

Spring 2020

Skateboarding, Space and Subculture: Indexing Skated Spaces and Their Urban Implications

Djimon Mark Gibson
Bard College, dg6533@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020



Part of the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Gibson, Djimon Mark, "Skateboarding, Space and Subculture: Indexing Skated Spaces and Their Urban Implications" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 179.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020/179

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Skateboarding, Space and Subculture: Indexing Skated Spaces and Their Urban Implications

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Interdivisional Studies
of Bard College

by
Djimon Gibson

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

Acknowledgements

To my parents for their unending support throughout this whole college thing, 'cuz I ain't first gen and I won't be the last; to Shernet, Nadine and Wayne; to my brother, Malcolm, to Maddy for backing me through the worst of it, to my SPROJ advisor Peter Klein for his insight; to Jen Triplett for her guidance; to Jane Smith for helping me hit the ground running; to Luke, Nate and Eli for going skating with me when I was up here; and to all the friends, homies, peers, pals, tutors, professors, librarians; studio monitors, TAs, neighbors, Tiv Gen cashiers and coworkers here at Bard who showed me more than a good time. 98 forever.

”Generations reared under California’s staring sun and snow-free temperate temps can guzzle cheap imported beer and train for the Olympic Contest all year round, rich with spots and pools and parks all over the place. Denizens of crumbly urbanaties like New York and Philadelphia enjoy doing their tricks against the appealing architectural densities that power some of the world’s most important t-shirt brands. In America’s Pacific Northwest, fever-dreaming hellriders scooped and shaped ever-gnarlier concrete bowls, waves and swirly whirls into breeding barns to populate the ATV era.”

Boil the Ocean blog, “The Rise of Hazzard County,” boiltheocean.blogspot.com

Introduction	2
Skateboard Academia	7
Research Methods and An Outline of the Rest of the Project	13
Chapter 2	15
The Abstraction of Human Space: How Modern Understandings of Space Beget Modern Activity	15
Constant Reproduction: The Cultural Origins of The “Transgressive Skate Spot” and Its Position in US Urban Politics Today	21
The World, Remade in Skater’s Vision: The Skatepark as Purpose-Built Space, a Reproduction of Urban Space and an Urban Corral	25
Chapter 3: The transgressive skate spot: Inner-Structures Create a New Public Common	29
Chapter 4: The Skatepark: Purpose-Built Space That Incubates and Isolates	34
Chapter 5: The Hybrid Skate Spot: Sanctioned Reproduction Through Legal Discussion	42
Conclusion: We’re All A Part of the Land Market	46
References	48

Introduction

Before leaving school for my mother's apartment in the Bronx on Fall Break weekend, I make tentative plans with a recently graduated Bard friend to meet up and skate. When I am in the city, Nate will bring me along with his skate friends to a space with obstacles worth skating and minimal interruption from legal authorities, pedestrians or other skateboarders. The list of skateparks, skate spots, plazas, and so on — is not short, so we have many options to practice our maneuvers. Regardless of those opportunities, on the day of, Nate is too hungover to skate and I head to Brooklyn Borough Hall alone.

In skateboarding, public buildings are often tread by skateboarders not only for their architecture but the circumstances of their management. In New York City, the Greek-revival style of courthouses and other large-scale public buildings lends to plazas made of great ground, ledges, stair sets and other obstacles preferred by skaters. Further, if you roll up on the weekend, you will rarely be kicked out — forced to leave by building security or the police. Hence, resembling the *flaneur* and the “urban pathology” of a graffiti artist or a homeless person, I can push my skateboard around Borough Hall's sprawling granite, grinding metal trucks against the building's stairs and curbs, weaving through groups of pedestrians and, on that day in particular, workers packing up the awnings from the Sunday farmer's market. To think that I could reproduce the experience I had skateboarding in a designated space would not be entirely incorrect. Coleman Skatepark, known colloquially as “LES,” has a better variety of obstacles. Riverside Skatepark is much closer to my mom's apartment, at 30 minutes by skateboard.

McCarren Skatepark, in the armpit of gentrified Brooklyn, is a great spot for people-watching.

Why “street skate” with an array of parks from which to choose?

A skateboarder uses a skate park by following the intentions of its architects. A skateboarder uses the ‘streets’ by producing their own space from everyday urban places. Chiu (2009) notes that street skaters identify what they need from their environment and then seek those niches out in their environment (p. 32). On that Sunday over Fall Break, I decided I wanted to skate granite curbs and do tricks over grates in the ground and decided that desire was accommodated by the architecture surrounding Borough Hall. Space and the social actions that occur in them define each other (Tsikalas, Jones, 2018, p. 58). Further, there is a higher cultural value among skateboarders for street skating. Beyond the physical restrictions of the playground-like skatepark space or the limitations of their designs, the “rich experiences” of street skating — engaging with the city as a “modern flaneur,” traveling between a seemingly endless set of obstacles, “exploring unknown lands and deserted places” (Chiu, 2009, p. 34) — lend street skating a popularity that is reproduced in skateboarding’s media. “Skaters find places to skate, document it and put the edited content in magazines, on DVDs and on the web,” writes Snyder (2012, p. 320). Street skating is recorded and presented in photo or video form typically to promote products that those who perform the tricks endorse. “Similar to scholars who stand on the shoulders of giants,” he continues, “skateboarding tricks are done in the context of the subculture.” Here, Snyder uses “skateboarding tricks” to describe the contributions of professional and amateur skateboarders to that aforementioned media, but one can apply that idea to the casual skateboarder as well. I approached Borough Hall not only to enjoy the activity of skateboarding or practice my maneuvers, but to skate within the context of impressive tricks I

have seen performed there.¹ Street skating is inspired both by the unique experiences it provides and its cultural magnification in skate media.

As it entails the unregulated production of social space in places not intended for skateboarding, street skating repurposes distinct pieces of urban architecture, and the slow and steady destruction of those pieces. Grinding my skateboard's aluminum trucks, urethane wheels and wooden deck along the bottom stairs of Borough Hall's sprawling staircase with a 50-50 grind or a noslide, I incrementally wear their granite structure away. The mere performance of maneuvers like those often requires a surface be rubbed smooth and made slick, typically with tools one acquires at a hardware store and paraffin wax. Sometimes, skateboard wheels can leave distinct marks by rolling across surfaces, like walls, Jersey barriers or even the ground. These physical remnants of street skating are one of the reasons it is unsightly to urban managers — public officials, parks and recreation professionals, private businesspeople, and so on — those who, as Howell (2008) describes, determine what will be built and what will be regulated, at a municipal level (p. 476). Not only does street skating incur the damage of property to which skateboarders do not exclusively hold access, it often disrupts the intended purpose of spaces. Howell (2001), in another essay, describes his disparate experience in downtown San Francisco as an office worker and a skateboarder.

An office worker contributes his labor and ensures the functioning of the city; an office worker is productive. A skateboarder, on the other hand, gets in people's way and chips up benches; a skateboarder is destructive. Given that the downtown is zoned for commercial use, it is clear why the design of open space should consider an office worker a member of the public and a skateboarder a nuisance (p. 2).

¹ Namely, [this clip from James Sayres and Tom Gorelik, based in the plaza](#). You can do a lot with smooth, sprawling spaces.

From here, one can observe one reason street skating presents an interesting issue for urban managers. The skatepark is one strategy to mitigate this misuse of space.

The skatepark, as a space where skateboarding is legally sanctioned with intentional architecture, is both an alternative to street skating, and a space to train certain techniques. The typical designs of contemporary skateparks are a weaving of two concepts. One end is the original, transition-based architecture, ramps that harken to the empty pools and “first-wave,” pre-street skating park design (Vivoni, 2009, p. 140). The other reproduces the furniture of the urban downtowns and other open spaces used by street skaters: benches, ledges, handrails and so on. These two strains of architecture call for distinct techniques, but these spaces lend to the mixing of those techniques by their users. In turn, for users, a skatepark could replace the necessity of street skating, and provide unique architecture unavailable in unspecialized urban spaces. This service can then be thought to diminish the byproducts of street skating urban managers do not like. The skatepark will not eliminate this alternative spatial practice, for the aforementioned reasons of street skating’s unique nature, and the reliance of mainstream skateboarding on it. Vivoni (2009) argues that skateparks “both marginalize skateboarders from city centers and serve as training grounds for appropriating urban spaces (p. 145); as they keep skaters, typically youth, from ‘misusing’ public and private spaces, skateparks have given generations of their users the tools to leave those spaces and perform that same misuse. Urban managers face an interesting catch-22; how can they appease skateboarders and their advocates, without alienating those who do not necessarily want skateboarders to occupy the spaces they

oversee? The latter group, other urban managers, make public and private efforts to diminish street skating, to conflicting effect.²

I look to New York City to further explore this question, as I grew up as a skateboarder there. The solution to that catch-22 seems to be ‘build a ton of cutting-edge skateparks.’ Of the results of a Google search for ‘New York City skateparks,’ ten are public parks, built in the last decade by a leading skatepark design and construction firm. These spaces span every borough but Staten Island, and they have arrived in neighborhoods at different points in the processes — gentrification, general urban development, and so on — through which urban managers extract capital from the land market. McCarren Skatepark, as it is a feature of the eponymous park between Greenpoint and Williamsburg, exists in a distinct context from Riverside Skatepark in Concourse, Bronx, which is down the street from Yankee Stadium.³ It is within reason to assume that skateparks in New York City are constructed for reasons besides the creation of sites of social engagement. The skatepark projects must be pursued in response or in prediction of urban development, as both the spaces and the presence of skateboarders have shown to impact the urban land market. My research is an effort to explain why urban managers, both public and private, would have skateparks like these built, and how the most recent wave of skatepark construction is the product of skateboarding’s history.

