by not skateboarding. This creates a problem since skateboarding in skate class is mandatory. In the long run this risks a lack of interest in school as a whole.

> For a while I didn't know who I was. I tried different things and hated skating. But then I came back and started doing it just for fun. It was hard when the pressure I had put on myself to be the best was gone. Believe it or not. But then it became fun again. Just fun.

One person could give examples of fellow skateboarders who could not cut down on skating but felt they had to fully quit to separate themselves from the identity they, and others, had put on them. The person stating this argued that this would probably not have been the case if the person went to a more traditional school and only skated as a leisure activity. In my experience, this is one of the biggest challenges the teachers at Bryggeriets meet. It seems important to give a broad education and advocate for more than one interest and gain from high school education as a whole. Otherwise, the risk of *putting all eggs in one basket* can create a tough existence when the fire fades.

Lack of adults

A substantial number of our students move from all over Scandinavia to attend Bryggeriets gymnasium. This leaves a group of students without the structure, rules, and support

most families with present parents provide. The lack of structure and perspective can have a negative effect on school results and general lifestyle.

> My adult role model was 21. I thought he knew everything. Now that I am older I realise I could probably have used some more adults in my life back then.

Hard to focus

As much as everybody in the focus group put emphasis on how valuable it was to include skateboarding, movement, and their biggest interest in education, they also talked about the fact that it can be hard to focus and hard to prioritise at school. One participant mentioned that they were often tardy to class after trying a hard trick in the skatepark and could not give up. This led to irritation among the teachers. It can be hard to come from an adrenaline rush, happy or frustrated over a new trick, and then focus on Math problems. As much as the skatepark made the school special, it could also sidetrack and make it hard to focus on other things.

This circles back to the conversation about joy. The problems to set priorities may not only be a concern for skateboarding, but a criticism towards the whole school structure. A good school provides structure and supports students in their work in a way that suits the students. With or without skateboards.

Thin line between school and spare time

When the school closes in the afternoon the skatepark opens to the public. Many students stay to skateboard. One person explained:

> Since I never went home and spent both school time and skate time in the park, it was hard sometimes to separate school from spare time. If I were to skate after school sometimes, I did not skate in class, using it as an excuse to chill. It sometimes made school feel like a youth center and made me less serious about it.

Conclusions

At the end of the session every member in the focus group was asked to look at the mindmap, add or subtract from it, and conclude the discussion. The group instantly turned nostalgic, reminiscing on memories. After a short while they concluded that this form of school is best for mature students with an ability to shift focus and prioritise correctly at the right time (e.g. knowing when it is time to study and when it is time for play). They were convinced that some classmates would not have succeeded at any other school. The sense of inclusion skateboarding gives and the fact that it is valued by teachers can boost overall confidence.

> When teachers saw that I was good at skating it got me psyched to get better in school as a whole. I used to suck at school. I felt they saw me as a competent person and that made me want to do my best for them.

This was credited to some staff members and not only to skateboarding. They all agreed that skateboarding made their school experience unique and a period of their life they are proud of. By way of conclusion, I would like to draw attention to four of my own take-aways from the focus group.

First, it is intriguing to me that none in the group discussed what formalising skateboarding in a school can do to skateboarding as a whole and how it affects the students outlook on skateboarding, a spare time activity that most started with to get away from set schedules of practice or fixed measures. This has long been a concern of mine, but is not something that the group addressed. This indicates that the issue is not a concern of the group and perhaps not as big of an issue that I once thought.

Second, there are many potential benefits of skateboarding in school: social and educational. The social benefits include a sense of belonging, fitting in, and being accepted. Skateboarding in this context can be used as a form of glue to build confidence, engagement, and other valuable qualities that can be a means to educational ends. It is also worth mentioning that a school's objective is not only to produce good test results and theoretical learning, but also to build community and, in the end, engaged members of society. The sense of community that skateboarding can build brings joy, adding exercise to a static school day while including students' interest in formal education.

Third, there are potential risks to this type of education, such as losing interest in skateboarding and consequently in school in general. Skateboarding can make it hard to focus on other, less joy-driven subjects. Skateboarding in school can

take the fun away from the otherwise joy-filled leisure and limit it with a schedule, rules, and grades. All in all, the group comes back to the good and the bad with thin lines between school and spare time activities. It is described as a gain, but also as a potential risk. With the pros and cons summarised I can see the benefits of structure and communicating clearly what is to be done, where, and when. Education in general tends to benefit from this, but context seems to be of essence.

Finally, I can also see that conversations and inviting external input is valuable as a means for understanding one's practice. I am convinced that skateboarding holds great potential when used right, but this can never be done according to a set protocol. It has to be done in dialogue with allied students. When done well, it can lay the foundation for a joyful, health-enhancing education that furthers the whole person.

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Chapter 4

Learning for life: Skateboarding, public pedagogy and belonging

Esther Sayers

I approach this paper as a skateboarder, an artist, and an academic. Skateboarding is for me a passion and a way of being but also an ethical and political project. Like many skate academics I share a commitment to combining academia with the outside world. I align my academic work with the idea of public good, by which I mean that through pedagogy I strive for change. Concerns with agency, rhetoric, politics, and pedagogy focus my work in the arts, in academia, and in the community. In this chapter I assert 'public pedagogy' as a conceptual tool (Giroux, 2004; Sandlin et al., 2010; Hickey-Moody et al., 2010). This 'tool' offers a framework through which to explore the cultural site of skate pedagogy as an active space in which identities are transformed and meaning is produced through social interaction. Here 'learning' is placed within a broader public politics. Through this writing, I connect skateboarding to the political practice of public pedagogy as a site in which agency is acquired through

learning creative ways that resist *and* enact power and contribute to human flourishing.

Skateboarding is practice-led learning (Billett, 2011; Hickey-Moody et al., 2010; Schon, 1983). The object of knowledge is determined by the learner and their steps toward successful assimilation of that knowledge is a learner-driven path that often involves the repetition of failure. Learning is central to skateboarding's relationship with freedom and control. The dynamic of regulatory and emancipatory forces creates a lived space in which what the skateboarder knows and what they need to learn are constantly being negotiated. Through skateboarding, community-centred practices emerge that decolonise existing modes of teaching and learning as they place learning within the social relations of everyday life. I argue that the decolonisation seen in skate pedagogy can produce learners who are equipped to use their collective imagination to learn skills for living well and, in the words of bell hooks (2008, p.5), "mak[e] a world...where everyone can belong".

Learning and skateboarding

All skateboarders have a tacit understanding of pedagogy and yet there is, to date, little published about the philosophies of teaching and learning within skateboarding. This is surprising when all skateboarders are simultaneously both teachers and learners. In the growing body of academic literature on skateboarding, Graham L. Bradley (2010), Dani Abulhawa (2017) and Tim Bindel and Niklas Pick (2019), have posed fundamental questions about aspects of learning

and becoming through skateboarding in the fields of adolescent development, learning in contexts of socio-political disadvantage, and pedagogical production respectively. On-the-ground projects have offered significant opportunities for learning, and academic skate writing has focussed on the social, architectural, political, and performative aspects of skateboarding. Learning is such an intrinsic part of skateboarding that the pedagogy often lies unseen, entangled in the social relations by which skateboarders intersect with space, city, power, politics, and one another.

A deeper exploration of the potentials in the relationship between skateboarding and education emerged for me in 2019 during Pushing Boarders in Malmö. The first day of the event was held at Bryggeriets Gymnasium High School, where students can take skateboarding classes alongside art, photography, film and a full suite of mandatory subjects. I had been invited to take part in a panel discussion 'Skate and Educate'. Contributing to this panel, alongside an erudite selection of skate educators, was a catalyst to my thinking about the linkages between communities and education. My research is concerned with gaining a better understanding of the embodied pedagogies within skateboarding and the value they offer to students and teachers. At this point, the project I co-founded with Sam Griffin, 'City Mill Skate', was just getting off the ground in London and I, a university lecturer and specialist in art-based pedagogies, had been learning to skateboard since 2017. One of the most important aspects of being a beginner skateboarder in my late 40s was that my identity as an educator, with an academic specialism in pedagogy, was challenged. I was excited at becoming

a learner in a new area of practice and I enjoyed the diminished responsibility that came with being a newcomer as it contrasted with my professional context. My curiosity meant that I wanted to learn about the context and understand skateboarding's back story. I was hungry for anecdotes, to acquaint myself with moments of historical significance, but most of all I wanted to participate in *doing* skateboarding. I discovered that there were multiple understandings of skateboarding. Initially, in the lived sense: actual skateboarding, and secondly skateboarding as a reification bound up with signifiers that assume an integral culture. My research is concerned with investigating the cultural and ideological frameworks that produce and validate symbolic meaning making and how attitudes to the participatory field of teaching and learning impact on processes of signification.

A statement about methods

The methods I have used are designed to explore skateboarding through multiple lenses: as a learner, a professional educator, and a researcher. This research is empirically and experientially based. It explores pedagogies, particularly critical and existential pedagogies, through which an understanding of contrasting social relations create opportunities for 'conscientization' (Paulo Freire's social theory of coming into consciousness) to explore learning entangled with lived experience (Freire, 1970, p.17).

As the opportunity to become immersed in the field of skate pedagogy comes through my personal learning journey, I have used autoethnographic and practice-based methods that enable me to explore myself and others within the dia-

logical space of teaching and learning. The thirty years I have spent as an artist and a gallery educator have informed my understanding of learning in community settings in which a range of approaches produce inclusive and exclusive effects on groups of people and their abilities to thrive. I explore skateboarding through materials which include interviews with self and others, fieldnotes, personal documents, and journal entries. Through such materials I create an enquiry in which reflexive, relational, open, and evocative values are pursued.

Modes of pedagogy

My understanding of skate pedagogy comes through observations and interviews with coaches and instructors who teach in various contexts. I researched the provision of skate coaches in the United Kingdom (UK) for Skateboard GB in 2021. This was a benchmarking exercise where I gained quantitative data as well as in-depth qualitative insights from coaches interviewed as case studies. I have also discussed and observed modes of skate pedagogy when commissioning skate lessons from Learn to Skateboard and Keep Rolling Co. for community skate lessons and summer schools as part of the City Mill Skate project. I have championed and supported lessons at Hackney Bumps designed to encourage newcomers from the local community and conducted qualitative research

at Bryggeriets Gymnasium School in Malmö, Sweden[1] to explore the impact of emplacement on belonging, placemaking, and learning. I also draw from my own experience and that of my children at House of Vans Skate School (2017-2020) and London Skate Mums Skate Club (2023-2024). In these settings I have been a participant-researcher in lessons that are one-to-one and in groups, in both public and private spaces. I have observed myself and other learners through peer-to-peer exchanges, social media, and in situations where the skateboarder is both learner and teacher simultaneously, engrossed in a kind of self-curated pedagogy.

The whole world as a school?

It may seem odd to talk about a pedagogy or an approach to teaching and learning in skateboarding when there is no overarching system to skate education. Each nation competing at Olympic level in skateboarding has a governing body, but there is no internationally standardised set of moves that skateboarders have to learn.

And even though skateboarding has recently become an option that students studying Physical Education in Wales and Northern Ireland can select, there is (thankfully) no National Curriculum mimicking governmental approaches to general education. Thinking about skateboarding as 'public pedagogy' offers a framework to consider the kinds of life

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1   Research data from Bryggeriets Gymnasium School is from qualitative data collection by myself and George Nichols, Goldsmiths, with research partner John Dahlquist, Bryggeriets Gymnasium School. Ethical approval has been granted from Goldsmiths, University of London.

learning which exist in community contexts and in some school settings. 'Public pedagogy' is born out of a desire to explore the "educational force of our *whole* social and cultural experience" (Williams, 1967, pp.15-16 emphasis my own). By talking about skate pedagogy, my intention is not to imply that skateboarding should be shaped by school-like institutions. Rather, my research observations have shown that there is a rich array of pedagogic approaches at play in the domain of skateboarding.

Apart from a few notable exceptions, skateboarding is not taught in school, and even when it is it ought not to be a 'schooled' discipline. This is because the assessment of success or failure is largely in the hands of the skater rather than through the successful completion of pre-determined attainment targets. In schools, a defining logic governing what is to be taught can mean that those who do not correctly interpret curriculum content are seen as lacking or inadequate in some way. In schools, students learn by interpreting the content of a lesson. They are then assessed to find out whether they have acquired the prescribed knowledge correctly. When they have reproduced the knowledge accurately, students are rewarded with qualifications and those who make different interpretations are identified as being in need of more education until they get it 'right'. The disruptive and anti-institutional side of skate culture carves a path that is more about self-determination than extrinsic approbation. There is no fixed curriculum to determine what ought to be learned and there are no pedagogies designed to input the so-called right kind of knowledge

I argue that to capitalise on the potential for learning through skateboarding we can, through public pedagogy, draw attention to the social logics that operate in society. My view is that if we are committed to strive for equality in the community of skateboarding, then we should be mindful of the so-called norms that govern the power balance in our communities. This is what Rancière (2010, p.149) terms 'the distribution of the sensible', in other words, the 'social logics' by which society is policed. Such policing can be seen in social interactions that define which achievements are more significant than others. For example, the attention of brands and skate media tends to be focussed on high-risk, high-impact skateboarding, rather than on quieter aspects of skateboarding where community building or providing welcoming environments is foregrounded. Such policing can also be seen in the familiar shout 'do a kickflip' which can be a call to test a skateboarders' competence. Alongside this self-policing also exists a small amount of peer pressure at the skatepark that can enable me to perform in situations that I might otherwise be afraid of. Learning is a complicated combination of carrot and stick. In skateboarding those tools are wielded most often by the skateboarder themselves (or their peers), rather than by a formal teacher. Either way, it can be understood as pedagogy.

A pedagogy of skateboarding

I am fascinated by skateboarding as a learning community: a 'community of practice', to borrow Etienne Wenger's (1998) terminology. I am using Wenger's (idem, p.214) categorisation of the contexts in which learning happens that

"involve[s] an interaction between experience and competence". I apply this to skateboarding in order to reveal important distinctions between the learning of beginners and the continual learning of advanced skateboarders where, in both categorisations, experience and competence work together to produce learning.

In skateboarding, mutual engagement and shared practice provide a context in which newcomers learn but also a place where the right conditions can contribute to the creation of new knowledges and radically new insights. I am thinking here in terms of the way the architectural space of the city is used, the potential for the personal and the collective to be political, and the formation of social and cultural understandings. Most of these exist outside of the physical competencies in learning a new trick. The potential outcomes of participation in leisure activities are set out by Bradley (2010) as a series of variables which contribute to the opportunities to draw benefits subjectively and socially, as well as in more vocational achievements.

Decolonising practices

Following Freire, I argue that the purpose of education, rather than simply a means to achieve personal success, is an instrument of liberation, a process of humanisation to seek freedom and the potential to transform reality. As Freire (1970, p.37) asserts, education should enable us to "become more fully human". Skate pedagogy is self-determined transformation. It relies on peer-to-peer sharing and learning, sometimes from coaches and instructors but mostly from the self.

In his work on sub-cultures, Indigenous education, and decolonising ways of knowing and doing, Romero (2021, p.233) writes about self-determination and liberation in pedagogy as a call to change how we educate and cites "the role of skate pedagogy in the development of queer and decolonising conceptions of learning". I am interested in the idea that skate pedagogy has the potential to speak to the crisis in knowledge production that I have seen through the sidelining of arts and humanities subjects in contemporary education. Here, teaching students to think for themselves is becoming increasingly difficult when faced with the need to scale up student numbers. This is achieved through the introduction of modes of teaching and assessment which resemble batch processing. Both Romero on skate pedagogy and Atkinson on art pedagogy offer alternatives to education systems that seek to teach predetermined learner identities and practices and instead look to make space for affective and incomplete collective values and assemblages to emerge through learning. As such, processes of learning and thinking in this way could be understood as having the potential to decolonise, when they disrupt and refuse existing modes of practice, as Atkinson (2022, p.218) explains when talking about art education.

In a similar way, skate pedagogy offers approaches that challenge mainstream pedagogy through enabling new and more immediately relevant forms of intra-action. "By analyzing skate cultures built upon the embrace (rather than the erasure) of difference….Queer and Indigenous skate pedagogies [are] sites of knowledge production that presage more just and equitable realities" (Romero, 2021, p.232) Such sites

of knowledge production can be seen in skateboarding where embodied practices in which riders, boards, wheels, surface texture, height, form and environment intra-act. Here the manner and positioning of embodied socio-material entities are entangled. This approach is underpinned with new materialist thought in ways that work with the entanglements of all phenomena; human, non-human, social, physical, material, and immaterial or what Barrett (2012, p.3) calls a "mingle and mangle", meaning "the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies" (Barad, 2007, 338). This *intra*-action is the movement generated in an encounter of two or more bodies in a process of becoming different, "the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-actions" (Barad, 2007, p.33). In other words, 'research into the pedagogy of such practices is not about the subject or the object but their entanglement, the event, the action between, not in-between. That is what matters. Therefore, not only are we always *with* bodies, but we are also always *with* matter. So, not only do we make matter and meaning, but it also makes us, we are entangled, co-implicated in the generation and evolution of knowing, being and learning' (Page & Sayers, 2018). "For Barad (2007), agencies (such as people, things, ideas, skateboarders, skateboards, skate culture, and skate pedagogy) are intra-active, or come into being only due to their relationships with other agencies and do not pre-exist in finished form" (Romero, 2021, p.233). Like Romero, my focus is not only on individuals' practices but the relationalities of learning and teaching, the pedagogy of bodies with matter, embodied pedagogy as an aesthetic encounter. Here pedagogy is not a passive process of acqui-

sition of knowledge in a classroom, but as bell hooks (1994, p.15) states "a union of the mind, body and spirit, not just for striving for knowledge in and understanding from books, but knowledge about how to live in the world". So, through this practice research I aim to enable rupturing, disruption, and questioning, that can then extend into new learning spaces of potential where we may become more conscious of our ways, materials, and spaces.

Skate pedagogy has the potential to remake other pedagogies by critically challenging how classrooms reproduce processes and ideas. Instead of training a workforce, what if the purpose of education was primarily to teach people how to live well and contribute to their communities? I argue that the concept of 'scalability' as part of global capitalism, as introduced by Tsing (2015) and discussed by Atkinson (2022), gives a way of questioning colonial ideas about knowledge and learning: where it comes from, which knowledges are most highly valued and the problems that can occur when foregrounding one set of practices above all others. By constructing the classroom as a space in which learning is done through doing in practice as well as learning through language we take into account aesthetic encounters in which learners flourish through their intra-actions with others and with the world. Learning from skateboard pedagogy to rework intra-actions in the classroom can decolonise classroom pedagogy by challenging the forces that continue to attempt to reproduce colonial hierarchies that reduce knowledge creation.

Bryggeriets Gymnasium and Belonging

If we understand pedagogy as an aesthetic encounter where engaging with others is compassionate, caring, and respectful, then we can imagine the product of learning as living well in the world with others. Abulhawa (2017, p.421) asserts that "[t]he fraternity of skateboarding comes from a sense of belonging to a group of people engaged in the same playful activity (that of riding a skateboard), and belonging to a culture that emphasizes a separation from fixed and fixing social traditions, norms and rules". At Bryggeriets Gymnasium the aesthetic and social encounter is maintained by the culture that is created at the school. This creates a sense of belonging which requires an ethos or an ethic of being together and requires classroom teaching that allows for emotion, relations, and sensory understandings. The teachers here take seriously the fact that the environments in which skateboarding happens affect people differently and that skateboarders have a shared responsibility to influence the atmosphere positively. In skateboarding relationalities of bodies with matter, pace, rhythm, and noisemaking are often used as tools to create a mood in a place. During skate class these tools are explored as students are supported in understanding their responsibilities for building the atmosphere for themselves and for others. In an interview with a Year 3 student, I asked how teachers support students when their motivation is low. I said, "They can't possibly teach you about 'stoke' can they?" To my surprise, the students said, "We learn what stoke is and how to build it" (interview with a Y3 student). This is a fascinating aspect of praxis-based teaching – a means to reflect on the learning process and

form it into action. A precursor of praxis is consciousness raising whereby an individual has to transcend their given reality and what it might determine and transform their consciousness to become aware of structures of power. Here 'power' can be understood as the impact of a negative atmosphere. It is common in Year 2 for students to experience a dip in their passion for skateboarding and for them to begin to seek alternative possibilities.

> The reason you start here as a skateboarder is because you have this passion for skateboarding and then when it becomes a school thing sometimes, some of the fun goes out of it and when you are with people who do different creative things, and you get inspired and find out that there's more than just skateboarding. Also, you get older, and things are just changing (interview with a Y3 student).

The power of their identification with skateboarding loosens partly because they have licence to skate, it is no longer 'special' in the same way. Also, because they begin to see the tropes of their desire to be included, ones to which they had previously subscribed. They are part of Bryggeriets Gymnasium now, they belong and do not have to prove their identification by wearing a skateboarder uniform of baggy pants and big hoodies. One student said, "In first year 90% of all [students] had baggy pants, caps and big hoodies" (interview with a Y3 student). In a sense their eyes are opened in Year 2 when "[they] found out there was more to life than just skate"; and the teaching is very much a part of this awakening. The pedagogic approach is based around empowerment. Students talk about the strong connection they have with their teachers

– they compare this to teachers they have known in the past who seem to lack passion, who do not bring their personality, and who lack a bond with their students. Students' passion for skateboarding and the arts is handled carefully, giving space for them to mature and showing them that there are more creative activities to help them broaden their interests. They find out "you don't have to cling to skateboarding". This is not because the school wants to dissuade them from skateboarding, it is because the school is committed to students' attainment of life lessons, which include democracy and the collective as well as personal enlightenment, known in Sweden as 'bildning', as well as qualification-based outcomes.

Skateboarding and belonging

As I have discussed, in skateboarding, continual acts of learning extend far beyond the remit of education in a formal sense. The research at Bryggeriets Gymnasium School tells us a lot about the ways in which the everyday experience of learners and their emplacement, where body, mind, and environment intersect, affect their social and emotional maturity. Here, shared ownership of space affects intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning, and we observe the 'bildning' alongside the more performative measure of qualifications.

The students are given a wealth of professional interactions to engage with through 'Substitute Teacher' classes, led by well-known skateboarders like Tony Hawk, where they are involved in industry projects. This offers them access to a network after they have finished at the school. The value of these industry contacts can have enormous benefits for life after school. Interestingly, this is regarded with ambivalence

by some students, "none of us are very interested to think about the future" (interview with a Y3 student). One explanation for this is that they have such a strong sense of belonging to their current community that they do not see immediate value in a larger network.

Students tell us that they understand belonging as "feeling at home", " as if you are part of something". By being a Bryggeriets Gymnasium student you are already part of a network. A Y3 student says, "when you meet someone that has been to the same school – because it's quite a special school – you have something to talk about". Belonging is formed by shared symbols like clothing (as mentioned earlier) but also shared experience, "something to talk about". Students speak very positively about the way the school prepares them for life. "We come out of this school with so much more than in other schools. More than just grades" (interview with a Y3 student). This research takes particular interest in the strong sense of belonging that seems to be emerging for the students there. Fuelled by their passion, the school helps them to mature and shows them more creative activities so that they broaden their interests and "find out there's more than just skateboarding".

> For me in the second grade I almost stopped skating because it got too serious. The fun disappeared and now, I've started skating ok sometimes again and the stoke is coming back. You need to find a balance where you are still playing around with it and having fun (interview with a Y3 student).

Belonging to a community affects identity formation and learning. In Wenger's (1998, p.173) view this happens through

"three distinct modes" of belonging. They are firstly, engagement through being involved in the mutual process of negotiating meaning, secondly, imagination by creating images of the world and seeing connections though our own experiences and finally, alignment in coordinating energy and activities to fit in and contribute to broader structures and enterprises. Wenger's notions of belonging resonate with the socio-cultural aspects of being in the subculture of skateboarding. We can see skateboarding as a 'community of practice' (idem) in which there are possibilities for mutual engagement. Through practice, alignment is secured and our identities are transformed as we come to see ourselves in new ways whilst we imagine others doing the same thing. These all contribute to our sense of belonging to that community.

Alignment with a community of practice contributes to belonging, but in skateboarding there are multiple communities of practice operating at the same time. Sander Hölsgens and Thom Callan-Riley (2020) use the term 'skateboardings' 'to encompass the diverse spectrum of skateboardings, describing their multiple practices, approaches, histories, and system of signs. Because of its self-determined nature, skateboarding requires the rider to think for themselves rather than wholly assimilating the preferences and experiences of other skateboarders. At Bryggeriets Gymnasium, the skateboarder learns about skate-culture as part of their learning experience.

