Spatial Ethno-geographies of ‘Sub-cultures’ in Urban Space: Skateboarders, Appropriative Performance, and Spatial Exclusion in Los Angeles

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Spatial Ethno-geographies of ‘Sub-cultures’ in Urban Space: Skateboarders, Appropriative Performance, and Spatial Exclusion in Los Angeles

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Photos by Chris Giamarino.
Abstract

Today, street skateboarding has transformed from a subcultural pursuit to a mainstream urban endeavor, as more than 50 million people partake in the activity globally. Cities respond to skateboarders’ spatial movements by imposing contradictory legal prescriptions and physical design barriers in public and private spaces. The point of departure for this thesis is that planning reactions provide subpar public skate spaces while imposing regulations that ban/stigmatize skateboarding outside of these sanctioned skate spots. A sizable population is denied their full right to the city, proscribed from partaking in the everyday organicism of democratic spatial experience and life. These exclusionary planning/design practices/ regulations warranted further investigation. The purpose of this research was to undertake an ethno-geographic inquiry into skateboarders’ performances and transgressions in two public skateparks and two privately-owned plazas in Los Angeles, CA. My research questions were: What can planners learn from an ethno-geographic analysis of a subculture in space? Are current planning practices and engagement strategies allowing skateboarders to have citizen control and dictate how spaces are designed in order to provide quality, designated skate/recreational facilities? What planning tools and policies can provide multi-use, just spaces that celebrate diverse, cultural consumption and the social production of space? I conducted mixed methods research (i.e., field observations, interviews, photography, behavior mapping) following an actor-network theory (ANT) framework, rejecting the separation of humans/nonhumans, embracing materiality, and seeing space as a heterogeneous assemblage of constituent fluid realities/forms. I analyzed my findings through Lefebvre’s trialectic conceptualization of space. Skateboarders’ artistic spatial performances provide spectacles, reinterpret the functionality of objects, and transgress planned regulatory/physical boundaries. Ubiquitous handrails, stairs, and ledges as well as challenges posed by exclusionary spaces motivate skaters to blur traditional binaries of appropriate/inappropriate users in public/private spaces. Motivated by Sandercock’s (2004) challenge for more imaginative planning and Beauregard’s (2003) call to incorporate diverse storytelling and discursive democracy to build bases for collective planning action, I encourage planners to expand their politics, be creatively audacious, and adopt therapeutic tools for planning in 21st-century cities. I recommend one strategic occupation tactic for skateboarders to performatively represent themselves and engender planning responses. Using traditional planning tools (i.e., zoning incentives, engagement workshops, programming), I recommend four policies for cities to plan, design, and celebrate equitable, vibrant spaces where diverse publics can produce social space, create spectacles for cultural consumption, and represent themselves as legitimate actors in everyday urban life.

Key Words: skateboarding, exclusion, performance, storytelling, right to the city, public space, privately-owned public space, imagination, actor-network theory, materiality, assemblage, ethnography, subcultures, regulation, Los Angeles
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Disclaimer

I am a skateboarder. Experienced with GIS & statistical analyses, this thesis challenged me to undertake my first solely qualitative ethnography. I use the term sub-culture(s) to ironically describe skateboarders throughout this thesis. This is both a way in which some skateboarders proudly describe themselves to be and a common skewed/negative perception that ‘others’ have of them. It will become clearer throughout the paper that skateboarding has come into the mainstream of everyday city life, slowly eroding this nominal attribution to the appropriative, creative, and ubiquitous activity. This thesis contains language that some may find offensive (i.e., curse words), out-there, and indecipherable to those unfamiliar with skateboarders. I used terminology expressed by skateboarders involved in this thesis to describe their performances in, conceptions of, and symbolisms socially produced in urban space. See the ‘Skate Lexicon’ in Appendix IV for translations. To abide by IRB protocol, I have not included names of any interviewees. When I reference skaters or planners without quotes, I am paraphrasing the content of interviews while ensuring complete anonymity. All visual content (i.e., photographs, maps, and datasets) was produced by me. I obtained consent from skateboarders to photograph them and their activities.

/ - signifies dualistic words that contain two essential and/or interchangeable parts

\\\\ - depicts two different interviews in different spaces or times within the same interview

‘’ - indicates a paraphrase, ironic tone, or unfounded negative perception
Reflections

The most important things for skateboarders can really be quite banal things, so they make a different map of the city - it’s a different edit, if you like.

Speaking skateboarding is not a mimicking of the city, an oration of a pre-given text, but a performative utterance wherein the speakers form anew themselves and the city.

In this respect, skateboarders are part of a long process in the history of cities, a fight by the unempowered and disenfranchised for a social space of their own. In doing so, they bring time, space and social being together through a performative confrontation of the body and board with the architectural surfaces; theirs is ‘not only the spaces of “no”, it is also the space of ‘yes’, of the affirmation of life.

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Introduction

Skateboarders are a burgeoning subcultural population that skate every aspect of their surroundings by “coopting … ubiquitous concrete public spaces and underground parking lots” (Perrin, 2012, p. 183). Through creative, embodied performances, skateboarders attempt to replace capitalism’s repetitive spaces and gestures with an organic reality and social artwork by appropriating and influencing urban rhythms and spaces (Lefebvre, 1996). This has elicited perceptions, policy responses, and regulations that peg skateboarders as non-productive users of space as they fail to participate in preconceived, inorganic notions of capitalistic consumption and are not subsumed by political-economy imperatives such as selling food or clothing (Jones & Graves, 2000; Stratford, 2002; Nemeth, 2006; McCormack, 2012). Skateboarders foster “productive tensions between the potential for subcultural resistance and key commodification processes” (Vivoni, 2009, p. 130) whereby “the appropriation of found urban spaces through street skateboarding contests the given meanings of cities as growth machines, theme parks, and spectacle” (Vivoni, 2009, p. 131).

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a spatial ethno-geographic study of skateboarders in city space to better understand alternative uses of urban spaces and the ways in which city government responds to, regulates, and excludes skateboarders. Throughout the duration of this thesis, I conducted research and analyzed my findings through an actor-network theory lens because “nonhuman actors have to be seen as part of the political universe and ... ‘environments are combined sociophysical constructions that are actively and historically produced, both in terms of social content and physical-environmental qualities’” (Keil, 2003, p. 726). I performed direct observations and interviews to reflect on multiculturalism, understand difference, and learn how skateboarders perform in different urban spaces. In addition, my ethno-geographic research documented interactions between skateboarders, humans, materials, and nonhuman things. I sought to also understand the perceptions of skateboarders by nonskateboarders through observation, experience, and interviews with planning professionals. I juxtaposed skateboarders’ use of space with regulations imposed – both in public and private spaces - by Los Angeles to provide planners and city officials with more nuanced insights into understanding and planning with subcultures to increase their representation in the public realm. The initial question that drove my research was: (1) What can planners and nonskateboarders learn from a spatial ethno-geographic analysis of the skateboarding subculture’s uses of urban space?
As I conducted my mixed methods research, spoke with more skateboarders and planners, and began to understand the spatial dynamics of exclusion better, I formulated two more research questions. (2) Are current skateboard/recreational facilities imagined and designed by those who utilize the space (skateboarders) as well as adequately planned for in regards to fostering meaningful community engagement, integration of the space into the urban fabric, and provision of quality amenities within the space and around it? (3) What ways can cities utilize zoning incentives, regulatory tools and frameworks, and creative public and private space programming initiatives to better provide multi-use spaces that are vibrant and afford the incorporation of and appropriation by skateboarders and other subcultural populations?

Although this research is intended to enlighten city planners, politicians, and publics around the world, I chose Los Angeles for my field study because of its warm, predictable weather and my local knowledge with publicly-designated skate spaces and privately-controlled, appropriated plazas and skate spots. I use the term *urban space(s)* throughout this paper. Urban space, as defined, is a combination of two constituent parts—public and private space in cities; this is all space that can be used by urban citizens.