Scholars of comparable cases have observed several different purposes to skatepark construction. The first is a clear one: effort to “corral” skateboarders, motivating them to

² That park surrounding Brooklyn Borough Hall, where skateboarding is legal and in 2017, the park’s ground was surfaced “to ensure that bicycles, skateboards, and strollers [could] smoothly move across the park,” Borough President Eric Adams had those granite stairs blocked with big planters and astroturf carpet. (Offenhardt, Charles, 2019).

³ Which WorldAtlas.com lists as the second most expensive sports stadium on Earth.

abandon street skating the surrounding neighborhood and obey that neighborhood's restriction of street skating. Further, the skatepark can aid the commodification of skateboarding as a subculture, which helps urban managers incorporate the activity into urban development, a la the bohemians and creatives of the first parts of gentrification (Howell, 2005). The presence of skateboarders can also "maintain order" in surrounding areas, reducing petty crime and displacing homeless populations (Howell, 2008, p. 485). Howell often writes of skateboarders as the "broom" or "shock troops" of gentrification, explaining in an interview in British skate magazine *Free* that urban managers use skaters to sweep out the "lower rung," only to be swept out themselves (Derrien, 2018). This framing shaped my assumptions as I began my research. Are the 'dustbins' of New York City's development its skateparks, where skaters are confined to provide urban managers the same benefits they brought as street skaters with neither the antisocial downsides of misuse nor the freedom they previously borrowed? Though my project's scale widened beyond the city, this viewpoint began it.

Skateboard Academia

Within "skateboard academia," there are common understandings of the contemporary source of the skatepark and the skating-sanctioned public space. The more prevalent are few. The first, most common understanding of the skatepark is as a response to community demand, proposed by advocates and skaters themselves. Skateparks provide users regardless of age, gender or skill level a "safe, low-cost place" to engage in recreation with little need for the supervision of outsiders. The nature of their approval, design and construction process often provoke civic engagement among municipality community members who otherwise take no part

(Morello, 2014, p. 67-68). The skatepark is one solution to the fear of ‘the gathering of youth’ observed in urban managers, typically assuaged with sports (Chiu, 2009, p. 37)

Another understanding is the skatepark as the corral (Tsikalas and Jones, 2018, p. 56), a purpose-built space meant to contain youth from participating in improper, unsafe or prone-to-liability-lawsuit activities (Howell, 2008, p. 477-478). This view often leaves skateboarders dissatisfied (Chiu, 2009) (Borden, 2001). This concept can be employed to solve apparent societal issues, such as the fear of the gathering of youth. Chiu writes that it,

leads to the creation of skate parks that set up an environment of discipline and order as well as a capitalist form of cultural consumption, thus changing the nature of free public space. Society does not support groups of teenagers gathering around public space unless they are engaged in sports, such as basketball or soccer. The provision of skate parks follows this logic to identify skateboarding as a sport. (2009, p. 37).

This environment of “discipline and order” is alienating, for more than the youth. Making skateboarding a sport brings those who partake into the “extremely rational world that they are told, as young adults, they must live and participate in” (Borden, 2001, p. 168) from which skateboarding afforded them an escape. “The city has created skateparks and skate camps and has enacted skate bans to control order in and functions of public space” in an effort to confine skateboarders and maintain the city as spaces designed with overt, pre-planned purposes a la de Certeau’s property city (Chiu, 2009, p. 37). As a subject of Chiu’s research remarked at the since-demolished Hudson River Skate Park, “Every skate park is like a cage” (Chiu, 2009, p. 38).

These arguments place skateparks within the discourse of the privatization of public space, in that they reveal the manner in which ‘the city,’ as an amalgam of public and private leadership, work to further regulate public space. If skateparks are built to draw the nuisance of

skateboarders away, the next inquiry should seek out why that nuisance needs to be removed. Much of that answer resides outside of ‘skateboard academia,’

In the hands of the urban manager, who oversees every aspect of skatepark construction, skateparks are built to do more than provide a recreational space or keep skateboarders off the streets. They can also apparently give users a contemporary civics lesson, as both a service or an effort toward social control. In recent history, the capitalist world has turned to the free market, around which it governs its people accordingly. This ethos, which I will refer to as ‘neoliberalism’ throughout this paper, is a “vision of a free economy and a minimalist state.” It is prevalent in policymaking in the United States at the state and municipal levels. Public agencies, including those who manage urban and recreational space (e.g., skate spots and skateparks), are run like businesses, and they make an effort to endorse entrepreneurial success in which their ideals resound (Howell, 2008, p. 477). Skatepark advocates, harkening to the neoliberal social values to which urban managers subscribe, promote the spaces as incubators of personal responsibility (ibid, p. 478), “self-supervised, self-maintained, and self-policed” (ibid, p. 484) and places where ‘skate at your own risk’ liability laws force any user to hold themselves accountable, (ibid, p. 492). These skateparks are even paid for through “public-private partnerships” (ibid, p. 483) that are emblematic of neoliberal public management (Scofield, 2019). The skatepark is a symbol of a managerial approach that has defined contemporary times; hence, even skateboarders engage with that approach to advocate for the spaces.

These ‘lessons’ skateparks provide do appear to work, as skateboarders themselves have worked with urban managers to sanction reclaimed space. One author, Chiu, argues that skate culture affixes those who partake in it an understanding of the entrepreneurship ‘neoliberal’

urban management endorses; skaters can then leverage that approach to create and protect their spaces (2019, p. 463). This phenomenon can be seen in the proliferation in illegally built skateparks that later gained sanction through a strategy of advocacy that speaks in the language of the urban manager. Skateparks incepted in this fashion span “Seattle, Portland, Philadelphia, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Oakland” (Howell, 2008, p. 485). Each space was informally claimed by skateboarders, who later organized and worked with urban managers to afford a form of access, to typical success. In every case, skaters were “praised for their initiative and voluntarism” by public officials. These figures seek to benefit from attaching themselves to successful entrepreneurial activity, regardless of its legality (Howell, 2008, p. 486), as “entrepreneurship is a capitalist endeavor embraced by and embedded within neoliberal urbanism” (Chiu and Giamarino, 2019, p. 482). Another point of leverage in these cases is the extensively recorded deterrence of petty crime; Howell cites 11 sources when he discusses this topic in his “Skatepark as Neoliberal Playground,” (2008, p. 485), exploring the phenomenon as it arose in Philadelphia’s Center City in another paper (2005). The concept is also discussed by Chiu and Giamarino (2019, p. 470), and Vivoni (2009 p. 136). Efforts like these, of civic engagement among skateboarders as a group, bring them skateparks at the cost of injecting “ideals of acceptable citizenship — the acceptance of surveillance, self-policing of order” into skate culture. Street skating continues to be criminalized and public space privatized, and skateboarders are moving into the civic realm by ‘adopting’ “neoliberal discourses” (Chiu and Giamarino, 2019, p. 470). As the public sector positively engages with skateboarding because of its entrepreneurial nature, the private exploits its creative image to extract capital from the land market while the public sector acquiesces its demands for the regulation of public urban space.

Even in cases of consistent civic action among skateboarders, advocates, lobbyists and the like, the desires of the skater as a user of space can be exploited without true accommodation. In his 2005 journal article, “The ‘Creative Class’ and the Gentrifying City: Skateboarding in Philadelphia’s Love Park,” Howell uses Philadelphia’s John F. Kennedy Plaza, or Love Park, as a case study in the use of street skateboarders as means to “stimulate urban growth.” Building on Borden’s argument that street skating presents a critique of “modernist space,” in that the activity asserts “use values as opposed to exchange values,” Howell argues that the urban managers of Center City, Philadelphia have turned that critique into an “instrument of development” (p. 32-33). At one point, to the urban developer, skating, like graffiti or the presence of homeless people, presented no obvious exchange value. In Love Park’s path from white-collar lunch place to refuge for homeless people to major skate hub into some amalgam of all three, the developer found a way to profit. Howell uses the city’s public policy documents and urbanist works on gentrification to argue that skaters, as users of Love Park and “some kind of individualized labor,” produced “surplus value [in the land market] by leading the reclamation of the space” from the homeless populace. Built in 1965, the plaza “hosted a vibrant public life” that was “well-integrated in terms of class.” With the “deep cuts to both public housing and programs for the mentally ill” of the 1980s, the space became defined by the presence of those protesting City Hall’s adoption of Reagan-era policy, those undercut by the loss of social programs and skateboarders, drawn by its sprawling smooth concrete, granite ledges, stairs and handrails (p. 33). The skateboard industry, by associating its profitable, creative image with the plaza and deterring the homeless, delivered a Love Park once abandoned by urban managers “in a new, marketable form;” and market it they did, even after banning skating in the entire city in 2000.