Teachers at Bryggeriets Gymnasium are often keen to create communities of practice (CoP's) with their students. There is a sense of shared purpose, learning here is to some extent a collaborative project. "The teachers are just wonder-

ful; the teachers really have passion. Sometimes the passion is maybe too much, and they want to get too much involved and sometimes you have to say, 'Back off, I want to do it this way'" (Interview with a Y3 student). Modes and relations of belonging in skateboarding are complex and multi-layered. They operate temporally, through space and time, and we must acknowledge that conversely, not belonging also affects identity and learning. "A community of practice can become an obstacle to learning by entrapping us in its very power to sustain our identity" (Wenger, 1998, p.175). A Year 3 student says "it's like a path. You are starting to find more or getting closer into who you are but it sounds so big and that sometimes can be too much". Teachers help students to broaden their CoP's, avoiding them becoming stuck and helping them mature. Y3's response demonstrates maturity and an understanding that they can join or form more than one singular CoP

Often formal education is arranged around a syllabus which sets out predetermined knowledge that the learner must consume and be tested on if they are to succeed. Such tests and the fear of failing them act as extrinsic motivations. By contrast, what we learn from looking closely at the teaching and learning at Bryggeriets Gymnasium is that the teaching of skateboarding and art aligns with hermeneutical principles that explicate the learning experience in terms of the intrinsic motivations that students are led by. Such self-determined learning can be understood in terms of a "perpetual need for understanding and guidance, [a] sense of trying to find, follow and keep to a path, the experience of being 'drawn-on', 'of-being-excited by' the anticipation

of where a dedicated route might take us" (Heywood, 1999, p.6). This is consistent with a pedagogy where an initial spark arouses interest, motivates further action, and allows for the differing paths such activity might take. Learning this contributes to learning for life.

Conclusion

I have discussed ways that skateboarding can be understood through Freirean notions of 'praxis' as enacting change on the world and that learning approaches affect the quality of such changes. I advocate for a transdisciplinary approach that enables the relational dynamics that affect ways of knowing and being. Here, the quality of skateboarding pedagogy is valuable in that it is authentic, exciting, inspiring, engaging, and a positive and inclusive experience, enabling personal progression and developing belonging and ownership. At Bryggeriets Gymnasium, these values permeate the curriculum in terms of the values and ethos of the school, its leadership, and the curriculum design and delivery where there are masses of cultural collaborations.

By building on the notion of public pedagogy in conceptions of skate pedagogy we can construct ways in which public space acts as a site where praxis is enacted not simply in terms of physical abilities but with critical capacities through which we can read the world. Pedagogy is not just for classrooms, it is a powerful political and moral public practice where learning takes place across a whole range of social settings, including skate spaces. As a critical educator, I value creativity, dialogue, and collaboration in my teaching.

The practical and social nature of skate pedagogy means it can be described as a reciprocal model of teaching and learning as 'teacher' and 'student' collaborate in learning and practicing. This is a contemporary application of constructivist educational theories concerning reciprocal pedagogy.

My early learning journey resembled an initiation where a number of experienced skateboarders offered me information about the history and origins of skateboarding. Understanding the background to contemporary skate culture in this way was important because it made me feel part of something, part of a scene. Small changes in footwear and action – riding or carrying my board everywhere to catch a pavement cruise whenever possible. All these changes, whilst practical decisions, also showed outwardly that I belonged to something. The consciousness that developed was feeling part of a politically engaged network, something that resembled the collective responsibility I had experienced previously through music. Only later did I discover there was more plurality in skateboarding and I began to question the idea of a single object of knowledge, particularly where that concerned a fixed definition of skateboarding. As a result, I propose a pedagogy of skate that takes account of 'skateboardings' to avoid processes of reification. Instead, let's continue to reimagine skate culture through the ways in which we teach.

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Chapter 5

Staying outside: Pedagogy, resistance, and DIY peer support amongst NYC skate crews

Arianna Gil and Jessica Forsyth

Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* thoroughly changed the world of education and social justice organising when it was first published in 1968 with a compelling perspective on how the status quo is maintained through institutionalised teaching methods. He developed the term "conscientizacao" or "awareness" to describe the results of "truly liberating education"; one where people are "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2003, p.35). In this chapter, we examine how NYC skateboarders have found a way to resist manipulation by inherently racist capitalist institutions, forming skate crews that operate organically as peer support groups in the process.

While many of the problems skate crews identify and tackle would guide the development of state social services for youth more efficiently, the rebellious and anti-institu-

tional history of the lifestyle has guided many leaders to be wary of neoliberal co-optation. Freire's philosophy offers a framework for examining how skateboarders understand and approach exploitation and injustice in their communities while protecting their values through DIY (Do It Yourself) approaches. We survey the ways working class Black and Latinx/Women/LGBTQIA skate crews in particular, faced with interlocking systems of structural oppression, formed both intentional and organic peer support groups as a method to confront, navigate, and transcend the various challenges they face, including health issues and access to resources for livelihood and learning. We do so by using three NYC skate crews as examples – BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Environmental Hood Restoration. Methodologically, we pay particular attention to data produced through anti-racist research and praxis methods employed by the Harold Hunter Foundation via multi-phase, youth-driven, community needs assessment research.

NYC is plagued by income inequality and employment and housing instability, resulting from decades of racial residential hyper-segregation, neighbourhood deprivation, racial school segregation, and the school-to-prison pipeline, and further exacerbated by the forces of gentrification and the hollowing out of systems of direct government aid in the neoliberal era. Class and racial disparities have eviscerated access to the essential services and resources necessary to address the harm perpetuated by life under these conditions. The marginalisation and alienation that accompany these phenomena are a common lived experience amongst low-income, working-class Black, Indigenous, and People of

Colour (BIPOC) skateboarders in NYC. By the time they are in their early teens, most skateboarders have interfaced with the disciplinary arms of the education system, the child welfare (family policing) system, the mental health system, and ultimately the criminal justice system.

In the face of profound intergenerational abandonment by institutions which have historically treated them and their communities with profound neglect, if not disrespect and hostility, BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Environmental Hood Restoration have responded by developing their own method of peer-support and mutual aid that offers a unique perspective on navigating the oppressive, exploitative, and market-oriented culture in NYC through skateboarding. The organic and playful nature of these groups not only simultaneously celebrates collectivity and individuality through their practices, but is also effective as a form of organising that addresses a variety of social and mental health issues.

The NYC skateboarding community has produced a celebratory way of living that is based on spontaneous, outdoor, and dynamic community approaches that foster an ecosystem of peer-support. This vibrant complex community operates outside of traditional institutional models of authority, and largely outside of the hegemonic skateboarding industry, leading to the development of alternative recreational programmes, mutual aid, and cultural services. The explicitly anti-institutional work of BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Environmental Hood Restoration, are particularly reflective of the vanguard DIY, "for us, by us", spirit of organising. Crews like these have already influenced contemporary pedagogy. Not only has skateboarding entered school curriculums nation-

wide, but the organising work of skate crews are studied both inside institutions including The Yale School of Architecture, Harvard, UCLA, and Stanford University[1], and outside them at teach-ins and DIY workshops as new and informative popular models for community organising.

A Brief History of the NYC Skateboarding Landscape

Skateboarding in NYC is a revolutionary and liberatory act: it is a rolling safe space, created by generations of young people from racially and socioeconomically marginalised backgrounds, who are often further challenged within their own communities for "doing white boy shit" or being "different" (i.e., non-binary, gender non-conforming). These spaces, both literal and figurative, are where skateboarders find freedom, escape, and refuge from the harsh realities of a racist capitalist system. Skateboarders engage in a form of performative refusal to participate in, and protest against, the system that exploits them. Their fearlessness, rebelliousness, creativity, impulsivity, iconoclastic thrill- and adventure-seeking nature, and ability to live in the moment is what draws them to skateboarding, which provides an outlet for the so-called socio-emotional and behavioural issues that are an expression of the consequences of and reactions to the oppression they struggle against as they navigate mainstream institutions. These "issues" that are not adequately addressed by traditional organisations and institutions, which typically

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1   BRUJAS members have guest-taught classes and given workshops on their organising method at these institutions amongst several others.

operate out of inherently white supremacist heteronormative cultural and organisational models, are further exacerbated by skateboarders' deepening disconnection and alienation from formal opportunities for training and education. This squanders their prodigious potential to make a meaningful contribution to their communities through formal channels, perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational poverty and oppression.

In the face of this bleak landscape, three generations of NYC skateboarders have endeavoured to create an alternative ecosystem for themselves that is full of radical, rebellious, transcendent joy, spirit, and energy. Freire (2003) sums up his philosophy of pedagogical liberation by theorising its advancement across time:

> Pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. Liberation is thus a child-birth, and a painful one. (p.48)

Over the span of these three skateboarding generations critical consciousness evolved organically, resulting from a unique intergenerational exchange that almost perfectly exemplifies the power of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Through a combination of oral history, performance-based practice, and community gathering at events and art-making spaces, the NYC skateboarding community shared their knowledge and resources with each subsequent generation, forming a school of thought and practice of their own that

resists privatisation. Augusto Boal's *Theatre of The Oppressed* (1974), a text influenced by the work of Freire, specifically looks into the way that performance art is a medium for empowerment and change. He writes, "all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society" (p.x). The performance aspect of skateboarding can be understood as theatrical spontaneity. In skateboarding, theatre joins pedagogy in a unique method of combating the oppression of industrialism.

The grassroots efforts of skate crews and collectives in NYC are one of the most unique political and social phenomena in the history of skateboarding culture and have made an impact on global culture and society. Whether they are an intentional collective with a group name, that hold shared values, publish skate videos, have an internet platform, run educational workshops, produce and sell merchandise, practise mutual aid, or just simply share bonds, these crews create social meaning through friendship and collaboration in the lives of many people. These organisations and their efforts demonstrate the alternative visions and practices of skateboarders who have made their own way in the face of challenges within traditional institutions and culture, and have built pathways for others to do the same. The first generation of NYC street skateboarding organisations took the form of underground shops and brands that emerged in the 1980s such as SHUT, Skate NYC, Benjis, and OD's, as well as a handful of households around the city where skateboarders could hang out, eat, spend the night, and feel safe (Rothstein, 2013). The runaway success of Larry Clark's 1995 film *KIDS*, which focused on the sensationalised exploits of a crew of

real-life NYC skateboarders, most of whom were sponsored by Zoo York (founded in 1993) or Supreme (founded in 1994), along with 90's brands and shops such as SoHo Skates, ABC skateshop, Basic Wheels, and CS skateshop, supported the emergence of a generation of skateboarders who went on to shape NYC skateboarding's impact on the global skate industry, as well as the literal landscape of skateparks and spots in NYC.

The second wave of early 2000s companies included Hopps, the re-launched SHUT, 5Boro, Rockstar Bearings, Raised Fist Propaganda, AM NY, anything, UXA, Savage Urethane, Prize Fighter Cutlery, and Substance. These were carried by shops such as Pro Sports New York, Blades, Supreme, Autumn, Homage, KCDC, Terminal, Labor, Belief, LICK, and Reciprocal, and featured in online platforms such as NYC Skateboarding, The Green Diamond, Static, and the Quartersnacks blog. These community-situated groups continued producing combinations of skateboarding, art, product, and events as a way of life.

The first three decades of NYC street skateboarding pioneered an incredible grassroots, performance, and arts-focused outdoor culture that viewed the architecture of the entire city as obstacles to express themselves. The combination of placemaking and community built through practice created a publicly accessible landscape of learning that transcends the spatial compartmentalization of contemporary social life. Spots such as Union Square, with the infamous 4 block and black curved handrails over which Harold Hunter performed tricks, are seen in *The Zoo York Mixtape*. Other skate spots including the Bronx Courthouse, Tompkins

Square Park, the Astor Place Cube curbs, the Brooklyn Banks, midtown plazas that hug the base of skyscrapers, the Zeigfield theatre, Lenox Ledges, and the Flushing Meadows World's Fair Fountain defined NYC skateboarding. They became the foundation of skateboarding culture and community, and hosted inspiration for crew identity and practice. Several of the first two waves of NYC street skateboarding organisations still exist, thrive, and play a foundational role in mentoring the upcoming generation. This grassroots mentorship structure that utilises business resources, as well as organic peer support, to mentor coming of age community members is truly unique and isn't reflected in any other sport, cultural activity, or institutional educational apparatus. Unlike a school classroom, or traditional sports field, these spaces are fluid and publicly accessible, making the information and support exchanged within them inherently more organic and accessible to oppressed groups.

Growing Conscientizacao in NYC Skateboarding

Established in 2006 amidst the second wave of NYC skateboarding, Harold Hunter Foundation (HHF) was founded in memory of iconic Black NYC professional skateboarder Harold Hunter, who was born into intergenerational poverty, but had the opportunity to see the world because of his skateboard. A Black-led grassroots organisation, HHF provides a network of support, resources, and advocacy for BIPOC, female, and LGBTQ skateboarders in the NYC metro area. HHF recruits, trains, cultivates, supports, empowers, and pays credible, authentic, leaders who emerge organically

within the skate community to work as mentors and community outreach workers in NYC skateparks. HHF's staff act as community leaders, representatives, organisers, and activists, engaging skateboarders in their neighbourhoods to better understand issues and concerns, so that HHF can be proactive about supporting that which is already building from within the community.

HHF conducted an initial youth-driven, community-based participatory needs assessment survey in 2016. This survey of over 300 NYC skateboarders focused on assessing the needs and interests of lifestyle skateboarders throughout the city and provided demographic data and information about issues and concerns in the community. It was followed by a series of interviews and focus groups conducted in 2021, working intentionally with segments of the community that were less-represented in previous needs assessments, including female-identified and LGBTQ skateboarders, and evaluating the impact of the COVID pandemic on the community. They found that the needs of the NYC skate community reflect the significant barriers erected via structural racism and white supremacy as well as the continued impact of historic racial residential and educational hyper-segregation.

In contrast to the racial demographic of skateboarders nationally, which is comprised of approximately 76% Caucasian, 11% African American, 8% Latino/a, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% identifying as "other" (Corwin, Williams, Maruco & Romero-Morales, 2020), HHF's 2016 research found that 70% of NYC skateboarders who responded to their survey identified as being from Black, Latinx, Asian or Mixed-Race backgrounds, and the majority were from low-income families (HHF, 2016).

Of the skateboarders who were born and raised in NYC, more than 80% identified as being from BIPOC backgrounds. Nearly 75% came from immigrant backgrounds and the majority lived in neighbourhoods with the highest rates of poverty, violence, incarceration, and unemployment in the city. 80% percent lived at home with their family, with almost half living in single parent households. 65% reported incomes placing their families under the federal poverty line, though only 20% reported receiving public assistance such as Medicaid or Food Stamps. Many appeared to have an adversarial and mistrustful relationship with schools, with 49% reporting having been suspended or expelled from school, which was at least double the general rate of suspensions in NYC. 23% reported that they had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and 15% thought they might have ADHD, though they had never been diagnosed (reflecting rates 3 to 8 times higher than that of the general population). Given the criminalisation of emotional and behavioural issues among Black and Brown boys within the educational system, this constellation of qualities and experiences put them at high risk for high school dropout and incarceration. And yet, despite the fact that they reported rates of being stopped, questioned, or harassed by police in excess of 80%, their rates of arrest and incarceration were significantly lower than young people from similar backgrounds in the city. 65% had never participated in any organised adult-led after-school or out of school activities. 88% of those over 18 worked in unskilled, part-time service-sector positions, and were interested in pursuing careers in creative fields or entrepreneurship, but received limited meaningful formal support during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (HHF, 2016).

With the cultural foundation put in place by the first two generations of NYC skateboarders, brands, shops, and organisations, the third generation of NYC skateboarders, many of whom were involved with HHF, were able to take another direction with their organising based on their growing awareness of skateboarding's power and potential to bring people and ideas together. The third generation of NYC skateboarding began around 2012 to 2015 represented by brands and crews like Hardies, Canal, Bronze 56K, Hardbody, Tenant, Casino, Mira Coño, BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Homies Network. They started with the silhouette of more traditional skate brands: a team, a product, as well as videos, however, change was underway. Hardies (started in 2015), whose logo is a raised fist in the shape of a bolt, represents a bi-coastal coalition of Black Skateboarders led by NYC's own Tyshawn Jones who attended Woodward with HHF in 2011.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2003) argues that "men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which, and in which, they find themselves and, at the same time, come to see the world not as static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation" (p.12). In his analysis of Freire's work, Fuertes (2014) notes that,

> Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to the status quo, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their society (p.104).

In other words, Freire's framework helps inspire folks to critically examine the nature of oppression and take action to change their conditions. Freire (2003) also developed an analysis of what he calls the banking model of education, whereby teachers deposit facts into the minds of students, who memorise and recall them. Freire critiques this model, arguing that it teaches students to adapt to an oppressive world, instead of teaching them to view the world critically. In the fight for liberation, oppressed people and educators are encouraged to replace the banking model with a problem-posing model that presents students with worldly problems that relate to their lives and pushes them to analyse how and why those problems exist.

Inspired in part by the lack of meaningful representation of skateboarders of Colour and female skateboarders in the mainstream skate industry, the third wave of NYC skateboard organisations was emblazoned with consciousness and calls for justice that employed a confident sense of identity and shaped their role as agitators against oppression in the skateboarding community and beyond. It is from this wave of NYC skateboarding that BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Environmental Hood Restoration emerged.

Of the three skate crews, BRUJAS provides the most explicit example of Freirian problem-posing pedagogy designed to create critical consciousness and action. Founded in 2014 by two Latinx female skateboarders who grew up influenced by NYC's second wave in the Bronx and the Lower East Side (LES) of Manhattan, BRUJAS led feminist discourse on skateboarding within the city. They argued that women of Colour in the city and around the world weren't getting the respect

or resources they needed to reach their fullest potential in skateboarding.

In 2017, as part of their mission to spread critical thinking throughout their community, BRUJAS published a syllabus and clothing collection titled "Each One Teach One". For the first module of their course, they introduced the unit with an open public letter to their membership, stating:

> [W]hen we set out to write a popular education curriculum, we wanted to emulate and honor the lives of pedagogues and educators throughout history that have sought to combat oppression and with it, institutions of power that uphold oppression. This tradition is one that emerged from grassroots organizing in Latin America with the work of Augusto Boal and Paolo Freire, some of the more well-known practitioners of what has come to be called "critical pedagogy." The text and video we wanted to introduce the class "Burning Down and Dreaming Up" with focus on the ways that institutions (the school, the prison, and the hospital/psych ward) have become vital tools of control that seek to "nurture, or let [marginalized people] die…" In turn, we wanted to open up the class with a simple assignment, to have YOU (the independent scholar) write a brief reflection in the form of a letter that would detail a time you interacted with an institution, and you then found that it was NOT built for you (BRUJAS, 2017, p.7).

This open letter led to submissions by members of the collective who shared how language barriers and immigration, sexual assault, and racism all affected their experience in school. In a submission by Myles Sales, he shared that he was

stopped for skateboarding on his college campus for not following traffic signs, and then arrested. He wrote:

> I am cuffed up against the wall not to one but with two other chains and this white baldhead, wearing glasses piece of trash is shaking uncontrollably. This officer who is supposed to handle worse situations than some skateboarder is shaking as if I had a gun to his head asking him to donate to a Black foundation. He counted the money in my wallet and looked through my family photos (Sales, 2017, online).

Sales' writing demonstrates only one example of the unreasonable, violent experiences that men of Colour experience while attending higher learning institutions away from home. However, his writing also creatively illustrates awareness of resource tension between members of the status quo (white police) and the foundations (working to advocate on behalf of Black people's needs). BRUJAS organising of alternative spaces to share and express one's awareness of systemic oppression demonstrates the development of skateboarding organisation's consciousness through community education and action. BRUJAS held a teach-in at the East River Park to celebrate the release of the syllabus and project with workshops on NYC school segregation taught by members of BRUJAS' former history teacher Lev Moscow; a plant identification walk led by their member Antonia Perez; and a Foucauldian analysis of "The Hoodie", led by Columbia University student Sloane Gustafson. The classroom was freely accessible and outdoors, meaning anyone could join the conversation, meanwhile there was merchandise on display, causing one

of the workshop instructors to comment on the neoliberal quality of the workshop (BRUJAS, 2017, p.3). Nonetheless, the "Each One Teach One" concept expanded on through the BRUJAS project demonstrates a shared responsibility to each other's growth, exemplifying the importance of collective learning in the supportive ecology created by skateboarders.

Gang Corp is a far more organic and informal example of Freirian pedagogical philosophy in action. Based in the LES skatepark under the Manhattan bridge, and formed by primarily Black skateboarders from all over New York City over a decade, many of whom attended Woodward with HHF and participated in HHF programming between 2010 and 2019, Gang Corp produced undeniably iconic and powerful work together. In an interview on the Quartersnacks blog (Abada, 2019) Naquan Rollings, Gang Corp's videographer and creative director, shared,

> this is not some forced shit. It was all happening before it was Gang Corp – that's just the name we added to it. We would just fuck around on our Instagram group chats, and change the name of the chat each time with some dumb link. Someone titled it "Gang Corp," and we decided that was kind of hard (Abada, 2019, online).

Gang Corp approached the problem of the skate industry's hegemonic whiteness by creating self-aware space for themselves. In their breakthrough 2019 skate video "Black Business", filmed and edited by Rollings, one can see a group of 12 or so members skating the Trump Tower building on Columbus Circle. Rollings shares, "that session was mad random. It was just the first thing we saw when we got off

the train. We weren't planning on going there. That's why I'm hyped that blew up" (Abada, 2019, online). The gold handrail shooting off the end of the plaza holding a globe statue is literally completely taken over by the group as they approach the obstacle one after another. When Duron Simons, wearing a white du-rag and grey t-shirt with "Gang Corp" printed in bubble letters lands his front smooth grind on the rail everyone rejoices in such a genuine and enthusiastic way that one cannot help but admire the fraternity, joy, and artfully radical way in which Gang Corp's skateboarding takes space. Rollings explains,

> Whenever we got kicked out, Duron would yell "Black Business! Black Business!" and the security guards would usually give us another try or even let us keep skating because we were all yelling that. I kind of like the name because I feel like it builds controversy. I've been getting comments on YouTube like, "Well what if it was a white business?" That shit is funny to me (Abada, 2019, online).

To the audience the symbolism of a group of young Black men in the #BlackLivesMatter era skateboarding property emblazoned with then-president Trump's name can literally be seen as a challenge to the power of the American empire represented in the architecture of the towers. Yet there is an element of nonchalance to Gang Corp's power building and art making that highlights the organic nature of their play. When their work began to produce opportunities for brand collaborations with larger white owned and operated compa-nies the political stakes of their work began to become more

articulated. Freire (2003) writes on the process of marginal integration arguing that,

> The oppressed are not marginals, are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside" – inside the structure which made them beings for others. The solution is not to "integrate them into the structure of oppression but to transform the structure so that they can become "beings for themselves." Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student conscientizacao (p.74).

Gang Corp's participation in negotiations and business amongst themselves and with other companies and peers within the skateboarding community led to a new phase of their conscientisation. During the time of BRUJAS and Gang Corp's rise, there was an underground business school forming amongst members who shared perspectives on how to approach exchanges and challenges. Simons, who now solely operates the Gang Corp clothing brand, points out that "they need us, we don't need them" (Personal Communication). By "them" he references the plethora of exploitative structures, commercial partnerships with large brands and press editorial, he and his peers encountered while building their organisation. The disposability and exploitation of "talent" in the American media marketing industry can sometimes influence the culture of grassroots organisations that have experiences with them. In fact, it is often during interactions with for-profit and "culture-vulture" marketing initiatives, that grassroots organisations begin to fracture.

Gang Corp founded their own space in the absence of anything institutionally or formally available to them in skateboarding (besides HHF). While the "for us, by us" and "they need us, we don't need them" mantras are foundational to the history of Gang Corp, the group has been periodically challenged by their pressing need for resources and the distribution and navigation of power within. BRUJAS expressed similar issues in their publications. Nonetheless, Gang Corp's work demonstrates critical thinking that identifies the way in which the American empire absorbs, and even fetishises, the success of its marginalised groups in order to legitimise contemporary and historical violence against them through further growth. In congruence with Freire's model, BRUJAS, Gang Corp, Environmental Hood Restoration, and HHF approach methods of problem-posing organically through their passion for collective skateboarding in NYC. HHF's needs assessment programme can be seen as a non-profit-style way of organising information from a community, but it can also be seen as an instigation, whereby groups and people are challenged, or given space, perhaps for the first time, to think about what they need from skateboarding.

The Growth of Organising and Mutual Aid in Post-Pandemic NYC Skateboarding

The four years between HHF's original 2016 survey and the COVID pandemic, saw rapid growth in the female-identified and LGBTQ community within NYC skateboarding. In 2020, HHF conducted a series of individual interviews and focus groups with this community and found that their experi-

ences reflect the structural anti-Black racism, anti-immigrant, misogyny, and homophobia of the community at large, which is expressed within the cisgender, male-dominant skate community as they struggle to evolve and integrate this new group. Skateboarders who participated in HHF's interviews and focus groups listed housing assistance, COVID, scholarships, financial assistance, conflict resolution relating to intimate and sexual abuse and harassment, mental health, health insurance, affordable housing, renter's rights information, voter's rights information, access to building material, gatekeeping, misogyny, overstepping of social boundaries, racism and discrimination as the many issues facing the community.

