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**Body Architecture: Skateboarding and the Creation of Super-Architectural Space**


Derived from Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City* (Berg, 2001).

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The relationship between philosophy and architecture not only works to position one in relation to the other, it also opens up the possibility that one may already be figuring in and thus would already be present within the other.

Andrew Benjamin

Surely it is the supreme illusion to defer to architects, urbanists or planners as being experts or ultimate authorities in matters relating to space.

Henri Lefebvre

Andrew Benjamin's statement is, in its first part, one with which many would agree; the relation between architecture and philosophy has a long history. But what if we not only explore the more tentative, second part of his assertion -- that somehow philosophy and architecture are present within each other -- and simultaneously rethink philosophy away from the academic or metaphysical practice divorced from daily life, and toward one that, as Henri Lefebvre has consistently argued, is or should be embedded in the everyday? What happens to the architect and to architecture when critical thinking is rethought as a quotidian procedure, and when appropriations of space, the space of the body, and representations as lived experiences are brought to bear on consciously designed construction as manifestations of philosophy-as-everyday-practice? The exploration here treats the activity of skateboarding for precisely these considerations, using, in particular, Lefebvre's considerations of space and the everyday as levers to open out meanings and possibilities.

The architecture of skateboarding falls into two interdependent categories, one closer to the conventional realm of architecture as the conceptualisation, design and production of built spaces, the other closer to the realm of the user and the experience and

creation of space through bodily processes. Both involve spatial thoughts, objects and actions, and, through this intersection, skateboarding and architecture can be seen to carry the presence of each other, a dialectic that institutes the supplemental realm of a super-architectural space. Three different kinds of territories of occupation are implicated in this production: the physical or natural space that is simply found, constructed space, and the space of representation.

First Territory: Found Space
Early skateboarders in the 1960s were commonly surfers, and used skateboards when the surf was flat. The suburban modernism of Los Angeles -- skateboarding's historical Garden of Eden -- allowed frustrated surfers to re-enact the sense of being on the sea, rolling down tarmac as if it were an ocean wave. This is artificial, second nature\textsuperscript{4} architecture, a kind of Californian decentralised version of the new town,\textsuperscript{5} re-thought as natural space. These early skateboarders also found other terrains on which to skate, in particular the gentle banks found in many Californian school yards. Most famous was Kenter Canyon school in Brentwood, Los Angeles, where skaters transcribed surfing techniques even more directly. Skaters rode along the length of the bank, just as a surfer carves across the front of a wave, or emulating surfing in other ways, touching the surface of the bank as if trailing the hand in watery spray, or re-enacting surf tricks, like the "Hang five" move where the rider hangs five toes over the front of the board.

Through such moves skaters provoked a re-combination of body, board and terrain, producing something at once simulative and original; the skateboard enabled the skater to both simulate one activity -- that of surfing -- and to initiate a second -- that of


skateboarding. In spatial-architectural terms, the modernist space of suburbia was appropriated and re-conceived as another kind of space, as a concrete wave; second nature was returned to first nature. This combination and recombination of body, image, thought and action lies at the heart of skateboarding. It is an integral combination of the abstract and the concrete, to which I shall constantly return.

The emulation of surfing and the production of skateboarding space occurred from around the early 1960s up to the early 1970s. But apart from gentle banks of Kenter and other Los Angeles schools, skaters found other, more challenging terrains. Above all, this meant swimming pools. Los Angeles, particularly the Hollywood Hills and the other more moneyed districts of Santa Monica, Malibu and Pacific Palisades, has many substantial individual homes, many of which have swimming pools. It is this architectural resource which skaters exploited, following the mythologised discovery by Gary Swanson in his own backyard Santa Monica pool that, once drained of water, such pools offer a curved transition from base to wall up which the skateboarder could ride.\(^6\) Pools known to skaters by such names as Dog Bowl, Egg Bowl, Fruit Bowl, Manhole, Canyon Pool, Gonzo’s, Teardrop and the Soul Bowl\(^7\) offered an extreme terrain on which surf-related skating could take place.

To begin with, this meant riding along the surface of the wall in a single sweeping movement known as a carve. This is one of the most basic of skateboard moves, in which the skater gradually learns to ride higher and higher, prevented from falling by the centrifugal force generated by their speed. It is also a move directly derived from surfing, duplicating the surfer’s carve across the face of an ocean wave.