The current population of skateboarders in Los Angeles is estimated to be approximately a little over 400,000 Los Angelinos of various ages, skill levels, and genders (Whitley, 2010; Dupont, 2014; U.S. Census, 2016). My ethnographic research, the attendant findings and recommendations are meant to have broad applications to most cities since skateboarding is a global phenomenon and the question of who can use city spaces is a challenge that many cities confront daily. Notwithstanding my research’s shortcomings, I hope that I am able to encourage urban managers to become more imaginative and nuanced when studying urban phenomena and issues like providing inclusive urban space. In sum, my research aims to encourage planners to think critically about how to include performances and marginalized voices into urban spaces, to think about creative ways to enliven underutilized urban spaces through the use of tools at their disposal, and to acknowledge that space is produced by those who creatively use it because “time as well as space is produced through appropriation, resisting by entangled polyrhythms, the domination of space on the part of State power” (Borden, 2001, p. 237).

Before reviewing the germane literature and presenting my research design and findings, it is vital to understand skateboarding, subcultures, and the linkages between this activity, objects, spaces, regulations, and cities. Next, I present skateboarding’s evolution and its growth in cities, skateboarders’ usage of public space, public perception of skateboarders by nonskateboarders, and policy responses to skateboarding.
Brief History of Skateboarding and Public Space

Skateboarding dates back to the 1950s, where it evolved from a sport invented by California surfers seeking to ‘sidewalk surf’ and ride ‘concrete waves’ in backyard pools to a global urban phenomenon (Perrin, 2012). During the inchoate decades of skateboarding, the activity was thought to be merely an extension of the surf culture as skaters were oftentimes alluded to as concrete surfers. As a subculture, skateboarders comprise “groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do, and where they do it” (Gelder & Thornton, 1997, p. 1). As skateboarding evolved, technological innovations with the shapes, materials, and sizes of skateboards and tricks performed by skateboarders led to an increase in its popularity in the late 20th-century (Prentiss et al. 2011; Irvine & Taysom, 1998).

Subject to booms and busts in the economy in the 1980s, skateboarding was democratized as many skateparks were torn down and urban street skateboarding provided a unique, (im)pervious environment with endless possibilities. Skateboarders’ increased exposure and subversive activities near nonskateboarders produced a lack of understanding of this subculture, led to negative perceptions, and produced planning responses that imposed regulations banning the activity from plazas in cities’ centers. Skateboarders’ co-optation of space spurred regulations by policymakers to discourage skateboarding, relocate them into controlled, fenced-off skatepark environments, and engendered public dissent by non-skateboarders who stereotyped this activity as a “sport with an outlaw aura, a punk image, and with very little public acceptance” (Browne & Francis, 1993, p. 46).

Urban street skateboarders are the most numerous cohort of the subculture that use both skateparks and urban spaces like plazas. Therefore, street skateboarders were the subject of my academic inquiry. Today, there are 12 million skateboarders in the United States and 50 million worldwide (O’Connor, 2016). Because of the popularity and growth of the activity, it has been posited that the ‘subversive’ nature of skateboarding has transformed from a subcultural pursuit to a mainstream, popular sport. Most recently, it was incorporated and legitimized as a sport in the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics. Skateboarding has slowly percolated into the commercial and governmental processes of neoliberal cities as action sports nongovernmental organizations
serve as vehicles for the sport’s public acceptance (O’Connor, 2016).

**Skateboarders’ Appropriative Usage of and Creative Performances in Urban Spaces**

Skateboarding is seen as subversive because the act of using objects, materials, and spaces solely for use value denies the logic of the city as pre-eminently existing to serve global flows of information and capital (Lefebvre, 1996). “If asymmetries have to be accounted for, it means that other actors than social ones are coming into play” (Latour, 2004, p. 225). Therefore, nonhuman entities such as the piece of wood, attached to the metal trucks, ball-bearings, and wheels are full-blown actors with agency as they interact with materials like wax to slide upon metal ledges, jump down stairs, and grind down handrails in newly imagined ways, allowing society to exist as a durable thing in space. Through a fun, playful, and shared re-imagining of space and use of parks, squares, sidewalks, walls, benches, and plazas for tricks and performances, skateboarders creatively reinvent the city as a terrain to practice skills and move across geographic demarcations as a single in-between terrain, defying the spatial logic and organization of consumption in the public realm (Lefebvre, 1991; Irvine & Taysom, 1998; Dinces, 2011).

Borden’s (2001) groundbreaking work on skateboarding and urban space – *Skateboarding, Space, and the City: Architecture and the Body* – offers a meditative glimpse into how skateboarders produce new, imagined, and real spaces. They congregate and perform purely to enjoy a space’s use value as opposed to its exchange value (See Figure 1). In left-over spaces, skaters’ energetic occupation of urban space is oftentimes ascribed to the negative aspects of modernist planning. In this sense, architecture is inherently designed to produce a space of things, but “rather than the ideologically frontal or monumental, skateboarders usually prefer the lack of meaning and symbolism of everyday spaces” (Borden, 2001, p. 188). In these spaces without meaning or spaces that are taken for granted (e.g., streets, mini-malls, and urban plazas), skateboarders’ true creativity materializes, as they perform in the “spaces of decision-making

![Skater tailslides on ledges within West LA Courthouse courtyard. Photo by Chris Giamarino.](image1.png)
(typically the urban plaza) which symbolize not through iconography but through expansivity of space” (Borden, 2001, p. 188).

According to Chiu (2009), there is nothing outwardly wrong with the ways skateboarders creatively use public space except that skateboarders are routinely considered as trespassers (Chiu, 2009). In fact, skateboarding redefines space in cities as a complex assemblage of obstacles, objects, and opportunities that are “open to creative and visceral reuse producing new trajectories along paths made up of heterogeneous elements” (Fine, 2013, p. 7). For cities around the world, unique built environments produce their own signature look and feel for skateboarders and present true pedestrian metropolitan cityscapes encouraging raw street styles, smooth concrete paradises, and challenging areas with harder-to-skate terrain (Eisenhour et al., 2013). For example, Los Angeles is popularly known by skateboarders as a skateboarding mecca. Its sunny weather and smooth concrete plazas, schoolyards, hills, and skate parks provide an Edenic destination for skaters from around the world to travel to and use. Skateboarders perform liberating actions of creative perspectivism in space by generating qualities, experiences, encounters, relations of body and thing, and pain and fun (Seijo & Hernandez, 2009). Through appropriating commonplace urban spaces and objects such as subway stations, handrails, fountains, statues, benches, and vertical walls, skateboarders continually fight for a distinctive social and physical space of their own, even as planners attempt to relocate them into controlled skatepark environments, away from public view.

**Perceptions, Planning, Regulation, and Exclusion of Skateboarders**

Many normatively claim that all urban inhabitants, be they skateboarders, business people, homeless persons, or street performers, should possess a universal, equitable right to spaces that are inclusive, encourage interaction among diverse parties, allow for participant control in the activities they conduct, and stimulate dynamic areas with a multiplicity of spectacles (Whyte, 1980; Nemeth & Hollander, 2010; Dinces, 2011). Mitchell (2003), in his book entitled *The Right to the City*, describes the importance of providing inclusive, physical spaces for subcultures to possess basic civil rights, congregate, voice dissent, and appropriate. However, due to securitization, regulation, and privatization of material spaces, governments, in a veiled attempt to squander fears of impending dangers such as terrorism, have relegated marginalized populations out of these physical spaces, and thus out of the public sphere (Mitchell, 2003). As Whyte (1980) lamented, many city officials, business elites and corporations “who make decisions about the city have surprisingly little acquaintance with the life of its streets and open spaces” and do not like it when ‘undesirables’ inhabit, occupy, and use public space (Whyte, 1980, p. 61). Lefebvre (1991, 1996) goes...
even further to suggest that serious scientific studies should find and understand the material in the ‘trivial,’ the everyday, and that current dominant strategies and ideologies should consider the imaginary which invests itself in appropriation of space as “the residue reveals itself to be most precious” (Lefebvre, 1991; Lefebvre, 1996, p. 153).