In HHF's research, traditionally marginalised groups such as BIPOC, LGBTQ and women all identify as "lifestyle skateboarders", demonstrating an identity where people come together across differences. Common characteristics found across all lifestyle skateboarders in NYC demonstrated in the research include the capacity for group-work, self- and community advocacy. Many skateboarders in NYC have come up with creative group names that play with the concept of being from a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural background while also referencing their lifestyle as skateboarders. These take the form of creative alternative subjectivities. "BRUJAS" for example, Spanish for witches, calls on feminine subjectivity and a cultural heritage of resistance through a word that is often used negatively. Gang Corp (as in Corporation) repositions the word "Gang", in the context of business and prosperity for Black Skateboarders. Environmental Hood Restoration (EHR) chooses the word "hood" over the formal word

"neighbourhood" in their name, reflecting cultural preference. These spaces offer creative opportunities for self-determination, differing from the rigid identity categories used by the state, non-profit organisations, and social workers to associate needs with group subjectivities.

In their summary of the interviews and focus groups conducted in 2020, HHF stated, "our number one asset in the community is the community. HHF suggests avoiding redundant programming by building out a platform to connect with new and existing groups and collectives to support their grassroots efforts" (HHF, 2021). BRUJAS, Gang Corp, Hardies, Surface, The Skate Kitchen, and Public Housing Skate Team kicked off the third wave of skate crews in NYC. A number of organisations formed over the course of the COVID pandemic, such as Bronx Girls Skate and EHR, who have mobilised a tremendous organising force.

The disproportionate death of Black and Brown people during the COVID pandemic, along with the antiracist protests sparked by the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, helped to politicise skate crews and collectives in NYC (or motivated them to be more explicit and overt about their politics). Like BRUJAS, Environmental Hood Restoration (EHR), a non-profit organisation founded in August of 2021 by East New York skater Brandon Alfonso, takes a more explicit approach to Freirean problem-posing pedagogy. Their work focuses on the intersection between environmental justice and neighbourhood advocacy that comes directly from the people. This organising approach is sometimes called a grassroots model, but EHR uses the term "for the hood, by the hood" (Personal Communication).

EHR has been developing its organising style in conversation with the dozens of nonprofits and community collectives that serve the Brownsville and East New York neighbourhoods of Brooklyn. These predominantly Black neighbourhoods contain the densest concentration of low-income public housing projects in the United States (Semuels, 2015; Sun, 2012). Members of EHR worked with HHF to build the Brownsville Skate Project, which successfully unified six organisations to build three skateparks in the neighbourhood between 2013 and 2023, and then provided lessons and programmes to teach skateboarding to neighbourhood youth inside of them. EHR has organised a bi-weekly food pantry programme, collaborating with Feed the Streets to bring their programme directly to the skatepark. In 2023, former HHF staff and Brownsville natives Wade Yates and Bilal Ndongo joined forces with Alfonso in charting the future of EHR. Ndongo, who grew up in public housing in Brownsville and was a fellow in The Skatepark Project's Fellowship Program, was inspired by his experiences as a skateboarder to become a member of the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) Resident Stakeholder Team and an active member of the Brownsville Community Board.

Since 2023, Ndongo and Yates have worked with Alfonso to build monthly convenings with other organisations and collectives where they provide a safe space for youth and access to a variety of activities including skateboard equipment exchanges and lessons, as well as music, art, food, and chess. In 2024 they produced their own Go Skateboarding Day (GSD) event in Brownsville as an alternative to the more corporately-backed major GSD event held at LES skatepark.

In an interview, Ndongo spoke passionately about the larger picture of building a solidarity economy through their work, meaning that economic survival is approached through community networks as opposed to individual pursuit. However, what stood out most was a general frustration with everything he's observed. In referencing EHR's focus on sustainability, he shared that, "what you do with your waste defines you", and that The Brownsville Skate Project was "thrown out by [other organisations] trash that luckily didn't land in a bucket" (Personal Communication). While they may have learned and grown with the several non-profits they have interfaced with, EHR remains sensitive to the pitfalls of the nonprofit industrial complex and continues in the spirit of DIY. Ndongo shares that he has no interest in "being a political pawn for the skate industry" (Personal Communication). EHR continues to carry the torch for independent skateboarding organising in NYC.

In the concluding summary of their 2021 research findings, HHF states that the "growth of local mutual aid organisations has made the idea of reciprocity more tangible and accessible in the skate community" (HHF, 2021). While BRUJAS and Gang Corp adopted the "skate/streetwear brand" model of limited clothing apparel drops pioneered by Supreme, EHR founded a non-profit organisation with more direct mutual aid and environmental action awareness. Though they have all approached their organising differently, they are three examples of groups that employ tactical diversity with a shared resistance to institutional co-optation.

The self-awareness and community intention developed over the span of three generations of skateboarders who

gathered non-institutionally, demonstrates the power of the peer-support, horizontal educational model dreamt and practised by Freire. Most social opportunities in the urban United States are either formally organised or created indoors, and neighbourhood-based, leading to the perpetuation of class- and race-based segregation. Crews that practice skateboarding together often form a relationship to a common place and a collectively shared style. This performance style (like an approach to tricks and obstacles), fashion, language, ethnicity, politics, and social practices all influence why certain skateboarders come together and develop collectively as a crew over time.

Legal fundraisers, parties, coalition building, clothing and other resource drives, grocery and meal access programmes, and educational workshops are among the many independent, skateboarder-led programmes one may see across the span of a year in post-pandemic NYC. Schools and traditional youth-serving organisations have not reached a level of engagement where individuals are voluntarily showing up and organising themselves around joy and problems alike, building community and solidarity across different ages and backgrounds. The mutual aid and collectivity efforts of skateboarders are important because they create alternative spaces to thrive. Chiu and Giamarino (2019, p.2) point out the way in which the creative economy around skateboarders is deemed valuable by city organisers, "Cities hope to co-opt the positive images skateboarders generate to market themselves as metropolitan areas with emerging creative enclaves". While skateboarders may contribute to NYC's allure for business investment and migration by young urban pro-

fessionals, their operation of resources outside of the welfare and social services state model as well as outside of the traditional marketplace, hold immeasurable value. The skateboarding community resembles a solidarity economy, where people are invested in each other's survival. The spirit of the skateboarding solidarity economy produces contributions to the city that intervene and support lives. Many low-income youth of Colour would be at higher risk for homelessness, unemployment, and illness were it not for their skate families that keep them on better tracks.

> Over Harold Hunter Weekend in June of 2022, at least two dozen people lined up for a Cash for Tricks MC'd by Billy Rohan on Friday night in Tompkins. One kid after another hucked themselves at the obstacle. After a spectacular completion, Billy would hand them a bill, ranging from $20, to $100 dollars the way he always did since he began running competitions in NYC more than a decade prior. That same weekend at Fat Kid Park, the Women and LGBTQ skate jam approached their cash for tricks with a slightly more egalitarian bent, distributing cash to as many skaters as possible for prowess, technical skill, performance, and style, as well as simply to encourage participation or making an effort to try a trick they'd never attempted before, no matter how rudimentary.

While cash aid access for poor families in NYC has diminished over the period of neoliberalism, cash for tricks events by skateboarders have emerged as a fun way to gather and organise resource distribution. The pedagogy of NYC skateboarders might include a collective inquiry into the urban politics of welfare services, resource distribution, and fund-

raising for the many institutions that keep the city running to further our awareness of our role within them. As exemplified in the LGBTQ skate jam, the community is becoming more aware of the necessity of universal programmes that do not have extreme performance access barriers. Furthermore, government welfare in the US has structured its logic around "needs-based", indoor households and families, while skateboarding, with its increasingly co-educational, outdoor, and boundary-breaching potential has produced a unique approach to public life and solidarity that may hold potential for alternative ways of managing resource distribution. As these crews begin to conceptualise their resources as a powerful culture and emerging industry, the obstacles to having a larger, and potentially radical impact will literally and metaphorically grow. The school emerging from this community's praxis will undoubtedly be "co-opted" by institutions and corporations alike. However, the survival of its spiritual essence will be dependent on the task of constantly thinking and acting outside of them; like Freire says, made and "remade". There is no doubt that the value of care within small groups, will continue to drive the prospect of our world, yet the industrial logics present in traditional educational settings will unlikely give us the tools to nurture them.

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Chapter 6

Skate and collaborate: Carving spaces to create and educate through sociology, performance and interaction design, and public art

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Introduction

Exclusionary practices have traditionally manifested in the cultural and social spaces where skate scenes and cultures are fostered, both shaped by and shaping the physical places where skateboarding occurs for 'urban play' such as skateparks, street spots, and city landscapes. This chapter foregrounds how women and other populations not traditionally foregrounded in skateboarding are opening up and reimagining once exclusionary, male-dominated skate spaces and places.

The *Skate, Create, Educate and Regenerate (SkateCER)* initiative is led by Indigo Willing and based in Australia. Its inaugural project consists of a collaboration between scholars in

the fields of sociology, performance, and design with Lian Loke, and public artists Sanné Mestrom and Nadia Odlum from the *ARTS/PLAY/RISK* project. *SkateCER* also issues a call to action to recognise the benefits of including research and expertise led by women and gender diverse scholars. A key feature of this new interdisciplinary research is the combination of sociological and artistic methodologies and creative community-informed strategies that contribute to disrupting exclusionary thinking to various social, spatial, and design approaches in skate spaces and, more broadly, public spaces.

We adopt the term "non-traditional skateboarders" from research by Delardi (2021) to mostly refer to women, non-binary, and gender diverse and queer individuals who have always existed in skateboarding, yet have not traditionally been included. However, the term can also apply to exclusions beyond gender and sexuality, encompassing those pushed to the margins due to racism, xenophobia, ableism, ageism, and biases such as toward class distinctions or religion (Delardi, 2021). The positionality of the co-authors of this chapter, as women and non-binary people in early to middle-age, informs our perspectives on issues of sexism and ageism. Our diverse experiences of sexual identity and cultural background further support our inquiries into the impacts of xenophobia and marginalisation in public space. As researchers, we are united by a firm commitment to making spaces and places more welcoming, inviting, and inclusive to all types of users.

In this chapter, we present three short case studies from our various fields of expertise that offer counter-points and interdisciplinary foundations for addressing issues of exclu-

sion and carving new spaces for inclusion. Two of these directly tackle social and interaction design-based interventions in the world of skateboarding, while the third focuses attention more broadly to 'play' in public space. Firstly, the power of community-led change in skateboarding and skater-led social projects are spotlighted in Indigo Willing's work for *We Skate QLD* and *Consent is Rad,* with a focus on activities led by non-traditional populations that have historically been discriminated against and excluded from skate spaces. Secondly, we turn our attention to Lian Loke's *ElectroSK8* event, whose creative engagements work to change how people interact and play in skateparks, and how interaction design and performance can interrupt forms of cultural dominance, spatial inequality, and social intimidation. Finally, we point to Sanné Mestrom's recent research at *ART/PLAY/RISK* with Nadia Odlum on the potential for public art to open up new opportunities and affordances for urban play, particularly for children and demographics prone to exclusion from traditional urban play spaces. In each case study, we provide recommendations and guiding steps towards ensuring gender equity and social inclusion in skateboarding and other forms of urban play.

In the last part of the chapter, we introduce *SkateCER*'s inaugural research collaboration that brings together scholars from the fields of sociology, performance and interaction design, and public art. We outline how we are combining our various approaches and perspectives to generate a deeper understanding on ways to overcome social, spatial, and design barriers in public space and to build stronger pathways of inclusion for future urbanism.

The Feminist Turn in Skateboarding Research

Feminist and women-led skate research commonly reveals that skate culture and spaces have traditionally been dominated by men and that there has been a tendency in the skate industry to also embrace hyper-masculinity (Beal and Weidman, 2003; Wheaton and Thorpe, 2022; Willing, 2022). Additionally, sociological research by Indigo Willing and Anthony Pappalardo (2023) featuring interviews with 42 change-makers in skateboarding, illustrates how barriers are also often intersectional due to issues including but not limited to sexism, racism, colonialism, heteronormativity, and various exclusionary views and structures. Willing et al's research on masculinity and skateboarding (2019; 2023a; 2023b) also links the influence of hegemonic and hyper-masculinity in skateboarding to perceptions that only particular styles of tricks to fashion are legitimate. Trick choices and clothing items perceived as feminine (Abulhawa, 2020) or Queer (Geckle and Shaw, 2022), or showing concern for safety such as wearing helmets and pads, are also often framed as inferior by a more macho and heteronormative culture in skateboarding (Willing, 2022).

Research on femininity and skateboarding by Dani Abulhawa (2020), of mostly younger girls and women, and Esther Sayers (2023), on mature women skateboarders, expands on such issues. Their feminist work highlights how pressure to measure up to narrowly defined ways of skateboarding not only makes skate spaces less welcoming, but can also be internalised by girls, women, and various non-traditional skateboarders who question their belonging in the

social and physical spaces where skateboarding is practised (Abulhawa, 2020; Sayers, 2023).

Public spaces, including where skateboarding occurs, are not 'neutrally' designed with a range of users in mind. Kalms (2023: 66) asserts that "The view that urban planning, policy and design should be a neutral framework has not led to greater inclusion and safety in public spaces". For instance, this is the case when obstacles are only suitable for advanced skateboarders, or through a lack of facility such as limited gender-options for toilets, and a lack of lighting to increase safety and usability. Spots may also be isolated from the general public, allowing for scenes to be insular and hostile to diversity.

Turning to the design and art world, new approaches to change-making can be drawn from affordance theory. In her reflections on technology, Jenny Davis (2020) raises the critical question of not just *what* objects afford, but *how objects* afford, *for whom*, and *under what circumstances*. Affordance theory was first advanced by James Gibson (1979) who coined the term in his work on ecological perception, environments, and complementary relationships. The concept of affordances was then extended by Donald Norman's (1988; 1999) influential work exploring design and perceived action possibilities. In this work, the axiom was that designers would create in ways that aligned with users' abilities, perceived needs, and anticipated interactions.

We view this feminist turn as useful in drawing attention to how values and interests are built into public spaces and objects. We attend to *who is designed out of public spaces* and excluded. We explore what can be done to bring in new affor-

dances. This includes women, non-binary, gender diverse individuals and also many other identities and positionalities that are intersectionally pushed to the margins. We propose that non-traditional skateboarders offer constructive insights for other creative sports, as well as groups and individuals dedicated to building playful, healthy, sustainable, and inclusive cities.

Case Study 1 – Community-Led Change-Making: Reflections on *We Skate QLD and Consent is Rad* by Indigo Willing

Skateboarding is simultaneously a high-performance competitive sport and a creative subculture. While this subculture cultivates an image of being alternative and progressive (Borden, 2001; Wheaton and Thorpe, 2022), it has also traditionally been dominated by men where a culture of hegemonic masculinity can go unchallenged (Abulhawa, 2020; White, 2021; Willing, 2022). In response to this, sociologists in particular have observed how a range of positive disruptions to dominant stereotypes and restrictive social environments in skateboarding now span various community activations, industry shifts and emerging studies. Interventions framed around diversity are now also intersectionally aware. Inclusion-focused work now also higlights diasporic identities, (Abulhawa, 2020; Willing and Pappalardo, 2023), Black skateboarders and skateboarders of colour (SoC) (Williams, 2020), Indigeneous skateboarders (see chapter 10) and projects led by Native women (Williams, 2020; Willing, 2019) and disability activism and adaptive skateboarding (Carroll and Cianciotto, 2020). Skateboarding is also

no longer just a youth culture with older skateboarders now challenging ageism and claiming a space (O'Connor, 2018; Sayers, 2023; Willing et al., 2019).

It is within this era of change-making that the Queer-led network *We Skate QLD* network emerged from the margins, co-founded by trans and cis women and non-binary skateboarders in 2016 (Indigo Willing, Evie Ryder, Tora Waldren) and joined soon after by other volunteers from various other marginalised backgrounds. We Skate QLD will be running their 9th Annual Spring Jam in 2025, with past competition winners including Olympians Haylie Powell, Heili Sirvo and Chloe Covell. Beyond awards, the jams ensure everyone can have fun with beginners skating side-by-side with more advanced skateboarders. There are open-gender heats with prizes for categories such as 'best style' and 'best stoke', complementing more traditional prizes for technical skills and advanced abilities.

The emergence of *Consent is Rad*, which includes an educational component in response to issues of consent and sexual violence prevention, also marks a shift in skate culture. The campaign (co-founded by Indigo Willing, Evie Ryder, Tora Waldren and Miljana Miljevic) aims to make skate spaces safe, inclusive, and respectful. This social initiative purposely moves away from pressures to conform to a hegemonic and hyper-masculine outlook of "skate and destroy" valorised by the "core" culture of skateboarding for several decades (Willing, 2022; White, 2021). Pivotal moments in this era of change include an "ethical turn" (Willing and Pappalardo, 2023 p. 48) in the past ten years where non-traditional skateboarders and allies are not only embracing the outlook to

Figure 1. *Community gathering and skate meet up by We Skate* QLD *and Consent is Rad.* Photo by: Peter Sondergaard.

"skate and create" but also to "skate and regenerate" (Willing, 2020). This outlook places an emphasis on caring for the people, the environment and issues of sustainability.

More than just attempting to carve out safe spaces through being present and populating physical places and online platforms where skateboarding occurs, *We Skate* QLD's and *Consent is Rad*'s strategies for change also disrupt broader structural processes with their community-led events that are staffed by non-traditional skateboarders in roles usually dominated by men. This includes roles such as MCs, judges, photographers,

videographers, and events managers. In doing so, these social projects draw attention to how it is not just enough to design and build a space, and label it safe and inclusive due to simply boosting the numbers of non-traditional skateboarders at skateparks and other places to skate. This entails opportunities for making space for skateboarders to move into leadership and professional roles, to learn this in a supportive way and have agency so that fresh approaches can join and mutually inform formal sports models, and to have more diverse representation in how things are run and by who are also crucial for change.

These activations also represent what Sharp and Threadgold (2020) describe as 'defiance labour', which refers to hidden or under-acknowledged work done in alternative music scenes to challenge discrimination and boost equity and inclusion. Defiance labour has transferable insights for skateboarding, sensitising us to the people who are doing the heavy lifting for change in skateboarding, as efforts often rest on the most marginalised. Defiance labour makes apparent where robust financial, institutional, and structural support is still lacking.

Our values and approaches also reflect research work by Bethany Geckle and Sally Shaw (2022), who highlight the process of failure and the non-competitive elements of Queer joy as empowering to Queer skateboarders. Rather than just replicating the roles men have predominantly occupied and shaped, *We Skate QLD* and *Consent is Rad* embrace a mix of DIY, Queer-led and feminist approaches that resist measuring up to traditional "core" skateboarding and a hyper-masculine pursuit of conquering and winning. Instead of styling activities after mega events like the Olympics, we keep close to our roots by prioritising community-based skills and resources,

creating joy, and having fun together. These are foundational steps towards enabling people to feel safe, respected, and included. The aim is not achieving a level of perfection in the traditional sense, but of practising, sometimes failing and purposefully progressing together.

Key Insights and Takeaways

We have found that research and education is needed to challenge problematic social dynamics in skateboarding culture that condone sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, colonialism, ableism and sexual violence. Social change-making in skateboarding is often sparked by community-led and grassroots movements and efforts to create programmes and projects that co-design spaces and places with 'non-traditional' skateboarders. Improving spaces in skateboarding is a multi-dimensional process and must be open to various voices, professions, experiences, and expertise.

Case Study 2 – Transforming Skateparks through Interaction Design and Performance: Reflections on *Electrosк8* by Lian Loke

In this case study, we put forth a view of the skatepark as an open canvas for inscribing new affordances – physical, social, and political – that challenge the dominant skatepark culture and make it more inclusive for non-traditional skateboarders through interaction design and performance methodologies. One aim of the project was to introduce the public to the playful creativity of the skatepark in a new way, expanding the enjoyment of the skatepark to non-skateboarders, spec-

tators, families, friends, and strangers, whilst celebrating the physical creativity of skateboarders of all types.

The curatorial concept for *Electrosκ8* was founded upon a celebration of skateboarders and an expansion of how they creatively appropriate urban spaces through playful and skilful movement. The public event was a presentation of several performances, interactive experiences and skate demonstrations to a large public audience, held over one night at Sydenham Green Skate Space. With a combination of skateboarders, roller skaters, artists, interaction designers, and others, the event transformed the traditional concrete playground of the skatepark into an "electronic wonderland". Participants and audiences could experience digital colour, light, and sound installations that were responsive to movement. Curated by Lian Loke and Abhiruchi Chhikara, Electrosκ8was presented by Inner West Council as part of EDGE Sydenham festival (2019) and supported by The University of Sydney Design Lab and UNSW Art and Design.

Creating an arts event for and with the community involved a year-long process starting with *Pilotsκ8*. Through the *Pilotsκ8* project, we trialled the methodology for developing motion-triggered interactive artworks, informed by site analysis and user studies, at the Sydenham Green Skate Space as part of an interaction design studio at The University of Sydney. The topography of the skatepark itself provided a spatial, material context for creative engagement by artists and performers. Following the trial run of *Pilotsκ8,* established and emerging artists were then invited to create works for *Electrosκ8*, resulting in 22 creative practitioners from diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds.

From interdisciplinary collaborations, a unique set of artistic works was created for the distinctive environment of the skatepark, including performance, games and interactive art installations, whilst incorporating motion-sensing, digital, and wearable technologies. Also featured were dance performers who re-imagined the environment of the skatepark as a site for socio-political activation and community engagement in response to the climate crisis. Two of the works are of particular relevance to our feminist agenda in this chapter: *SonicSk8er* and *Light Land*. *Light Land* presented a game-like format for beginner skateboarders, especially targeting young girls, by adding motion-triggered lighting effects on the skateboard (designed by three women, see Hosseini et al., 2019). *SonicSk8er* was a collaboration with female and queer roller skaters (Loke et al., 2019). The motion of roller skateboarders modulated wearable sound systems for an emergent sonic composition interwoven with movement choreography.
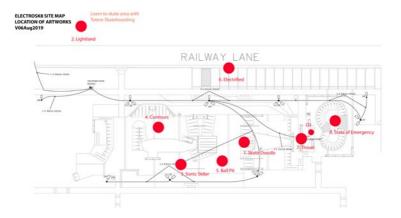

Figure 2. *Site map of digital artworks and live performance for Electrosk8 at Sydenham Green Skate Space.* Image by: Lian Loke.

Beyond the initial design and build of skateparks, it is possible to creatively activate and extend, augment or subvert the affordances of public space – and existing skateparks – through design of interactive, digital media, and performance. The *Electrosк8* project has demonstrated the successful application of art, design, and performance methodologies and outputs for temporary creative appropriation of skateparks that cater to wider audiences and non-traditional skateboarders. It addressed the issue of who gets to skate, and how, through augmenting the skatepark with digital light and sound installations that amplified 'spontaneous performances' by skateboarders and added a new dimension to the typical use of the skatepark. Inclusive practices included participation by non-traditional skateboarders in the making of the interactive works in collaboration with artists and designers (e.g. SonicSk8er), thus ensuring under-represented female and queer skateboarders were visible and actively contributing to changing skate culture in positive ways through co-creation and live, interactive performance.

In contrast to the common perception of skateparks as encouraging anti-social behaviours, we stress how more recent initiatives by local councils bring out the positive aspects of youth skateboarding, such as the development of prosocial behaviours, including cooperation and physical skill-building (that is, getting better at skateboarding). Odlum and Collette (2022, p.252) argue that "play goes beyond being merely a means for social encounter. Play is a core part of development for young people". Willing and Shearer (2015, p.48) then emphasise (in the context of skateboarding as play)

that skateboarding can also become a positive and "significant part of their identity" (c.f. Wheaton and Thorpe, 2022).

My own (Loke) observations from interactions with the local skate community at Sydenham skatepark confirm such findings on the cultivation of prosocial behaviours. Surprisingly, little aggression or competition was visible. There was a camaraderie with skateboarders looking out for each other, trading tips and an unwritten code about respectfully sharing the use of the park (for example, not snaking, that is, not dropping in on someone else's run).

A well designed skatepark such as Sydenham Green Skate Space attracts skateboarders of all ages from well outside the suburb, with people travelling from interstate. This skatepark is popular with skateboarders, scooters and roller skaters. By offering unstructured contexts like skateparks in public space, councils can provide facilities for leisure activities that promote physical activity and wellbeing, enable risk-taking and bending of rules without serious criminal consequences, and enhance social networking and social integration amongst youth (Willing and Shearer, 2015). There is also potential for involving youth and non-traditional skateboarders in the design process of new skateparks, which can encourage a sense of civic duty and care in skateboarders, as well as give voice and visibility to those typically marginalised in the dominant skate culture.