Skating in pools also means creating an empathy and engagement with the surface of the pool wall. This occurred in two ways. Firstly, skaters, encounter the wallness of the wall -- when riding up a wall, they sense the change of the pool from floor to wall, such that it presents itself to the skater as a surface which becomes a wall under their very feet. The skater’s experience is that of an encounter with this transition, and that experience becomes heightened as they ride higher up the surface -- the higher up they go, the more vertical, the more wall-like that surface becomes. This involves a double-movement -- and movement is key -- of body and architectural surface: initially, there is the sudden compression of the body hitting the bottom curve of the transition, in which the terrain is felt to press back on the skater, translating momentum into a forced acceleration of her/his trajectory up the wall; and at this point the second stage of the movement arrives, tense compression is released, and the skater feels the enclosed concave curvature of the transition give way to vertical flatness, and to a corresponding sense of speed and expansivity of space.

(Photog. 1: Jay Adams, Adolph’s, May 1977, from Glen E. Friedman, Fuck You Heroes).

The second engagement with the pool wall is through its pure surface, and particularly the tactility or materiality of that surface: its smoothness as a texture, like a cloth, and its smoothness as a concave plane, like a mathematically complex curve. Here the micro-architecture of grain, asperity, cracks, ripple become evident, translated into body space through judder (from wheels, to deck, to feet and upward), slide/grip and -- above all -- noise. The skateboarder’s traverse on the clear white wall creates a mono-tonal hum, so near silence yet so clearly audible that it creates a dramatic calm interlude to the shuddering, high-speed fire rasped out by hard wheels passing over blue ceramic tile and metal
truck grinding along concrete coping. These aural salvos remind us that "[s]pace is listened for, in fact, as much as seen, and heard before it comes into view"⁸ and that hearing mediates between the spatial body and the world outside it. This is a 'sensuous geography"⁹ created by a phenomenal experience of architecture, a 'sensory space" constituted by "an 'unconsciously' dramatized interplay of relay points and obstacles, reflections, references, mirrors and echoes."¹⁰

Pool skateboarding is not just about emulating surfing, and also involves an imaginative production in terms of the moves skaters conceive and enact. In particular, this involves thinking less about the pool wall as a concrete wave, and more as an element which, together with the skateboard and skater's own body, can be recombined into an excited body-centric space. In the pools, skaters explore both the boundaries of the surface on which they skate and the space beyond. They concentrate on the top of the pool wall, shuddering over the blue tile to grind the rear truck against the pool coping blocks before dropping back down. Here the edge condition is important, the skater addressing the very limits of the wall, and the precise micro-space of the skateboard wheel and truck in relation to that edge. More spectacularly, the skateboarder can perform an aerial: pass over the top of the wall, torque around in mid-air while holding onto the side of the skateboard hand and return to solid surface some four metres below. Moves like these -- first enacted in the 1970s -- initiated a unique airborne spatial experience, wherein space is produced centrifugally, a spiralling field of influence thrown out from the body, and then centripetally, pulling the terrain underfoot back into the realm of body space.

⁸ Lefebvre, Production of Space, pp. 199--200.
Second Territory: Constructed Space

By 1975 SkateBoarder magazine had a circulation of 165,000 and, according to Time magazine, Southern California had some two million skateboarders.\(^{11}\) And by 1978, Skateboarder had one million readers.\(^{12}\) Although other terrains besides pools and schoolyard banks could be found -- notably large circular concrete drainage pipes at Mount Baldy, Palos Verdes and further out in the Arizona desert\(^ {13}\) -- skateboarding was rapidly outstripping the available found terrains. The Los Angeles commercial sector responded with a number of purpose-built skateparks which extracted and exaggerated fragments of the city to create perfect skateboarding architecture. One of the first and best was “Pipeline” skatepark in Upland, opened in May 1977. Featuring the first circular pipe and vertical walls intended for skateboarding, Pipeline emulated and improved upon the pipes, drainage ditches and pools found in the Los Angeles area. As competition from other skateparks increased and as skateboard moves became increasingly demanding, the “Combi-Pool” was added to Pipeline, effectively a square pool with rounded corners and a circular pool joined together at a common entrance point.\(^ {14}\) From the start, Pipeline was a great success and was quickly emulated by others: in 1981 the Los Angeles region alone had at least eight other skateparks of a similar standard, including “Concrete Wave” at Anaheim, “Skateboard World” at Torrance, “Skate City” at Whittier,


\(^{12}\) Glen E. Friedman, e-mail, 16 February 1997.


“Big O” at Orange and others at Colton, Lakewood, Marina Del Rey and Carlsbad.

This specialised architectural activity was repeated throughout America, Europe and Asia, all these skateparks mimicking backyard Californian swimming pools, Arizona pipeline projects and other features of American architecture and civil engineering. In the United Kingdom, for example, around twenty-five purpose-built skateparks were constructed by 1980, including “The Rom” near Romford in Essex and another by the same constructors at Harrow, both of which continue to operate.