Skateboarders occupied the very bottom rung of the ladder from which they had tossed a homeless and underserved population (p. 40-41). Though the skateboard industry took strides to prove skateboarding's worth on paper, and even got the city to acknowledge that its activities at Love Park "served as cultural, economic and competitive catalysts for further development of the declining city center" (Chiu and Giamarino, 2019, p. 468), the city of Philadelphia did not, in turn, accommodate or even legalize skating in the space. Adopting those 'neoliberal discourses' does not always work. Pairing a case like Love Park's with the observed tendency for skateboarders to regulate their spaces to the benefit of nearby business (Howell, 2008), and one could observe that example of New York City's boom in skatepark construction as an effort to reap the benefits of skaters as a 'creative class' in gentrification processes while weaning them from street skating entirely.

Skateparks have been observed as the aforementioned 'training ground' of street skating; explorations of the dedicated spaces as sources of disinclination for that spatial practice seem less prevalent. Holgens, examining an unwillingness to street skate among skatepark users in Seoul, South Korea, argues that the city's skaters "favor the familiar contours and outlines of the skate park;" the city is "unhomely," and those experiences unique to skateboarding, as an unorthodox way of using urban space, are not sought out (2019, p. 15). Seoul's skaters do not seek to build new meaning in zero-point space — the architecture that "states coldly what it is" — they see skateboarding as a sport (Borden, 2001, p. 190). There, the activity is highly formalized, and the actions that one partakes within it are site-specific (Holgens, 2019, p. 15). These spaces are typically sited near other public recreational facilities (ibid, p. 9), as they are in the United States (Howell, 2008, p. 476). Users train in the traditional sense, as skateparks are

marketed as “training sites” for contests, “recreational spaces,” or “sports facilities, rather than as spaces that propose new spatial conceptualizations for skateboarding” (ibid, p. 10). This approach negates that contradiction that skateparks present developers in the US, where the spaces confine skaters somewhat but do not mitigate street skating (Vivoni, 2009, p. 145). In Seoul, the cultural precedent for street skating did not carry across the Pacific when the skateboard did, because the skatepark is ample accommodation. Perhaps efforts towards establishing social control in urban space use bring this sort of cultural shift to a dense, American city with historical significance to skateboarders, such as New York City.

The public and private sectors have been working in tandem, privatizing public space and ameliorating that loss with purpose-built space. The skateboarder may become the ‘acceptable citizen,’ leaving the authentic cultural trappings of their activity behind as they ‘enter’ society as they leave behind street skating, with which they stepped outside of the ordained purposes every space is affixed.

Research Methods and An Outline of the Rest of the Project

The next chapters of my project will gather and discuss the results of my research. Chapter 2 will establish the sociological framework through which I will observe the ‘ideal’ spaces where skating happens. Focusing on the investigations of capital and urban space of Henri Lefebvre, I will demonstrate philosophical motivations for skaters and urban managers as actors. Further, Harvey Molotch’s conceptual “growth machine” is another frame through which the actions of these groups will be investigated. The ensuing chapters will expand on each of those types. Through a review of skate academia, skate media and relevant media, index the historical

origins of the street spot and the skatepark, discuss their subcultural relevance and observe the harmony and discord between skaters and urban managers.

This project is ultimately an effort to index the distinct ways that skateboarding can manifest in contemporary urban spaces, finding a place and even taking part in systems of exploitation and capital extraction from the land market. From its findings, one can look towards tide-shifts in urban public space; all urban space, regardless of ownership, has begun to resemble purpose-built space, and that purpose is typically consumption or other economic activities. If the skatepark subsumes skateboarding into straight-up consumption, will the activity lose its critical qualities? How then will the other urban nuisances — homelessness, graffiti, unrestricted youth-gathering, so on — as byproducts of poverty, a lack of welfare, maldistribution of resources, or broken-windows viewpoints, be dealt with? How will other critical misuses of space, like protest, be dealt with? These are questions my research seeks to use skateboarding to explore. Governments throughout contemporary history have long chewed up and spit marginalized people; today, the free market does the same, in a slow and mundane manner, perhaps using useless wooden toys in the process.

Chapter 2

The framing of skateboarding as a “spatial practice” is key to understanding its position in contemporary urban society. The origins of the term illuminate urban space in its distinct capitalist form. Examining that origin story will reveal theoretical sources for the act of ‘street skating’ and its legislation.

The Abstraction of Human Space: How Modern Understandings of Space Beget Modern Activity

Human society began in what Lefebvre calls "absolute space." It was "made up of fragments of nature" that once consecrated, lost the qualities that drew humans to consecrate them. Society then parsed the remaining aspects of nature with "ceremonial requirements: age, sex... fertility" (1991 p.48). The “spatial practice” of the ancient city was the creation of a new “appropriated space,” constructed from practices that engaged within the interweaving of human-made and natural space (p. 31). In Lefebvre's eyes, this manner of space defined pre-industrial life. Absolute space was both "civil and religious," incorporating family and relationships into the town, the city and the political state. "Out of it evolved a space which was relativized and historical" (p. 48). "[A]bsolute space is located nowhere. It has no place because it embodies all places, and has a strictly symbolic existence" (p. 236). When "the forces of history" replaced "naturalness" with the "space of accumulation" — of "all wealth and resources" — society made new spaces.

Thus, absolute space became *abstract* space: industry, art, academia and so on changed labor's purpose. It now did more than produce social space. Labor was now abstracted, and the places resembled this shift, built from hard things that stood as symbols, of "glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty" The "functioning of capitalism" became the focal point of space, and that design sought to eliminate the "distinctions" as they derived from "nature" and "time" and "originate in the body" (p. 49). What remains as a point of reference is the "family unit, the type of dwelling, fatherhood and motherhood and the assumption that fertility and fulfillment are identical." In turn, "spatial practice" typically reproduces these concepts and relations (p. 50). Further, the rarity of commodities has been flipped. Bread, once emblematic of all food in the West, is now over-produced, as agriculture has been deeply industrialized. Meanwhile, the presence of once-ubiquitous aspects of nature is dictated by development. Today, the city, as it has long appropriated nature, produces nature's elements (p. 328-329). "In the most modern urban planning," writes Lefebvre, "... *everything* is produced: air, light, water — even the land itself" (p. 329). The use value of land resides in the commodities it can produce; hence, as land in urban centers begets the exchange of capital, urban land is assessed for its *exchange* value. This setup is a byproduct of the development of abstract space, which established this emphasis.

Contemporary urban space embodies exchange value; it is built first for commerce and trade. Invoking Lefebvre, Borden observes "over the last thirty years or so, nearly all city spaces... have been increasingly 'mallified' as opportunities for retail expenditure" (2019, p. 225). Lefebvre notes the new commercial nature of the city center in his *Writing on Cities* (1996). "These [urban] cores survive by transforming themselves" he notes, becoming "a high

quality consumption product for foreigners, tourists, people from the outskirts and suburbanites.” In turn, “[t]he aesthetic qualities of these urban cores play an important role in their maintenance” (p. 73). The themes of these observations ring throughout ‘skate urbanism,’ theming several articles (Howell, 2001) (Howell 2005) (Chiu 2019) (Tsikalas and Jones 2018) (Snyder 2012) and related media. The skateboarder, especially the street skateboarder, is not a consumer or laborer, and she brings little to urban space, in the eyes of certain managers (Borden 2019, p. 231). The skateboarder neither takes part in the “consumption of place” Lefebvre sees as the lifeline to the continued existence of public urban space (1996, p.73) or the production of any labor. Instead, the skateboarder produces “energies” that embody play and pleasure (Borden 2019, p. 224), sticking out in spaces dedicated to production, consumption and complacency.

Though its ‘energies’ upset the fabric of contemporary urban space, skateboarding is not an inherently revolutionary act, nor does it often lead to major political action. The events and developments the activity brings about are sometimes inadvertent. The cries of protest about the several-times-mentioned removal of skaters from Center City, Philadelphia’s Love Park embodies this semi-effectiveness. “[W]e gave it life,” lamented professional Ricky Oyola in 2002. “We gave it to where people could walk by and not feel scared because you got these little scrawny kids on skateboards here next to these fuckin’ big time drug dealers” (Howell 2005, p. 40). Here, “life” as Oyola cites it, required the removal of the “drug dealers” and the homeless populations that had occupied the park prior. The ambient presence of skateboarders shaped the social makeup of the plaza, making the park an appealing space again for consumers. This effect, however, was not the initial intention of those skateboarders, though it has been an effective bargaining chip in other skate space issues with urban management.