Arts and performance companies remind us to view cultivating creativity in physical activities such as skateboarding as social good initiatives. At the same time, initiatives such as *Electrosк8* envision skateboarding as a gateway into a broader creative world of multidisciplinary interactions and potentials, storytelling, and community building.

Key Insights and Takeaways

The *Electrosк8* project provided a platform for temporarily re-imagining and transforming skateparks through interaction design and performance. We have found that working closely with local councils is key to access skateparks and skate communities for temporary creative public events. Collaborating with a group of committed, local skateboarders on the creative development of the interactive designs and performances would ensure the skatepark transformation values their participation, enhances their skateboarding experience, and does not introduce unnecessary risks posed by material and technological augmentation of existing infrastructure. Creative, digital activations of skateparks can aesthetically amplify skateboarders' moves, tricks, and performances, as well as expand the opportunities for audience engagement and entertainment across all age groups.

Case Study 3 – Public Art, Affordances, and Agency: Reflections on *Art/Play/Risk* by Sanné Mestrom and Nadia Odlum

The *ART/PLAY/RISK* research project, led by public artist and academic Sanné Mestrom, with research contributions by artist and PhD candidate Nadia Odlum, studies the distinctive, rich affordances that urban spaces can offer for playful actions and social interactions. Its key objective is the design of more child-friendly, intergenerational future cities. This research, and the resulting public art works, emphasises the role of public art in expanding opportunities for intergenerational play in public space.

Accommodating the needs of children in public space is increasingly significant as more and more families move into our cities. Opportunities for play (and skate) are typically limited to conventional fenced-off playgrounds (or restricted to skateparks), which offer limited scope for exploration and growth, with children often following predictable paths, devoid of the challenge, cooperation, and risk-taking opportunities that are so vital to their health and development.

Through empirical research (2022-2023) into playful affordances via observation of children playing in public spaces – both in fenced-off purpose-built playgrounds and peripheral spaces in the open urban realm – we learnt about the incredibly varied and unexpected ways that public spaces can be used for play. We observed and analysed the ways the material and social conditions of urban spaces may provide for or inhibit children's play. Across a variety of sites, we examined how children typically 'use' or 'misuse' environments for various, often unanticipated activities, finding ways to play that subvert the norms of behaviour in public space in favour of embodied and exploratory engagement. Analysing these behaviours through qualitative and practice-based art methods, we sought fresh insights into the complex relationships between form and use in public space. Expanding this research in 2024 with the *SkateCER* collaboration, we note similar affordances and limits placed on skateboarders through skateparks versus streetscapes.

The potential playable affordances of an urban space can be expanded through the presence of playable public art (Odlum and Collett, 2022). To test this assertion, we conducted participatory research with the playable sculpture

'The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts' (Mestrom, 2023, photograph below) This sculpture was tested in four public contexts across Australia to observe how people engage with, or 'use' the work. Observing over 2500 "play experiences" (how individuals of varying ages interact with the artwork through play), we were able to better understand the relationship between form, use, and self-determined perceptions of risk, as they relate to playable public art.

Figure 3. Children playing with one of her recent public artworks. Photo by: Sanné Mestrom

The objective was to design a sculpture for the public realm that did not have any prescriptive use or way-to-play, but that nevertheless embodied subtle cues to indicate that this public object was intended to be played upon. Play affordances were designed to be attractive to the body, such as sculptural limbs corresponding to the width and gradient of a conventional

slide, with the varied heights providing opportunity to negotiate risk. Our observations of children's play with the artwork demonstrated that the open-ended affordances allowed users to escape specific preconceptions and rules about their relationships with objects and environments. One key finding here is that the greater formal variety and lack of prescriptive function of public artworks led users to discover more and varied potential affordances. This mirrors observations by skateboarding researchers in terms of the appeal of street skating over conventional objects in skateparks (Borden, 2001; Giamarino and Willing, forthcoming; Giamarino, O'Connor and Willing, 2023).

Both Quentin Stevens' (2024) framework of play settings and Roger Caillois' (2001) classification of play behaviours have been influential to us. Building on their work, we analysed the diverse patterns of play facilitated by the artwork. Climbing, sliding, imaginative role-playing – all emerge as prominent forms of engagement, highlighting the sculpture's capacity to inspire creativity and social interaction among users of all ages. Stevens' (2024) analysis provided a foundational perspective, presenting play as a critical lens through which to examine and expand the traditional notion of affordances, and for our work to challenge conventional interpretations of urban design and open more spaces not just for play but in ways designed to consider how are non-traditional users are designed 'in' rather than 'out' of view. Complementing our perspectives are Henri Lefebvre's theories of spatial practice (1992), which emphasise the dialectical relationship between human agency and the dominant forces shaping urban landscape. As such, we call for a nuanced

understanding of public art's role in expanding play in urban environments. We also build on recent contributions by feminist researcher Leslie Kern (2020) who emphasised the gendered dimensions of urban design, revealing how typical attributes of urban spaces can be excluding, neglectful or hostile to non-traditional users.

The research reveals that, akin to skateboarders and other non-traditional users of public spaces, children are often relegated to the peripheries of public space and public life: skateparks for the former, and fenced-off playgrounds for the latter. While safety is an issue, we contend that relegation to the peripheries is not an adequate response to these concerns. Our study demonstrates how we could integrate these diverse users of public spaces into the core of urban environments, with the aim of fostering more inclusive cities for the future.

Key Insights and Takeaways

The incoming findings of the *ART/PLAY/RISK* project provide interdisciplinary perspectives on the nuanced relation-ships between design interventions, urban play dynamics, and social interaction. Careful analysis of observational data, qualitative feedback and creative outputs thus far has provided the following insights, which will be used to further our research. *ART/PLAY/RISK* makes apparent the importance of formal variety and non-prescriptive design in promoting diverse play experiences to foster physical, psychological, and social resilience. Design affordances play a significant role in shaping spontaneous social interactions and fostering a sense of community within urban spaces Traditional playground elements and street furniture are limited in accommodat-

ing varied play behaviours compared to public artworks. The social and health benefits of self-determined, open-ended play experiences contribute towards nurturing creativity and building resilience among users.

Bringing Diverse Disciplines, Perspectives and Expertise Together to Roll Forward and Push for Progress

The *SkateCER* project is dedicated to bringing together women, non binary, and other non-traditional skateboarders and professional and community perspectives for a symposium and skate festival. More than just a series of events, it is also an opportunity for skateboarders – via their roles as community experts – to be part of co-producing inclusive spaces. With Willing, this includes a suite of skateboarders-informed resources that tackle social barriers in skateboarding, as well as being co-designers of a pilot art work by Mestrom for skateboarders and the public to interact with. Combining this work with additional insights from skatepark events by Loke, outcomes from *SkateCER* can also combat the negative stereotypes about skateboarders and the idea that 'skate spaces' are mutually exclusive to 'public spaces'.

Our methodologies include running co-design workshops at skateparks and online, whereby creative methodologies guide participants to discuss art, performance, and design. We are also drawing on sociological and qualitative methods, guided through a skateboarder's perspective, with ethnographic observations and interviews at skate shops, skateparks, street spots, photo-elicitation exercises looking at skateable architecture and interviews (semi-structured and

unstructured). The recruitment and sample so far includes skateboarders who have engaged with and been active participants in Willing's community networks, have assessed and discussed miniature models of Mestrom's vision for playable artworks, and have been an active part of Loke's *Electrosk8* event. We also expanded our criteria from skateboarding over to those falling under the broader umbrella of what we call 'creative sports', which better emphasises the artful and creative side of skateboarding, unlike the terms 'action', 'lifestyle' or 'extreme' sports. Our workshops and interview participants currently also include individuals from the roller skating, roller blading, WCMX, dancing, and parkour scenes.

Key to our mission is to prioritise community-led and creative approaches where non-traditional skateboarders and collaborators are a central part of the process. This call to action builds on existing creative explorations by women and non-binary scholars in the field of performance studies (Abulhawa, 2020; Ong, 2016) and architecture, notably by professional skateboarders Alexis Sablone (Bansinath, 2023). The next stages are to keep generating and sharing various ideas, knowledge, and collaborative work between social researchers, designers and performers, architects, urban planners, and public artists interested in how programmes, places, and spaces for skateboarding and other creative sports can become more welcoming and inclusive. We encourage fellow researchers and educators to explore and embrace interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations that go outside the box to not just create, but also educate and regenerate.

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Chapter 7

Teaching skateboarding as movement literacy – feel, explore, collaborate, and assess

Åsa Bäckström

As a researcher focusing on social and cultural learning, and using skateboarding as an empirical example, I have often been asked to present the educational peculiarities of skateboarding. What do skateboarders do, and how can we learn from them? These kinds of curious questions often have a distinct idea that skateboarding is socially and culturally different from the so-called normal ways of learning, whatever those may be. Likewise, skateboarders suggest that skate culture and its ways of life and learning are indeed alternative. However, the "oddities" of skateboarding are often found in other movement cultures, too. In the following, I take the opportunity to dismantle obscured ways of talking about teaching and learning skateboarding. It is important to do so for various reasons, one being that skateboarding pedagogies have become increasingly significant as skateboarding per se is expanding and weaving into societies, communities,

and cultures. It is crucial to make sound and informed decisions on what to teach, what to learn, by whom, how, and why. I would even argue that it is crucial for the future of skateboarding.

Pedagogy does not currently have a definition which researchers agree upon, but it is fair to say it is about teaching and learning. Pedagogy has different meanings in different languages and cultures. For this text, I adopt how Standal (2016, pp.7-8) employs the term to describe the teaching and learning process, including "socialization, curriculum studies and the raising of children". It partly overlaps with how Romero (2020, p.232) defines skate pedagogy as "the teaching, learning and relationship-building that occurs in skateboarding", but Standal's conceptualisation draws explicitly from phenomenology, to which I will return later.

Recently, new approaches to movement learning have emphasised holistic and dynamic perspectives on human movement and moving humans, in contrast to the prevailing mechanistic and individualistic perspectives (Larsson, 2021). Departing from Sfard's (1998) discussion of the two leading metaphors informing our thinking of learning, acquisition, and participation, Larsson suggests that we should look at these metaphors as supplementing and supporting each other instead of handling them as conflicting. Acquisition tends to focus on automation, measuring, and performance, while participation emphasises the social aspects of learning. Standal (2016) suggests that movement learning based on phenomenology provides a middle ground. In this chapter, I expand on Standal's model of movement literacy, focusing on its four features: feel, explore, collaborate, and assess. By

way of Standal's thinking and empirical examples from my research, as well as glimpses from other people's work, my intention in this chapter is to present one way of thinking about the often-obscured teaching and learning processes in skateboarding.

The growth of skate culture and education

The current state of skateboarding education is similarly challenging to sketch. The difficult task of defining skateboarding is included in this challenge. Is skateboarding a sport, culture, art, play, recreation, way of life, or everything at once? My definition is that it is a movement culture intricately woven into societal webs. Thus, it may mean different things to different people and take various forms. Outlining the history of skateboarding, Iain Borden (2019) sketches the social, cultural, material, economic, and artistic growth from being an innovative underground phenomenon to the well-established activity it is today. He concludes that skateboarding is "inherently contradictory and plural, being at once authentic and corporate, playful and serious, rebellious and conformist, street-based and skatepark bound" (p.282). Similarly, Lombard (2016, p.12) states that "skateboarding is a fluid, dynamic field, a global phenomenon whose participants have strong connections to local scenes, a rebellious activity, and commercialized form". The cultural representations of skateboarding have shifted from alternative to respected and possibly mainstream after the turn of the millennium. Skateboarding has become "a significant part of urban and cultural fabric in contemporary global society" (Lombard, 2016, p.3)

or, as Borden put it, "an integral and vital part of our urban world" (Borden, 2019, p.264).

Formal and informal education

Skateboarding has not been part of formal education historically, according to Corwin et al. (2019b, pp.10-11), but as skateboarding has expanded, schools, districts, and "forward-thinking educators" integrated this physical activity into school programmes as part of the curriculum and as after-school programmes in the US. Incorporating skateboarding in formal educational systems is no doubt recent in skateboarding history and could be explained by the increasing popularity and spread of the activity. In the 2010s, middle and high school teams in Southern California could skate in the *National Scholastic Skateboarding League* (NSSL). In higher education, the course "Skateboarding and Actions Sports in Business, Media and Culture" is offered regularly at the University of Southern California. In Sweden, several high school programmes offered skateboarding as part of the curriculum during the early 2000s, two of which are still running: *Bryggeriet* in Malmö and *Fryshuset* in Stockholm.

Even though skateboarding has been scarce in *formal* education, *informal* teaching and learning have existed since its early days. Rightfully so, informal learning is also what researchers tend to focus on when scrutinising learning in skateboarding. For example, a scoping review on learning in action sports (including skateboarding) states that it is mostly an informal and self-regulated activity (Ellmer et al., 2020). The review also declares various learning objectives (although not naming them that way), such as skills and

ability, social engagement, and cultural content. The *what* of teaching skateboarding may, in other words, be many different things, particularly if the *how* is informal. Self-reported ways of learning among skateboarders suggest that demonstration, practice and imagery are mainly used in this coach-free environment (Collins et al., 2022). Demonstration and the act of looking are similarly prevalent in Jones (2011, p.599), who points to the use of do-it-yourself-videos while learning to skate, which function as "inspirational and instructional tools, as texts of self-promotion and as historical records of the community, preserving the lore of lost skate sports and legendary members." Hölsgens (2024, p.391) follows this line of thinking as he suggests mediated forms of learning together with "skating-alongside-experts" and "knowing-by-doing" as the combination of practices which skateboarders use to learn skateboarding. Becoming part of skate culture often results from these informal learning processes (Bäckström, 2005; Jones, 2011; Sayers, 2023).

Fostering athletes and building community

The expansion of skateboarding has led not only to its incorporation in formal education, but also to its sportification through the development of a bureaucratic organisation, measuring performance and quantification, as well as a quest for records (Guttman, [1978] 2004; Kilberth & Schweir, 2019). Since 2020, skateboarding has been part of the Olympics, which signals global recognition and sport. Nations may now send elite athlete skateboarders on nutrition schemes and peak performance training programmes to compete against

other athletes. Learning to be an elite athlete is thus possible in contemporary skateboarding.

Two key traits of skate culture that have persisted over time are innovation and cooperation. Those traits are important for how the teaching of skateboarding as a physical activity has evolved. Innovation and creativity feed from, but also contribute to, a strong DIY-ethic. This ethic, in turn, has two sides: it does not only imply that skateboarders work for themselves, but also how they work for others. In other words, the cooperative key trait is enhanced. Borden (2019, p.264) points out that we are currently witnessing a significant do-it-for-others movement where skateboard-centred projects and organisations "help build communities, enrich individual lives, and create cultural capital, and so nurture qualities of trust, independence, confidence and hope." Teaching skateboarding is part and parcel of this movement (Abulhawa, 2020; Atencio et al., 2018; Friedel, 2015; O'Connor, 2016). For Romero (2020), skate pedagogy, drawing from Freire's pedagogical ideas, has the potential to establish kinder societal frameworks. "Skate pedagogy, or the educative dimensions of skateboarding […] fosters community-responsive and antiauthoritarian approaches to teaching and learning" (p.231.)

In line with this strand of skate culture, Corwin et al. (2019b) further describe how skateboarding in the US manifests itself today in many ways. They state that skateboarding may be a way to promote physical and mental health. Moreover, they argue that skateboarding fosters certain skills, such as "the ability to navigate social institutions, develop resilience and perseverance, build community, communi-

cate with others, and express artistic prowess" (Corwin et al., 2019a, p.28). Although these findings are correct, this is also where pedagogies become hazy. Because *how* social skills or social and cultural norms are fostered in practice tends to be obscured. Often, it just happens. Magically. When skateboarding. Parallel to the objective of learning to skate as being something other than skateboarding, the learning process of acquiring techniques and the learning process of fostering social skills are often inadequately discussed. This is where I call for more transparent research and policies in this sense. In doing so, I turn to colleagues in pedagogy for help.

Phenomenology and Movement Literacy

The new perspectives on learning movement which Larsson (2021) displays, demonstrate ideas expanding from various theoretical approaches, one of which is phenomenology. According to Standal (2016), phenomenology is a fruitful theoretical approach to physical education since it enables a way to explain the entangled embodied relationship between the knowledge object and the knowing subject, or the relationship between activities of movement and the person who knows. Skateboarders are such knowing and moving people. From a phenomenological standpoint, Standal suggests four features that are essential elements of any pedagogical model that could be considered a form of movement literacy. The four features are the felt experience of moving, exploration, collaboration, and assessment of the learning process. The first feature has to do with the felt bodily experience of moving. The second feature involves exploring movement

other than the habitual movement. The third feature highlights the social dimension of learning together with others, and the fourth feature involves evaluating the learning process. The four features will be exemplified in relation to skateboarding in the following.

Standal stresses that the model needs to be criticised and improved; he writes: "movement literacy is [now] open for debate" (Standal, 2016, p.159). This is significant because models-based practice and models per se have been glorified but also questioned in educational research. Models have been presented as *the* (one and only) way to teach something to someone, irrespective of *where* this teaching occurs, *what* the teaching is about, and *who* are involved as teachers and learners. To solve the problematic use of models and models-based practice, Casey et al. (2021) suggest thinking about models as something we do, a verb instead of a noun. This allows us to use models as something evolving, i.e. not fixed in place and time.

Below, I present and discuss Standal's movement literacy as a way to teach and learn skateboarding. I think of his model in general terms, beyond the empirical examples I use, and I refer to his imperative wording for teaching on purpose for three main reasons. First, verbalising what is practised formally or informally may showcase what happens, while allowing for adjustments if needed. It makes *what* to learn, *how*, by *whom* and *why* apparent. Second, it resembles what teaching and learning in skateboarding may look like in informal coaching sessions and skate schools, but I would argue also beyond, so the pedagogical model does not appear forced in this setting. Third, this is my answer to the question:

what do skateboarders do, and how can we learn from them? This is my pedagogical credo founded on pedagogical thinking and empirical research.

Two skateboarding ethnographies on different types of learning

The empirical examples in this chapter are from an ethnographic research project focusing on emplaced knowing and the forging of gender, particularly femininity, in skateboarding. The project was theoretically informed by feminist and phenomenological thinking and resulted in texts on emplaced knowing and femininity (Bäckström, 2014; Bäckström & Nairn, 2018). The project lasted five years between 2008 and 2012, and data was generated through a sensory ethnography methodology – mainly between 2008 and 2010. The data comprised digital, visual, textual, interview, and aural material. For this project, to be able to pose better questions, I decided to step on the skateboard again after a very long break. I am no expert on the skill of riding a board, and I probably never will be, as I, like Sayers (2023), calculate the risk, but in contrast to her, I give in to the fear of injury and don't make time to go skate any longer. However, I am convinced that the research project benefitted from me taking up the practice once again.

All in all, 68 young people gave written consent to participate in the study. They contributed in various ways, some more in-depth and over a longer period than others. The participants were mainly Swedish citizens living in urban settings; 90% were female and young (aged between 12

and 36), and varied in skill, ranging from beginners to highly experienced skateboarders with sponsorships. The majority were middle-class according to their personal or parents' occupations and education.

This project builds on a preceding ethnographic research project titled *Traces*, which focused on informal learning processes, board sports culture, and identity (Bäckström, 2005). The project lasted between 2000 and 2005 and was informed by socio-cultural learning theory. The title connotes an entangled connection between informally learned socio-cultural practices, performed identity, and sideways board sports practices. The *Traces* project empirically included semi-structured interviews and media material such as TV programmes, videos, and magazines. Moreover, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in a board sport shop and at a skatepark. The national context for both projects is Sweden. When discussing cultural aspects of skateboarding, both research projects and personal experiences from before and after this research affect my thinking.

Teaching and Learning in a Cultural Context

The desired effect of teaching is, of course, learning. Quennerstedt (2019) declares that teaching is an art that includes making judgments about the *why*, *how*, and *what* in education. In combination, it means that "teaching is about making judgments about what is educationally desirable, i.e., the purpose of education in terms of what to bring to the educational table" (p.619). "The art of teaching," coined already by Comenius (1657), is relational, as suggested by contemporary

researchers (Biesta, 2014; Dewey, 1938; van Manen, 1991). As demonstrated and discussed in this chapter, the relationality in movement literacy is found between the teacher and the learner, between the moving body and the material surroundings, and between the learning situation and the social and cultural context.

In this text, *how* to teach is accentuated, and *what* to learn is specifically the skill of skateboarding. However, learning to move is always situated as a social and cultural practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Waquant, 2004), which Standal also acknowledges. Accordingly, skate culture not only contextualises this teaching but is also enmeshed in teaching the skill of skateboarding. *What* to learn is more than the skill of skateboarding. Learning skateboarding skills may thus include learning skateboarding values, and teaching skateboarding skills may concomitantly reflect skateboarding values. Although separating the four features from Standal's model in practice is difficult, I will do so for clarity in this text. I revisit filmed sequences from the phenomenological research project, picturing teaching and learning situations to illustrate the first three features. The fourth feature is included in all of them. The first examples show how the teaching of beginner skateboarders unfolds as feeling, exploring, collaborating, and assessing during so-called skate schools and coaching sessions appearing as part of a skate-camp in Sweden. I have chosen to focus on beginners to demonstrate how basic skateboarding is taught while, in parallel, demonstrating how fundamental skate culture works. I thereby illustrate the elementary ways of teaching and learning to skate. In my empirical data, more advanced skateboarders tend to work in similar

ways, although at a quicker pace and with media explicitly involved (cf. Jones, 2011; Hölsgens, 2024). The skate-camp in question was an all-girls camp held at an indoor skatepark in Sweden in 2009. It was initiated and organised by one of the young women working there to attract more girls and women to skateboarding by creating a welcoming environment. Coaching sessions called "skate school" were held as part of the camp, and more experienced young women skateboarders functioned as coaches. The coaching sessions resembled coaching sessions (for all genders) at other skateparks on regular hours. There was no core curriculum; instead, more experienced skateboarders demonstrated and commented on tricks and manoeuvres to be learned. While various forms of "skate schools" are reported from countries such as South Korea (Hölsgens, 2021), usa (Atencio et al., 2018), Afghanistan (Friedel, 2015), and the West Bank (occupied Palestinian territory) (Abulhawa, 2020), teaching skateboarding is still far from formal practice.

This is how the movement literacy model (Standal, 2016) plays out in skateboarding.

Feel

The first of the four features in the movement literacy model emphasises what moving feels like. Standal's (2016, p.76) directions read as follows:

> Emphasize the qualitatively felt experience of moving, rather than a linear understanding of skill. Avoid normative ideals of performance where pupils are compared with each other or with norms.

In teaching skateboarding, paying attention to the bodily sensation of movement is fundamental. It is what both "teachers" and "learners" of skateboarding focus on in a learning situation. In my data, Linda, Anna, Karolina, and the other coaches gave suggestions to the beginner skateboarders and accentuated the importance of the felt experience of moving. For example, Linda instructs Ellen, who is interested in getting the hang of an ollie. This trick is usually one of the first tricks a skateboarder learns and requires a technique combining squatting, jumping, and moving one's feet in a particular way. The trick is useful as other tricks are developed from knowing this one. Linda stands with both feet on her board and bounces slightly up and down, verbalising the importance of bending the knees in this movement.

Figure 4. *Feeling the board, the moving body, and the material surroundings.* Photo by: Åsa Bäckström (2009). Still from video. Manipulated to ensure confidentiality.

"You see, straight legs… it doesn't work, you know", Linda explains while she looks at Ellen and smiles. "Uhum", Ellen answers supportively and smiles back at Linda, aware of the difficulty of doing anything on a skateboard with straight legs.

Instructing someone to do a certain trick, such as the ollie, implies, in this context, giving some verbal cues and advice, but mainly showing what this trick might look like (cf. Collins et al., 2022; Jones, 2011.) The demonstration includes continuous movement. Linda is never still. Her whole body communicates a search for bodily sensation. This feeling in the body is seemingly also what Ellen aspires for as she, too, bends her knees and makes small bouncy movements on her board while rolling off slowly to feel the board and the floor, ready to attempt an ollie again.

In movement learning it is important to develop the capacity for "feeling better" (Standal, 2016, p.115). Paying attention to what it feels like to move centres the awareness of bodily moving and bodily knowing. Despite an emphasis on the visual in research on skateboarding, such as Borden's (2001) conceptualisation of "the skater's eye", which captures the skater's visualisation of skateable urban spaces, the visual is rarely just visual but a multisensorial experience (e.g. Fors et al., 2013; Hölsgens, 2021). Moreover, as Hölsgens (2024, p.392) put it, "[t]o sense and experience architectural space is to come to inhabit it – to habituate oneself to it". These bodily experiences of using and reproducing architecture in skateboarding are essential to describe informal learning in urban settings, although the pedagogical dimensions are not always highlighted.