From the early 1980s onward, these skateparks were also increasingly complemented by the provision, often by skaters themselves, of ramps. Typically of free-standing, above-ground timber construction, the most common form of ramp is the half-pipe, referring to the U-section profile and two parallel side walls. A flat bottom between the two transitions allows greater time between moves. Overall height varies between two and five metres, the walls being topped off with a narrow platform allowing skateboarders to drop in at the beginning of their runs and providing easy observation. Smaller versions known as mini ramps are made for cramped sites, constructed rapidly and at minimal cost. At the other end of the spectrum, complicated multi-unit combinations are built for demonstrations and competitions, with half-pipes of varying size and shape placed in combination to enable skaters to transfer directly from one to another.

These various constructed architectures of skateboarding are not, however, despite their unique contribution to the specialist typologies of the differentiated built environment, the principal contribution of skateboarding to architectural space. This lies instead in the performative aspects of skateboarding. In particular, the terrains both replicated but also formally extrematised the terrains found within the modern city, and so enabled a new form of spatial engagement to occur. The Combi-Pool at Pipeline, for example, offered the same white walls, blue tiles and concrete
coping as a typical backyard Los Angeles pool, but, benefiting from
design advice from professional skateboarders, was also now deeper
(and hence more dangerous) and with greater areas of vertical wall,
faster transitions from base to wall, a flat bottom between walls,
and a smoother surface optimised for skateboard wheels. And of
course skateparks also offered a controlled social space free of
outraged pool owners and patrolling police.

Skateparks and ramps thus provided a theatre, an arena for the
display of skateboarding in which skateboarding and its body moves
became partly spectacularised. This is immediately evident from the
new moves that skateboarders invented within skateparks. At first
this took the form of more extreme versions of the same moves, with
aerials becoming larger, rising some two metres or higher out of the
top of the pool or ramp wall. Aerials were also adapted to other
variants, the most bewildering being the "ollie" air, in which the
skater flies out into a normal aerial, but this time without holding
onto the board; here the aerial manoeuvre is performed entirely by
controlled flight and balance, with a very delicate friction-weight-
force relation between the skater's body, feet, board, and terrain
below. Other, even more complicated and technical moves were also
rapidly developed at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, including
"invert" aerials, in which the skater performs what is in effect a
one-handed hand stand out of the top of the pool, a "layback",
stretching their body off the back of the board and across the pool
wall, held up by an outstretched arm, and a "rock 'n roll", in which
the skateboard is laid over the top of the wall, rocking like a see-
saw before the skaters turns and descends.

(Photog. 3: Jay Smith, Marina Del Rey, September 1979, from Glen E.
Friedman, Fuck You Heroes).

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15 National Safety Council, Skateboarding, Chicago, 1978, p. 3; and
Thrasher, June 1989, vol. 9, no. 6, pp. 53--8 and 127.
At the first “Framed” series of architecture and film shown at the London RIBA Architecture Centre in 1996, film-maker and architect Patrick Keiller showed a short by Len Lye.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Particles in Space} was created without camera or lens but by scratching directly on to the film, and depicts a swarm of dots and lines pulsing on a black ground.\textsuperscript{17} The resulting depiction of compression and tension, eruption and repetition, pulse and stillness, humour and gravity, lead Keiller to describe it as the most architectural-spatial film ever made. Although devoid of any “architectural” subject (there are no buildings, no drawings, no concepts – only the development of a sense of space), the Lye film does indeed manage to convey a sense of spatiality entirely missing from most other attempts at representing architecture’s spatial character.

It is this exploration which lies within the skateboarder’s complex spatial actions, using a series of front-back, left-right, up-down reversals and rotations, in combination with precise relations of board, hand/body and terrain, to generate an extraordinary movement and production of body-centric space.

\begin{quote}
Before \textbf{producing} effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before \textbf{producing itself} by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before \textbf{reproducing itself} by generating other bodies, each living body \textbf{is} space and \textbf{has} its space.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

As Lefebvre notes, following Hermann Weyl,\textsuperscript{19} symmetries of all kinds exist in all manner of natural and non-natural phenomena, including -- and especially -- architecture and the body. In this context, the prepositional “in” of Lye’s title -- \textit{Particles in Space} -- is wrong, for the space is entirely produced by that series of dots, in their movement and collective evolution. In the same way, the spatial

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Particles in Space} was made over three decades and finally finished in 1979.
\textsuperscript{18} Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}, p. 170.
\end{quote}
architectonics of the skater, to use Lefebvre’s body-centric terminology, is a space produced by the skater, out of the dynamic intersection of body, board and terrain. This is the kind of space which Lefebvre describes as having “properties” (dualities, symmetries etc.) which come not from the mind or spirit, but from a particular occupation of space with particular “genetic” production operations, in the same way that, for example, the relationship between nature and space in a shell or a spider’s web is “immediate” and independent from any external mediation of spirit, God or conscious design.