Skateboarding re-emphasizes the use value of urban space while holding stakes in the aspects of capitalism that emphasize said space's exchange value. This vagueness places the activity at the center of the socioeconomic conflicts Lefebvre observe in urban centers. In the city "action is exercised over specific conflicts," he writes, listing those between use and exchange value, the "mobilization" of wealth and investment, and the accumulation of capital and its squandering (1996, p. 68). These conflicts have long determined urban development. In the US, they have shaped skateboarding culturally in their direct influence on materials and design of street furniture. One can gather a conceptual understanding of them by parsing urban centers through Logan and Molotch's theory of the growth machine. They observe cities where developers work together as groups of mutually interested urban managers within the land market to ensure that capital can be extracted from urban space at an exponential rate. Under the influence of these managers, the construction of new businesses, homes, transportation infrastructure, labor opportunities and so on contribute to a procedural increase in rent and land value (1987, p. 112-116). Land, unlike other things bought and sold, is inherently finite and is not produced. It bears a distinct necessity, however, in location. Every home, business, school, government building –US everything needs to go somewhere (p. 111). The manipulation of locational relations through urban development can ensure the constant growth of capital as money is extracted from the land itself; hence, the "growth." Cities today are growth machines; to reincorporate the use value of a space is to threaten a capital extraction process important to powerful people, as "the appropriation of found urban spaces through street skateboarding contests the given meanings of cities as growth machines" (Vivoni 2009, p. 146). This perception

of a threat by urban managers can be observed in the history of anti-skate legislation, which has existed for as long as the activity has.

“Attempts to block skateboarding are as old as skateboarding itself,” writes Borden. Skateboarding was restricted in 20 US cities by the mid-1960s. These restrictions, enforced with fines and the confiscation of equipment, followed skateboarding into the pool skating era of the 1970s, and eventually, street skating (2019, p. 228). “Today, skateboarding in public space is legislated against everywhere from Brisbane and Manchester to Quebec and the Bronx. In turn, a general fear of “arrest, penalties and even imprisonment” is in the mind of street skaters everywhere (p. 231). Institutions and urbanists cite risk of injury to skaters, (p. 229) and pedestrians and other street traffic (Howell, 2001), or damage prevention (Borden 2019, p. 231), but the legislation of skateboarding does appear a product of that aforementioned discord between use and exchange value. The trouble that illegality presents the skateboarder pales in comparison to that the political protester or panhandler experience in these exchange value-spaces. Public in appearance but often private in essence, urban public space is unwelcoming in practice to user types drawn to it for its design. As the skateboarder seeks out the hard lines of concrete, granite and metal that define modernist architecture, the panhandler and the protester seek public space for the presence of others. They are legislated against in a similar way.

The Supreme Court has established a precedent of constitutional interpretation that has decimated the concept of the public forum in the United States. An 1897 decision compared legislation against public speech “in a highway or public park” to a private home owner forbidding it in their home. A 1992 decision “followed a similar logic,” holding that a ‘public forum’ need not be upheld when the “principal function” of public spaces is disrupted. This is a

problematic management of space, as all public spaces have such a function; this idea “would be tantamount to forbidding [public expression] altogether” (Kohn 2004, p. 49-50). Kohn articulates that restricted First Amendment rights to “out-of-the-way” places spoil the nature of the public sphere, as the “spatial segregation” would produce spaces with no purpose but speech, and there would be no person doing something else with whom to interface (p. 50). Political speech may have an apparent higher value than street skateboarding, in terms of it helping uphold democracy both as a concept and in its functions, but precedents set in the legislation of both correlate with a distinct urban management that places the flows of capital over the rights of citizens, whether they are riding around or fighting for other rights. To ‘spatially segregate’ public speech is to ‘skatepark’ the activity; does the skatepark create the same spoiling of purpose? Regardless, there appears to be a group of urban managers who strive to eliminate public actions that disturb the means of extracting capital from the city, those actions that disturb those who sell their labor and buy goods and services. These actions include those of urban homeless populations. As they have “no private space, no dwelling where they can exercise sovereignty or perform the basic bodily functions that we think of as a private: sleeping, washing, sexual activity, urinating and defecating,” nearly every action of theirs is taboo, and every action is public (Kohn, p. 167). “No amount of criminalization or harassment can prevent people from performing activities intrinsic to life itself,” Kohn observes (p. 167) The nature of these actions makes legislating them difficult for urban management, but it is legislated, often in a manner similar to those of protest or skateboarding.

Constant Reproduction: The Cultural Origins of The “Transgressive Skate Spot” and Its Position in US Urban Politics Today

Skateboarding has been a means of spatial production since its very beginning, on the winding roads and banked schoolyards of 1960s California. Here emerges the production of space; Borden describes the creation of new space, up from that Lefebvre’s “abstract space” as a “central characteristic of skateboarding” (Borden 2009, p. 98). This alternative use continued through the 1970s, as skaters imitated surfers across drainage ditches, tunnels, reservoirs and most notably, kidney pools, having fun in under-utilized spaces with no explicit meaning (p. 200-201). Skateboarding began as street skating, in a way. It existed for decades before the skatepark conceptually existed, and the skatepark began as and often continues to be an emulation of those water-holding structures dried out in California’s frequent droughts. “The banks, ditches, pipes and pools were already present in the urban realm,” Borden writes, going on to describe the “urban tactics of found space skateboarding.” Spot searching, “pool-hunting” and the like became a practice vital to skate culture. 1970s California skateboarders surveyed neighborhoods for hints of a pool, by any means necessary, sometimes looking through public housing records or social engineering an answer by impersonating “house buyers, police and pool maintenance operatives” (p. 109-112). Today, skateboarders have an easier time; they can take to mass surveillance programs like Google Earth⁴ or the backdrops of internet dating profiles⁵ to snoop for spots. Regardless, these strategies predate the prevalence of the skatepark. All of these features of urban architecture remain heavily documented and sought-after reclaimed

⁴ <http://www.jenkemmag.com/home/2019/09/03/finding-skate-spots-google-earth-jake-keenan/>

⁵ https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nzxj5w/why-tinder-skate-spots-is-my-favourite-instagram-account

spaces in skate culture, even alongside the ever-developing 'street skating,' as defined by the metal and granite of dense cities (p. 114). Skateboarding began at urban sites of reclamation; the use of those sites is arguably the activity's definitive trait. One can begin to codify what I will call the 'transgressive skate spot' here.

The asphalt hills, schoolyard banks, kidney pools that defined early skateboarding history and the ledges, stairs and handrails that have since entered the fray of reclaimed urban architecture embody the 'transgressive skate spot.' This term is an effort to codify one sort of space as it is used by skateboarders. "Transgressive" describes the rule-breaking nature of the skateboarding in these spaces, legally, socially or otherwise. "Skate spot" redeploys skate lingo, a "spot" is definitive in that it is not a "park." It is a 'skate' spot in its manner of fitting the act of skateboarding, not because of the intentions of its architect(s), managers, owners, non-skating users, as a skatepark is. A key example from skateboarding's history is the aforementioned Love Park of Center City, Philadelphia, claimed by skateboarders in every sense but a legal one. Though Love stands as a solid example of what I envision as the "transgressive skate spot," the TSS need not be legislated to the degree to which that plaza in Philly was. Monsignor Del Valle Square, colloquially known as "Hunts Point Station" as it is directly above a 6 train stop of that name, is a park owned by the City of New York where one can frequently find skateboarders, often affixed to the park's 5 by 5-foot black bench. They share this space with commuters, passersby and homeless people, despite a blanket "no skateboarding" rule across New York City parks.

This type of skated urban space has a strong presence in skateboarding culture for several reasons. To the casual observer, a simple reason is the constant depiction of a transgressive use of

urban space in skate media at most levels of notoriety. In the middle of that spectrum of notoriety, skate media created ostensibly to sell niche skate products to skateboarders constantly produces this depiction. “The job of the professional street skateboarder,” writes Snyder, “is to successfully complete skateboarding tricks according to the dictates of their interests, skills and style, on urban obstacles that meet very specific criteria (2012, p. 310).” For many professionals, a street skating practice that can be properly documented is at the core of their careers. Tricks, captured in magazines and more often now, online video clips, are marketable when they can emulate the taste and ability of those that perform them. Further, these tricks exist in the context of others; those paid to skateboard are motivated to land ones that have not been completed yet. This edge drives two competitions, of sorts. In the first, professionals strive to perform tricks of higher difficulty or in a style distinct from those performed by their peers in street spaces known to consumers. In the second, they strive to discover new spaces to appropriate, in under-skated neighborhoods, in spaces where it is considerably difficult to skate illegally and so on. Both media phenomena create a landscape of emulatable and aspirational tricks, performed in spaces where skateboarding is often illegal. Further, both events overlap considerably.