Besides stressing the multisensorial involvement in bodily moving when teaching and learning, it is important to allow time. Sayers (2023) writes about the slow and time-consuming felt experience of moving. She acknowledges the many hours she spent learning skateboarding in her reflections on time. As much of everyday life is about productivity, this time might be considered wasted. By contrast, to her it is valuable not only for progression in skateboarding skills, but for changing the perception of time and learning. Welcoming sensory ways of knowing is necessarily a slow process. Sayers' reasoning departs from the normative ideals of performance in resisting productivity.

Feeling is likewise deeply ingrained in skate culture. The bodily sensation of skateboarding, being airborne, sliding or grinding obstacles, touching ground and urban architecture is known to and imagined by skateboarders and is what skateboarding images moving or stills strive to encompass (Bäckström, 2005; Hölsgens, 2024; Jones, 2011; Smith, 2024). A research participant in Jones' (2011, p.601) study verbalises the connection between the sensory experience of skateboarding and a filmed sequence shown in slow motion: "That's really the way it feels when you're doing it… like time is slowed down and you're aware… aware of everything around you and everything you do".

Explore

The second of the four features in the movement literacy model emphasises the quest for exploration to reach one's potential. It reads as follows:

Emphasize a teaching style that encourages exploration of each pupil's individual potential. Avoid demonstrations intended to convey a 'correct' way of moving that pupils should imitate (Standal, 2016, p.76).

Linda offered recommendations but never formulated them as demands. Nor did the other coaches phrase anything but pure suggestions, something to try. When suggesting something to try, they explicitly propose exploration. Although demonstrations are routine, as shown above, these demonstrations never convey a specific "right" way of rolling or performing a certain trick. When Amanda asks Linda where to place her feet on the board to perform an ollie, Linda gets on the board and starts bouncing and feeling the board again. She taps her feet in various places and turns to Amanda with a straightforward but very open: "It depends… it depends on where you feel that you have your balance", she says, looking at Amanda.

Where to place the feet may, in other words, vary per individual, and Amanda does not answer but continues to scrutinise Linda's bouncing and tapping.

> If you have it [the foot] way up front it becomes too difficult," Linda explains while tapping her board, sensing where a possible place could be as she looks at Amanda and eventually advises her to place the feet somewhere in the middle of the board. "To begin with, I think somewhere behind the screws [trucks]. That's pretty good," she says thoughtfully. "Pretty good. You can try that.

Figure 5. *Exploring ways in which it would be possible to move the body in the material surroundings*. Photo by: Åsa Bäckström (2009). Still from video. Manipulated to ensure confidentiality.

She nods at Amanda. Amanda nods back and watches Linda making small moves. Amanda explores and attempts the ollie again, now with Linda watching. She elevates the board from the ground, but fails to properly land the trick. Linda offers her expert look, but is far from judgemental as she examines Amanda's attempts. In her analysis, she encourages Amanda's exploration of movement. She suggests a variety of choices for her, one being placing her feet differently, one being a shift in stance to a more sideways posture.

Exploring what it feels like to move in a certain context allows for changing and trying new and different ways of moving. It allows for attempting and exploring what it feels like to move differently than habitually, differently than before (cf. Nyberg et al., 2020). In skateboarding, exploring means adjusting to a moving board or adjusting the board to

a moving body in a specific but ever-changing environment. Hockey and Allen Collinson (2007) write about how sports participants become highly skilled at certain movements and manipulating objects specific to their activity. They claim that individuals develop sensory intelligence to execute this action. In a similar vein, Abulhawa (2020) writes about "bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence" in relation to skateboarding. Repeating movements often explains success or perfection; however, "reproduction is never identical because the conditions change, demanding improvisational adjustments, accomplished via constant sensory monitoring of conditions" (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2007, p.126). This constant adjustment and monitoring is similar to what Standal calls "exploring" in the movement literacy model.

As previously mentioned, innovation is a persisting trait of skate culture. It may be argued that bodily exploration is connected to exploration on a larger cultural scale through the ways of going beyond the ordinary and known by exploring something new. Exploring the urban landscape and finding skateable architecture to use innovatively is part of this (e.g. Borden, 2001; Hölsgens, 2021). Beyond exploring material encounters, skate culture per se may also be understood as innovative and explorative as it expands rather than constrains.

Collaborate

The third of the four features in the movement literacy model emphasises cooperation. The directions suggested by Standal (2016, p.76) are: "Emphasize collaboration between pupils, as opposed to competition".

The coaching sessions described above feature one "teacher" instructing one "pupil". Yet, the skate school sessions were set up in small groups, focusing on different tricks or manoeuvres. The groups were dispersed all over the skatepark. The coaches introduced and led their group at the beginning of the session, but people later moved around and changed groups as they pleased. Despite coaches being endowed with a particular authority in this context, the sessions were highly cooperative, and "pupils" discussed with each other and often interfered with the coaches in reasoning on the task in focus with their interpretations and suggestions on alternative ways of moving. Thus, teaching and learning are highly collaborative tasks in this context and the coaches supported the collaborative nature.

Although the skate school examples may be interpreted as tutor/student relationships and as examples of traditional DEP-model teaching (demonstration, explanation and practice), I argue that they are not. According to Tinning (2010), DEP-models dominate physical education in schools. It is based on a traditional teacher role. Standal's movement literacy model is different. Instead of centring the knowing of an "expert" or a "teacher" it centres the sensory learning of a "pupil." What's more, there is no exact way to perform the movement in question. Learning happens in collaboration with the others involved, with what Jones (2011) calls the affinity group.

Collaborating when paying attention to and exploring what it feels like to move highlights the social dimensions of informal teaching and learning. Romero's (2020) definition of skate pedagogy as teaching-learning and relationship-building encompasses this feature of the movement learning model.

Moreover, the situatedness of learning is reflected in collaboration. Research on learning in skateboarding has drawn from situated learning (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Waquant, 2004). Jones (2011) states that skateboarding, although not a team sport, is a social sport. Skateboarders learn "through participation in affinity groups", rather than in tutor/student relationships. In these groups, participants "advance together, challenge one another and cooperate in imagining new possibilities" (Jones, p.601).

From a sociocultural perspective, learning appears as participation, often contrasted with acquisition, according to Larsson (2021). Learning as participation includes norms and values which are informally taught and learned through talk, body language, affective expressions, and related to skateboarding, mediated. Learning informally what it takes to be part of a culture or not, termed by sociologists as socialisation and by pedagogues as fostering, is essential for educational research. As mentioned, the *what* of teaching and learning skateboarding often tends to appear as something other than the skill of skateboarding. Social skills from the context of skateboarding may be useful in other walks of life; moreover, social and cultural values from skate culture may benefit society in general. "Try skateboarding sessions", or skate schools are often part of the so-called do-it-for-others movement (Borden, 2019). Although the skills of skateboarding are taught, desirable norms and values are what hopefully follow. Collaboration as a cultural trait in skateboarding is, in other words, both a way to work pedagogically, i.e. to teach and learn skateboarding skills, and a cultural value fostered by this way of teaching and learning.

Assess

The last of the four features in the movement literacy model emphasises assessment. Standal (2016, p.159) writes as follows:

> Emphasize forms of assessment that stimulate the individual learner to become self-reflective about his/her[/their] progress in the learning process, as well as about the learning process itself.

This feature is related to inclusion, difference, and norms. Standal emphasises that it is important to teach movement literacy in a way that promotes choice and to construct "learning spaces that allow pupils to utilize different options for progression at their own tempo" (p.142). In the examples above, Linda offers suggestions on how to change the posture and position of the feet, but she allows both Ellen and Amanda to explore ways of moving that would suit them. No one expects a "right" way to do it, and the collaborative process furthers the openness of the situation. Nonetheless, the situation admits reflection on their bodily experiences and on the learning process. Teaching strategies in movement learning should do just that – help awareness and reflection.

The affinity group in Jones' (2011) study documents what they do on film. The amateur videos allow for scrutinising micro-moves, stance, and style. This is where assessment happens. More advanced skate photographers work in a similar way. Smith (2024) shows how collaboration is important, as are bodily sensations and exploration. Teamwork and assessment of bodily movement around a screen together with a photographer in what she termed "the huddle". Huddling together around a digital screen, skateboarders

and skate photographers collaborate on improving both the trick per se and how to portray it, as they evaluate bodily movement and what they look like on the screen. This is where bodily movements are evaluated and assessed, suggestions for improvements are given, and ideas for how to portray these movements are assessed.

Figure 6. *In the huddle (cf. Smith, 2024) skateboarders and skate photographers assess both the trick per se and how to portray it.* Photo by: Åsa Bäckström (2010). Manipulated to ensure confidentiality.

An important source for reasoning on reflexive thinking in this model is Dewey's theory of education (1910; 1938), where reflection is a structured and systematic meaning-making process. Reflection here is both about a heightened awareness of bodily feelings and sensations *and* overcoming the dualism between mind and body. Thinking and acting are parts of embodied experience, much like ideas in contemporary neu-

roscience. Moreover, reflexive thinking (involving the body) takes place in interaction with a community, and it "requires an attitude that values the growth of both oneself and others" (Standal, 2016, p.110).

Assessing the learning process thus requires incorporating the social, material and cultural context. The reason for this is that movement learning occurs in relation to other people and in relation to the material context, where culture is crucial. For instance, we have norms on what movements are suitable for what bodies (e.g., Young, 2003). In skateboarding, like in any learning setting, this includes the axes of, among other identity markers, gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, and ability. Additionally, the material context allows certain bodies to "extend" while other bodies rather than "unfolding" are hindered to do so (see e.g. Ahmed, 2006). Assessing the learning process thus means reflecting on inclusion, difference, and norms.

Challenging norms, for example related to gender, has been proven somewhat successful in skateboarding. Through assessing skate culture and actively working against its masculine norms using skate schools as *one* tool, girls and women have made way for themselves. For instance, the Swedish *No limit* network of women skateboarders worked strategically to make room for more women skateboarders in skateparks and in skate media (Bäckström & Nairn, 2018). Similarly, Abulhawa (2020) shows how women and non-binary skateboarders develop knowledge about and express themselves through skateboarding. These and other strategies are used to make space for one another, which has echoed beyond skateparks and into the skate industry and mainstream sports.

This part of movement literacy has the potential to build an understanding of exclusion, but "must also involve the active process of including oneself and one's peers" (Standal, 2016, p.140).

Standal underlines the importance of making the felt experiences of moving the object of reflection for "pupils". This way they do not only learn to master movement or certain skills but learn something about themselves as moving subjects (Standal, 2016, p.118). In her study, Abulhawa (2020) highlights how the skateboarders expressed a development of self-knowledge. Moreover, she recognises gender-based dynamics in the skatepark from working in skateboard philanthropy herself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have followed Standal's (2016) phenomenological route to movement literacy by demonstrating how his four features play out in relation to selected empirical data. My ambition has been to explicate how teaching and learning in skateboarding happen, to begin with as part of skate schools and coaching sessions in skateparks in Sweden, and via others in more general terms.

Teaching skateboarding in this context largely mirrors Standal's model. The felt experience of moving is highlighted by the teachers and pursued by the learners. Exploration of a way to move that works for the individual is foregrounded, and normative ideals of performance are downplayed. Collaboration is an integrated part of the learning situation. Skateboarding, as a cultural context, is not exceptional in

highlighting the felt experience and exploration of movement when it comes to teaching and learning. For instance, pole-vaulters use similar ways to reflect and elaborate on skill (Nyberg, 2014) and learning to sail has been described similarly (Andersson, Östman & Öhman, 2015).

As previously mentioned, assessment in movement literacy deals with both individual self-reflection on bodily movement and reflections on the learning process itself, the latter part concerning norms and inclusion. The current do-it-for-others movement in skateboarding embraces both teaching skateboarding skills and value-based inclusion in communities on various levels. Hence, innovation and cooperation as cultural traits have developed into what may be termed Sport for All. The pedagogical and phenomenological elements are thus sustained by skate culture. However, skateboarding expands in a myriad of ways and may also take other routes parallel to this and in the future. Assessment may, in sum, have to do with what skateboarders of today want skateboarders of tomorrow to be and what skateboarding of tomorrow shall signify.

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Chapter 8

Drop In Ride Out: Skateboarding in a Gestalt therapeutic setting

Sophie Friedel

Learning about Oneself

Kick, push, roll; kick, push, roll; kick, push, roll. We move our skateboard down the street and I feel my body relaxing a bit more with each movement. The stress of the day and the worries of finding the right words for this chapter fade into the background, replaced by a growing sense of joy and tranquility. I take a deep breath, noticing how the fresh air on my face feels and the rhythmic sound of my wheels become a soothing soundtrack. I decide to use this experience as the beginning of my chapter, as this moment encapsulates the essence of what I want to convey: the transformative power of skateboarding within a therapeutic context.

Why do I share the above experience? In Gestalt therapy, becoming aware, perceiving and describing what is happening in the here and now is a fundamental practice that can help our wandering mind with returning to the present moment (Perls et al., 1951). The present is where our powers

reside, where change can happen, and where we can take responsibility for our actions (ibid).

Despite the increasing interest in the therapeutic potential of skateboarding (Bader, 2018; Clark & Sayers, 2023; Friedel, 2015), there remains limited understanding of its integration into psychotherapeutic practices. Drawing from my six years of experience as a Gestalt therapist who incorporates skateboarding into my work, I aim to share the unique insights and benefits that the combination of Gestalt therapy and skateboarding can offer, starting a deeper conversation on its therapeutic potential for mental health within the skate community and beyond.

Integrating skateboarding into therapeutic environments can significantly benefit emotional well-being and personal growth, particularly when guided by trauma-informed best practices (Bader, 2018). However, it's important to recognise that this integration requires careful guidance. If you are not a trained professional, attempting to use skateboarding for therapeutic purposes with your participants may not yield the intended benefits and could even be counterproductive.

Method and Background

In addition to having knowledge about psychological conditions and disorders, my therapeutic approach is grounded in phenomenology. From there, I support the clients to practice observing without theorising and focus on the present moment and the lived experiences that unfold (Perls et al., 1951), nurturing a sense of benevolent compassion (Naranjo, 1993). I play with the power of imagination, which allows

clients to create inner images that can facilitate healing and transformation, bridging the gap between the mind and body in therapeutic work (Redemann, 2020). By simultaneously creating a relational and neurobiological framework, I guide my client's process through feedback and observation and I trust that the solution lies within the client and the challenges they bring. This approach fosters a deep connection with the client's experience while also tapping into the therapist's intuition and knowledge (Martin & Süss, 2020).

To share my learnings, I present two case studies that highlight particularly noteworthy moments, revealing insights that may be moving, interesting, or inspirational. I obtained permission from clients to use their stories, while changing names and omitting detailed physical descriptions to protect their identities. To give the clients control over their stories, they had the chance to read this chapter before submission to the volume's editors.

I am not including a diagnosis, timeline of symptoms, or possible pre-existing conditions in the family system when describing the two case studies because I want to focus the text on the lived experience and the transformational potential of the therapeutic approach, rather than on clinical or diagnostic labels. Including such details could risk reducing the complexity and depth of their experiences to mere clinical labels or conditions, potentially overshadowing the process of self-discovery and transformation that is central to the therapeutic work. Furthermore, not all readers may be familiar with or concerned with specific diagnoses. The most relevant aspect is how the therapeutic approach can impact personal growth, emotional regulation, and overall well-being.

On Skateboarding for Mental Health

A considerable body of literature exists concerning the history and various evolutions of skateboarding, focusing on how skateboarders interact with and shape their environments (Borden, 2019; Glenney & Mull, 2018; Schäfer, 2020), perform and negotiate their gender identity (Beal & Ebeling 2019; Abulhawa 2020), and connect to philanthropy and youth ownership (Friedel 2015; Thorpe 2016; O'Connor 2020).

The intrinsic qualities of skateboarding – its dynamic power, style, and identity – can offer benefits such as self-esteem and empowerment (Sorsdahl et al., 2021; Willing & Pappalardo, 2023) in a therapeutic context. Skateboarding has the potential for self-help, offering time away from a stressful everyday life, as much as it enables regeneration, play, and creativity (Friedel, 2015; O'Connor, 2020). The repetitive movements can be soothing, and the social skate project Push to Heal views "skateboarding as a tool to support healing through regulation, connection, and development" (Pippus, 2024: online). Participating in skateboarding can positively impact mental health recovery, nurturing feelings of belonging, empowerment, and social connectivity (Clark & Sayers, 2023). These benefits, however, are deeply shaped by the unique experiences and needs of each individual.

Rather than exploring skateboarding's potential for mental health in greater depth, the following section introduces Gestalt therapy. As such, I provide essential context for understanding its role in fostering awareness, connection, and personal growth.

About Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapy, developed in the 1940s by psychoanalysts Fritz and Laura Perls, philosopher Paul Goodman, and psychology professor Ralph Hefferline, is an effective, humanistic, and experimental psychotherapeutic approach (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2024) that emerged from traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. Like Sigmund Freud, Fritz and Laura Perls had to flee their German-speaking homeland to escape Nazi persecution, losing many family members in concentration camps. This experience deeply influenced their desire to create a therapy that respects individual freedom and responsibility. Unlike traditional psychoanalysis, which focuses on the unconscious, Gestalt therapy emphasises the phenomenology of awareness. As Fritz Perls (Stevens, 1975, p.8) noted, "The difference between us and Freud is that he stressed remembering, and we stress being aware". Gestalt therapy shares a lot in common with the practice of mindfulness (Naranjo, 1993).

The term "Gestalt", meaning "shape" or "form" in German, reflects the essence of an experience or situation. Gestalt therapy is committed to the humanistic worldview, incorporates a Gestalt psychology-oriented systemic thinking (Hartmann-Kottek, 2012), and embodies an "existentially grounded holistic psychotherapy system with a phenomenological, present-centered, and client-centered approach" (Martin & Süß, 2020, p.63, translation mine). From the perspective of clinical Gestalt therapy, psychopathology is relationship-oriented and should be viewed as a psychosocial, co-created field phenomenon (Francesetti, Gecele, & Roubal, 2016). The therapeutic approaches are tailored to the client's individual

needs and experience-centered (Perls, 1989[2005]), with a therapist who is professionally available and involved as a person (Martin & Süß, 2020) emphasising the present inter-action between therapist and client (in contrast to a traditional psychoanalytical therapist being absent as a person to enhance the projection of clients past experience on the therapist) The therapeutic attitude of compassionate presence, awareness, and responsibility are essential components of successful therapy (Naranjo, 1993). Echoing Martin Buber (1983, p.28, translated by the author), "A person becomes an *I* through a *you*".

In today's psychotherapeutic landscape, dominated by cognitive behavioural therapy, there is a growing emphasis on common therapeutic factors (Grawe, 2006). Cognitive behavioural therapy has borrowed many concepts from Gestalt therapy. These include helping clients stabilise, regulate, and understand themselves before addressing specific issues such as traumatic experiences, all within a framework of compassionate presence (Naranjo, 1993; Redemann, 2020). The therapeutic relationship and the creation of a space where clients can express themselves freely play a crucial role in this process. A key intention of Gestalt therapeutic work is to accompany clients on their journey to rediscover themselves. As Haberzettl (2020, p.118) states, "It is a non-prescribed, but discovered and self-conscious individuality in plurality that we can support and encourage with our work". This process is akin to helping individuals remember, regain, renew, and strengthen something they have lost (Oaklander, 1994). Incorporating skateboarding into therapy can be a powerful way to reconnect with a childlike sense of playfulness and

to reawaken the body's natural sense of aliveness, or what skateboarders call 'stoke' (Friedel, 2015).

Figure 7: *Kai Welle doing an Ollie in the streets of Lahr, Black Forest, Germany.* Photo by Timo Enderle (2020).

From the Streets to a Therapeutic Setting

The convergence of skateboarding and psychotherapy might initially seem unconventional, but it reveals profound therapeutic potential. The case studies discussed illustrate how skateboarding, guided by therapeutic principles, facilitates meaningful change. These cases demonstrate how skateboarding can aid clients in exploring their inner worlds, addressing challenges, and finding self-efficacy, balance and purpose. In my outpatient private practice in Freiburg, Germany, I integrate skateboarding with Gestalt therapy. Collaborating with youth organisations, schools, and institutions such as the Office for Migration and Integration, I offer group and individual therapy sessions, funded by various sources including private payments and local foundations. Sessions occur at skateable locations or my practice room, accommodating all skill levels and physical abilities. In general, there is a warm up at the beginning of a session, followed by a unit of instructed skateboarding. Customised to the mental health condition and skate experience of the clients, this session might be very free or more structured. There are elements where we skate together and elements where the clients learn new skills. These include new ways of moving the board or learning something new about the internal world of the client. The therapeutic interventions can happen before, during or after skating. The sessions are rounded off with a closing part that includes a reflection.

Early in my work, it became clear that therapeutic skateboarding differs significantly from teaching people how to skate. While teaching skateboarding focuses on skill acquisition and performing tricks in a specific way, therapeutic work

with clients emphasises their issues and psychological difficulties. This means that different contact phenomena emerge compared to regular skateboarding workshops. Therapy is not about teaching per se: facilitating healing, learning about one's inner world, and personal growth are on the forefront of the therapeutic process.

What is the effect of therapeutic skateboarding on mental health? We know little about this. But already Hippocrates (400 BCE) recommended movement, the arts, and fresh air as key for maintaining mental health (Kleisiaris et al., 2024). What's more, countless studies confirm that regular physical activities have preventive, therapeutic, and supportive effects on mental disorders (Greist et al,. 1979; Marques et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2020). For some mental diagnoses, such as mild to moderate depression, certain sports and movement-based practices can be as effective as psychotherapy or medication (Blake, 2012; Noetel et al., 2024).

In a similar vein, I argue that Gestalt therapy shares a kinship with skateboarding as a creative, in-the-moment practice. Gestalt therapy is a creative art that happens in the moment (Oaklander, 1994). Just as we feel the movement and experience of skateboarding in our bodies, Gestalt therapy operates in a space where the perceived experiences can be difficult to capture with words; it's as if the essence of the experience is slipping between the letters. A skateboarding session is felt and experienced in the body, capturing that experience in writing can never fully encapsulate its richness and spontaneity. There's this in-between space, a bit like when a child offers you a sand cake, assuming without hesitation that the piece will be eaten. We all know that the sand cake is

made of sand, and will not be eaten, nevertheless in the play it will be real. When reading the case studies, especially the first one, I invite you to keep in mind that felt experiences are different when reading about them afterwards. Despite that, I hope that the case studies convey some of the transformative potential of the therapeutic approach with a skateboard.

Case Study 1: Nourishing the Train Conductor

The problem of the mother who called me was that she could no longer connect with her daughter. The mother asked for help because her daughter was behaving increasingly "strange". The most striking thing was that her daughter memorised timetables compulsively and annoyed everyone around her with them. "It's exhausting for me that she only talks about timetables and asks me about them. There is almost no other form of contact between us. That's sad. I don't know what to do with her anymore", shared the mother on the phone.

Emilia, eight years old, sketched train timetables as often as she could. She almost only spoke about trains, including departure and arrival times. Memorising these schedules had become so important for Emilia that she didn't want to play with the other children in the afternoon care, but preferred to brood over her plans. She no longer enjoyed sports. Recently, she preferred looking at timetables to going to her best friend's birthday party. In Emilia's room, piles of papers with timetables of the school bus, as well as local trams and long-distance trains to Hamburg, were stacked up. For

Emilia, these plans were sacred. She became really angry if her little brother, or anyone else, disturbed her papers.

In our first session, it was striking that Emilia looked pale and lost. Unlike the lively eight-year-olds I know from regular skateboarding classes, she seemed very anxious. Her arms hung limply from her shoulders, and she didn't seem enthusiastic about skateboarding. It was only when I asked her how she got to the skatepark that her eyes lit up. She proudly explained to me at what time they had left and where, and at what time they had changed trains. Her mother, who was listening, interrupted Emilia brusquely and said, "Don't tell it in such detail! Nobody is interested in that". Emilia said defiantly: "But I am interested", and I immediately sympathised with her. I was impressed by how well Emilia could remember the many numbers and stops, yet I could also feel the mother's pain. Her hope was that Emilia would learn to focus on other things while skateboarding and find joy in a new activity, distracting herself from the timetables. After the mother had left and I spent time alone with Emilia, I asked her why she liked to memorise the timetables so much. She just shrugged and said she didn't know either, "I just have to do it". After some thought, her answer changed: "I'm interested in the timetables, and I like numbers".