Skateboarders are subject to negative perceptions and policy responses by policymakers, private property owners, the media, and ‘appropriate’ users/consumers of public space in cities (Stratford, 2002; Carr, 2011; Snyder, 2011). However, they have also been characterized as productive users of public space because every day, material objects like “roads, footpaths, railings, stairs, and buildings [are] stripped of symbolic value and accorded a use value” (Irvine & Taysom, 1998, p. 25).

Public perception has posited skateboarders, street performers (i.e., breakdancers, graffiti artists), and other subcultural populations (i.e., homeless, youth) as possessing no economic worth and as inadequate consumers of public space. However, the ‘postmodern’ ethos of skateboarding in the 21st-century has led to the emergence of the subcultural identity as an increasingly important output of capitalistic production processes through the production of marketable street imagery and cultural creativity (Howell, 2005; Dinces, 2011). Now that skateboarding has global reach, this has presented new sets of planning problems for local governments and city planners. While city governments celebrate the benefits of recreational risk-taking, they continue to exert control and prioritize commercial interests. For example, there is “legislation enacted in various countries worldwide to keep skateboarders out of city centers and to fine skateboarding in public places” (O’Connor, 2016, p. 480), while many skateboarders who are provided publicly-controlled skate parks still transgress boundaries to “retain subcultural identity [while remaining] deeply skeptical of skateboarding being represented as a sport” (O’Connor, 2016, p. 480).

Continuing along the theme of regulation and control, policymakers mark groups of young people and skateboarders as threats to public order and “subcultural groups failing to fall within the definition of ‘rational’ or ‘appropriate’ users can also be excluded from public space, as social identities are constructed in space” (Nemeth, 2006, p. 298). In Los Angeles and cities around the world, public space has been shrinking through its privatization, exclusionary zoning mechanisms, and control through design features and security measures (Peterson, 2006). For example, security guards are hired to keep undesirable users out, skate-stoppers and other physical barriers are placed on objects to prevent their usage, and visual signs forbid certain activities (See Figure 2). These regulatory impositions “[compromise] the concept of the public sphere as an arena of discursive relations conceptually independent of both the state and the economy” (Crawford, 1995, p. 4).
Visible signs in spaces forbid skateboarding, rollerblading, and bicycling as “particular uses [have been] legislated in written regulations and engrained in the built environment” (Peterson, 2006, p. 370; Tower, 2014). Regulations deny skateboarders their right to the city. The right to the city is not a visiting right, but it “is like a cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158). The urban should serve as a place of encounter and prioritize use values, but because of hidden regulations in municipal codes, skateboarders are denied the ability to make the city different, shape it to their desire, and remake themselves in a different image (Harvey, 2003). For instance, a landscape architect who designs skateparks in Los Angeles bluntly interjected while I interviewed him, “In LA, it’s illegal to skate in public right-of-ways. Legalizing it could help. It’s a lot better than it was ten years ago. You’ll see people skating ledges in a plaza and nobody will stop it.” Skateboarders have been ticketed for ‘recklessly’ riding on sidewalks and ‘defacing’ property by performing tricks. Surprisingly in 2012, Ordinance 182389, an amendment to prior anti-skateboarding laws in Los Angeles, harshly equates the ‘dangers’ (i.e., colliding with a pedestrian) of skateboarding to driving an automobile, while also legally banning the activity from public roadways, sidewalks, and other publicly-owned property, giving the City Council the power to adopt future ordinances to further exclude and criminalize skaters (LA, 2012).

These regulations and other policy responses have allowed policymakers to transcend the everyday life of urban space through the imposition of contradictory regulations, allowing urban managers to possess spatial nature, and leave it up to private developers and security to contrive urban culture (Lefebvre 1996). Public space regulation reveals the ‘public’ realm as an amalgamation of increasingly privatized areas of political power, revealing socio-spatial inequalities and structurally stratified hierarchies in urban space among different people and subcultures.

Figure 2: Exclusion

Skate stoppers deter skating & Metro Bike stations prevent any occupation or usage of ledges. Photo by Chris Giamarino.
Skateboarders as Creative Placemakers and Public Space

A number of researchers have looked at the (1) ways in which skaters use public and private space; (2) the reasons skateboarders have persisted in the use of privately-owned public space even in the face of extensive regulation and the provision of skate parks; (3) the types of spaces skateboarders have appropriated; and (4) the informal social hierarchy within the skate subculture and how elite members maintain power and status (Karsten & Pel, 2000; Chiu, 2009; Vivoni, 2009; Dupont, 2014).

Karsten and Pel (2000), in one of the earliest empirical studies on skateboarding practices, taking place at one skatepark and eight skate spots in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, systematically explored the ways in which skaters used the city differently from that of the rest of its inhabitants. Going to all nine spaces eight times each, they observed skaters through mapping, charting, writing field notes, and collecting information about skating from skateboarder interviews. They initially found that the “challenging designs [of urban spaces] attracts skaters” (Karsten & Pel, 2000, p. 329). Limitations with this study included inclement weather and the fact that it is almost impossible to guess when skateboarders may be using a specific space. Therefore, certain days at certain spaces left these urban geographers with no users to observe or interview. Regardless, this study found that skaters clash with more established modes of transportation, concede to the demands of other users in space and shopkeepers by occupying and appropriating underutilized spaces after working hours, and that “the places where people skateboard and the sporting activity itself are continuously subject to change” (Karsten & Pel, 2000, p. 338). Skateboarding appears to be more than just a leisure-time activity; it is also an identity-building performance with considerable impact on media, clothing, and culture, but most importantly produces new opportunities and spaces for the rapid pace of city life (See Figure 3).

Chiu (2009) found that street skateboarding, as opposed to controlled park skateboarding, “represents contesting spatial practice, creating a mental, social, and body space, embodying a skater’s self-identity and cultural expression” (Chiu, 2009, p. 25) in controlling, expressing, and performing in city space. He employed a methodology where four sites (two public and two private) were selected throughout New York City and participant observation and interviews were conducted and compartmentalized into three thematic dimensions - social production of public space, social control imposed on skaters, and discursive construction of skateboarding. Chiu concluded that cities afforded more complex spaces that were socially produced.
and practiced by skaters; parks offered delineated landscapes that controlled creativity; and the occupation of skate spots provided skateboarders a discursive medium to display their subcultural tricks and styles to the public (Chiu, 2009).

Vivoni (2009) looked at the different types of spaces that were offered to and created by skateboarders, which he labeled as ‘found’ and ‘purpose-built’ spots occupying the political spectrum of public space policy (Vivoni, 2009). Through a case study analysis of laws, plans, and skateboarding flows, Vivoni distinguished found spaces as DIY spaces under highways, city infrastructure such as sidewalks, and wax-caked ledges, all showing remnants of skateboard usage. Purpose-built spaces are based on the cooptation by corporations and city regulations to build contained, representative spots for skateboarders that are deemed appropriate for skateboarding. This results in a tension between the types of spaces skateboarders demand and the ways in which city government tries to regulate skateboarding out of the private and public realms (Vivoni, 2009).

Dupont (2014) elaborated on Chiu’s research by exploring the interrelationships between different types of skateboarders. He conducted a multi-sited ethnography to explore commonalities of the subculture across different urban geographies to construct a social hierarchy of skateboarders (Dupont, 2014). Providing a more nuanced, hierarchical construction and insight of skateboarders, Dupont’s findings are critical in understanding varying degrees of expertise and how “commitment, subcultural
capital, and social capital [are] intertwined with race, class, gender, and status” (Dupont, 2014, p. 577). This entangled, yet fragmented hierarchy highlights how varying populations and intersections of class, race, and gender can be disparately treated, negatively stigmatized, and become increasingly spatially excluded in cities.

**Changing Perceptions of Skateboarders/Subcultures in Urban Public Space**

Several studies provide powerful qualitative and ethnographic methodologies for understanding skateboarders, painting them with a more socially-acceptable brush, and showing how, oftentimes, regulations to keep skateboarders out of certain areas are met with resistance - the skateboarders keep coming back.