In this spatial production, space is produced outward from the body, centrifugally, then centripetally pulled back in. It is a gestural and phenomenological space, a space of flow and action, of direct engagement with the terrain. In particular it involves the skater in an extremely precise engagement with the terrain underfoot, a temporal as well as spatial engagement simultaneously measured in the extensive run (the total range of moves and traverses made over a minute or so), and in micro-seconds and millimetres (the specific meeting of board, body and terrain). The skateboard itself becomes a tool-in-hand, mediating the body-terrain space. Indeed, within the act of skateboarding, the skateboard is less a piece of equipment and takes on more the character of a prosthetic device, an extension of the body as a kind of fifth limb, absorbed into and diffused inside the body-terrain encounter.

But the body is not the sole producer of space in a Leibnizian sense, in which “absolute relative” space is waiting to be filled, and where a specific body is considered capable of defining space by

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20 Lefebvre, Production of Space, ch. 3 “Spatial Architectonics”, pp. 169--228.
21 Lefebvre, Production of Space, pp. 171--3.
22 Another relation of body-centric to architectural space concerns the traces and marks inscribed by the body in space. Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 174. This is dealt with in Iain Borden, “Another Pavement, Another Beach”, in Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell (eds.), The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space, Wiley, forthcoming.
gesture and movement. Sensory-sensual space is, ultimately, simply a component in the construction of social spaces. Body-centric productions of space are not purely sensorial; instead, the body produces its space dialectically with the production of architectural space.

There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space [. . . ] This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at it disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.

What then is the nature of dialectical interaction with architecture? Given the body-centric nature of skateboarding space, it makes sense to consider this in relation to the operations of the skater’s body, particularly their multi- and inter-sensory nature.

Architecture frequently operates as kind of social mirror, forming a kind of Sartrean “Other’s look”, the user self-checking their identity and validity against a building or boundary. For its part, modern architectural space in particular tends to ignore the space of the body.

This modern space [is] the space of blank sheets of paper, drawing-boards, plans, sections, elevations, scale models, geometrical projections [. . .] It forgets that space does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible-readable realm, but that it is first of

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23 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, pp. 169--70.
24 Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 212.
all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements).  

In practices such as skateboarding, however, a process of resistance and re-creation occurs. The Sartrean look is not only returned, but architecture ceases to be purely the Other, and is instead absorbed into the body-board-terrain relation.

Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body.  

This process takes place through a very precise (although undoubtedly limited) questioning of architecture put forward by skateboarding. What is architectural form for? To what purpose can it be put? What is the relation of ground, verticals, textures, surfaces? The skater’s body and actions here interrogates architecture as another body in relation to its own demands and actions.

Objects touch one another, feel, smell and hear one another. Then they contemplate one another with eye and gaze. One truly gets the impression that every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-renewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection, an interplay of shifting colours, lights and forms.  

These questions are of course very phenomenal -- unconcerned with historical or cultural purpose of architecture -- but they are nonetheless single-minded and demanding in their line of attack. They also resist the intellectualisation and “logic of visualization” implied by much architectural space, for skateboarding uses, beside intense vision, a highly developed

28 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 200.
30 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 183.
31 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 200.
32 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 98.
responsivity of touch, sense, balance, hearing, posture, muscular control, strength, agility and fluidity by which to perform.

Much of this stems from the essentially dynamic nature of skateboarding. As both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and August Schmarsow noted, we tend, in particular, to express the relation of space to ourselves by imagining that we are in motion, using terms like “extension”, “expanse” and “direction”, and measuring size by the movement of the body and the eye.

Because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them.33

The spatial construct is a human creation and cannot confront the creative or appreciative subject as if it were a cold, crystallized form.34

Because skateboarding is both body-centric and motile, space is projected from the whole body (and not just the eye or the intellect); as well as being an engagement with the architecture, it does not ever assume that architecture is the dominant projector of space, but rather treats it as one projector of space that can be interpolated with another moving projection of space from the body.

Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience. Of that experience the tourist, the passive spectator, can grasp but a pale shadow.35

In skateboarding, unlike the scopic-dependence of the tourist gaze, user and architecture are separate potential systems of projection, which then come together in the active performance of skateboarding to create a new spatial event, an occupied territory. Architecture

33 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 102.
35 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 137.
is at once erased and reborn in the phenomenal act of the skater’s move.

But architecture is not the only space creatively destroyed in this process. The space of the body is equally reconstructed as a ‘spatial body’, subject to the various symmetries, interactions, planes, centres, peripheries and other determinants of space.\textsuperscript{36} As Lefebvre clarifies from its ambiguous presence in Marx, the concept of appropriation – the modification of the natural to serve a group -- comes to the fore in the context of space and this spatial body.