She confessed somewhat embarrassingly that she felt a bit sad that she didn't play with other children anymore, but was always thinking about trains. She felt lonely and often had to think about what would happen if she missed a tram on her way to school. After I introduced Emilia to the skateboard, it was clear that she was too exhausted and tired to ride standing up. This repeated itself in the following

sessions, and the desire to ride independently did not arise. Instead, she preferred to sit on the board and roll down the ramps while giggling. She also loved it when I pulled and pushed her through the ramps, ledges, and bowl corners of the skatepark. My therapeutic consideration was to follow Emilia's interest, reinforce it, and give her the necessary space to grow. Therefore, I offered to transform my skateboard into a locomotive for her, and she could travel anywhere with me. Our boards were transformed into trains, and we set off. We visited her father in Hamburg, we were in South Africa to eat a whole jar of Samba (the chocolate spread) without giving any to her brother, and we travelled all over Europe; we were real explorers, like baking real cake in a sandbox. We weren't just pretending; we were on the train. Emilia was the train conductor and could gradually relive her story. So, we roamed around, sometimes we were as fast as an ICE (Inter-City Express), sometimes like a slow tram with many stops. I patiently listened to her stories, in which she told me what she saw. Near the skate spot, there were railway tracks. Sometimes we spent half of the session near the tracks, watching trains, talking about her time at school and at home. As the sessions continued, she painted her family as animals, and she told me a lot about her father. Her parents had separated about a year earlier. Emilia really wanted to be with her father, but he was too far away to see her regularly. At home, her mom quickly got annoyed when she talked about her dad, so it seemed important to me that she could give space to talk about him in therapy.

After some time, the conversations about timetables decreased, and the interest to stand up on a skateboard

increased. There was a new boy in the afternoon day-care whom Emilia befriended. He became more interesting than timetables, and when he invited her to his birthday party a few weeks later, it was clear to Emilia that she preferred to go there rather than to focus on her timetables. For both of us, that was a big step and Emilia found more and more energy to push her skateboard by herself. She could also engage with topics other than timetables. We finished the therapeutic process when mother and daughter had found a better way to relate to each other again.

Case Study 2: Mr. Hopeless, Chair Work, and Transformation

Leon, 21, came to me accompanied by his mother. At first glance, he seemed shy, introverted, and quiet – dressed in black, with a pearl necklace around his neck, dark green nail polish (for hope, as he later mentioned), and bitten fingernails. We had agreed over the phone beforehand that his mother would stay on the edge of the park during the session. I had asked her not to watch conspicuously and kindly invited her to practice a non-judgmental view of her son, which was a difficult task for her. Despite this, I agreed to her request to be present on the sidelines. This is somewhat unusual at that age, but she wanted to be near him out of fear that he might run away during the session and commit suicide. While I observed that Leon was more interested in skating than running away, I couldn't fully assess the situation at that point, so I agreed to the mother's presence on this occasion. A week before Leon first came to see me, he had been dis-

charged from the Child and Adolescent Psychosomatics hospital, where he had undergone therapeutic treatment for twelve weeks following a failed suicide attempt.

My first impression was that Leon felt embarrassed by his mother's presence. This initial awareness, a key aspect when working as a therapist, helped me attune to the relational dynamics at play (Yontef & Jacobs, 2011). After a brief introduction, we moved away from her. Once we had some space to talk without the risk of being disturbed, I asked him if my initial assessment matched his feelings. He said, "Yes, I would have preferred to come alone". He felt restricted and watched by her. He wasn't allowed to do his own thing; they had an interesting dynamic where she was always worried about him, and he worried about her. This enmeshment highlighted how Leon's sense of self was entangled with his mother's concerns. As a therapeutic process, one aspect would be (when the time is ripe) to help Leon to differentiate himself from his mother as a crucial possible path to personal growth (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951). After a few specific questions about his suicidality and observing his expressions, I did not perceive him as acutely suicidal.

Leon lives in Switzerland, so he had almost an hour's drive to reach me, but he enjoyed skateboarding. That's why his mother and he thought it would be good to consult me. He seemed motivated to work on himself and improve his situation. He said the hospital stay had been very beneficial for him, and he wanted to continue working on his autonomy in our sessions together.

Our sessions usually went like this: we would skate together for the first 15 to 30 minutes, then spend about 30

to 50 minutes on therapeutic work, and usually finish the 90-minute session off with another round of skateboarding. This approach aligns with the Gestalt principle of integrating body and mind through physical movement, which fosters a holistic sense of self-awareness (Joyce & Sills, 2014). In this way, I gradually learned their painful story. Leon was seven months old when his father, a "gifted musician" according to his mother, committed suicide. The mother worked part-time and, since her husband's death, occasionally had a boyfriend, but her main focus was Leon. He tried to "escape" from her (as he called it), and then he felt guilty if he left her alone for too long. He struggled with thoughts like "not being good enough", "not being worth anything", and "not knowing what he wants". This feeling worsened when he didn't get into the university he wanted and his girlfriend left him for someone else. He told me all this little by little, sometimes in tears. His situation seemed so hopeless to him that after a party, in the throes of unhappiness, he downed a pack of sleeping pills and whiskey he took from his mother. "Luckily, I threw everything up before they took effect", Leon said, smiling and looking at the ground.

We explored various ways he could express himself verbally, along with different forms of self-support, such as standing on the skateboard, performing tricks, reassuring himself, and grounding. Gestalt therapy emphasises the development of self-support, where the individual finds ways to sustain themselves in challenging situations (Polster & Polster, 1973). Leon's grounding was jumping into the air and landing wide-legged, then feeling it out – a small exercise he chose for himself, likened to a samurai. This grounding

exercise was a form of contact with his environment, helping him to stabilise physically and psychologically (Joyce & Sills, 2014). Self-efficacy, a concept rooted in Gestalt theory, can unfold when a person has the opportunity to become effective by shaping their own environment (Yontef & Jacobs, 2011). That's why I invited Leon to create his own grounding exercise.

We also explored how Leon could create space for himself. In Gestalt therapy, the concept of boundaries is interesting as it defines the borders between the self and others (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951). We looked for his aggression, which is often linked to boundary-setting, but couldn't find it for a long time, as he felt he was not allowed to show any of it. I invited him to build a circle around himself with various boards and pads that I had brought to see how much space he needed to feel comfortable in his own space. It was quite a lot of space – so much so that he could lay down, stretch out, and perform shove-its and other tricks within the circle. This physical representation of his boundaries allowed Leon to explore and define the space he needed to feel safe and autonomous (see Crocker, 2015), an important part in his journey.

We played with the boundaries of this circle, and I encouraged him to defend his "skateboard castle", as he called it. Initially, it was quite difficult for him; he didn't know how to protect his boundaries. At first, Leon stood frozen on the edge of his circle before using his board as a "machine gun". Leon externalised his defense mechanisms, keeping me at bay. I told him that it scared me when I was being "shot at", and he began experimenting with other forms of defense, using his voice and body to assert himself. This exploration

is one example of how we, in Gestalt therapy, work with the integration of different parts of the self, ultimately leading to greater self-awareness and self-support (Joyce & Sills, 2014).

So-called chairwork is considered a valuable core practice in Gestalt therapy for fostering self-awareness and resolving inner conflicts (Pascual-Leone & Baher, 2023). It involves having clients engage in a dialogue with different parts of themselves or with significant others, often using an empty chair to represent the other person. I like to use skateboards or ramps instead of chairs. This technique helps clients externalise and confront unresolved issues by creating a space for these internal dialogues. In another session, I asked Leon to choose a ramp at the skatepark that represented his mother. Leon chose one of the concrete obstacles that we call "volcano" because it looks like one. In the middle, there is a hole from which a tree grows. I invited him to close his eyes and mentally knock on his mother's door to make inner contact with her. This process, adapted to the skatepark environment, has the intention to allow Leon to project and process his emotions towards his mother (Perls et al., 1951). Then I asked him to tell me a bit about how he was feeling there. In the position of his mother, he felt sad and troubled. He said, "there's aching and bubbling everywhere, I'd like to just burst out". I encouraged him to do so, which he did with joy after a brief hesitation. His arms flailed wildly in the air, and he jumped and threw body shapes expressing an outbreak.

This expression of pent-up energy is central to Gestalt therapy, where physical movement is seen as a way to release blocked or repressed emotions (Yontef & Jacobs, 2011). After

the energy subsided, he lay on the ground exhausted, expressing relief. I asked him to look at the volcano from a distance. He sat beside me and reported that breaking out was fun and that he now understands his mother better. I felt that the liveliness had done him good and asked him, "Is there anything you'd like to say to your mother?" He bubbled forth and told the volcano, representing his mother, many things, including that he's sorry for scaring her. The energy was dense and meaningful, and he shared that he now understands her better and that he can take care of himself. Leon also told her that he needs more space for himself.

Having the opportunity to express all of this from his personal perspective was a powerful experience for Leon. In our feedback session, he shared that externalising all the unresolved conflicts and sorrows with his mother and gaining a better understanding of her viewpoint helped him. He felt more free and ready to move on. This shift reflects the Gestalt process of achieving closure, where the individual integrates their experiences and moves forward with a renewed sense of self (Polster & Polster, 1973).

Conclusion

Through the examination of two case studies, I aimed to illustrate how skateboarding can be seamlessly woven into the Gestalt therapeutic process, revealing its unique capacity for fostering growth and personal transformation. Talking about mental pain is often not enough and in the case of traumatic experiences it can also be counterproductive. From the perspective of Gestalt therapy, a helpful thera-

peutic process requires regaining a sense of agency, regaining control, enhancing the feeling of safety, connecting to the body, the environment, personal goals, and resources, and fostering closeness to others (Van der Kolk, 2015). This reflects a broader context of learning, where self-initiative, relationships, and the surrounding environment play crucial roles. Self-initiative encourages individuals to take proactive steps in their learning journey, fostering a sense of ownership and motivation (Pikler in Gutknecht & Bader, 2021). Relationships with mentors and peers provide essential support and feedback that enhance learning experiences (ibid). This concept is deeply rooted in attachment theory, which highlights the significance of being seen and recognised by others (Bowlby, 1988). Skateboarders arguably compare accomplishments to gain social acknowledgment (Goleman, 2005). Together, these elements are instrumental in creating an enriching experience that not only promotes skill development in skateboarding but also nurtures overall personal growth and mental well-being.

For clients interested in skateboarding, incorporating the board into a psychotherapeutic setting can offer valuable learning support for their mental health. Sometimes, the parents or caregivers express more excitement about skateboarding than the children. The true magic of skateboarding unfolds when it is embraced wholeheartedly, as it cannot be imposed to be effective. The first case study introduced the concept of therapeutic nurturing, emphasising the importance of providing care, support, and nourishment to restore or strengthen an individual's well-being. In psychotherapy, this nurturing process involves helping clients heal, grow, and

develop by offering them tailored experiences, insights, and tools that resonate with their reality. For example, guiding Emilia through the skatepark in the imagined train and creating space for her to talk about her father enabled her to reconnect with her inner strength. The second case study explored the use of ramps, a practice analogous to Chair Work, originally developed by Jacob Moreno, and later popularised by Fritz Perls (1951). Chair Work, now widely used across various therapeutic disciplines, is a powerful tool for externalising the inner world, allowing clients to view their experiences from different perspectives and shift core beliefs (Pascual-Leone & Baher, 2023). By adapting this technique to the skateboarding context, therapists can create opportunities for clients to engage in self-exploration and transformation in a dynamic, embodied way. In my experience, integrating psychotherapeutic principles into skateboarding not only enhances the learning of new skills but also promotes holistic growth and I expect more clinical research will be undertaken in the future. I hope this chapter serves as a resource for other therapists and researchers working with skateboarding, highlighting the potential of Gestalt therapy to amplify the benefits of this practice.

In conclusion, Gestalt therapy offers a unique and powerful framework for leveraging the therapeutic potential of skateboarding, especially in addressing psychological challenges and fostering personal development. The synergy between Gestalt therapy and skateboarding, both of which emphasise balance, presence, and creative expression, provides a robust approach to promoting resilience and well-being. While Gestalt therapy may resonate most profoundly with

skateboarding culture, exploring how other therapeutic approaches might engage with skateboarding could further enrich the field, offering diverse perspectives and methods for effective intervention. This exploration would broaden the understanding and application of therapeutic skateboarding, making it an even more versatile and impactful tool in various therapeutic settings.

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Chapter 9

Unlearning motherhood through skateboarding with a baby (in a stroller)

Adelina Ong

Traditional confinement practices observed by Singaporean mothers include a 30- to 45-day period of physical confinement for both mother and infant where both are discouraged from leaving the home (Fok et al., 2016). This overprotective approach to the physical wellbeing of infant and mother is significantly different from advice given by the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom where mothers are encouraged to take a walk "as soon as you feel up to it" and "get out as much as you can", as this helps to reduce the risk of postnatal depression (NHS, 2022). I chose to deliver the baby in London and went for my first walk outdoors with the infant six days after delivery. My first post-delivery skate took place at a skate spot in London when the baby turned two months old. My husband and I put the baby in a stroller and took turns to skate. This desire to skate soon after the birth of the baby surprised me. I wasn't sure if I remembered how to skate after eleven months of not being on a skateboard. I pushed tentatively. The skateboard wobbled forward, then

stopped. I pushed harder, more intentionally playful, seeking that balance between uncertainty and momentum. I started to glide and that first taste of weightlessness was intoxicating. It is this desire to share the joy of skateboarding with the baby that has made me reflect on maternal encounters in public while skateboarding with an infant in a stroller in Singapore. Drawing from Kwan SanSan's kinesthesia for my methodology, I will articulate how skateboarding *with* the baby has prompted an unlearning of Singaporean constructions of motherhood.

Kwan (2013, p.xxxiv) defines kinesthesia as a way of putting her "own physical experience of moving through city space...in dialogue with a reading of concert dance works". Imagining herself as a *flâneuse*, Kwan uses kinesthesia to critically analyse Chineseness in Hong Kong, Taiwan, New York's Chinatown, and Shanghai. Kwan's kinesthesia focuses on "the ways that notions of what it means to be Chinese are produced through choreographies of space" (p.xiii). For her as a dancer, "dancing has become...a way of knowing" (p.3). Kwan reflects on how her own Chineseness is produced through the confluence of the city's sociopolitical history with her own 'personal-somatic' navigations of public space and her movement analysis of dance performances in these cities (p.xiii). Kwan "considers choreography...as a mutual process: Bodies choreograph space; space choreographs bodies" (p.4). I find Kwan's kinesthesia useful for thinking through how skateboarding with a five-month-old baby in a stroller disrupts choreographies of space and interrogates conventional, gendered constructions of motherhood in Singapore. In reflecting on skateboarding *with* the baby, I suggest that

skateboarding provokes alternative approaches to parenting that can facilitate the unlearning of motherhood.

Falling

A man carrying a toddler in his arms drops down from the side of a mini bowl at the skatepark at Lakeside Garden in Singapore. He rides through the centre of the bowl, then gently glides along its sides. The comments on this online video range from "awesome dad" to "Respect. But if you are a parent and you know this is [sic] high risk sport will you do this to your child?" (TODAYonline, 2023). One commentator said, "I'm sure he is skillful and knows what to do if he senses danger…But it's good to have [a] child helmet just for safety purposes in future, just in case" (Yeo in TODAYonline 2023). In the paternalistically governed city state of Singapore, parenthood is a public performance that everyone feels entitled to comment on, regardless of whether they have children or whether the child they once cared for is now a middle-aged adult. The performance of paternalism is constant.

In attending to the "intimate public sphere" of "maternal encounters in public", Lisa Baraitser attends to the ways "in which publics are produced and structured through genres of intimacy, which in turn deform our very notions of the private and intimate" (Baraitser, 2009b, p.10). Baraitser observes how the child who unhooks a barrier strap at the airport elicits "a bizarre shocked silence" from other passengers in the queue (p.20). The child's playful disregard for social conventions and arbitrarily imposed orders is read as transgressive in this intimate public sphere. The parent

is summoned (by the public) to publicly "make a citizen of the child...to voice on behalf of everyone, nice and loud, just why we have a barrier, and why it must be maintained" (p.21). Returning to the online video, each commentator takes it upon themselves to evaluate the skateboarder's assessment of risk – as if they have been called upon to determine whether the skateboarding parent is *capable* of making a citizen of the child. Given how falling is crucial to how skateboarders learn, skateboarding *with* a child is incompatible with the performance of overprotectiveness that is expected of parents in Singapore.

On the morning that I first visited Somerset Skatepark with my husband and the baby in a stroller, there were only two children on skate scooters. Both seemed to be around five years of age. The Swedish boy was accompanied by his father, who was pushing a pram with a three-month-old infant. The Chinese girl kept trying to skate up a ramp even though she kept falling. Each time she fell, she would cry and her mother would chide her for trying. "I already said don't do it, but you keep going!" she would say in Mandarin. This happened twice. The baby had fallen asleep in the stroller on the way to the skatepark, so I sat next to the pram on the concrete steps as my husband practised ollies. There were new rails and ledges set up between the ramps that were the main feature of Somerset Skatepark. Twenty minutes later, we swapped, and he watched over the baby as I practised carving, extending old lines and creating new ones. Time felt suspended for a moment as I squatted and leaned forward. It felt like I would fall off the board, face first on the concrete. Bethany Geckle and Sally Shaw (2020, p.137) note that in their celebra-

tion of falling, "the clumsiness and shameless non-mastery of falling connotes a certain childish failure…indicative of a comfort with or embrace of failure". I stood as I came out of the turn and picked up speed by rocking from side to side. I stumbled as I hit a crack in the concrete and ran forward as I fell. I laughed as I fell, even though I didn't fully understand why I was laughing. Extending Kwan's kinesthesia, I noticed that the choreography of space in this skatepark directed my body towards speed, gliding and momentary weightlessness as much as it stumbles, jerks, and falls.

Babies feel no shame or embarrassment when they fall. They may cry in response to the pain and be surprised by the fall, but learning through falling is the only way they'll learn to sit upright, stand unsupported, and eventually walk. The overprotectiveness of many Singaporean parents resists the choreography of space in skateparks and socialises them to fear failure. Beyond the skatepark, fear of being punished for failing examinations has led Singaporean children to commit suicide (Hussain, 2016). Singaporeans who choose unconventional paths in life are often penalised for doing so. Longboarder Adrian Oh, 36, who skated across 32 countries over 722 days, wrote that:

> The prospect of not knowing what future lies ahead when I return home is more terrifying than the mountains I skated up, the icy cold rain, harsh brutal wind. Nothing daunts me except the future of finding work, settling down. This journey is actually an escape from my reality, and I have to face my fears real soon (Oh, 2018, online).

For Oh, it appears that despite acquiring the ability to adapt to extreme weather conditions and unexpected situations on his longboarding journey, the uncertainty of employment upon his return to Singapore remains terrifying. Perhaps, this is partly because Oh's resourcefulness and ambition might amount to little but escapism in the eyes of many Singaporean employers. Falling is par for the course when we are working outside of comfort zones, challenging ourselves to accomplish something difficult or something that scares us because it is different from anything we've done before.

Overprotective parenting in Singapore may be more pronounced for girls. The Chinese girl who kept falling was told to stop trying to skate up a ramp. By contrast, the Swedish boy was encouraged to try again each time he fell. When the girl fell the third time, I told her to be brave and not be afraid of falling. She tried not to cry this time. I know that I'll need to unlearn the instinct to be overprotective and let my baby learn from falling. Hopefully, he'll learn from watching his parents fall and laugh while skateboarding and begin to perceive setbacks in life as opportunities for learning. Perhaps then he will not think of himself as a failure when he falls and will keep on seeking out and creating new challenges for himself. This will enable him to constantly learn about himself, about life, and about the world, for the rest of his life. In life, as in skateboarding, falling is how we learn.

Skate Ramp Ruminations on Visibility while Breastfeeding

At noon, the baby woke up and started crying from hunger. The midday sun made it too hot to breastfeed on the concrete stairs built for spectators flanking one side of Somerset Skatepark. All the sheltered picnic tables were occupied, so I decided to breastfeed the baby standing up, behind a skate ramp. In 2008, Dani Abulhawa (2008, p.59) noted that female skateboarders "occupy a subcultural edgeland position" where women are marginalised within a subculture that is often greeted with hostility. Abulhawa (2008) has observed that female skateboarders must perform masculinity in skateboarding in order to succeed within the male-dominated arena of skateboarding. Skateboarding is not inherently egalitarian and inclusive, but there has been sustained effort made by female skateboarders to resist the pressure to perform masculinity. Skate conference Pushing Boarders Malmö featured speakers from Girl Skate UK, MAHFIA.TV, Skate Like a Girl (SF Bay Area), Girl Skate India, Women's Skateboarding Alliance, Girls Shred, Women Skate the World, Girls Skate Brisbane, and Skate Like a Girl who have made significant contributions towards making skateboarding more inclusive for women (Pushing Boarders, 2019). It is no longer unusual to see a female skateboarder wearing a dress or skirt while executing challenging tricks that many skateboarders (regardless of gender) would struggle to perform, but mothers complicate these recently accepted expressions of femininity at the skatepark. The performance of motherhood at the skatepark is not easily domesticated when the mother is not playing a supporting role to her skateboarding

child. The baby's cry makes my motherhood, and femininity, publicly visible at the skatepark. My visibility as a mother is not solely mine to control. All eyes now seek out the mother who must now perform mothering and stop the crying.

The choreography of space in the skatepark entices bodies to movement. A spontaneously coordinated rhythm between skateboarders emerges as lines intersect in this space. In the skatepark, the stillness required of breastfeeding feels out of place. In her analysis of stillness in the practice of sitting meditation, Kwan (2013, p.94) argues that "stillness allows us to dive inward, and in that intimate space we experience not immobility but motion and vastness." Kwan observes that the body is not still, even when in a state of rest. Meditation draws our attention to "microscopic tremors, vibrations, and pulsations happening within the body" (ibid.). During meditation, one focuses one's awareness on the movement of breath within the body, whilst being aware of perceptions external to the body. Often, this focus on breath is interrupted by thoughts. During meditation, one is encouraged to let these thoughts pass without attachment. This juxta-position of outward stillness with heightened awareness of inner movement resonates with breastfeeding. My left forearm cradles the baby's head, guiding him to latch, while my right hand is tucked under his bum. My shoulders relax as I enter a state of standing meditation. Borrowing from Kwan (p.95), my body is "doubly perceiving", attending to the baby's rhythmic feeding movements while conscious of the asynchronous movement of skateboarders around me.

In this state of outward stillness, my awareness of time passing is intensified. Following Kwan (p.96), this "stillness

did not remove [me] from time or space; rather it intensified [my] presence in it". My visibility as a mother is intensified by the apparent stillness of breastfeeding, standing up behind a ramp, at Somerset Skatepark. Breastfeeding in public remains stigmatised in Singapore. In 2022, a woman was shamed for breastfeeding her daughter at a restaurant by fellow diners (Batuyong, 2022). In 2017, a mother who breastfed on the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) was shamed online (Chew, 2017).[1] Her photo was taken without consent by a fellow passenger and posted on STOMP, which is an online platform for citizen journalism. Breastfeeding in public without a nursing cover is still perceived by conservative Singaporeans as an obscene act of indecent exposure. I was initially worried about getting heckled or shamed online and was relieved that no one stared. As time passed, the act of breastfeeding standing up began to feel like a protest against the shaming of mothers who breastfeed in public. I felt indignant about how breastfeeding mothers are told to cover up (Chew, 2017). The display of cleavage is normalised and regarded as acceptable within a visual culture that has socialised men to regard women's bodies as spectacles that invite the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975, p.11). The breastfeeding mother may display less cleavage while breastfeeding, as the baby's head covers the nipple and most of the breast, yet breastfeeding in public is regarded as obscene because women's bodies have been "coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (ibid., emphasis in original).

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1   The MRT is Singapore's version of the tube or metro.

Then the baby's legs wriggled in oblivious delight, interrupting my ruminations, and I shifted to balance his movement. While the performance of masculinity may no longer be expected of women at skateparks, to what extent is the performance of femininity already sexualised, and therefore tamed, within the wider frameworks of visual culture? The outward stillness of standing to breastfeed seemed to intensify my protest, demanding the normalisation of breastfeeding in public in Singapore. What is the disruptive potential of breastfeeding at the skatepark?

Skateboarding with…Time

Even though parenting responsibilities were equally shared (except for breastfeeding), the first three months of motherhood seemed defined by an endless cycle of breastfeeding, nappy changing, soothing the baby when he cries, and settling the baby to sleep. There were days where I only had 30 minutes to attend to my own needs (eating, pooping or bathing – a new mother can only choose to do one of the three) before the baby cried for a feed again. There seemed to be no time for expressing breast milk, let alone skateboarding. I am reminded of Esther Sayers' (2023, p.322) positioning of time spent skateboarding as an activity that "raises ethical questions about how I am in the world with others". She notes that tensions arise when mothers prioritise their individual desires at the expense of time spent on contributing to the children's wellbeing. Skateboarding is perceived as a "distraction from the primary focus of motherhood" (p.318). Baraitser describes maternal time as interrupted time that

constantly returns her to "the immediate, the present, the here-and-now of the child or infant's demand" (Baraitser, 2009a, p.58). The mother (or 'maternal subject') is both "subjected to relentless interruption, and she whom interruption enunciates" (p.57). Baraitser becomes a mother through this interruption. I cannot choose when the baby needs to feed or control the duration of the feed. Unlearning this desire to control time is (still) one of the toughest lessons of motherhood, but motherhood should not be defined by sacrifice.