One exemplary case study was skateboarders’ usage of the plaza at Love Park in Philadelphia. Howell (2005) adopted an analytical case study methodology to illustrate how skateboarders went from being portrayed as punitive, destructive, and even anti-social to being lauded as an ‘organic’ street culture that produces marketable imagery, reclaims dead space, attracts employers, and begins the process of gentrification (Howell, 2005). The proposed 2000 ban of skateboarders in this plaza sparked controversy with regular police sweeps and violent police tactics. This lead to a sustained, politicized effort by skaters, activist organizations, private businesses, town planner Edmund Bacon, and planning scholar Richard Florida to remove the ban and rebrand the skate culture as part of the ‘creative class’ that generates revenue through media exposure, by producing a marketable image for the city. Howell concluded that the successful campaign and partnerships established to promote the usage and occupation of the plaza by skateboarders reclaimed a failing urban space and helped to establish the concept of ‘The City as Entertainment Machine’ as “contemporary consumption practice [extended] to the consumption of space” (Howell, 2005, p. 38).

To better illustrate Howell’s research, Beneker et al. (2010) used an interesting methodology with children to figure out their specific representations of spaces. They also used the case of Love Park in Philadelphia as an example of different representations of space where skateboarders offer spectacles by grinding ledges while city workers use the space as a lunch time retreat. The major finding was that the education of a population based on narrative text, teaching, and images affected the perceptions and spatial decisions of urban managers and citizens (Beneker et al., 2010).

Wooley and Johns (2001) focused on the exclusion and powerlessness of urban youth in public space by administering focus group discussions in three cities with skateboarders. They discussed the politics of space and how the occupation of space by skateboarders annoyed building owners and managers. However, because skateboarders prefer hard, urban spaces and cities tend to lack adequate...
green space in every neighborhood, they found that skateboarding should be encouraged by city officials as impervious materials and objects provide an endless ludic city space (Wooley & Johns, 2001). To further justify the argument for the ludic city, which Stevens (2007) describes as non-instrumental, post-structural behavior in spaces that have a “dialectical relation to the order, fixity, and functional and semiotic determinism of built form” (Stevens, 2007, p. 1), other sports like soccer or football have higher rates of harmful injury compared to skateboarding (Nemeth, 2006). In focus group settings, Wooley and Johns (2001) found that skateboarders are relatively more genial to other users of space such as pedestrians, the elderly, authority, and bicyclists, but the press and urban-decision makers oftentimes dramatize conflicts between these groups, leaving skaters to be grouped in with beggars and vandals.

Snyder (2011) provided an in-depth ethnographic study of the skateboarding subculture and the opportunities skateboarding affords youth and adolescents. He is the brother of a professional skateboarder, skateboards, and knows the lingo, culture, and inner workings of this subculture. His methodology involved living with skateboarders, conducting interviews with photos of skateboard landmarks, and analyzing paths that skateboarders took to make a living. He also documented how skateboarders’ performances of consecutive skateboarding tricks were captured on film in a public space and led to them being paid by skate companies (Snyder, 2011). His findings on the skate subculture’s economic contributions is antithetical to previous perceptions of skateboarders as anti-capitalist and anti-authority. The findings described skateboarders in a more positive light. As skateboarding has been commodified within the strictures of neoliberal planning ideologies and economies, more skateboarders, coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds and locales, have adopted its subcultural lifestyle. This has led to a politicization of and mass identification with skateboarding. Consequent forms of resistance, such as future campaigns to keep spaces open to skaters, may no longer be symbolic, due to the popularization, infiltration, and appropriation by skateboarders into the urban fabric of most cities.

Snyder’s ethnographic study found that “as more and more skaters experience [highly regulated] spaces they have become active in discussions about the use of public space and in the building of skate plazas” (Snyder, 2011, pp. 319-320). Although he documented professional skateboarders as positive role models who made careers out of skateboarding, his modus operandi wasn’t to postulate that subcultural career pursuits are solutions to the myriad social, political, and economic problems facing young people. Rather, and to the point of this thesis, ethnographic analyses can counter commonly held negative perceptions of a diverse, multicultural population’s relationships to the city. The documentation of courageous and
imaginative performances in public space led to the creation of opportunities for skateboarders, which meant skateboarding created exploratory new uses of public space, providing not only a space to play in cities, but also a respectable, creative means for one to earn a living (Snyder, 2011).

**Skateboarders, Spatial Exclusion, and Planning**

All nine studies exploring the relationship between skateboarding, spatial exclusion, and urban planning employed a methodology which consisted of picking a site(s) that had large skateboard populations and problems between community residents, city planners, and skateboarders in public space. These studies analyzed case studies and regulations about why skateboarders were deemed a nuisance, administered surveys, performed observations, and conducted interviews for more qualitative, location-specific understandings.

The Nemeth (2006) study focused on one iconic skateboard spot in Philadelphia, PA; Howell (2008) quantified the growth of skateboarding's popularity, the restrictive legislation put in place within most municipalities' laws, and the construction of skateparks as neoliberal spaces through market-oriented approaches to the management of public affairs; Carr (2010) assessed skateboard activism and advocacy for a spot in a vacant supermarket parking lot in Seattle; Jones & Graves (2000) documented the power-plays in public space between planning for skateparks and building skate spots in Portland, OR; Owens (2001) looked at recreational restrictions and the dynamics between community residents and skateboarders in California; Freeman & Riordan (2002) sought to acknowledge conflict between young people (skateboarders) and other users of public open space, and figure out how to plan successful skateparks that could reduce tensions between different populations; Stratford (2002) and Walker et al. (2014) provided global context on the issue of planning and skateboarding in two separate jurisdictions in Australia; O’Connor (2016) provided further context on issues of planning, control, and skateboarding in Hong Kong.

The research found that communities and cities perceived skateboarders’ usage of public space as a nuisance that displaces other potential users, exhibits a general sense of lawlessness, appears to be inherently transgressive, is detrimental to city-branding strategies for downtown revitalization, anti-police, and damaging to property (Jones & Graves, 2000; Owens, 2001; Freeman & Riordan, 2002; Stratford, 2002; Nemeth, 2006; Howell, 2008; Carr, 2010; Walker et al., 2014; O’Connor, 2016). Because of preconceived perceptions, policy responses were rather extreme in controlling and displacing skateboarders. For example, in Philadelphia’s Love Park and in Seattle, economic and political restructuring in the early 2000s created strict regulatory regimes to combat damage to property, limit threats, and provide security and order, which led to the proposal for
complete closures of spots and suggested relocations of skaters (Nemeth, 2006; Carr, 2010). However, due to skateboarding activism, in the form of participation in city planning meetings and occupation of the banned spaces, and the recognition by policy makers that skateboarding was an economic driver of cities (e.g., the X-Games coming to Philadelphia, generating $80 million in revenue for the city, and gaining over 150 million viewers nationwide), closed spaces – or those that regulated certain users and not others - were reclaimed.

The studies in Portland, Oregon (Jones & Graves, 2000), California (Owens, 2001), New Zealand (Freeman & Riordan, 2002), various locations in the United States (Howell, 2008), and Australia (Walker et al., 2014) analyzed policy responses – the building of controlled skateparks. These studies showed that due to a lack of understanding of skateboarders’ needs, cultural sensitivity to place, and of holistic planning, planned skateparks were rife with shortcomings. In all five cases, skateboarders did not like being told where to skate, plans sparked divisive public debate from concerned citizens, and the “activity … was being regulated/legislated out of the realm of appropriate public space use and into the world of either a singular athletic activity, or as a public nuisance needing to be addressed” (Jones & Graves, 2000, p. 146).

Three studies analyzed skaters’ uses in the publicly-provided and -controlled skateparks. In all three cases, singular activity-based planning led to isolated skateparks which were not integrated with transportation systems, provided piecemeal recreational facilities that were missing vital elements such as connected paths or seating areas for spectators, and placed spaces in low-income, crime-ridden, and/or industrial areas far away from amenities such as bodegas where park users and skaters could stop for a drink or food. Walker (2014) pointed to the social capital and health benefits associated with providing skateparks for youth, teenagers, and adolescents in cities, but in agreement with Jones & Graves (2000) and Owens (2001), more organic, participant-controlled spaces for skateboarders already exist in cities and the real problem was perceptions held by those in power.