Skate media is largely an emulation of the urban politics of play and reproduction that motivate street skaters on the ground. “A multiplicity of micro-, niche- and increasingly mass-media depictions have played an integral part... in skateboarding’s dissemination [and] also in the development of its values,” writes Borden, in his *Skateboarding and the City* chapter on media depictions (p. 68). He goes on to describe how the embodiment of a ‘skater mythos’ in the 1980s onward became a furtive marketing tool for those printing magazines and selling products (p. 71). Around that time, Powell-Peralta developed the first ‘company videos’ - films capturing a

company's riders and their "technical achievements, framing the skating with plot, humor and other aspects of rider's personalities that "rendered skateboarding attractive and accessible to younger audiences." As the higher production values of Powell-Peralta's videos gave way to the handheld camcorder productions of the late 1980s, company videos continued to center the ability of a team's skaters, with an accessibility built on "realism," rather than jokes (p. 84-85.) Here, skate videos, and in turn, the professional world of skateboarding became truly accessible; professionals rode alongside amateurs, specialty skate "filmmers" emerged (p. 85), and amateurs across the world mailed homemade tapes of their skateboarding to companies in pursuit of their sponsorship. This accessibility created overlapping camps of street skateboarders. There are those who seek company sponsorship by producing and those who conduct similar street skating practices that mirror those of the first group outside of the professional realm. Many skateboarders, either through aspiration, or inspiration, conduct street skating as a means of media creation. The professional skater needs the transgressive skate spot to make money (Snyder 2012) (Chiu 2019), marketing products to the consumer skater. In turn, the consumer uses the transgressive skate spot to emulate the street skating practice of the professional.

Just as media depicting the practice is accessible, street skating itself is accessible the same. The only infrastructure a skateboarder needs to partake in it is the 'everyday terrain' of the urban landscape. I have discussed media as one motivation for the constant creation and recreation of transgressive skate spots; the other is simply pleasure. Those 'energies of play' from the last section drive skateboarders to incubate what Lefebvre calls the "pleasure principle" (Borden 2019, p. 224). Lefebvre argues that what "distinguishes life from survival" for the "living organism" is the surplus of energy beyond survival some creatures have. This

energy “must be *wasted*,” and “play, struggle, war... sex” and “festival” are “coextensive” activities. The idea that these activities are each equal necessities among living beings living ‘lives’ as opposed to simple survival is present in the work of several theorists, like Marx, Schiller, Goethe and Spinoza (1991, p. 177). Ludic avenues of urban space are just bound to be ridden down.

The World, Remade in Skater’s Vision: The Skatepark as Purpose-Built Space, a Reproduction of Urban Space and an Urban Corral

The skatepark exists within these dynamics of play and media reproduction in skateboarding. The skatepark is fun, skateboarding without some of that abrasiveness. It is also a “training facility” for further street skateboarding (Vivoni 2009, p. 146) with all its illegality and social indiscretion. Even when street skating was simply the reclamation of pools, banked inclines, sidewalks and literal city streets, skateparks emulated the ‘found space’ of its users. In the 1970s, the US commercial sector accommodated skateboarding with the creation of “purpose-built venues that exaggerated the found space banks, pools and pipes (Borden 2019, p. 119). Skateboarding developed alongside the skatepark, as new forms of skateboarding emerged alongside common skatepark features, like the half-pipe. In a round-about way, the skatepark gave street skaters concepts that are at the core of their activity: the ollie and the grind. Invented in 1977 on steep skatepark ‘pools,’ the ollie began as a no-handed aerial; performers would go up the wall, and as they went over the lip, the edge of the transition, they would lift their board without touching it and turn 180 degrees to re-enter the ramp. This move eventually reached the flat ground, becoming a street-skating move in the 1980s (p. 174). The skatepark is my second

codified space; it is both an architectural celebration of the potential of skateboarding as a physical activity, and a means of defusing the critiques and damages street skating brings to public space.

The skatepark is, before anything, an urban manager's "rational response to demand for recreation space" (Howell 2008, p. 477). Like the public parks and the playgrounds before it, it is a purpose-built space constructed to the specific demands of urban constituencies. The skatepark is a 'sanctioned' space for skateboarding, where the activity is fully legal. The sanctioned skatepark, in this project's view, are spaces built intentionally for skateboarding and similar activities (e.g., BMX, aggressive inline). The difference between a skatepark and say, an outdoor gymnasium is that the skatepark mimics urban furniture, rather than a parallel purpose-built space. It, regardless of architectural intention, can stand in for reclaimed urban space, at least down to the individual tricks and movements skateboarders perform in it. Further, the skatepark also presents ramps, transitions, vertical walls and so on — constructed in ways not observable in urban architecture, but reminiscent of the California kidney pools, drainage ditches, schoolyard banks and empty reservoirs that defined early skateboarding. The ideal sanctioned skatepark as a code is a fenced-in space.

The skatepark has had a generational history. The first wave of skateparks were market-driven responses to the rising popularity of skateboarding (and in turn, street skating) in the 1970s. In 1975, California had over two million skateboarders. In 1976, it had its first commercial skatepark, and by the next year, there were more than 20. Commercial competition drove "rapid design evolution" - the linear, snake-run style of ramp construction gave way to the half-pipe, the bowl and so on - "discrete skateable elements" became commonplace by the end of

the decade (Borden 2019, p. 118-121). This change ushered in what Borden describes as the second generation of skateparks. They spanned the world, from California to the United Kingdom to Japan, culminating in more faithful recreations of backyard pools. The third generation brought concrete lips and authentic tile to the coping of these skatepark pools (p. 127). Many of these skateparks, private enterprises that charged admission, fell victim to injury liability lawsuits and became mostly insolvent by the early 1980s. In turn, skating dropped in popularity and many parks closed. Wood, a cheaper and more accessible material, overtook concrete for a moment (p. 134-141), and the skateboarder turned back to the streets.

The dissolution of private skateparks spurred street skating as it exists today, and the public skatepark, as a public/private response. When private spaces initially shut down, street skating moved on to street furniture like the ledge and the handrail, leaving a new kind of property damage and presenting new injury liability issues for private property owners (Howell 2008, p. 478). Street skating crystalized as the “urban pathology” urban managers malign it as today. In their eyes, the skateboarder became destructive (Howell 2001, p. 2), disrupting the intended purpose of public spaces, which has been increasingly commercialized (p. 3). So, in the 1990s, the skatepark became an effort to solve several issues, shared between its users (the skaters), urban managers (elected officials, private skatepark design firms, and owners of private property) (2008, p. 476). Skateboarders demand a legal space to skate and urban managers acquiesce this demand. The skatepark industry wants projects, and private property owners often want their property undamaged and properly used. The skatepark then serves several different purposes; it is a skater’s sanctuary and a corral. It is important to note that at this moment, the skatepark became a de facto public space, sanctioned by local government and funded privately.

The community typically must seek majority funding for these projects from some sort of benefactor (ibid). Howell argues that this situation is the result of an endorsement of a “bundle of qualities” in skateboarders by urban managers. He observes the skatepark in a manager’s view as “means by which to reward and encourage specific character traits in young people, principally personal responsibility, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism” (ibid). This attempt at influence is one of several ways urban managers use skateparks to enact a social control of sorts.

The others are the corralling of skaters as an urban nuisance and the general acquiescence of community demand. Skaters have long acknowledged the wants of the urban manager regarding their sanctioned spaces, and have utilized them in efforts to get parks built and protect and legalize their use of unsanctioned spaces. This cooperation and co-opting of a different political class’s expectations precedes both the funding and construction of purpose-built skate space, and the sanctioning of skateboarding in certain reclaimed spaces. The latter occurrence creates the third and final case: the hybrid.

Chapter 3: The transgressive skate spot: Inner-Structures Create a New Public Common

The transgressive skate spot is the manifestation of the desires of skateboarders. They constantly ensure the legitimacy of their new spaces by making clear what actions are allowed and which are not. 'Street skating' is the practice that takes place in these spaces. Skateboarders, once they have broken the rules by skating an unsanctioned space, create new rules within their subculture. This rule-breaking only opposes the capitalist system that built the rules to ensure the continued presence of skateboarding in these spaces, first and foremost. In fact, the reliance of skate media on both street skating and capitalist structures like consumer goods and venture capitalism creates representations that can appear hypocritical. The skateboard industry often relies on messaging that appears to 'rock the boat' but cannot bring upset too much, as it would end everyone's meal ticket. Do the tightening forces of the bottom line on those who depict street skateboarding in these transgressive skate spots negate the space's revolutionary capacities?