We need to combine the pure mastery of dominated space with appropriated space, and to understand this recombination in relation to time, and to rhythms of time and life.\textsuperscript{37} In particular this involves the body.

Dominated by overpowering forces, including a variety of brutal techniques and an extreme emphasis on visualization, the body fragments, abdicates responsibility for itself -- in a word, disappropriates itself [. . .] Any revolutionary “project” today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda.\textsuperscript{38}

Skateboarding operates in this context, a partial glimpse in the society of the spectacle of a recovery of the body that resorts neither to the world-stage commercialism of professional sport (skateboarding is, perhaps, the only “sports” activity whose practitioners actively campaigned for it not to be included in the Olympics\textsuperscript{39}), the conscious artistic intellectualism of performance art,\textsuperscript{40} nor the narcissistic “mirroring body”\textsuperscript{41} of such practices as

\textsuperscript{36} Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{37} Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}, pp. 165--6.
\textsuperscript{38} Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}, pp. 166--7.
\textsuperscript{39} Kevin Thatcher, editor of \textit{Thrasher} skateboard magazine, quoted in Armen Keteyian, “Chairman of the Board”, \textit{Sports Illustrated}, 24 November 1986, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{41} Arthur Frank, “For a Sociology of the Body: an Analytical Review”, in Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner (eds.), \textit{The
body-building and consumer-shopping, obsessed with their surface and monadic, internalised world. In skateboarding, the body is treated neither as an image nor as commodifiable entity; more than anything, it is in the act of skating that the skater’s body is constructed, born from the poetry of its intricate spatial distortions and from the rehearsal of its conflictual body-board-terrain events.

I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.42

The skater’s body is an assertive act, constructed out of the activity of skateboarding performed in relation to architecture; as Merleau-Ponty describes it, the spatiality of the body is not an assemblage of points of stimuli, located in relation to other objects, a spatiality of position, but is presented to the self as an attitude directed towards a certain task, a spatiality of situation.43

In short, skateboarding is a destructive-absorptive-reproductive process of both body and architecture. Consequently its mode of spatial composition is very different to that of the dominant modes of discourse and production of architecture, replacing architecture’s classicist mode with one of romanticism.44 In place of the organised cosmos of architecture-classicism’s cohesion, internalised hierarchies, imitation and balance, we have the waves, undulations, vibrations and oscillations of skateboarding’s ludic procedures, suggesting conflict and contradiction, emotion, chaos and confusion, the internalisation of the external world within the self, spontaneity and the affective. Like Lefebvre’s concept space

42 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 140.
43 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 100. See also Lefebvre, Production of Space, pp. 42 and 363.
44 The terms and descriptions here are taken from Lefebvre, “Twelfth Prelude: Towards a New Romanticism?”, Introduction to Modernity, pp. 322--4.
of rhythmanalysis, it is closer to the rhythms of music or the imagined spaces of poetry and literature than the sights of the visual arts, linking inner and outer life, body and architecture, action and meaning. Like Joyce's "festival of language, a delirium of words", skateboarding is a festival of movement, a series of precise spatial-temporal actions rendered demented and deranged, and which ultimately destroys and recreates body and architecture together. This is super-architectural space.

Third Territory: Spaces of Representation

So far consideration of skateboard performance has been mainly as a kind of pure activity, a spatial invention restricted to the confines of the skater’s own body and the immediate terrain beneath. I turn here to focus on the problematic of the integrated nature of representations in skateboarding; through this process, the full performativity of the body, skateboard and architecture is played out.

Technical Images

Considering a skateboarder as an image or representation can be undertaken in two ways. Firstly, and most obviously, this can be done through the technicity of the image as a published or projected medium. Originally, this took place in specialist skateboard magazines as photographs, using conventional still imagery.


This, of course, is only part of the social and political character of skateboarding. The political connotations of skateboarding in urban streets are considered in Borden, “Another Pavement, Another Beach”. Masculinity and skateboarding is considered in “Here Are the Young Men: Skateboarding, Architecture and the Performance of Masculinity”, in Jane Rendell, Iain Borden and Barbara Penner (eds.), Gender Culture Architecture: an Interdisciplinary Introduction, Routledge, forthcoming.
Particularly after the advent of skateparks in the late 1970s, skateboard photographers used new high-speed motor-drive technology to capture innovative moves. Photographers used wide-angle lenses to get close to the action, while also showing the skater in the context of the location; (a side-effect was to often exaggerate the height and posture of skateboard moves). Images like these enabled skaters to both celebrate and to analyse what was going on.