Two of the studies took a more process-oriented, and planning-centric approach by studying how planning could improve participation by skaters in decision-making to address their needs. Freeman & Riordan (2002) and Howell (2008) sought to understand inadequacies in planning frameworks to address the needs of skaters, how skateboarders are engaged by urban managers in decision-making processes, and where areas (or gaps) exist for improvement. These studies centered on specific planning processes rather than focusing on the use of the physical skatepark and how well urban managers have controlled skaters’ appropriation.

For example, in New Zealand, the planner’s dilemma was to study a cohort that was misunderstood
in order to reduce tensions between different users, all the while providing younger generations adequate recreational facilities. In an attempt to stymie conflicts between skaters and nonskaters, and be conversant with the debate on access to and rights to public space, planners included young people in the selection of sites and conceptual designs (Freeman & Riordan, 2002). The study’s key findings showed that skaters used space differently, the diverse nature of skateboarding requires individual, unique approaches for each site being planned, the provision of skateparks doesn’t resolve issues concerning street skating in mixed-use, public areas, and that current planning frameworks were inadequate which led to the provision of poorer quality skateparks.

Howell (2008) studied park facilities, planning documents, and skate advocacy materials throughout the United States to better understand planning decision-making processes. Skateparks were (and still are) predominantly funded through private-public partnerships. In addition, he found that planners acknowledge that skateboarders take responsibility for their recreational risk-taking, the notions that skating is inherently dangerous and a huge liability for cities are largely unfounded, and that the “presence of skateboarders can deter vandalism, drug use, prostitution, and homeless encampments” (Howell, 2008, p. 485). He concluded with the belief that skateboarders will continue to be involved in the planning process because urban managers see skateboarders as self-policing, responsible urban space users. Skateparks were also seen as safe spaces, a means of economic competition for development, a more desirable land use than vacant land, and as a legally-binding contract (i.e., a space to skate in exchange for the acceptance of personal responsibility for injury).

Lastly, the most recent study by O’Connor (2016) argued that skateboarding has now transformed from a subcultural pursuit to a mainstream recreational activity, particularly because the sport has been included into the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. The study focused on issues of participant control versus government legislation in skate facilities at one skatepark in Hong Kong. With skateboarding’s shift to the mainstream, cities have acknowledged skateboarders as appropriative users of spaces/objects and that skateboarding is “typified by its freedom, spontaneity, and creativity” (O’Connor, 2016, p. 478). However, the growth in the culture and number of urban skate spaces have signaled a new set of problems for local governments. Although the primary mode of global governance has been to keep skateboarders out of city centers and to fine skateboarding in urban spaces, most Asian cities lack anti-skateboarding legislation and enforcement. Regardless, they’ve turned their attention to the provision of skateparks to provide more legitimate space where local governments can audit recreational risk-takers through a “defensive
approach to accountability [to reduce] risk by measured control” (O’Connor, 2016, p. 486). Through an ethnographic study to explore why skateboarders don’t use helmets at one skatepark, O’Connor found that skateboarders see safety legislation as a deterrence to the very spirit of the activity – individual freedom and performative expression. He suggested that increased regulations could be a contributing factor as to why skaters move en masse to the streets and other urban spaces. He concluded by stating that skateboarding can be characterized as a form of transcendental play or edgework, whereby skateboarders “defy and overcome risk through the practice of developing controlled expertise” (O’Connor, 2016, p. 486). Skatepark provision and spatial regulation of skateboarders remain sites of conflict for governments surrounding control. The activity of skateboarding, however, is increasingly being celebrated by cities ideologically as neoliberal in its work ethic, individuality, and creativity (O’Connor, 2016).

In all nine studies, there existed a dialectic between accommodating skaters in urban governance policy while making sure they were controlled and their spaces contained. Instead of integrating skaters into the urban fabric or allowing them to use plaza spaces, everyday urban objects (i.e., benches, stairs, rails, etc.) were planned, designed, and placed into contained, publicly-controlled spaces while heavily regulated spaces were filled with signage to ban skateboarding completely (See Figure 4).

Carr (2010), however, suggested that regulatory law should be used as a way to reinvent cities as spaces of play, opening up the exercise of individual agency and freedom (Carr, 2010). Further isolating a social activity from the city center will exacerbate suspicion, fear, and perception of difference between groups, while preventing cities and their residents from seeing the merit in activities like skateboarding that produce creative placemaking. In order for planners to understand diverse subcultures and plan “ideal, truly inclusive public spaces, powerful groups [must] become aware of existing inequalities and deal with such difference rather than detaching themselves
“exclusions should be viewed as instances of the erosion of truly public space” (Howell, 2008, p. 479). Simply planning more skateparks strengthens and reiterates the power of city elites, negative perceptions of skateboarding, and creates inadequate, single-activity recreation facilities. Low-levels of engagement with the skate community and the banning of skate activities at plazas hinder skaters’ rights to the city. Notwithstanding the negative aspects of banning a population from certain spaces, the same studies also found concrete benefits in the provision of skateparks (e.g., exercise, personal responsibility, empowerment, self-government, inclusion in decision-making processes), acknowledged the fact that skaters are not truly a liability, and believed that skateparks won’t completely stop skaters from exploring other urban spaces. Regardless, if skaters demand for their right to the city and are integrated back into organic urban fabrics, other populations, planners, and businesses may reverse their judgments and see the merit in allowing creative appropriation and performance within city spaces and upon urban objects.

To summarize, skateboarders see and use objects, materials, and spaces differently in cities, reorienting, deconstructing, and reconstructing symbolic meanings of plazas, handrails, and stairs to their liking. However, as skateboarders have become more populous and adventurous in their performances in myriad urban, concrete spaces, increased exposure to nonskateboarders and city planners has led to exclusionary policy responses and the provision of publicly-controlled spaces based on negative, socially-constructed stigmatizations of skateboarders. Lastly, skateboarders’ utilizable space has shrunk due to regulations that control skateboarders’ movements in space, which has led to the development of skateparks as well as mass mobilization, further ‘transgression,’ and spatial exploration by skateboarders in plazas and industrial areas.
Research Design

My mixed methods research constituted a “study of [skateboarders] in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving [me] participating directly in the setting…and…activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on [skateboarders] externally” (Brewer, 2000, p. 10). My research design and undertakings emphasized understanding and interpretation rather than explanation of social reality in terms of theories and models. I undertook three research tasks. First, I observed skateboarders in four spaces in Los Angeles. Second, I conducted semi-structured interviews with skateboarders in these spaces. Third, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with planning/public space professionals, urban journalists, and academics who have written on the right to the city and public space topics.

Columbia University’s Institutional Review Board approved me to conduct human-subject research on December 7th, 2016. All of my field observations and most interviews I conducted took place between December 31st, 2016 and January 18th, 2017 in Los Angeles, CA. I conducted the rest of my interviews from January 23rd, 2017 to February 3rd, 2017 over the phone and through Skype in New York City, NY. This methodology focused on skateboarders as a sub-culture and consisted of me observing their practices and performances in public and private space in Los Angeles. In addition, the interviews added to my analysis in the findings section and buttressed my policy recommendations. One of the most difficult aspects of conducting this spatial ethnographic research was to “initiate, develop, and maintain a productive informant relationship” with all skateboarders involved (Spradley, 1979, p. 45). After acclimating myself to the spaces and as a skateboarder of 14 years, these initial difficulties were not a problem.

Analyzing and Mapping Skate Ethno-Geographies and Appropriative Performance

My overarching research task was to provide a spatial ethnographic understanding of skateboarders in Los Angeles through analyzing my findings following Lefebvre’s trialectic conceptualization of urban space: (1) creative performance in public space (lived space); (2) design of space by skateboarders, planners, and architects (representations of space); and (3) the symbolic meanings attributed to space by skateboarders (representational space) (Lefebvre, 1991). To summarize this complex trialectic conceptualization, in The Production of Space (1991), Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist philosopher, contributed this spatial triad to theories of space in an attempt to understand the antagonistic yet interconnected dynamics working together to produce
the physical fabric of the world (Lefebvre, 1991). By reducing fields of spatial thought when critiquing/analyzing space to these three coproducing/codeterminant monads, I systematically analyzed how human/nonhuman agents and exclusionary planning practices were socially producing space from absolute (i.e., physical, conceptual, social) space in Los Angeles. As I mentioned, I adopted an actor-network theory lens when analyzing my findings through Lefebvre’s trialectic because I sought to develop a way of thinking about reality that doesn’t assume humans are the only agents while the rest of the world stays passive (Beauregard, 2012). Assemblage thinking allowed me to explicitly acknowledge that urban spaces are comprised of heterogeneous human and nonhuman elements/agents that contribute to its fluid reality. Following post-structuralist social conceptualizations and productions of space (Lefebvre) and a Latourian theoretical framework of ANT, I focused on action in public and private space which reflected “the contemporary understanding that planning extends beyond directives to implementation” (Beauregard, 2012, p. 14).