There were several moments in skateboarding's history where "the outsider" could not cross geographic lines. Spots were for locals, plain and simple. In the early 1990s, assembled crews of skaters at places like San Francisco's Justin Herman Plaza and New York City's Brooklyn Banks would 'vibe out' newcomers, with physical attacks or board theft (Borden 2019, p. 29). This dynamic stems from a defensive urge; it is the same self-policing that has been observed to decrease nearby crime (Howell 2008) (2005). An outsider, an interloper, a cop — these figures threaten a skate spot's function and resources. It was not enough to be a member of

the subculture; even an outsider within it threatened a spot's existence. The functional skate spot is a tenuous concept, even today. Spaces acquire a crowdsourced preparation, in waxed, sometimes sanded edges and cracks filled in with putty. An example of this physical part of this process is observed in Snyder's "The city and the subcultural career:"

This spot has never been skated before and work needed to be done to make it 'skateable'. Two weeks prior Aaron used a power leaf blower to clean all the debris. On the second day he marked off a spot on the ledge, painted it with industrial grade, grey primer, sanded it smooth, and then waxed it. The point of this process was to make the rough cement surface smooth so his skateboard will slide on it (2012, 307).

This is the sort of work and expense that goes into making a reclaimed space skateable (Snyder 2012, p. 307). From that point, other skateboarders could use Aaron's prep work until it wore away, perhaps patching it themselves. This is also the sort of work necessary for professional skateboarding, because, as I observed earlier, skate media is an emulation of street skating as a concept. An entire industry of product marketing through the sponsorship of skateboarders relies on the function of these skate spots. Often, those skateboarders, filmers and photographers were members of those hostile crews. So, if one were, say, to alert authorities or property owners or concerned citizens to the improper use of a space, they could affect people's incomes. Beyond the capitalist risk, there is a stronger mutual desire to ensure skateboarders and like-minded individuals a common space. Skate scenes appear to have moved on from its 1990s cliques — they now embody a diversity and friendliness at odds with the alienation innate to urban life (Borden, p. 30) — but self-policing as an evasion of external policing continues.

The policing of peers is a tactic among several skaters employed to ensure their presence in reclaimed space. The other tactics range from simple, like the evasion of police and private security to a tad corrupt, like when Chiu reports New York City skateboarders bribing security

guards for more time in corporate plazas (2009, p. 37), to civic, like Chiu's observations of grassroots activism around the legalization of skating in certain spaces. They are mostly outward, in direct conversation with the actions of those who manage these reclaimed spaces. Self-policing is inward. This nature defines the nature of the transgressive skate spot, constructed by its users.

A skater's reproduction of space through street skating is a direct subversion of architectural authority. Street skating operates within the context of Foucault's idea that architecture itself is not freeing or oppressive, it instead being the actions of those who govern it that free or oppress its users. The thinker describes the failures of projects to ensure freedom, citing the designs of Le Corbusier and Jean-Baptiste Godin as incomplete efforts. Godin's industrial communities emphasized "the power of ordinary workers to participate in the exercise of trade, embodying their autonomy..." But everyone could see everyone at all times — in that flaw resided the potential for oppressive practice. "Liberty is a practice," he argues (1984, p. 245). In turn, oppression is also a practice. Public spaces today are built to ensure the open access of people as consumers, rather than citizens; skateboarding in these spaces takes advantage of the potential for them to be freeing, rather than oppressive. Skateboarding, in practice, reintroduces liberty to spaces defined by different concepts.

This liberty is one for skateboarders and their activities, and is not inherently an urbanist one. For example, the aforementioned 1990s Love Park 'chilling effect' skaters brought that pushed out the homeless populations. The pool culture of the 1970s introduced "barging:" "a single session until the irate owner or police arrived to throw skaters out" (Borden 2019, p. 112). Barging is a lasting method of street skating, as it has been taken to corporate plazas, indoor

shopping malls and in the San Francisco/Bay Area, the exteriors of row houses. It's prevalent in places with contested, virulent housing markets like San Francisco or New York City. Video features from projects like SF's GX1000 or the Supreme clothing brand feature skateboarders treating people's houses with the same disregard they bring to plazas and abandoned industrial space. These skateboarders in turn, treat homeowners as they do police and private security, with aloofness and hostility. The GX1000 video, released through Thrasher's online channel in 2016, opens with an Al Davis line that ends with a trick over a person sleeping on a ledge, cutting into a clip of someone spraying the crew's name along an industrial wall some 12 feet tall.⁶⁷ This incident is a prime example of the regressive aspects of street skateboarding: any impediment to your skating, be it a source of income, pleasure or both, is an obstacle to surpass, be they a homeless person, a low-wage worker or a renter in a bad market. The nebulous damage that skate media then captures is magnified by street skating's marketing value. This approach to public space features in the skate videos of Supreme, a luxury brand in which the Carlyle Group invested some \$500 million in private equity.⁸ Skateboarding began its reclamation of space in the empty pools of people affected by California's 1970s droughts and the country's 1970s economic downturns, and these contentions continue now within skateboarding's media and messaging itself. So, as skateboarders operate according to societal circumstances, those with which they interface do also.

⁶ https://youtu.be/suSHw02_w2s?t=13

⁷ One incident in San Francisco left a security guard permanently brain-damaged, and a member of the GX crew with an assault with a deadly weapon charge. <https://skatenewswire.com/jesse-vieira-black-rock-security-guard-assault/>

⁸ Carlyle owns majority stakes in several weapons contractors employed by US military. <https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/a25736933/supreme-carlyle-group-yemen-saudi-arabia/>

Public space advocate Margaret Kohn describes public places as “desirable” ones that “most people cannot afford to provide for themselves” or that “they prefer to share with others.” She argues that sharing space with other users encourages sympathy with them, even in spaces as simple as a busy street (2004, p. 190). These are important observations, especially in the context of classical urbanist ideas about dense cities — namely Simmel’s argument that the high-stimulation and the role of economy in city life forces its residents to adopt an alienated, rational outlook (2002, p. 12). This nature of public space — of constant visibility and inherent community, of emotional detachment and work — is not innate to street skating. Just as often as skateboarders see themselves as interlopers, they see others as outsiders. Skateboarders mechanically share space with each other first. Skate media is often packaged with this message, invoking the vaguely political ‘us-vs-them’ theme. In turn, public perception of skateboarding is often one of subversion and outlaw culture (Chiu et al, 2019, p. 3). Skateboarders within public space discourse advocate for skateboarding by invoking ideas similar to those Kohn observes. Self-policing has been adapted, as skateboarders attempt to find an acceptable way to utilize space. A dichotomy emerges here — one that I will examine closer in my ‘Hybrid Skate Space’ chapter — between those who ‘barge,’ and those who share public space. Both groups are exploited by urban managers to spur development (Chiu 2019) (Howell 2005).

Chapter 4: The Skatepark: Purpose-Built Space That Incubates and Isolates

The skatepark is a site of social control of its users by urban managers. These urban managers, though they may have different desires for skateboarding's place in urban space, they support skateparks as an effort to influence an often young and sometimes wayward group. Some managers engage with the societal association between the activity and petty crime; there is also an understanding of skateboarding as a means to better the lives of the marginalized. Hence, managers use the skatepark to both direct skating and its nuisance status to the margins of the city, and economically and socially uplift its users. These motivations make the skatepark a site of compromise. Skateboarding culture has also made a compromise, developing methods and maneuvers reliant on contemporary skatepark design. Using techniques gathered from both the streets and the half-pipes and pools of the seventies and eighties, this emergent practice has gained ground in skateboard media and contests. The latter has become increasingly relevant in mainstream media; for example, the 2021 Tokyo Olympics will hold Women's and Men's Park and Street sections. The designs for both sections are architecturally reliant on the contemporary skatepark. Beyond media presence, the skatepark invites skaters who are younger, older, and of different genders and racial groups than the average young white male; it also provides a respite from anti-skate legislation and the prep-work street skating provides. The growing popularity of this skate practice paired with the furtive intentions of those who have skateparks built has ensured this recreational space's longevity.

The skatepark began as a land market reaction to skateboarding's mid-century popularity. Private owners assumed skateboarders would pay to access spaces. In contemporary times, these spaces emerge in response to similar demand, paired with that of property owners (and urban managers with similar motives) with their own desires. The skatepark, now a public/private project, is built as a unique terrain for skateboarding, and a controlled alternative to the urban streets. The skatepark cannot, in spirit, or physically, replicate the street, which is either a cog or a spanner in the works of street skating's continued existence. The skateboarding that happens in parks and that happens in the street resemble each other in form, but not in function. No aspect of a skatepark's architecture is misused by skateboarders; skating a park operates within the architectural intention. Street skateboarders reclaim space and repurpose it. Skating a park is a distinct discipline; since they were invented, specialty styles of skateboarding that require them have remained popular. Contemporary skate competitions, a site of major earnings for skaters and major promotion for private companies, nearly always revolve around aforementioned "street" and "park" sections, both of which are reproductions of skateparks before they are of any extant architecture. The skateboarding competitions planned for the Tokyo Olympics, now postponed to 2021, are a typified example. Benefactors of contests often leave behind parks built for competition as donations to site cities. Skate culture has culturally influenced and adapted to its most widely available skatepark. Where once parks were the site of the demo, where professional teams traveled far to tour skateparks and skate among locals, documented as an addendum to the episodic release of 'videos,' they are now a space for laymen to create casual skate videos of their own.