Another technique, frequently used in low-light or indoor conditions, is the combination of flash photography with a slower shutter speed. This produces a sharp image of the skater overlaid onto their blurred movement across surrounding terrain. Although undoubtedly successful as dramatic composite images, they also expose the partial limitation of still photography with respect to time. As a technology which is based on the freezing of a singular moment, the photograph has a tendency to eradicate both the immediate time of movement of the event being captured, and also to dehistoricise the time of its location.\footnote{For a more extended discussion of the problematic of photography, time and space in relation to architecture and the urban, see "Strangely Familiar", special issue of Scan, Photographers' Gallery, London, 1996, vol. 1, no. 1.} Although readily available in a large number of specialist magazines, such images are restricted by the limitations of the medium itself.

In response to this limitation, and to the inherently dynamic nature of skateboarding, skateboarders commonly exploit the camcorder and video to capture and distribute skate moves. A large number of a skate videos are now available, some as video magazines with skaters from all kinds of different locations, such as the American 411 or the English Video-Log, and some as elaborate manufacturer videos showcasing their own professional team skaters. The latter can also be very experimental and sophisticated in their forms of representation; for example, the Ban This video, made by Stacy Peralta for his Powell Peralta company in 1989, manipulates such elaborate devices as tracked shots, skateboard-mounted cameras, special lighting, overlays, montage and high-design graphics.
The problem, however, for skateboarders is that the forms of distribution for these media -- specialist magazines, commercial videos -- are still very much closed access. Instead, it is increasingly the internet on which skaters are receiving and posting images. Over 130 sites range from commercial manufacturers and retail shops to professional “digital magazines” like Influx and Heckler, to good college sites, like the DansWORLD site, to skaters' own home pages, like the B-Grrrl site run by mostly female skaters in Melbourne, or Skate Geezer, a site catering for older veteran skaters of the 1970s and early 1980s, to the Usenet alt.skateboard site, with incessant conversation on a myriad of topics from how to perform tricks, equipment, phrases, the existence of god, general abuse, to (most popular of all) skate shoe design. From these sites skaters obtain communication about skate moves ranging from the usual textual descriptions, representations using the ASCII character set, still photographs and movie clips. All these can be viewed on the screen or down-loaded. The internet also offers an easier chance for skaters to place their own material for global consumption. It is much simpler to post a photograph or movie clip onto an internet site than to publish in a commercial magazine or video; the internet allows skaters both to represent skateboarding, and to receive and distribute these representations world-wide.

Lived Representations

55 Adam Bender, alt.skateboard listing, as accessed 5 January 1997.
Describing these different kinds of imagery and distribution channels at some length discloses their emphatic presence within skateboarding. However, their importance does not lie in their quantity, for images _per se_ are only an apparent stage of the representation process within the skateboarding production of space. Instead, we must introduce the second way of thinking about the image, realising that skateboarders use imagery less as pure image, and more as an integration and re-presentation of that imagery through skateboarding practice. The lived representation of skateboard images occurs when skaters undertake the moves themselves, reliving and re-producing photographs, video footage and the internet movie clips through the agency of their body. This needs to be taken apart in more detail.

Skaters perform moves. The predominant way in which a skateboarder perceives of their activity is as a set of moves performed within a sequence of such moves; on a ramp or in a skatepark pool, a skater might do say ten to thirty moves in a run lasting no more than a minute or so. The predominant self-identity for a skateboarder is then the number and kinds of moves they perform -- the more difficult the moves a skater can do, the greater their achievement. It is not only a quantitative matter, however, and a number of factors also come in to play here, including the style in which the skater develops and performs. The refinement, elegance, fluidity, speed, apparent ease, speed and, above all, attitude with which skaters perform moves is just as important as the fact that they can perform them at all, while, conversely, performing moves without style is frequently met with disdain.

You can mix style and aggression together. A lot of people don't do it; they just mix aggression with tricks without the style. ⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Marc Sinclair, interview, _SkateBoarder_, September 1979, vol. 2 no. 6, p. 32.
In purely quantitative terms, however, the move is the unit of exchange between skaters, and skaters spend much time poring over photographs in order to understand and acquire them.

We see a hot shot in the magazine, and we have to figure what went on before that.\(^{57}\)

This process is analogous to the way consumer's accumulate commodities and capitalists accumulate money, except that of course skateboard moves cannot be hoarded or invested -- there is no bank for real moves, only the image bank of the photograph, film, video or internet -- and to maintain ownership the skater must continually re-perform the move. Consequently, when skaters undertake a run, they are not so much performing an act of pure physical spontaneity, as reproducing through their body-actions the activity of skateboarding as it can be systematically codified, and understood, as a set of produced images.