By reading germane qualitative methods research literature, I conducted ethnographic research to analyze and present a West Coast vignette into the skateboarding culture, skateboarders’ performances, usage and creativity, and the regulations that have been imposed by urban managers to exclude this population (Spradley 1979, 1980; Brewer, 2000; Blommaert & Jie, 2010). The initial research task (1) consisted of participant observation of two types of spaces that skateboarders frequent (public skateparks and privately-owned public spaces) accessible by Los Angeles’ public transportation system. These spaces were (1) Lafayette Skate Plaza, (2) Hollenbeck Skate Plaza, (3) Staples Center Ledges, and (4) Jkwon Plaza (See Figures 5 & 6). I chose these four spaces because they possess similar features, but afford different types of appropriate uses. Skateboarders use all four spots and planners have imposed varying degrees of regulations within these spaces. Over the course of four weeks, I went to each spot four times (n = 16). I went to each space twice during the week and twice during the weekend; once in the morning and once in the afternoon. For the first half hour, I observed and documented skateboarders, and for the second half hour, I skateboarded to experience the space myself as well as establish rapport for my interviews. For the remainder of the time I spent there, ranging from one to two hours, I conducted interviews.

At all four spaces, I documented skateboarders’ spatial ethno-geographies, flows, networks, and appropriative performances through rough sketches of the spaces. Through this initial, experimental mapping exercise, I understood the ways in which skaters used the different types of spaces and objects through a visual analysis of the paths taken. For my field observations, I used Fulcrum, a mobile application that compartmentalizes mixed methods
**Figure 5: Contextual Locator Map of Trips to Spaces in Los Angeles, CA**

- Locations of spaces in LA
- Transit from Orange to LA County
- LA County in California
- Source: LA eGIS, 2016

**Figure 6: Images of the Four Skate Spaces Observed in Los Angeles, CA**

- Lafayette Skate Plaza
- Hollenbeck Skate Plaza
- Staples Ledges
- Jkwon Plaza

Photos by Chris Giamarino
ethnographic research in the field into an easy-to-read spreadsheet. By sinking up real-time qualitative and quantitative field observations, photographs, and videos, Fulcrum aided my memory in contextualizing the character and uniqueness of each space I researched. I was able to display skateboarders’ usage and performance in space, revealing how different subcultures and urban dwellers “create multiple and overlapping spaces of action and meaning that define the everyday contexts of social movements” (Gehl & Svarre, 2013; Barassi, 2013, p. 48).

I noted observations like the name of the space, counts of skateboarders, location of the space, different types of nonskateboarding activities taking place, appropriative performances, and wrote miscellaneous notes of interesting things that happened. I also photographed and filmed the performances to understand each space’s unique spatial and social environment. See Appendix I for an example of Fulcrum’s incorporation into my research to easily systematize and organize my findings. This part of my methodology allowed me to describe the four spaces analyzed, understand what types of spaces were most popular, decipher how skaters used the spaces similarly or differently, and show other nuances of urban space usage in Los Angeles.

Conducting Semi-Structured Skateboarder Interviews in Public vs. Private Spaces
For my second research task, I conducted semi-structured interviews with skateboarders. I wanted to know four things from the interviews. First, I wanted to know what specifically about appropriating space is so empowering. Second, I sought to understand how skaters believe they see and use public space differently than others. Third, I wanted to understand if tensions, perceptions, and potential confrontations manifest themselves regularly. Fourth, and final, I aimed to analyze how planners can better accommodate skateboarders. I informally spoke to about 60 skateboarders and formally interviewed 30 skateboarders (n = 30). I interviewed skateboarders both individually and in focus group settings. There were fifteen questions that I asked. See Appendix II for the full list of questions. To ensure anonymity, all skaters were assigned a number (e.g., Skater #1, Lafayette Plaza). At Lafayette, I formally interviewed thirteen skateboarders (n = 13). I conducted eight (n = 8) interviews at Staples Center. At Hollenbeck, I interviewed five skateboarders (n = 5) and at Jkwon I wasn’t able to conduct any interviews (n = 0). I was able, however, to conduct four more interviews at the West LA Courthouse (n = 4), which is a hybrid space elaborated on in the findings section. The number, or lack thereof, of interviewees is circumstantially described in the findings section.

I codified my skateboarder transcripts into the three themes following Lefebvre’s spatial triad pertaining to the social production of space so that analysis of my qualitative data would be systematized (Spradley, 1979). Through codification,
I identified cultural themes and present my findings in the next section on skateboarders’ performances in the city, symbolic ties to and in urban space, and regulations placed on skateboarders. My field observations and interview data helped me to “uncover realities [in urban spaces] previously unseen or unimagined” (Corner, 1999, p. 213). They also aided me in consciously challenging the “omniscient, disembodied and totalizing urban map that [has] become the principal instrument for urban planning” (Cosgrove, 2008, p. 174). Specifically, the interview data allowed me to understand multiple things about the skateboard culture. My interviews captured how skateboarders perform in space through an ethnographic lens and the reasons why skateboarders use the whole city as opposed to publicly-controlled skateparks. In addition, these interviews elucidated how skateboarding is inherently creative as opposed to destructive. Transcripts also revealed the ways in which skateboarding could be better integrated into all types of urban spaces through design interventions and inclusion of skaters into public participation and planning processes.

Understanding Spatial Exclusion and Perceptions of Skateboarders in Cities

For my third and final research task, I conducted interviews with planning professionals, public space experts, journalists who have covered skateboarding in cities, and academics who have written on right to the city and other germane urban space concepts. This served as a meaning-making process to understand socially-constructed perceptions of and planning responses to skateboarders, the circumstances of this construction, and the meaningful linkages between planning, skateboarding, and spatial exclusion, which I tied back into the interview transcripts of the skateboarders (Holstein & Gobrium, 2011). I conducted 9 interviews while in Los Angeles and New York City from January 9th, 2017 to February 3rd, 2017. These interviews took place at city agency offices in Los Angeles, over the phone, and through Skype. I sought to understand three things from these interviews as they related to skateboarding and spatial exclusion. First, I inquired into how planners and public space experts plan spaces for or against skateboarders. Second, I investigated why certain populations are regulated out of urban spaces and forums. Third, I aimed to find out what tools, initiatives, and programs skateboarders and cities have at their disposal to create more multi-use, inclusive spaces. I conducted consent-approved, anonymous, and semi-structured interviews that functioned as engaging conversations to see how the planning professionals positioned their narrative in broader schemes of urban space, why populations are excluded, and their perceptions of ‘undesirables’ in public spaces.
Public Space Planning, Shrinkage & Exclusion in Los Angeles

In this section of my findings, I discuss the problem of shrinking public space, the regulations that may increase this shrinkage, the provision of skate facilities by the city, and the contrasting ordinances put in place within public and private spaces. The City of Los Angeles’ public recreational space is shrinking. The historic, neoliberal transformation and privatization of space reflects “an ongoing negotiation of the relation between the state and the market” (Peterson, 2006, p. 359). Space is differentiated across a private-public gradient which encourages privatization, developable land is in short supply, and private developers have leverage in the provision of space and in deciding who can use it. Some have even gone so far as to state that Los Angeles’ democratic space is virtually extinct, as municipal policy has taken a security offensive by responding to a middle-class demand for increased spatial and social insulation with liaisons emerging between urban planning, architecture, and a police state (Davis, 2012).