Both skatepark advocates and critics argue that the constructions influence their users and nearby citizens. They disagree on the quality of that influence. Urban management, composed of people who seek both to appease these people and those who see skateboarding's utility as a neoliberal spur for a major youth group. Here, I use neoliberal as Howell does, referring to a set of ideals applied to governance from a local to global that pushes public agencies to "function as businesses" (2008, p. 477). I will expand on this definition, observing that 'neoliberal' also entails the conception of people as consumers before they are citizens. 'Neoliberalism' is a concept through which one can analyze government and the management of space, not a hard-and-fast explanation of post-Progressive politics. Returning to the skatepark and its social byproducts, they are seen to produce positive social development in adolescents just as they are seen to produce noise, graffiti and the gathering of youth (Borden 2019, p. 165). Skateboarding's unstructured nature is inviting to young people, as public space is often built as "adult's civic space" (Chiu 2009, p. 37), with no intended space for the young and/or transgressive. This situation, paired with what I imagine as cultural Puritanism, makes the skatepark objectionable to some people. The activities it incubates — specifically the gathering of youth skateboarding — have negative associations for citizens who expect their peers to conform to social expectations. These associations are often criminal. As Borden quotes from one concerned citizen, "If you let the skaters in, you are just opening our neighborhood to pushers, pimps, pedophiles and prostitutes" (2019, p. 165). This overt, brash critique sounds like pro skater Ricky Oyola's pleas for the "little scrawny kids on skateboards" of Love Park, who seemed to boot the plaza's "fuckin' drug dealers" in the 1990s (Howell 2005, p. 39). The concerned citizen's feelings are invoked when urban managers place skateparks in remote and marginal sites, in an effort to

avoid conflict. Though studies show otherwise, this opinion of skateboarding is prevalent and influential (Borden 2019, p. 165). In another vein, advocates argue that skateparks build stronger community ties, pushing skateboarders into the civic world of city council meetings and public outreach (ibid, p. 169). Both understandings of the skatepark, like my application of “neoliberalism,” are conceptual frameworks through which urban managers use skateparks to certain ends.

Regardless of positive or negative perceptions of skateboarding, the skatepark can prove fruitful to ensure profit for private owners and control of skateboarders as citizens. The skatepark can both corral the skater and her associated public nuisances from public space, and push her to engage with society ‘correctly.’ This potential makes the ideal skatepark a companion to urban space’s recent shift to management that seeks to bring about profit and stimulate the economy. Get skateboarders out of the streets, into the parks, where they’ll become citizens and consumers or train to compete. Likewise, the ideal skatepark also empowers the skater, as a respite from the streets, with unique, user-centered architecture with which one can either ‘train’ for the streets or use exclusively. It is a site of contention, not out loud, but in every other sense. Supporters have intersecting motivations that manifest in skatepark architecture and usage. It corrals skateboarders as an urban nuisance, caging the culture. The skatepark has become a necessity, as it presents a level of safety, accessibility and constructed landscape that is hard to find in the streets. One can observe the skatepark backed as a corral from places as remote and lowly populated as rural Alabama (Tsikalas et al. 2018, p. 55), and interpreted as such by skateboarders around the world (Chiu 2009, p. 38) (Holsgens 2019, p. 13). But some forms of skateboarding need not be corralled, as they require the skatepark. The concrete landscapes of contemporary

ones have angles and transitions that do not exist in broader urban design, besides the rooftops of Gehry designs.

"Transition" skateboarding is a skate media genre all its own, with an emphasis on stretching the limits of contemporary skatepark designs. It holds a chunk of the industry comparable to that of street skating. On the architecture of the half-pipe, the pool, and the bowl, which have been well-tread over the last three decades, professionals innovate by introducing "street techniques" to the age-old ramps, often without pads (Borden 2019, p. 151). This variance of classic techniques seems necessary to hold the attention of skateboarders as consumers. Traditional half-pipe, or vert, skating fell out of fashion within skateboarding as it grew in popularity in the mainstream. Halfpipe skating, with a presence catapulted into society by cultural objects like the X-Games and the popular Tony Hawk's Pro Skater video game series, languished in obscurity within skate media. Skaters who came of age in the nineties and early aughts refer to the fast-forward button on their VCRs and DVD players as the "vert button" (Mortimer 2015). The skatepark's omnipresence in the West come the aughts, however, create a new style for skate media to depict, laymen to imitate, and contests to judge.

This new contemporary, skatepark-reliant take on transition skating depicts a skater's mastery, risk-taking and well-roundedness; it is prevalent in skate media, in marketing to skaters and outsiders alike. Oskar "Oski" Rozenberg is Sweden's leading professional skateboarder by the numbers, winning the world championship of the Vans Park Series and being their lead athlete for Men's Park in the now-postponed Tokyo Olympics. In an interview with AP News, he remarks that, "other sports are about jumping a centimeter longer or a centimeter higher than what you did last year. But skateboarding is the opposite of that" (2020). The Swedish pro speaks

on skateboarding as a whole activity; not too long ago, however, skate contests did grade performance by distance and height. The vert skating "pad-trolls" of the eighties and nineties, as beloved late vert pro Jeff Grosso describes them, could air out of ramps much higher in the security of their helmets and other safety gear (2018, 7:07-7:25); in turn, these skaters sought to push barriers of height, number of spins and complexity. But as skateparks changed in design and become more accessible, pushing those barriers fell out of fashion. Rozenberg, a padless skater himself, describes encountering skateboarding first at Stapelbaddsparken, a park with architecture and transitions that lack any standardized ramp design (2020). The approach that these designs inspire in skateboarders has shifted skateboarding prestige further from objective analysis of performance. Raising the bar is site-specific. Less often is it so-and-so can air this high, or grind this long; instead, the skate consumer observes what has been done in what spaces, even within the skatepark. Individual spots, rather than standardized architecture, have become the proving grounds for the innovation that shapes skate media. Meanwhile, the ever-emulatable style and grace that media depicts are accessible in the skatepark.

This new skatepark paradigm is by no means universal. This design style often parallels with attempts at urban revitalization, the upfront attempts of urban managers to incur development. It may not be as prevalent outside of cities seeking redevelopment or coping with rapidly shifting land markets. Further, within skate culture, the new model skatepark has not usurped other practices. Stapelbaddsparken itself was constructed by Malmo's abandoned shipyards (Skatemalmo.se), which are emblems of the city's difficulty in transitioning from industry (Draper 2018). This park arose out of what the website dedicated to Malmo's skateboard community, Skatemalmo, describes as "plans for new coastal neighborhoods... brewing." This

take on development is common in developing neighborhoods. My original intended case studies, River Avenue Skatepark in the Bronx, Coleman Skatepark in Chinatown, Manhattan, and McCarren Skatepark in Greenpoint each arose following neighborhood rezoning or stark changes in land value. (NYC/EDC 2020) (Ali Kully 2019). But this trend does not necessitate the design, which evidences the involvement of skateboarders themselves in the civic processes that lead to skateparks. The transition-heavy, flowy-concrete style skatepark is also more expensive than other designs (Borden 2019, p. 149), so many municipalities opt for architecture that is pre-fabricated and typically metal or wood to a standard and laid about a flat surface, rather than built for the site. Conditions of this sort push people to street skate, as does skate culture at large. Rozenberg, my example skatepark-and-contest professional, is renowned for his street skating as well; he won European Skater of the Year in 2019 (*europeanskateboardawards.com*), off of the merit of both his objective and subjective accomplishments(*A Propos De Magazine* 2019, my translation). The judges factored in both his video and magazine output, depicting mostly street skating, alongside his contest standings to make their decision. ESOTY is an arguable arbiter of majority taste within European skateboarding; leading US magazine and video publisher Thrasher Magazine decides a Skater of the Year that holds similar influence. This magazine's winners often have few contest accomplishments. The leading edge of skateboard culture is not skatepark-adverse, especially given the strong presence of transition skating, but it is reliant on street skateboarding as a marketing tool and general activity.

As skateboarders seek a variety in architecture, many seek both the freedom from prohibition the skatepark provides but desire the openness and social intersection that street

skating creates. Here emerges the hybrid skate space; legislated like a skatepark but upheld by use of space by skateboarders.

Chapter 5: The Hybrid Skate Spot: Sanctioned Reproduction Through Legal Discussion

The hybrid skate spot breaks down some of the physical and conceptual walls the skatepark presents, while ensuring the approval of authority. The location of the hybrid is determined by users rather than managers, affording users more agency in their selection of locale. These spaces often hold a subcultural value that cannot be recreated with a skatepark. Users fought to ensure skateboarding's presence in the Undercroft of London's Southbank Centre, West Los Angeles's Courthouse, Montreal's Big O within the city's 1976 Olympic Complex and New York City's Brooklyn Banks, each spaces with long-documented histories within the activity (Chiu 2019, p. 462) (Borden 2019, p. 265-269). Not only do these locales hold immaterial value and stand as places of pilgrimage, they also serve users every day. Chiu notes that the Courthouse "allows skaters to build community, friendships and solidarity while progressing their skill sets and spatial repertoires," with a practice of media documentation and a presence that "continually layer the space with subcultural capital and meaning" (2019, p. 478). Skating these spaces creates the subcultural capital of street skating while ensuring skater's safety from persecution, as they are undisturbed by security personnel or police (p. 477-478). The hybrid sublimates the creative and social energies of street skating without hindering it.