In Singapore, having children is perceived as the "ultimate sacrifice" (Vignehsa, 2024). While that may be an exaggerated evaluation of the cost and stress incurred by raising a child in Singapore, it is true that many women are penalised at work for going on three months maternity leave. On a Reddit discussion forum, one commenter said, "I already know my career will never recover even after just one child…For me, I have accepted it. But a lot of people won't" (KoishiChan92 in risingsuncoc, 2024). Some new mothers have been denied promotions after claiming 12 weeks of paid maternity leave (yuu16 in risingsuncoc, 2024). Infant care services are expensive, even after government subsidies, and many women struggle to return to work. In Singapore, mothers are expected to "do it all" (So, 2021). This includes doing overtime upon return from maternity leave, shouldering most of the childcare responsibilities, supervising the physical, social and cognitive development of the child, while cooking for the family and keeping the house clean (pencilbride2B, Status_Alive_3723, doc_naf, Azurebold, Adultingishard2345, choco_mousse24, Prize-Nobody-9024 and azureseagraffiti in davechua, 2024).

Eventually, many mothers decide to set aside their professional ambitions to focus on the newborn. But there is no joy in devoting oneself to the completion of household chores, or the "endless food preparation, eating, tidying up, washing, shopping for groceries, attending to life admin" and other child-related tasks that have come to define motherhood for most (Sayers, 2023, p.317). In balancing her desire to skate with the needs of her family, and reckoning with the limits of physical mobility as age progresses, Sayers eventually decides that she must make time for skateboarding. My husband and I have decided that we want to share what we love with the baby and this includes skateboarding. Having a newborn has forced me to make brutal decisions about what I choose to prioritise given my perpetually exhausted and time-starved lived reality. Both of us have had to make adjustments to the way we work, but we have resolved to share parenting responsibilities equally and enable each other to engage with activities that nourish us individually. At this point of the newborn's life, skateboarding with the five-month-old baby is compatible with an exposure to new experiences and environments that is characteristic of sensory play. He may grow into skateboarding through these moments spent together. And he may grow out of skateboarding as he becomes a teenager, as Sayers' children have. Regardless, my husband and I have decided that we must make time for skateboarding, and we do so by skateboarding *with* the baby.

In December 2023, my husband and I skated with the baby in a stroller from the bus stop at Overseas Union Enterprise (OUE) Bayfront to Marina Bay Sands (MBS). The baby slept as we skated towards Marina Bay Sands. The boulevard is wide

and paved with smooth concrete. The choreography of space is reminiscent of promenades built for *flânerie*. Pedestrians perambulate at a leisurely stroll, guided by pleasure along the visually spectacular waterfront. An awareness of selfie aesthetics pulls them towards the water's edge for a photograph against the distinctive skyline. The smooth concrete is ideal for skateboarding. We usually take turns to skate but, on this occasion, my husband decided to try skateboarding *while* pushing the stroller from One Marina Boulevard to the Red Dot Design Museum, past the Promontory at Marina Bay. *Flânerie* is typically conceived as an individualistic pursuit by its most prominent male walkers including Henry David Thoreau (Heddon and Turner, 2012, p.226). Thoreau (1951, p.64) positioned the walker as "a crusader and errant knight, traversing the wild" who must be ready to "leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends and never see them again" in order to be "ready for a walk". By contrast, Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner (2012, p.232; 234) note that walking practitioners who identify as women tend to build relationships through their walks, walking with others (like a small child or baby) and "embracing…obligations rather than their abandonment". Sander Hölsgens and Thom Callan-Riley have argued, "contrary to popular conceptions of skateboarding as an act of the individual…skateboarding has a broader capacity to generate an affective and intimate form of being-with-others. Skateboarding is collective" (Hölsgens and Callan-Riley, 2020, p.i).

Baraitser describes the maternal body as an "encumbered" body that is "literally weighed down by stuff" (Baraitser, 2009a, p.125). In Singapore, it is rare to see fathers pushing the

stroller while the mother skates unencumbered, alongside. In this duet between skateboard and stroller along Marina Bay, gendered parenting expectations are subverted. The parenting skateboarding body is encumbered by care for the baby in the stroller. Kwan (2023, p.2) notes that "duets generate awkwardness and inspire care". My husband started out awkwardly and tentatively, getting a sense of the momentum required to move both skateboard and stroller without falling forward. In this duet, the consequences of falling extend beyond the skateboarder. The stroller might roll towards the water on the left, or onto the road and into traffic on the right. Careful small adjustments in the tension of my husband's wrist and forearm kept both skateboard and stroller moving in a straight line. Passers-by frowned at us as we skated past. We are "bad parents" who have put the baby at the unnecessary risk of falling. Yet this awkwardly careful duet is unfettered by the gendered expectations of motherhood that are typical in a Singaporean context. It is not sustainable for mothers to do it all. I am not confident enough as a skateboarder to skate with the stroller, but finding balance isn't about trying to do it all. For me, finding balance between mothering, professional ambitions, personal interests, and relaxation is only possible through equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. Motherhood, and its gendered expectations, becomes irrelevant when parenting responsibilities are equally shared.

Outside the Red Dot Museum, we parked the stroller next to a set of tiered benches. We took turns watching over the sleeping baby while the other skated up and down Marina Bay Waterfront Boulevard. I practised carving on a surfskate, using the slight downward slope to generate speed.

After just 15 minutes, my 44-year-old post-pregnancy body ached for rest. I could not skate more, even if I wanted to. But resting is as much a part of skateboarding as landing a trick. I've had some of the most profound conversations with friends (and strangers who have become friends) about what makes life meaningful while we were resting. As we caught our breath, we also found different ways of approaching the trick or move. For me, there is as much pleasure to be found in carving along the boulevard as there is in resting and watching over the sleeping baby while taking in the weekend morning tranquillity of this waterfront boulevard. It started to rain, and we took shelter in Marina Bay Sands (MBS). The baby woke up and started crying for a feed. We searched for a place where I could sit and breastfeed, but the choreography of space in this luxury mall did not allow relaxation without consumption. Avoiding the expensive restaurants and cafes, we made our way to the food court in the basement for more affordable food and drink options. The precarious navigation of the crowded luxury mall with skateboard and the baby in a stroller took balance and a heightened awareness of street architecture (kerbs, railings) and hazardously slow-moving pedestrians acquired from skateboarding. With this encumbered parenting body, I was forced to renegotiate my relationship with the city. At Pushing Boarders London, skate scholar Åsa Bäckström described how women skateboarders were "talking about using their skateboards as shields" in order to "make space for themselves" (Bäckström in Pushing Boarders, 2018). Without consciously realising it, I used the skateboard as a shield to make space for the baby

in the stroller as I carved through gaps that emerged between slow-moving pedestrians preoccupied with their phones.

We moved to a skate spot under the bridge next to MBS after the rain cleared. As my husband skated, I carried the baby upright in my arms so the baby could see my husband skateboarding. The baby babbled in delight as I explained what ollies are. Then my husband took a break and carried the baby while I practised carving between lamp posts. He explained surfskating to the baby while encouraging me to turn my head and lean forward even more so that I can turn more sharply. I straightened my legs and leaned back as I emerged from a turn and that drove the skateboard into the next turn. I let my gaze follow my outstretched arm as I cleared the next turn. It was sharper than before. It felt like I was falling but through this momentum of falling, I found balance. Tommy Carroll and Luke Cianciotto (2020, p.11) have described skateboarding as "practices in radical empathy" where one is "seeing one's self, seeing another, seeing one's self through another and then re-seeing another through one's self". Skateboarding with the baby as part of this parenting duet has prompted a different understanding of motherhood. As I emerged from the turn, I realised that one of the most important things I've unlearnt about motherhood through skateboarding is that motherhood need not entail the sacrifice of career or the pleasures of skateboarding when parenting responsibilities are equally shared. It is tempting to become enamoured of the romanticised, gendered idea of motherhood that is produced through constant interruption, in response to the baby's needs. But this heroic doing of endless child-related tasks associated with motherhood

leaves no time for anything else. For my husband and me, skateboarding *with* the baby is an approach to parenting that shares what we love with the baby, creating time for activities that nourish and sustain us as we live in this world with others.

During a rest break, I let the baby practise sitting upright on the skateboard and he giggled as he toppled to the side. The baby is constantly teaching me about parenting as we wander through life together. I have no doubt that skateboarding with the baby will generate future encounters that will provoke further unlearnings. Perhaps, this is why parenting, and life, is often described as an adventure.

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Chapter 10

Anticolonial skate pedagogy: Skateboarding as decolonising education

Noah Romero and Douglas Miles

Introduction

This chapter aims to demonstrate how skateboarding can function as a site of decolonising education. It does so by theorising the social practice of Apache Skateboards through literature on decolonising education, or approaches to teaching and learning that build upon critiques of settler/invader colonialism, white supremacy and Euro-American imperialism. Such critiques inform concrete pedagogical efforts to foster reparation, reciprocity, connectedness, balance, healing, the rematriation of stolen lands, and the resurgence of Indigenous lifeways. This study deepens scholarship on skateboarding, decolonisation, and education by bringing the lines of inquiry associated with these disparate fields into conversation with one another.

We anchor this work in the concept of *anti-colonial skate pedagogy* (ASP), which bridges scholarship on skateboarding and decolonising education to show how the two have

much to learn from one another. Literature that frames skateboarding as a potentially emancipatory and holistic form of teaching and learning can be deepened by understanding the nuanced ways skateboarding facilitates the critique, contestation, and negation of settler colonialism. Similarly, anti-colonial pedagogues can partner with Indigenous, Black, and person-of-colour skateboarders to gain a deeper understanding of the informal, embodied, and community-embedded dimensions of decolonising education.

ASP can help us understand how decolonising education is not a simple matter of curriculum, teaching methods, vocabulary terms, consciousness raising, or knowledge transmission. ASP instead shows us how decolonising education must be a holistic endeavour that engages the mind, body and spirit while drawing us into kinship with land and community. Later sections will examine how various aspects of Apache Skateboards' community-engaged social practice specifically allow ASP to emerge. These analyses coalesce into an invitation for scholars and practitioners to view Apache Skateboards as a model for engaging in the dynamic and emergent practice of anti-colonial resistance.

A Note on Methods

Drawing from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2021) writing on *community research*, this chapter emerged out of a process of collaboration and consultation that took place before any writing occurred. As part of an Indigenous research agenda, community research refers to collaborative research activities undertaken by community members in order to achieve col-

lective goals. Importantly, Smith (2021, p.149) argues that the reciprocal and community-sustaining ethics that underpin community research initiatives are more artefacts than they produce: "In many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination". Co-written by an Indigenous studies scholar (Noah) and the multimedia artist who founded Apache Skateboards (Douglas), this chapter reflects our ongoing efforts to plan anti-colonial education events that also showcase the liberatory potential of skateboarding.

Our analyses are primarily drawn from our conversations. They also include reflections on the archive of commentary, critiques, and works of art Douglas has made publicly available elsewhere, including in social media outlets, magazines, documentaries, galleries, and museums, along with works screen printed on t-shirts and slapped onto the undersides of skateboards. Rather than rewriting in academic language, we found elaborating on these public texts to be a generative strategy for analysis. Centring public data was also important because academics, skateboarders, curators, and journalists often look to Douglas' public work to draw conclusions about Apache Skateboards, often collapsing it into generalised discussions about 'Native American skateboarding.' These generalisations risk oversimplifying the diversity of Indigenous skateboarders and the communities they inhabit and traverse. They also risk minimising Apache Skateboards' specific and singular contributions to decolonising the skate industry. As an exercise in community research, this chapter can be

encountered as a corrective exercise in self-determination that offers a first-hand theorisation of the importance of Apache Skateboards. We aim to subvert the anthropological impulse to extract and fetishise Indigenous knowledge. We instead prioritise the embodied social practice that Apache Skateboards has conceptualised, planned, executed, and introduced to the public. We do so to demonstrate how the organisation's efforts expand the possibilities of skateboarding and decolonising education alike.

Toward an Anti-colonial Skate Pedagogy

ASP critically synthesises literature on skateboarding and decolonising education to demonstrate skateboarding's potential as a site of anti-colonial resistance. Drawing from the work of skate scholars like Indigo Willing, Ben Green, and Adele Pavlidis (2019), I (Noah) have elsewhere used the concept of *skate pedagogy* to refer to the educative dimensions of skateboarding (Romero, 2021). Skate pedagogy involves the entangled physical and cognitive processes involved in learning to ride a skateboard. It also involves the process of learning skateboarding's values, which broadly prioritise autonomy, rebelliousness, anti-authoritarianism, and a "jaundiced eye toward what constitutes public space" (Romanoff, 2024, n.p.). Anti-colonial skate pedagogy builds upon this definition to refer to skateboarding practices that foster educational experiences that specifically advance Indigenous struggles and a critique of colonial power relations. Defining anti-colonial movement building, the late Diné artist, activist, and land defender Klee Benally notes that:

Anti-colonial struggle assumes the position of engaging in attack of colonial structures to end them. To abolish them. You'll see a range of anti-oppression or collective liberation analyses that…are not articulating their relationship to Indigenous Peoples whose land they're on.

The analysis there is that no matter how liberated they're going to be against heteropatriarchy or white supremacy, they're still occupying Indigenous lands and they're still settler colonizers.

To be able to reconcile that is to reconfigure the analysis through an anti-colonial struggle framework and engage in supporting Indigenous struggles *to their conclusion*, which is to liberate the land and their people as well. (PeopleLiveTV, 2017, n.p.)

Framing skateboarding as a potential site of anti-colonial attack requires analysis of how skateboarding might unsettle the mechanisms of Euro-American imperialism and make its abolition inevitable. Our analysis goes beyond an examination of how skateboarders repurpose public space and exercise individual freedom. We pay closer attention to how Apache Skateboards' holistic social practice contains the raw material for the destruction of settler reality. We are not interested in promoting skateboarding as a way to keep 'vulnerable' youth 'out of trouble'. We are not interested in theorising skateboarding as a tool for bringing people from different cultures together while naturalising settler colonialism and the nation-state. We instead draw attention to how Apache Skateboards engages in community-sustaining pedagogies that create new worlds built on the old ways – Indigenous

worldviews that actively maintain intersubjective bonds based on reciprocity and responsibility.

Still, it is important to note that skateboarding communities exist in relation to dominant culture and can therefore reflect its prejudices (Beal & Weldman, 2003). Institutionalised versions of skateboarding, like competitive and Olympic skateboarding, for example, are critiqued for the ways they compel skateboarders to follow rules and protocols that reproduce the gender binaries, racial hierarchies, and eugenic obsessions of the colonial project. In Olympic skateboarding, participation is further adjudicated according to the International Olympic Committee's rules on gender expression and its competitive format that pairs sport with statecraft (Romero, 2021).

Such impositions can be mandated by governing bodies, but they can also be policed by skateboarders. A rule in the Berrics' SKATE competition series, for instance, states that competitors cannot grab their boards, plant their feet on the ground, or allow their toes to drag on the floor. These rules necessarily limit skateboarders' ability to utilise the breadth of their physical and creative vocabulary. Still, rules do not always go unchallenged. On an episode of *Battle of the Berrics*, Mike Vallely responds to host Steve Berra's recitation of the rules by asking "who makes rules for skateboarding?" (The Berrics, 2014, n.p.). Vallely's protest compels Berra to discard the rules entirely, allowing Vallely and his competitor, Chris Cole, to allow foot plants, grabs, handstands, and unfashionable 'old school' tricks. Negating Berra's rules, the ensuing contest becomes an educational demonstration of skateboarding's past and future, rife with street plants, no

complys, and mutual admiration. Viewer @BijanCamp (2014, n.p.) notes that despite the creeping commodification and policing of mainstream skate culture, the video reminds us that "games of SKATE are all about respect, having fun, and learning from each other".

While skateboarding's 'rules' are under constant negotiation, this interaction demonstrates how skateboarding's idealisation of unimpeded freedom exists in tensile relation to the constraints imposed by larger forces and internalised by individuals. Skateboarders must often balance exercising freedoms with either adhering to or enforcing collective norms. To follow this chapter's line of argumentation, it is important to take note of *where* the rules that give skateboarding communities their ideological, aesthetic, ontological, and epistemological boundaries come from. It is equally important to note *who* gets to decide what these norms are and *what* social, political, and economic realities these impositions produce. Finally, we ask *how* colonial obsessions with categorisation and control might be undone through anti-colonial approaches to skateboarding.

When placed in conversation with decolonising education, studies of skateboarding help us understand how resistant ways of being forecast collective experiences that refute colonial conquest and its bedfellows – white supremacy, mass surveillance, overpolicing, racialised capitalism, and punitive forms of schooling that assume children require disciplining before they can be considered fully human (Cajete, 2012; Styres, 2019). Decolonising education critiques, recognises, and transforms the ways in which schooling has been used as a wartime technology that invading forces impose on besieged, occupied, and

enslaved peoples. Schooling is the key technology invaders use to extinguish Indigenous cultures, primarily by forcibly assimilating children into individualistic and exploitative western ideologies and construals of self, oftentimes at the crack of a whip. Colonial educators also used organised sports to discipline bodies thought to be immutably deviant. In the Philippines, American teachers introduced baseball to teach Indigenous peoples concepts thought to be wholly alien to the Philippine psyche, like self-control, sportsmanship, and thrift (Gleeck, 1976; Grande 2015).

Decolonising education responds to the debilitating mandate of colonial schooling in varied ways across contested terrains. In Aotearoa, efforts to decolonise education have directly contributed to the resurgence of the Māori language and culture. Te Kohanga Reo is a network of Māori immersion schools for pre-Kindergarten children and their families (Rona & Maclachlan, 2018). Te Kura Kaupapa Māori, established in 1985, offers primary and secondary schooling options dedicated to fostering Māori language, culture, and self-determination (Tocker, 2015). At the university level, Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiārangi offers degrees grounded in Māori epistemology and ontology, including PhDs in Māori Studies, Indigenous Studies, Environment Studies, and Education (Smith, 2015). According to Smith (2015), Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi centres the decolonising objectives of conscientisation, resistance, and transformation, concepts which Freire (1976) introduced to education research but have animated Indigenous communities since time immemorial:

Conscientisation: Coming to understand the stark realities of the neoliberal economic changes in New Zealand and its overt and inequitable impact on Māori and therefore the subsequent conscientizing of Māori to the fact that our struggle was not just about our culture, but also over structural elements such as economics, power, and ideology, that is, a need to simultaneously struggle for structuralist and culturalist change.

Smith (2015, p.57) notes that Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi was established because Māori "argued for the recognition and validity of their own cultural frame of reference as well as increased economic and resource parity in their own right alongside the dominant Pākehā (non-Māori population) in NZ". In the United States, institutions like Diné College and Haskell Indian Nations University were established out of a similar need to protect Indigenous students and preserve and revitalise Native American cultures. Tribal universities were also established out of the recognition that predominantly white institutions are often ill-equipped to serve the needs of Indigenous students and seldom offered degree pathways that were responsive to their backgrounds and needs (Haskie, 2013). In Guatemala, the Ixil University was established to protect Ixil culture and territory (Batz, 2019). Ixil University was also founded to contest the notion that economic progress and social mobility were contingent upon abandoning one's Indigenous identity and community, an idea heavily promoted in Guatemalan schools (Batz, 2019).

The San Carlos Apache Reservation's own school district exemplifies decolonising education. Responding to how contemporary issues facing young people in San Carlos (like

poverty, suicidality, and drop-out rates) have their roots in historical traumas associated with removal and forced re-education in American Indian boarding schools, the district has transformed its curriculum to bridge student-centred culturally-responsive, and social-emotional learning paradigms with Apache language, culture, history, and knowledge (San Carlos Unified School District, 2024). The district also implemented comprehensive mental health services, school-family partnership programs, and academic policies that prioritise student well-being and happiness. The district's efforts increased attendance and graduation numbers while reducing disciplinary, drop-out, and suspension rates. They have created educational conditions needed for Apache youth to articulate and pursue their educational goals and succeed *as Apache*. The district's effort is best understood as a community effort to reflect the Apache philosophy of shiłgozhoo, which 15 year-old student Lorena Cosen defines as:

> …the definition of beauty and happiness. A strong word that describes an Apache life. I can't say what it means to me personally, because I am still young and learning the N'nee life. I still have a lot to learn. This weekend I was told beautiful and pretty are two different characters. Beauty is something you see inside, outside, and around a person. Pretty is just what's on the outside but on the inside is awful. Shiłgozhoo is beautiful. A beautiful word that takes me back to my past, when I had my sunrise dance.

> I saw the beauty in the sun rising behind the mountains, my feathers and ribbons floating as I pounded my cane, hearing the bells as my spiritual leaders danced, and feeling the white paint run through my whole body. Shiłgozhoo—a beautiful word, inside, outside, and all around me. (San Carlos Unified School District, 2024, n.p.)

While their ideological aims and pedagogic strategies shift according to historic and geographic contexts, efforts to decolonise education share two overlapping aims. The first is to resist Eurocentrism while acknowledging the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous, oppressed, and colonised peoples. The second is the pursuit of social justice, or the righting of historical wrongs and the equitable redistribution of resources and opportunities. ASP, as such, deepens decolonising education by showing how people from targeted and minoritised communities create equitable realities without mediating entities or pre-planned curriculum, actualising liberatory modes of teaching and learning that respond to the historical traumas and contemporary needs of communities they sustain on their own.

Anti-colonial skate pedagogy extends the analytical trajectory of Indigenous and decolonising education, primarily by bridging radical and ancestral learning paradigms with the physical pedagogies that emerge from the act of skateboarding itself. Learning to skate requires a high level of discipline and the ability to persevere through hardship (Adi, Aditya, & Citrawati, 2010). Skateboarders often work on the same manoeuvres for years, sustaining a high level of effort and attention even into adulthood (Willing, 2019). Along with the self-directed way one learns to skate, skate pedagogy

instils skate culture's "most cherished values" (Kassel, 2016, p.4) – orientations toward resistance, rebelliousness, repurposing public space, support for other skateboarders, and an appreciation for consent and bodily autonomy (Beal, 1995; Chiu, 2009; Lombard, 2010; Atencio, Beal, & Yochim, 2013). As such, anti-colonial skate pedagogy calls attention to the iteratively unfolding decolonising education that skateboarders develop as they embody skate culture's oppositional orientations toward (colonial) authority and the contested politics of place.

These divergent ways of knowing emerge largely sans formal instruction, as skateboarders come to embody them through their interactions with cityscapes, other skateboarders, skateboards themselves, and the regimes of regulation that map the contours of dominant culture. Examples of the latter include anti-skateboarding policies and the police officers, security guards, and private citizens who enforce them. They also include identitarian discourses that say people's abilities and options are tied to their bodies, minds, and skin colours – a broad assumption that is anathema to ASP but is foundational to schooling. Other enemies of skate culture include *posers* – uninvited guests from the dominant culture who appropriate the aesthetics of skate culture. Skateboarding's antagonists also include architectural aggressors designed to prevent skateboarding, like *skate-stoppers*, or metal deterrent devices on public property. Intrepid skateboarders routinely challenge themselves to elude and *undermine* all of these and more. Still, theorisations of skateboarding that portray it solely as a rebellious act overlook the fact that the ultimate purpose of skateboarding is simply to *have*

fun. If nothing else, ASP's move to afford analytical consideration to skateboarding allows for examinations of a particularly underdeveloped notion of decolonising education: that it too can be fun.

Apache Skateboards as Anti-colonial Skate Pedagogy

Apache Skateboards is the world's first Native-founded skateboarding company, established by San Carlos Apache and Akimel O'odham artist Douglas Miles Sr, and his son, professional skateboarder, photographer, filmmaker, and community organiser Douglas Miles Jr. Apache Skateboards provides a counterpoint to colonial conquest, capitalist consumption, and Olympic statism by promoting a skate culture whose legitimacy is not derived from the exercise of dominion but from the relationships between people, community, history, and land. The entanglement of skateboarding and Indigenous ontology is showcased in *The Mystery of Now* (2019), a documentary on the history of Apache Skateboards. In addition to tracing the growth of skate culture in Apacheria, the film functions as a source of sensory data on the affective capacities of ASP, introducing audiences to educative settings that uplift Indigenous ways of knowing and being through skateboarding. The film situates Apache Skateboards' work within the broader collective endeavour of securing the rematriation of Indigenous lands and the preservation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Endemic to Southern Arizona, the Apache Nation was forcibly exiled and resettled on reservations as a result of the US military confiscation and occupation of Apache land in the late 1800s.

Laluk (2017) notes, however, that displacement and genocide have not diluted the Apache sense of kinship with their lands:

> Despite continuous deception, mistreatment, dehumanization, and eventual exile of various Apache groups from southeastern Arizona, Apache communities retain strong social ties through kinship and clan obligations and retain significant associations to their former homelands (p.97).