To put these claims into a more quantifiable perspective, I looked at the Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore. The Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore (2016) analyzes public park systems nationwide and ranks parks based on metrics like median park size and park spending per resident (TPL, 2016). In 2014, LA ranked 45th out of 100 cities; in 2016, it ranked 65th out of 100 cities (Barragan, 2014). Park size is shrinking, but parks spending is increasing per capita (Barragan, 2016). These scholarly claims and empirical facts are not meant to disparage the state of LA’s parks and spaces. Rather, they are mentioned in order to challenge planners to be more innovative and imaginative in developing space that is accessible and truly public. In fact, although park size is shrinking, pocket parks (< ½ acre) are popping up all over the city as city agencies take advantage of market failures like housing crises to develop park space upon cheap land (NPR, 2012).

Today, “there continues to be a shortage of park space to service many of [Los Angeles’] communities” (City Planning Commission, 2016, p. 11). This shortage stems from a 1965 state law. Los Angeles’ Quimby regulation requires residential developers to dedicate land for recreational space or pay an in-lieu fee as a condition of subdivision map approval. Speaking with a Zoning Planner for the City of LA and looking at Quimby documents, I discovered that developers routinely pay the in-lieu fee to the Parks Department who must then find city-owned land to develop recreational facilities. Right now, the City prioritizes affordable
housing development and job growth while recreational space is becoming more and more of a rare luxury, especially prevalent in the City’s most affluent communities. Even when developers provide park space, it is primarily privately-owned and strictly for residents of the development. The Department of City Planning for Los Angeles recently passed a credit-incentive system to grant developers a 35% tax credit for park fees or land dedication for parks. If facilities are made publicly-accessible, the developer will obtain a 100% tax credit. This can be accomplished by the developer granting the City an easement through the open space it provides. There currently are no zoning regulations requiring commercial developers to provide public or privately-owned public space. A Zoning Planner/Specialist for LA summed up the limitations and contradictions of Quimby in relation to providing more accessible, inclusive open space.

"The implication of providing new parks ... um ... the intent of the law was so that people – the developers provide the park, but they also gave them an out to pay an in-lieu fee to not provide the park. Which in Los Angeles, has also been the default way to meet the need of Quimby requirements, which is to give the City money. The money goes to the Parks and Recs Department and then it's up to them to figure out how to meet those goals. The law is written in such a prescriptive way that you can't just buy a cheap parcel on the other side of town to develop land."

Planning for and Exclusion Against Skateboarders

How does this privatization of space play out in LA for skateboarders? Planning contained parks for skateboarders is the rational response to perceived increased physical confrontations, liability to injury, and minor property damage. A popular park-typology in Los Angeles is the skate plaza. Skate plazas are purposefully designed to represent the types of places and objects one would find in an urban environment (i.e., a privately-owned public plaza). Ordinances in the public skate spaces reduce liability from the city while other spaces criminalize the subculture's presence by constructing ‘skate-proof’ spaces with design interventions and arguing that skateboarders are a liability that produces some property damage. Privatized representations of space are socially-produced, hierarchically-constructed, suppress democratic principles, and can stymie multicultural expression. Nonetheless, this shrinkage of public space also increases opportunities for creative performance and instances of ‘insurgent citizenship’ that generate “new histories, cultures, and demands [that] inevitably disrupt the normative categories of social life and urban space” (Crawford, 1995, p. 8)

A planner from the Department of Parks told me that in-lieu Quimby fees are nice, but the biggest barrier to mass development of recreational facilities (skate facilities) is finding city-owned land. They believed that readily-available, privately-owned lots are opportunities, but the Department of Parks has little power to condemn and acquire these lots. Because there is not a lot of city-owned land for the Department to use Quimby fees to develop public
space, they have started to look at other spaces in cities.

“I’ve also thought about over the holidays how you will have vacant lots where you will sell pumpkins, Christmas trees, and how are those regulated? Here in LA County they get a temporary use permit. When we were looking for opportunities in urban communities we found parking lots. Here in LA there are park-n-rise lots. They’re not always full. It’s only during the commuting hours.”

However, these spaces are not under the jurisdiction of the Department and the planner suggested coalitions of park advocate groups may be better suited to deal directly with procuring this land and developing public recreational space. They oversee skate facilities within LA Parks and told me that skate parks are usually funded through private-public partnerships with skate foundations. This was the case with both skate plazas I observed.

California and Los Angeles have passed ‘quid pro quo’ ordinances in these city-owned skate spaces. State and City ordinances require signage that explicitly states that skaters must wear protective gear as it is a ‘hazardous recreational activity’ (LA Parks, 1979; JUSTIA, 2015; onecle, 2015). The City must keep a record of injuries incurred in plazas, but these spaces are ‘skate-at-your-own-risk.’ These State and City ordinances eliminate liability from injuries sustained by skaters and literature has shown that skaters value space given to them and decline to sue when injured (Howell, 2008). However, Ordinance 182389 allows the City Council to legally ban skateboarders in other public spaces not designated as skate plazas.

When providing skateparks and plazas, meaningful engagement with those benefiting from the space is becoming the norm, but this wasn’t the case with plazas I observed. In my focus group interview with skateboarders at Lafayette, skaters described that they would like an iterative community planning and design process with charrettes and workshops. They also told me that it would be cool to be able to skate the public skate plazas in iterative sections and then provide feedback to parks planners and landscape architects to either move the objects or include new ones.

Skater #4: I feel like every skatepark has its main obstacles in it, right? I feel like after those main obstacles are built. They should have people come in, skate the course after it’s built or while it’s still under or in construction; after those obstacles are built just have some people who are authorized to skate it, contracts and all. Then ask them their feedback on the park. Like, well these five obstacles…what other obstacles would you like added to these obstacles? We got stairs. We got an a-ledge. We got a back ledge. We got a manual pad. What else would you like here? Like skating this stuff (referencing Lafayette). If we would have got to come here and skate the star, the a-ledge, the back ledge, the stairs, and the manual pad first, and they asked us, before they opened the park, they asked us ‘what other obstacles would you want here besides the things you have?’ This park would look way better and it would look way different.” (Lafayette Plaza)

Although Lafayette Skate Plaza appeared to have poor engagement and feedback from the skateboard community, the Parks Department has incorporated meaningful engagement and community-based design strategies for other skateparks. One skater at the West LA Courthouse told me that Belvedere Skate Park in East Los Angeles had a robust community engagement process with skateboarders. I spoke to a
landscape architect at the Department of Parks who described the challenges in convincing city officials to engage with skaters, the engagement process at Belvedere, and the benefits for the community.

“We had people within the Department questioning the success of spending so much money on this facility. It’s not only one facility. It’s because of that that there are others. Other ones were developed throughout the county at our other parks. They developed into clubs, the clubs developed into teams, partnerships are coming in and supporting that activity. It’s a win-win situation. It’s for the benefit of the kids and for the skateboarders, and it’s succeeded in that respect. Now we’re in the process of developing two others, and there was a third that was just constructed.”

“We notified all the skateboarders within the area by posting flyers at all the local schools, junior high schools, high schools, elementary schools, the parks, the library. We invited them to participate in workshops. We invited them to take part in three workshops that we held. That was the design process. Our intent was to engage with the community and allow them to take part and ownership of the park and the elements so that it was tailored to what they wanted to see in the skatepark.”

Private spaces present different challenges reflected in the literature regarding skateboarders and space – liability and damage. A Parks Planner and Management Analyst remembered one example where a private developer tried to develop an inclusive plaza where residents and skateboarders could coexist. What got in the way was liability law. However, there currently exists a State law that eliminates liability from injury in public and private spaces. Backed by court precedent, the adoption of section 831.4 by the California legislature was “in response to closures of large parcels of public and private land in order to encourage the use of such lands for public recreational activities” (Burke, 2013, p. 2). However, this ordinance applies to streets, sidewalks, and urban nature trails along riverbeds. Considering the recent passage of Quimby tax credits, if State and City ordinances are updated to include private plazas under Section 831.4 and private developers are willing to grant easements across their plazas and open spaces, recreational space can grow. Planning for more recreational spaces that uniquely suit multicultural urban populations’ diverse activities can become a reality using traditional planning tools and legal ordinances. Without new ordinances, it appears as though public space will continue to shrink. Without imaginative planning solutions, private urban plazas will remain regulated, securitized, and discriminate against certain populations (e.g., skateboarders, bicyclists, rollerbladers, homeless, street performers, etc.). I explore the daily meanderings, performances, and transgressions of skateboarders below before revealing findings pertaining to the four spaces I observed and the interviews I conducted with skateboarders.