This is a complex intersection of lived experience and mechanically reproduced imagery, in which the latter acts as a kind of mirror, not only reflecting the subject's image back to the subject but also extending a repetition/symmetry immanent to the body into space;\(^{58}\) the mechanical image projects the skater both back to themselves, and to others. That both the image/reflection and the skater's own move are "weightless" (in the case of image being the representation as pure image, and in the case of the skater being the momentary equilibrium of gravity and trajectory which the skate photograph frequently arrests) emphasises the fantastical nature of this projection in which the skater forever dreams -- alongside the immediate phenomenal engagement with the terrain -- their display to the eyes of other skaters. The "reflection" is of course not coincident with the body of the skater, but merely represents it as


\(^{58}\) Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 182n14.
something identical but at the same time “radically other, radically different”.

This is further complicated by the collective nature of skateboarding as a practice in which many skaters perform the same moves, and so act as mirrors both for themselves and others. Thus skaters’ reproduction of themselves as images involves both the reproduction of themselves as a reflection of other skaters and, secondly, the reproduction and externalisation of that image as being exactly like others, but different again -- they are the mirror for skate moves and other skaters; every time a skater performs a move, they are both reproducing themselves as themselves (seeing themselves do a move), themselves as other than themselves (seeing themselves in the role of others), and other skaters as themselves (they are the reflection of other skaters). The desire to enact the move and to have it reproduced is then the desire to be, at the same time, oneself, oneself as someone else, and all other skater in oneself. And the process by which this occurs is the skate move as something simultaneously performed, mechanically-produced and imagined.

The skate move, like the mirror, does not then constitute the unity of the subject, but acts as means of disclosure of consciousness of the skater and their body. The skateboard move is the projection of the self through the imaginary-and-real medium of the photograph; it is neither pure activity or image, but a lived image. The skateboard run (the combinatorial series of moves) is at once a communication, development and lived enactment of things such as the Influx digital journal, or Friedman photographs.

This has some interesting spatial effects, not least that, particularly in the context of internet imagery and communication, skaters continually oscillate between the very immediate physicality of their own bodies and a globally dispersed skate community. There

59 Lefebvre, Production of Space, pp. 184--5.
60 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 185.
are skateboarders today in just about every city around the world, such that when a skater from, say, London's Notting Hill talks about their immediate friends or community, they will frequently feel more in common, and have more contact or communication, with other skaters in Mexico City, Prague or Philadelphia than with other non-skaters in Notting Hill. And the way this community is knitted is though a continual exchange and re-experiencing of a lexicon of skate moves. The image becomes not only a locally lived but, simultaneously, a globally reproduced and exchanged phenomenon.

There are also two other, and somewhat different, roles of the image that should be considered. The first concerns the role of the photographer, for, as former skateboard editor and photographer Tim Leighton-Boyce points out, skateboard photography goes far beyond the technical exaggeration of space and temporality. Skateboard photographers employment of wide-angle lenses is near unique, having initially borrowed the technique from surf-photography where fish-eye lenses are often used by photographers in the water, for in all other sports photography the main lens is the telephoto. In part skateboard photographers use wide-angles to emphasis locational context, but they also do so for a very different reason, to become a close participant in the scene; the optical characteristics of the wide-angle forces photographer and subject into a proximate spatial relationship, such that the photographer often leans over and projects the camera underneath or even within the orbit of the skaters' body. At times this immediacy even becomes directly evidenced in the photograph itself: for example, one of Glen E. Friedman's earliest hardcore images of skateboarding -- of Jay Adams in the Teardrop pool -- shows his own foot at the base of the images, caught in the same frame as the explosive skater. Friedman, the epitome of the involved reporter and artist, is not a distant

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61 Conversation, 9 August 1996.
62 Glen E. Friedman, e-mail, 16 February 1997.
observer, recording the action with an external gaze, but a participant, someone intimately -- socially and spatially -- connected to the activity in front of their lens.

(Photog. 4: Jay Adams, Teardrop, October 1976, from Glen E. Friedman, Fuck You Heroes).

The second concerns the image of the terrain in the particular context of the purpose-built skatepark. While everyday architecture is encountered as a natural given, the more spectacular forms of architecture, often those designed by named architects, are revered as much for their aura as for any particular encounter that we have had with them. The same may be applied to particular features of skateparks, which as given rather than found terrains are always invested with a conscious, representational quality; this is particularly the case with those special attraction features -- often the centre-piece pool -- with a (often deserved) reputation for difficulty and danger.

