

Skate or Die!

Rebels on a Board

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The simple and obvious freedoms that first inspire the imagination of young kids, freedom of movement and freedom from the constraints of physical laws, are so simple as to hide a much deeper liberatory kernel.

From the blood sacrifice initiatory trials of learning to skate to the insular lingo, skateboarding is every bit the revolutionary community, in many ways like the revolutionary secret societies of Haiti. In contemplating a subject as broad as and as theoretical as global anarchism, it seems to be much more productive to explore areas of inspiration rather than explain proper applications. To this end, I'd like to explore the radical potential of one of my lifelong passions. Skateboarding.

The most basic element of skateboarding is the session, or sesh, a group of friends skating a spot. Part potlatch, part temporary autonomous zone, the sesh embodies both free play and universal struggle in a single act. Often a great sesh is made up of total strangers sharing drugs, food, and laughs. A skater only needs to enjoy a few sessions in a strange land before the locals happily welcome them into the fold and teach them all the unwritten rules of their new environment. This integrative aspect constitutes a sort of latent mutual aid network between all skaters across the globe.

Like Haiti Voodoo societies, one of the central expressions of faith in the skateboarding community is the pilgrimage or the skate trip. A cross between a Hunter Thompson road trip and an Indiana Jones adventure into lost capitalist mythology, the skate trip is the high point of any skater's life, the truest expression of the urge.

In James C. Scott's history of the state, *Against the Grain*, he makes a clear argument that, while sedentism might not have spawned the state directly, it was definitely an important step in that direction. The nomadic nature of most hardcore skaters is antithetical to every aim of the state. It's hard for the state to tax, corral, quantify, coerce, and/or control a moving population.

Since the very beginning of skate culture, with the barging (skater for trespassing) of southern California pools and continuing into the street skating of the '90s, skateboarding has always had a deeply ingrained illegalist tendency.

In the case of street skating, in a symbolic twist the Situationists would have loved, the most imposing architecture of the state becomes a playground for daredevil children. A thirteen-year-old Tyshawn Jones conquers the New York City courthouse banks (a concrete embankment with a huge drop at the bottom) and solidifies his legendary status in 2014's well named "Illegal Civ 2" video, from LA's Illegal Civilization skate crew. As Consolidated Skateboards, a skateboard company that built its brand on its opposition to Nike and other corporate skate shoes, likes to proudly proclaim, "Skateboarding is a crime!" This tendency in skate culture orients most skater's world views and values toward fun, cooperation, creativity, mutual aid, and freedom, and away from rules, taboos, structure, boredom and control.

Taking it a step further, the trend of DIY skateparks has a long history in skateboarding but is currently having a moment.

Complicated, beautiful and dangerous homemade skateparks now span every continent of the globe, hidden under freeway overpasses, in old warehouses, storm drains, burned out homes and dead-end roads, concrete poured lovingly under cover of darkness by a construction crew with no bosses, no plans, no budget and often no acquaintance with their coworkers. One of my favorites, Lower Bob's, in Oakland, Calif is replete with ornate tile mosaics and a build-in BBQ pit.

But it's not just skate cultures' feral charms and their negation of domestication we should take inspiration from, but also skateboarding's organizing principle: passion.

I'm not suggesting here that everyone should take up this activity, but that each person's own passions should rule and guide their lives the way skateboarding guides skaters, their own unifying mythologies.

The everyday rebellions of skateboarding create a lively, free, minimally corrupted community in stark contrast to demeaning drudgery of everyday capitalism, pointing toward the feeling of an unadulterated life and attracting, not coercing, the decentralized voluntary network needed to not only sustain, but foster a new, free, and harmonious society.

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