The self-policing of the transgressive skate spot must change its approach to appease urban management in hybrid spaces. Chiu describes the concept of 'civil society,' as a concept at the core of the legalization process at West LA's Courthouse. There is an attempt to establish a

message of a "cognizant, responsible, self-regulated skate community" through signs posted throughout the space. This is not the 1990s self-policing of San Francisco's Embarcadero, where pro James Kelch would toss your board in the fountain if you disrespected other skaters. Instead, skaters at the Courthouse worked to police the image of skaters themselves in the eyes of the public, endorsing the idea that "a skater is/can be a mature, empathetic citizen, not a hoodlum or vandalizer" (2019, p. 485). This image is part of the new approach skate advocates must take to leverage their presence in urban space. Another is corporate partnership; Chiu argues that Nike's support of the Courthouse campaign was key to its success, not only materially, but as a legitimizing factor. This new approach is a selling point of the hybrid to urban managers.

One can see the skatepark as a concession to the demands of urban management, and street skating as a refutation. When skateboarders seek legal spaces to skate with the self-determination of the street, they must make different agreements with people in power. They point to new self-policing techniques and corporate partnership to validate their approach. The urban manager relinquishes its control over skate spaces by compromising with skater advocates, in turn, diminishing their development returns on investment. Whether skating is legalized in a courtyard built decades prior for public use, or an unused concrete lot on which people have built their own skate architecture, managers can reap the same benefits that skateparks present them — teaching neoliberal ideals and corralling skaters from other urban spaces — with less initial investment. These spaces, as existent spaces reclaimed by skateboarders, cost managers a lot less to create and maintain. As location is a subcultural and social choice, rather than an economic one, the hybrid's role in the land market is a toss-up, however it impacts development and the growth machine. Further, the hybrid spaces maintain and incubate the skate culture and

community building that street and park skating also produce. The spaces are a site of contention in that skateboarders produce them by twisting the neoliberal approach that they concede for conventional skateparks. They can stake claims in urban spaces based around their subcultural value; in turn, that value is not as easily converted into capital by urban managers.

The traditional skatepark can be seen to stifle qualities innate to skate culture as it teaches different ones, though they may appear similar. The neoliberal ideal for making money that urban managers attempt to instill in skateboarders is one of conventional entrepreneurship and mass-market consumerism. This ideal manifests differently in skateboarding culture, and that difference can stifle what skaters get from their activity. Entrepreneurship is not alien to skateboarding. Scenes rely on skater-owned local shops for products, events and social space. Brands rely on these shops for access to skaters as consumers. Skater-owned brands use their status as marketing; consumers respond positively to that image (Borden 2019, p. 54-57). There is a flavor of enterprise embedded in the culture itself and it emphasizes skateboarding as a broad community. When enterprise is invoked by the outsider urban manager, it is not as palatable. The skatepark has been observed as means to inspire individuality in an economic and social sense. Though both the skatepark and the hybrid share appeals to private entities in their establishment processes, the hybrid also endorses collective action, in this new form of self-policing. Urban managers cannot profit as well from a general 'good citizenship.'

The ideal skatepark can have sensible, interesting architecture, can be ruled with policy inclusive of a diverse group of users, can provide its community an accessible social space, but the bargains made to bring it about can still be alienating. Once a skatepark is constructed and managed as a 'contract' between managers and users, where users stay out of the streets, enter

civic life, pursue real jobs, become consumers (p. 169), it reduces user autonomy. Beyond its alienating flavor of entrepreneurial inspiration, the skatepark is inherently limiting. The corral effect impacts skaters as well, who lose spontaneity and creativity they could access in street spaces. With limited community engagement from skaters, a lot of parks just aren't fun to skate. (Chiu 2019, p. 465). I return to one of Chiu's subjects in his 2009 study, who remarked that "every skatepark is like a cage" (p. 38). The hybrid model is one attempt between skaters and urban managers to solve the stifling nature of the skatepark.

Conclusion: We're All A Part of the Land Market

The simplest thing that my research reveals is that skateboarders use space for a variety of reasons. They seek social spaces, usable architecture and sites through which they can generate income. Within their subculture, these spaces are interpreted by their degree of access. Users consider whether they'll be kicked out of a space, or which skater has landed what trick in a space, or even just what they'll do there. Urban managers, those who manage both public space and private space accessible-to-the-public, also parse the access of skateboarders to their spaces. They in turn legislate against the activity or accommodate it. But the presence of skateboarding in urban space is not a simple call-and-response, where urban managers create spaces through architecture and legislation, and skateboarders create new social spaces within them, regardless of manager intention.

Street skating as a practice works against certain capitalist intentions of urban management; namely the process of extracting capital from city land. Engaging in play without consumption is in essence a negation of a lot of contemporary urban architectural intent. The manufacturers and brands of the skateboard industry, however, force skateboarders to engage with these systems. A skater in most instances must buy a board and relevant gear to take part. This is the nature of capitalism today; a skateboard is an amalgam of commodities made into consumer products. Skate media, the marketing arm of the skate industry, uses street skating and the extralegal and illegal activities that often accompany it as a means to sell products. Some parts of the skate industry (multinational sporting goods companies especially) have the same

interests as urban management. Though the practice in its current form does diversify space use, working against urban management to further democratize space, street skating has a role in related capitalist processes.

This observation is parallel to the often-observation intentions of neoliberal influence that skateparks are often built to incur. One could also argue that skate media's use of skating in skateparks as a practice engages directly with those intentions. Bankable athletes, large competitions with television coverage and an increasing consumer base of skateboarders make the park design economically relevant, in and outside of the skate industry. As brands and business entities make money off of skateboarding's continued popularity, what entities or groups make money off the skateparks themselves? It's not a question discernable from a subcultural analysis of the space. Urban managers see skateparks in one way, the skate industry in another and skaters another, though each view overlaps. As skateboarders seek not to be controlled, but to leverage their access to space, they broker this access both with management and brands, both groups seeking profit of their own. These deals produce skateparks and other sanctioned space, but they do not solve issues pressed on by the privatization of space.

References

- Borden, Iain. *Skateboarding, Space and the City*. Oxford: Berg, 2001.
- Borden, Iain. 2019. *Skateboarding and the City: A Complete History*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
- Certeau, Michel de, and Steven Rendall. 20. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Nachdr. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Chilcote, Lee. 2016. "Skate Parks Ramp Up." *Planning* 82 (11): 22–27.
- Chiu, Chihsin. 2009. "Contestation and Conformity: Street and Park Skateboarding in New York City Public Space." *Space and Culture* 12 (1): 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331208325598>.
- Chiu, Chihsin, and Christopher Giamarino. 2019. "Creativity, Conviviality, and Civil Society in Neoliberalizing Public Space: Changing Politics and Discourses in Skateboarder Activism From New York City to Los Angeles." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 43 (6): 462–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723519842219>.
- Holgens, Sander. 2019. "Skill Acquisition and Korean Landscape Architecture: An Ethnographic Account of Skateboarding in Seoul, South Korea." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 43 (5): 368–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723519832460>.
- Howell, Ocean. 2005. "The 'Creative Class' and the Gentrifying City: Skateboarding in Philadelphia's Love Park." *Journal of Architectural Education* 59 (2): 32–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1531-314X.2005.00014.x>.
- . 2001. "The Poetics of Security: Skateboarding, Urban Design, and the New Public Space." urbanpolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Howell_2001_Poetics-of-Security_NoPix.pdf
- . 2008. "Skatepark as Neoliberal Playground: Urban Governance, Recreation Space, and the Cultivation of Personal Responsibility." *Space and Culture* 11 (4): 475–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331208320488>.

- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, Henri, Eleonore Kofman, and Elizabeth Lebas. 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Cambridge, Mass, USA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Merrifield, Andy. 2006. *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Morello, Patrick G. 2014. "Skateparks -- a Key to Community Engagement." *Parks & Recreation* 49 (5): 67–69.
- Mortimer, Sean. 2015. "Tony Hawk Talks About Surviving the Early 90s, When Skating Died." *Jenkem Magazine*.
- Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, eds. *The Blackwell City Reader*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002.
- Snyder, Gregory J. 2012. "The City and the Subculture Career: Professional Street Skateboarding in LA." *Ethnography* 13 (3): 306–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138111413501>.
- Tsikalas, Stephen G., and Mark Allen Jones. 2018. "Creating Skateboarding Spaces or Corralling Skaters? The Rise of Public Skateparks in Rural Northeast Alabama." *Geographical Bulletin* 59 (1): 55–69.
- Vivoni, Francisco. 2009. "Spots of Spatial Desire: Skateparks, Skateplazas, and Urban Politics." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33 (2): 130–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723509332580>.