Particular elements of skateparks become invested with a spectacular life -- the reputation of a facility such as Pipeline's Combi-Pool for example, invested it with an aura beyond the basic ground on which skaters skated. In undertaking a move in a place like the Combi-Pool, the skaters perceived themselves as much for their positioning within the image of the element as for the simple phenomenal interaction with a physical terrain. The move became perceived both individually and socially as not just, say, an ollie air, but as an ollie air in the Combi-Pool. This may in part explain the frequent territorialisation of skateparks, in which "locals" claim and treat that skatepark, and in particular specific elements within it, as belonging to them, and consequently treating any strangers or outsiders with an attitude ranging from disdain to outright tribalised aggression. In such a process, locals see the element less as pure image, their intimate and repeated use of it having stripped it of its external aura (as known outsiders, the
image reproduced in magazines), and more as a known entity, re-invested with a character of their own construction. Through a long drawn-out and often painful intimacy built up over months and years with the element, they have an invested physical and emotional relationship with that element.

The deployment of the energy of living bodies in space is forever going beyond the life and death instincts and harmonizing them. Pain and pleasure, which are poorly distinguished in nature, become clearly discernible in (and thanks to) social space. Products, and a fortiori works, are destined to be enjoyed (once labour, a mixture of painful effort and the joy of creation, has been completed). “

Skaters give the element, and the element returns to them, a knowledge of each other. The incoming outsider, conversely, threatens to obstruct the intensive local use of the skatepark, getting in the way, and possibly even skating better. The arriving stranger is an interference and a potential rival.

The spectacular nature of skateparks creates the possibility for skaters to become dissatisfied with them, either becoming bored with skateparks as a whole, perhaps no longer providing the right kind of terrain, or rather because the element “wins”, creating a terrain that they cannot alternatively master or relate adequately to, either by themselves or in competition with others. Unlike the urban streets of the city itself, on which most skateboarding now takes place, the skatepark is always a provided terrain, a mental projection and representation of skateboard terrain, and so yields a peculiarly focused kind of terrain: its architecture is consciously and deliberately functional with regard to skateboarding.

This may be why some skaters prefer banks and more gentle skatepark terrains, partly because they do not represent the extreme challenge of the pool or half-pipe, and partly because they consequently appear to just be there, allowing skaters to reassume the position of creative adaptive user rather than compelled

64 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 137.
consumer. Here, like Lefebvre’s description of speech and activity in the city, the play of the skater’s adaptation of terrain comes to replace the legitimised, fashionable moves performed in skatepark pools and pipes.

In the city speech will unify the scattered elements of social reality, functions and structures, disconnected space, compulsive time; the city will have its everyday life, but quotidianness will be banished [. . .] The city’s uninhibited self-expression and creativity [. . .] will restore adaptation so that it prevails over compulsion and [. . .] so that play and games will be given their former significance.65

In this context, skateboarding is, despite the codification and routinisation of moves by name and repeated performance, a resistance to the reduction of the subject to alternatively either a purely mechanistic performer, mental entity or capitalist competitor. The dislike of skateparks by many skaters is also a resistance to the common practice in commercial skateparks of not only charging entrance fees but also imposing certain social standards, such as the requirement for safety equipment or a particular kind of behaviour. Such economic and social values run against the continual confrontational and anarchist tendency within skateboarding.

Instead of accepting codification and regulation, skaters enact a “practical and fleshy body conceived of as a totality complete with spatial qualities (symmetries, asymmetries) and energetic properties (discharges, economies, waste)”,66 a “practico-sensory totality”.67 Skateboarding as a quantitative set of places and actions (moves, routes, routines, sites) is not only further invested with quantitative measures (size, height, distance, duration, speed) but also with qualitative measures (difficulty, complexity, innovation, surprise) and experiential conditions (noise, texture, sound, flow, touch, rhythm, space-time). Placed within the skater’s imaginative

66 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 61.
67 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 62.
absorption of the body-subject as an actively-experienced and produced engagement with the terrain underfoot, already described above, this creates an inter-dependent relation of skater and terrain, each internalised within the other.

The “other” is present, facing the ego: a body facing another body. The “other” is impenetrable save through violence, or through love, as the object of expenditures of energy, of aggression or desire. Here external is also internal inasmuch as the “other” is another body, a vulnerable flesh, an accessible symmetry.68

Architecture is both external and internal to skateboarding, its concrete presentness being at once the other and the accessible symmetry to the skateboarder’s physical activity. Similarly, the architect as designer of built terrain is both the other to the skateboarder, and re-presented within the skateboarder, the creative act being transposed from the “classicist” realm of balanced order into the “romanticist” sphere of destabilised movements. Architecture is dissolved, recast, and re-materialised.

Skateboarding is nothing less than a sensual, sensory, physical emotion and desire for one’s own body in motion and engagement with the architectural and social other; a Balladesque crash and rebirth of body and terrain.69

« ENDS »

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68 Lefebvre, Production of Space, p. 174.