Laluk (2017) further notes that Apache identity, which is defined by the relationship Apache have with land, becomes more interrelated and complex over time. The contingent relationality that weds Apache personhood to Apache land is evident in the contemporary struggle to protect Oak Flat, a sacred site known by the San Carlos Apache for its cultural and spiritual significance. Oak Flat and its protectors currently face development aggression and state violence stemming from a proposed mining project by Resolution Copper, a domestic appendage of foreign mining conglomerates. Resolution Copper's project involves excavating one of the largest copper deposits in the US, reproducing the genocidal compulsion to eradicate Indigenous lands, knowledges, and peoples in the name of settler progress. The mine would secure a limited supply of raw materials to be used in semiconductors, gadgets, and trinkets at the cost of permanently destroying Oak Flat and the cultural protocols, land-based knowledges, and endemic species associated with it (Apache-Stronghold, 2024). The Protect Oak Flat campaign involves advocacy, litigation, and public awareness efforts to halt the mining project and safeguard the land.

An Apache skateboarder skating on Apache land could accordingly represent an evolving understanding of the contingent relationality of bodies, land, and matter. It is a reminder that we come from the land – we journey with it, and will eventually return to it. This respect for the unfolding bond between land and human vitality underpins Miles's art:

> When I look out at San Carlos, I see the power of the past. I see the way Native American people resurrected themselves and why. Because the land is forever. And when you realize the land is forever you realize you are forever. We are forever (Buchanan, 2019, n.p.).

Apache Skateboards has continually served as a means for connecting Apache understandings of the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, or what Styres (2019) terms *literacies of Land,* with the contemporary priorities of Apache youth, or their need for "access to goods and services like everyone else" (Buchanan, 2019, n.p.). Apache Skateboards pursues this mission by combining skateboarding, art, and community building to dynamically practise and preserve Apache knowledge while affording varied educational, economic, creative, and pro-social opportunities to Native youth.

Apache Skateboards began when Doug Jr. took up skateboarding as a teenager but noticed a lack of Indigenous representation in commercial skate culture, apart from a small number of boards bearing crude images that reproduced harmful stereotypes. Activating his artistic training and repertoire, Doug Sr. sought to address this Indigenous erasure in both art and skateboarding by painting and designing custom boards for his son and other community members. Apache

Skateboards then grew their operations to include consulting on the design and construction of skateparks in San Carlos and other Native nations (Rocker, 2022). They also embarked on public health, voter registration, and public education campaigns, along with supporting Indigenous youths to develop skills in filmmaking, photography, marketing, social media, entrepreneurship, and art. Apache Skateboards also founded the Apache Skate Team, the world's first all-Native crew of professional skateboarders.

Apache Skateboards' expanding practice is inextricable from Douglas Miles Sr.'s art, which pairs themes of Apache history and Indigenous resurgence with bright colours, warm textures, and human figures rendered in ways that portray perpetual motion. Taken together, Miles's work defies the anthropological gaze and the settler imaginaries that are often brought to bear on the collection, exhibition, and production of Native American art. Miles's joyfully radical negation of colonial conquest, cultivated in part through his deep enmeshment with skateboarding culture, assails stereotypes of Indigenous cultures as lifelessly stoic, encased in amber, and fading away. Skateboard decks and other merchandise (like keychains, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and stickers) can serve as powerful material and documentary attestations of the subculture's values and aesthetics. Skateboarding's visual repertoire, writ large, contains iconography that can serve as key curricular tools of anti-colonial skate pedagogy. Decks, hoodies, t-shirts, and stickers bear slogans like *Skate and Destroy* and *Skate or Die* accompany drawings of monsters, aliens, and Eldritch Abominations like Santa Cruz's screaming hand logo. Skateboarding's visual vocabulary, writ large,

has the tendency to assail the imposition of colonial order and respectability (Brayton, 2005; Lombard, 2010). Apache decks, shirts, and stickers take the anarchic preoccupations of skate culture's prevailing aesthetic further by augmenting them with explicitly anti-colonial assertions of Indigenous autonomy and vitality. The brand's most recognisable board, recently featured in an exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum, combines a historic photo of Apache warriors with a drawing of a grinning skull and a prescient reminder: *You're Skating on Native Land*.

Many of Miles's other designs – like *Apache Presidents* (inspired by the Hughes Brothers' seminal heist film, *Dead Presidents)* and *Apache Skateboards is a Love Machine* (which winks toward "Love Machine" by The Miracles) – highlight his appreciation for Black creatives and communities. These works showcase how anti-colonial skate pedagogies might inform horizontal solidarity building and forecast mutual futurities, thus defying the racial technologies of categorisation and segregation imposed on nonwhite peoples under the rubrics of colonial statecraft. Apaches Skateboards' artistic catalogue can be appreciated as a congealment of reflection, practice, community-building, and agency – material testimonies to the complex educative processes in which individuals and collectives critique conditions rooted in cultural genocide before asserting their kinship and survival in direct and intentional ways.

ASP is evident in Miles's previously published analyses of decolonisation, which reminds scholars and skateboarders alike that resisting colonial imposition requires an understanding that the front line is everywhere, not only in the classroom:

> There are a lot of ways to talk about decolonisation. The word decolonisation is really just a fancy way to talk about the deconstruction and/or disruption of old and tired systems…you know, [systems] that don't have much diversity — like skateboarding, they need a brand like Apache Skateboards to talk about that. And we're not just diversity, we're not checking a box — this is our life. (Koelkebeck, 2024, n.p.).

Apache Skateboards' work does not aspire to the fleeting gains associated with profit-generation, representational balance, or purporting to liberate peoples' minds by introducing them to academic jargon. Rather, the mission of Apache Skateboards emerges out of the celebration of Indigenous survivance and is actively accountable to the needs of Indigenous communities. While Apache Skateboards' ongoing practice began and remains grounded in the San Carlos Apache Reservation, it has since expanded to enfold other Indigenous communities and communities of colour. The rhizomatic and relational nature of Apache Skateboards' anti-colonial skate pedagogy accordingly demonstrates how fragmented communities can bond over shared experiences and agitate together toward collective liberation.

In addition to helping build skateparks on reservations throughout Turtle Island, Apache Skateboards regularly hosts demonstrations and artistic activations at universities, schools, and local communities. There, members of the Apache Skate Team participate in speaker panels, film screenings, skate jams, and actively model their approach to community sustaining practice. In 2024, the authors partnered with the University of Nevada Las Vegas' Porter Troutman

Jr. Center for Multicultural Education on a two-day event that hosted Apache Skateboards and the Apache Skate Team, represented by professional skateboarders Tray Polk (San Carlos Apache), Tyniesha Thompson (San Carlos Apache), Cecely Todacheenie (Diné), Savannah Chischilly (Diné), Breeze Miles (San Carlos Apache), and Lane Begay (Diné). The event, naturally titled *You're Skating on Native Land*, featured a speaker panel, film screening, beading circle, and skate demo. It also featured opportunities for local youth, community members and students, staff, and faculty to design their own skateboard decks and zines. This constellation of activities was curated in an effort to approximate ASP in microcosm. Outside of this formal curriculum, the skate team was granted free rein to skate the campus, in defiance of the several visible and plainly threatening signs (and only after Dr. Danielle Mireles, a fellow skater and anti-colonial activist, politely and fearlessly re-educated university police, in consummate skater fashion).

Apache Skateboards's deep involvement in this event was intentional. As the organisation becomes more visible to academic audiences and non-Indigenous communities, Miles has noted the need to assert authorial vigilance over how it is perceived. Miles warns academics, gallery owners, and white-owned skateboarding companies against assuming that Apache Skateboards' work is indicative of skateboarding's broader popularity in Indigenous communities. In reality, skateboarding's popularity on Native nations, and the ensuing investment it has attracted from major entities like the Tony Hawk Foundation, is very much indebted *to* Apache Skateboards and its decades of tireless advocacy. As such, we

cannot understand Apache Skateboards simply as a skateboarding company – it is a comprehensive and multi-faceted creative phenomenon rooted in responsibility to Indigenous communities. On social media, Miles has previously gone on record to state that:

> [due] to its love affair with Eurocentricity, academia is oblivious to why Apache Skateboards is important. They can't conceive how Apaches in community could lead, create, build impact on Indian country outside of academia, media or 501 C-3 culture (for 20 years).

Pale attempts to whitewash or exclude our contribution to art, community and culture in favor of gimmickry, trend or spectacle is apparent. We make observations too: Academia doesn't make new cultural shifts, we do (Miles, 2024).

At the same time, Apache Skateboards cannot be pigeonholed as a narrow operation that only serves a small community. Apache Skateboards' diverse team represents numerous Indigenous communities along with gender identities and ages, challenging the stereotype that skateboarding is a subculture that belongs solely to young white men. In the elder Miles's words, "I decolonized the skate industry. We wanted to create a brand that Indigenous kids could be proud of. Representation matters but good representation matters even more" (60 Second Docs, 2020, n.p.).

Douglas Miles Jr. exhibits a similarly relational understanding of his numerous roles as a skateboarder, community leader, and subcultural insider. Instead of focusing on individualistic pursuits like securing lucrative sponsorships from skateboarding companies, Miles primarily uses his status as

"the rez skateboarding expert" to create opportunities for Native youth. Miles's ASP underpins the *Apache Passion Project*, a grassroots initiative he leads and whose mission is to expand skateboarding on the rez:

> Skateboarding is the fastest growing "sport" on Native reservations. Most of our communities do not have spots or parks we can skate. We are taking the initiative and raising funds to build skateparks and ramps in our communities and neighbouring towns.
>
> These funds will go directly to building skateparks and DIY skate spots for the younger generations to come. Most people continue to leave us out because we are not into mainstream sports but we love what we do and want to help others too. (Lerner, 2021, n.p.)

The Apache Passion Project demonstrates the younger Miles's priorities – he has largely opted to leverage his notoriety and standing to create sustainable creative outlets for Indigenous youth, a mission that notably extends beyond skateboarding:

> When kids go here to skate, this isn't only going to create skateboarders. This park is going to create filmmakers and it's going to create photographers, it's going to create business owners, it's going to create social media people (Lerner, 2021, n.p.).

Miles Jr. recognises that the skatepark's communal functions might also offer Apache youth the resources needed to pursue self-defined learning goals and a wide array of creative, social, and professional competencies. Miles's version of skate culture transforms it from a largely solitary

pursuit into a catalyst for systemic change that emerges from the self-directed actions of Indigenous youth. The Apache Passion Project, in this manner, functions as an anticolonial pedagogy because it emphasises the autonomy of Indigenous people themselves, in direct refutation of colonial approaches to Indian education that use the technologies of teaching and learning to obfuscate a mission of eradication, assimilation, and the imposition of dependency on settler welfare (Grande, 2015; Yellowhorse, 2020; Romero & Yellowhorse, 2021; Romero, 2023).

Through skateboarding, art, and activism, Apache Skateboards, its founders, and its riders demonstrate how decolonising pedagogies trouble "the ways colonist ideologies become normalized within national discourses and internalized among minoritized peoples" (Styres, 2019, p. 32). Apache Skateboards also augments, informs, and strengthens the work of organisations like Unity Skateboards, Skate Like a Girl, Skateistan, Pushing Boarders, Slow Impact, and other Native-owned brands like Lakota Skateboards and Wounded Knee Skateboards. These collectives all work within local contexts to create physical and figurative space for people from under-represented communities in skateboarding. What makes Apache Skateboards revolutionary, in other words, "is the fact that the skate industry is pretty much a white dominated industry, but we are the longest standing Native American skate group, skate brand and skate company…we are constantly working, doing demos, consultation events, community building, skatepark planning, art projects, design projects, branding and co-branding — all in the last 20 years" (Koelkebeck, 2024, n.p.).

For Apache Skateboards, anti-colonial skate pedagogy means staying engaged and providing opportunities for Indigenous youth to articulate and advance the goals they create for themselves, in real time. ASP is a means for safeguarding and sustaining Apache futures. While the photographers, researchers, journalists, and curators will come and go, the Apache Skate Team will continue skating, creating art, and securing Apache self-determination on Apache terms. The anti-colonial skate pedagogy of Apache Skateboards also underscores the fact that the Apache people *have been and always will be*.

Conclusion

Apache Skateboards, above all, should be appreciated as a collective and community-embedded effort to exercise Indigenous autonomy and livingness in ways that are reflexive to the changing needs of real communities. This interpretation forms the crux of skate pedagogy's contributions to decolonising education, as it suggests that teaching and learning to subvert all forms of Euro-American colonialism involves pairing unceasing resistance with respectful engagement with one's community, surroundings, and self. Anti-colonial skate pedagogy shows how decolonising education is not simply a matter of instituting the 'correct' curriculum, using the most appropriate and non-offensive terms, and making teaching practices and assessment tools less oppressive, pathologising, or surveillant.

ASP shows us that decolonising education might instead be a matter of uplifting forms of learning that encourage

people to work for *the people* and reject the colonial mandates of competition, categorisation, and domination- be it over territories, bodies, industries, polities, or knowledge. Skate pedagogy shows us that developing a critical consciousness about oneself and one's surroundings requires a simple willingness to come into relation, an act of agentic association in which the skateboard might serve as a talisman and guide. On two feet, it is easy to dismiss a handrail as just a handrail, a curb as just a curb, and a human being as just a human being. Anti-colonial skate pedagogy shows that on four wheels, each of those things has the capacity to become a formidable obstacle, a catalyst for growth, and an agent of change.

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Chapter Abstracts

1 *"We belong here": Lessons from skateboarding*
 (Sander Hölsgens)

Skateboarding is like an enduring spell: as soon as you're enchanted, you'll likely be a skater for life. But what exactly is the allure of a wooden board with some polyurethane wheels? How to make sense of it? This preface traces recent developments in skate studies, including a turn to environmental, methodological, and ethical issues. The overall aim is to provide a context for the chapters that follow – particularly designed for readers who may be attracted to skateboarding in some way or shape, yet haven't been fully enchanted yet.

2 *Open-source learning communities for social skateboarding*
 (Rhianon Bader)

As the reach of skateboarding continues to extend around the world, over the past 20 years there has also been an exponential growth in skateboarding-based social and educational initiatives globally. There are now more than 750 social skateboarding initiatives operating in more than 100 countries around the world, with hundreds of these initiatives collaborating formally and informally to share their best practices and knowledge with each other. This chapter will give an overview on the scale, scope, and focus topics of open-source learning communities that social skateboarding

practitioners are engaging in both regionally and globally to increase their collective impact. Such collaborative learning exchanges have been especially strong during the Covid-19 pandemic and on topics related to inclusion, mental health, and anti-racism. This chapter will also provide recommendations for adapting collaboration approaches to increase the social, educational, and inclusion outcomes achieved through skateboarding-based programmes.

3 Skateboarding as a school subject: pros and cons
   (John Dahlquist)

Adults visiting Bryggeriets Gymnasium often say, "What a dream! I wish this was here when I went to high school". The quote implicates an adult's understanding of education and a reflection of a time when skateboarding and education were like water and oil. Today, this dream is realised at our school. Is Bryggeriets really the dream it sought out to be? This chapter sets out to investigate some of the alumi's experiences of skateboarding as part of high school education, situated in Malmö, Sweden.

4 Learning for life: Skateboarding, public pedagogy and belonging
   (Esther Sayers)

This chapter explores how skate pedagogy extends beyond the acquisition of technical skills to support the potential life-worlds that skateboarders can inhabit. The analysis contributes to an understanding of the pedagogy of skateboarding within the broader discourse of education's purpose. In this context, social pedagogies and cultural learning produce symbolic and embodied ways of knowing that help to shape

the communities to which we belong. Drawing from research with instructors, learners, skate schools, summer courses, and coaches in skateparks, I explore how a sense of belonging to the people, space, and culture in which we skate is linked to the engagement and imagination necessary to build a life of meaningful connections. This chapter proposes that collective play can lead to learning-for-life rather than simply learning for reification.

5 *Staying outside: Pedagogy, resistance, and DIY peer support amongst NYC skate crews*
  (Arianna Gil and Jessica Forsyth)

In this chapter, we use Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed as a framework to examine how New York City skateboarders understand and deal with exploitation and injustice in their communities while protecting their values through DIY (Do It Yourself) approaches, such as forming skate crews that operate organically as peer support groups. We survey the ways working class Black and Latinx/Women/LGBTQIA skate crews in particular, faced with interlocking systems of structural oppression, formed both intentional and organic peer support groups as a method to confront, navigate, and transcend the various challenges they face, including health issues and access to resources for livelihood and learning. We do so by using three NYC skate crews as examples – BRUJAS, Gang Corp, and Environmental Hood Restoration. Methodologically, we pay particular attention to data produced through anti-racist research and praxis methods employed by the Harold Hunter Foundation via multi-phase, youth-driven, community needs assessment research.

6   *Skate and collaborate: Carving spaces to create and educate through sociology, performance and interaction design, and public art*
    (Indigo Willing, Sanné Mestrom, Lian Loke, and Nadia Odlum)

This chapter, based on exploratory and applied research, emphasises the need to re-think public spaces and educate city planners and designers in ways that embrace urban play through creative sports and art, and with a priority on the expertise of women and other traditionally excluded populations. We highlight an inaugural project by the *Skate, Create, Educate and Regenerate (SkateCER)* initiative in Australia led by Indigo Willing that brings researchers from the fields of sociology, performance and interaction design, and public art together to disrupt conventional thinking on skate spaces and, more broadly, public spaces. We begin by sharing insights from our past work that include community-led change-making in skating by Willing (*We Skate QLD* and *Consent is Rad*); performance and interaction design to skateparks in Lian Loke's work (the *ElectroSK8* event); and public art that is shaped by co-designing in Sanné Mestrom's research (*ART/PLAY/RISK*) in collaboration with Nadia Odlum, which emphasises 'play beyond playgrounds'. We then introduce how *SkateCER* weaves sociological and artistic methodologies and co-design practices with skateboarders and individuals from the margins, outlining why such reflections and perspectives are vital for ensuring gender equity and social inclusion for urban play and future urbanism.

7 *Teaching skateboarding as movement literacy – feel, explore,*
   collaborate, and assess
   (Åsa Bäckström)

Why and how to teach skateboarding is at the heart of this chapter. It is important to ponder these questions as skateboarding expands into the mainstream sports realm and teaching skateboarding is used as an approach to learning many other things apart from skateboarding, such as desired social skills and cultural norms. This chapter suggests that movement literacy, with its four features of feel, explore, collaborate and assess, is a viable route to work pedagogically with teaching and learning skateboarding. The features resonate with cultural traits in skateboarding and are sufficiently open yet distinct. The chapter answers the question: what do skateboarders do, and how can we learn from them? It may be read as a pedagogical credo founded on pedagogical thinking and empirical research.

8 *Drop In Ride Out: Skateboarding in a Gestalt therapeutic setting*
   (Sophie Friedel)

This chapter explores the transformative potential of skateboarding within the framework of Gestalt therapy, drawing from Sophie Friedel's two decades of experience as a skateboarder and her use of skateboarding in therapeutic practice since 2018. Through two compelling case studies, the chapter demonstrates how skateboarding can be effectively integrated into therapy, fostering emotional well-being, personal growth, and resilience. The first case highlights therapeutic nurturing in the skatepark, creating a space where clients can express themselves freely to reconnect with their inner world.

The second introduces ramps as a dynamic variation of Chair Work, encouraging self-exploration, shifting core beliefs, and expressing one's inner world. This chapter invites therapists to explore the rich possibilities skateboarding offers for fostering meaningful change and offers skateboarders interested in therapy a glimpse into this integrative approach.

9   *Unlearning motherhood through skateboarding with a baby (in a stroller)*
     (Adelina Ong)

This chapter critically engages with the gendered expectations of motherhood while skateboarding with an infant in Singapore. Adapting from Kwan SanSan's kinesthesia for my methodology, I reflect on the choreographies of space experienced while skateboarding *with* an infant in a stroller. Skateboarding with a baby in a stroller disrupts choreographies of space and interrogates conventional, gendered constructions of motherhood in Singapore. In reflecting on skateboarding *with* the baby, I suggest that skateboarding provokes alternative approaches to parenting that can facilitate the unlearning of motherhood. I attend to the gendered narratives of falling, the visibility of motherhood when breastfeeding standing up behind a skate ramp, and parenting as a duet between skateboard and stroller along Marina Bay.

10 *Anticolonial skate pedagogy: Skateboarding as decolonising education*
     (Noah Romero and Douglas Miles)

This chapter draws from the artistic, pedagogical, and social practice of Apache Skateboards to theorise anti-colonial

skate pedagogy, an analytic for understanding how skate-boarding might function as a decolonising form of education. Apache Skateboards' work allows education researchers to understand skateboarding as a valuable form of informal education that enables minoritised people to reclaim space, achieve self-defined learning goals, dynamically practise and safeguard ancestral knowledge, strengthen their communities, and challenge the authority of oppressive institutions. Analysing skate pedagogy through this lens offers further insights into the physical dimensions of Indigenous and decolonising education, suggesting that informal and out-of-school learning experiences can enrich efforts to agitate for Indigenous autonomy.

Contributor Biographies

Åsa Bäckström is Associate Professor in Sport Science at GIH in Stockholm and at the University of Gävle, Sweden. She has a PhD in Pedagogy and has studied learning in skateboarding from various perspectives. Bäckström skated in the late 1970s but defines herself more of a researcher than a skateboarder.

Rhianon Bader (she/her) has worked on youth development, social inclusion, and sport for development for two decades. Since 2010, she has worked with the international award-winning NGO Skateistan in various roles, and currently manages Skateistan's global knowledge-sharing initiative – the Goodpush Alliance. She has been a skateboarder since 1997.

John Dahlquist, born in 1977, is a skateboard teacher and vice principal at Bryggeriets gymnasium in Malmö, Sweden. Since 2006 he has developed skateboarding as a high school subject.

Jessica Forsyth is a psychologist and co-founder/former ED of Harold Hunter Foundation. She earned her PhD from Columbia University, completing postdoctoral research training in racial health disparities at NYU School of Medicine. She has twenty years of clinical experience with diverse populations, and is currently part of an expert witness practice specialising in racial trauma.

Sophie Friedel, MA, is a Gestalt therapist from Germany with 20+ years of experience in skateboarding projects, blending education and mental health. After recovering from meningitis, skateboarding helped her to find balance again. She is the author of *The Art of Living Sideways: Skateboarding, Peace and Elicitive Conflict Transformation*.

Arianna Gil is a skateboarder from NYC and co-founder of BRUJAS, a women's skateboarding/arts collective. She earned her B.A. from Oberlin College, and has worked as a musician, critical theorist, creative entrepreneur, and director. In 2020, she co-founded BRUJAS World Syndicate, a members-based programme focused on labour organising amongst cultural producers.

Sander Hölsgens is Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Leiden University, The Netherlands. He is a co-director of Pushing Boarders, a platform and international conference tracing the social impact of skateboarding worldwide. Sander's writing on skateboarding has appeared in *Skateism*, *Vice*, and *Jenkem*. He is the author of *Skateboarding in Seoul: A Sensory Ethnography* and *Skateboarding and the Senses: Skills, Surfaces, and Spaces* (with Brian Glenney).

Lian Loke is Associate Professor in Interaction Design Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning, The University of Sydney. She curated the successful ElectroSK8 event and her work in The Tactile Playgrounds ARC funded (2024-2026) research project will explore how to design accessible playgrounds for children through co-design with the blind and low vision community.

Sanné Mestrom, Australian Research Council DECRA Fellow, Art/Play/Risk and Senior Lecturer. Her practice-led research seeks to incorporate "play" into a socially engaged practice and urban design. Her research investigates ways that art in public places – and urban design more broadly – can become critically integrated, inclusive spaces.

Douglas Miles (San Carlos Apache-Akimel O'odham) is a painter, printmaker, curator, writer, muralist, public speaker, director, and the founder of Apache Skateboards and the Apache Skate Team.

Nadia Odlum is an artist from Sydney, Australia, whose practice explores the material language and everyday practices of urban space and PhD Candidate, The University of Sydney. She is also the Research Assistant for the ART/PLAY/RISK project, led by Dr. Sanné Mestrom.

Adelina Ong is an independent applied performance researcher who has been working with young people from low-income families in Singapore (2003 to present) and London. Her practice is inspired by placemaking practices like skateboarding and Death Cafes. She has published in *TRI* and *Research in Drama Education (RIDE)*.

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Skate/worlds brings together writers, educators, researchers and social workers who use skateboarding as a learning tool. Can skateboarding be a school subject? Is it therapeutic? Why do skaters learn to move sideways? What do you learn from falling and failing? And how can skateboarding help parents with raising newborns?

This volume chronicles how we can learn to skate and learn from skateboarding – zooming in on topics including gestalt therapy, high school education, open-source learning communities, DIY peer support, care work, motherhood, anticolonial pedagogy, and grassroots advocacy.

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