**A Day-in-the-Life Vignette of a Typical Ethno-geography within the Skateboard Subculture:**

It’s January 16, 2017 (MLK Jr. Day), sunny with highs in the 60s, and a perfect day for skateboarding in Los Angeles. After thirty-five minutes commuting from Orange County by train, I alight from the train at historic Union Station. I make my way towards the Metro Red
Line, where I descend into the underground labyrinth of Los Angeles’ subway system. Seven stops later, I have arrived at Wilshire/Western, ascend the subway steps, drop my board down, and push towards the Radio Korea building.

To skaters, it is better known as the legendary Jkwon Ledges. Likened to a heavenly Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater virtual video-game level come-to-life, it has been a local haunt for skateboarders to gather. The spot contains low concrete ledges, several stair sets, handrails, shelter from the sun, and other objects that skaters value. This spot is usually teeming with skate activity, particularly on weekends when businesses aren’t operating. On this holiday, however, and based upon my observations, stricter regulations, increased security, and the placement of skate-stoppers on every object except one at the main plaza and the outside ledges has created a dead space.

For example, several skateboarders are present, but they are only using two ledges near Wilshire. These ledges are located one-minute by foot away from security who is patrolling the urban plaza at the base of the building. As security drifts towards the skaters to kick them out, one skater performs a trick off the ledge and onto the sidewalk. They make their escape down Wilshire, high-fiving and exhilaratingly smiling at the trick they just pulled off.

A local Los Angeles skateboarder, my key informant for my thesis, is on his way to pick me up at Jkwon to meet with his ‘homies’ at a skate park in Glendale, a twenty-five-minute drive from Jkwon (See Figure 7 for day-in-the-life). We skate Jkwon for half
an hour, positioning pieces of litter on the ledges and avoiding them while we perform tricks – just one of many ways skateboarders produce and appropriate urban objects and space. Tired and sweating, we jump in his Prius, roll down the windows, and cool-off during our commute to the park. We arrive at Palmer Park in Glendale and are presented with a poorly planned skatepark. “The flow is pretty wack here,” intones one skater. The park is packed, cramped, and all objects (e.g., ledges, stairs, rails, embankments, and mini-ramps) are heavily used and too close together. After exchanging handshakes and fist-bumps with the ‘homies’ and using this park to stretch and warm up, the group of eight skaters and I carpool to an industrial area in Burbank. According to one car-full of skaters, they scoped this spot out by windshield surveying and thought it would be a great space for a session to film a few tricks and to photograph the crew for a company they have just started – Smells Like Fish CO.

We park illegally next to dust-laden work trucks at a marble and stone manufacturer storefront. This street spot contains an elevated, jagged concrete slab, four feet above the street. There are two ways to skate this spot. First, two of the more audacious skaters, while getting a running start and throwing their boards down, are jumping off the concrete slab, over a fire hydrant while clearing a five-foot grass gap, and landing onto the street below as big-rigs timorously drive by. Second, a group of technical skaters (See Appendix IV) identify a two-foot high stack of bricks that they jump over and land in a manual position (See Appendix IV), attempting to roll off a loading dock on the side of the building. A few workers come out and ask, “¿Qué están haciendo?” The two audacious skaters importunately tell them that they are skateboarding, filming, want to get a few tricks, and will leave soon. “Señor, por favor nos permita patinar. Están filmando y vamos a salir pronto.” The workers kindly oblige and leave, noting that they don’t mind the noise or the company. We stay for a few more hours. After the four skaters get their tricks on camera, final photographs of the skate crew are taken. Throwing our boards into the back of the trunks of our respective vehicles, we head back downtown to Pescado Mojado for fish soup and burritos.

After lunch, some skaters leave us. They work night shifts at various businesses in Los Angeles. At dusk, the rest of us head to the Ramón C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts in Chinatown for the last session of the day before our legs give out. Here, we skate waxed curbs, parking islands as manual pads, gaps between parking islands to jump between, embankments, and a ledge that holds the school’s digital sign. As our legs grow weary and the night creeps upon us, the rest of the skaters leave. The group has embraced me. As the skaters leave, we pound-hug. One skater bids farewell. “It was so nice to meet you brother. Good vibes and good session.
See you around. Take care.” I’m dropped off at Union Station, and I begin my commute back home to Orange County.

This vignette introduces a typical day for skateboarders. A common thread stringing together our path to and from each spot is that the spaces, regardless of regulations in place, were underutilized and almost completely empty, save for workers and security guards. The collective, familial identification with the subculture manifests itself in many ways – through familiar language, traveling in adventurous cohorts, the forging of group-identity and friendship, and the ways in which they ascribe new social meanings and use values to space. Skateboarders find opportunity for diverse appropriation, embodied performance, and interaction with the materiality of urban things. With the board mediating between the body, urban objects, and surfaces, the city is reimagined as a borderless, concrete assemblage which provides a blank canvas for artistic expression. This convergence of the body, board, and materials provides an illustration of cyborg urbanization whereby extant, fantastical combinations of bodies and machines are “closely linked with the corporeal experience of space” (Gandy, 2005, p. 128). Skaters can be found at highly regulated commercial office plazas with perfectly waxed ledges and drop-offs or at publicly-controlled skateparks. They can scope out industrial parks with grassy gaps, brick stacks, and rugged concrete loading docks before venturing to a dimly-lit school’s deserted parking lot with painted curbs, smooth flatground surfaces, and parking lot islands to end the day. In sum, skaters appropriate and create space for recreation. Skateboarding is sporadic, transient, artistic, and appropriative in differentially legal spaces. Next, I offer my systematic findings for the four skate spots that I studied for my thesis.

Public and Private Spaces for Skateboarders

Lafayette Skate Plaza

Lafayette Skate Plaza is a publicly-controlled space located a two-minute skate from the Wilshire/Vermont Metro Purple/Red Lines stop in the Westlake neighborhood. Opened in 2009, this skate plaza was the first plaza opened through a private-public partnership between the Rob Dyrdek Foundation, Carl’s Jr., and the LA Department of Parks as part of the Foundation’s ‘Safe Spot, Skate Spot’ initiative. This initiative functions “as an alternative option for communities to develop real legal street skating locations given limited budgets or space restrictions” (ESPN, 2009).

Lafayette Skate Plaza contains smooth concrete interrupted by three naturally-landscaped areas. There are two levels to this plaza. The upper level has an abnormally-designed area with an un-skateable cobblestone section. In addition, there are two sets of stairs, two handrails, and three ledges that connect the higher level to the lower level. The
lower level contains five objects – four ledges and an embankment in the shape of a star. All objects in the skatepark are relatively mellow, meaning that they are low to the ground and easy for skateboarders to jump on to and perform tricks on.

The skaters have built group identity as well, pushing each other to try outlandish tricks and strengthening relationships. One skater told me of this dynamic (See Figure 8).

“The thing about the environment at Lafayette is that there’s people here who will push you beyond your limit; what you can do on a skateboard. Really nice people. And, the obstacles here aren’t too big, so you can start from anywhere.”

This spot was the most popular in the number of skateboarders present. The two most popular days and times were during the week in the morning (n = 23) and in the afternoon (n = 23). Notwithstanding the plaza’s popularity on weekdays, it was still a popular spot with skateboarders on the weekends in the afternoon (n = 14) and in the morning (n = 11). A variety of factors could have contributed to fewer skaters being present on the weekend. A day before the weekend, it had rained and puddles coalesced in sunken parts of the park. Some of the skaters told me they were super tired and others told me that weekends were when businesses were closed and private plazas were less policed.

As Figure 9 shows, the space is an elongated shape and a skateboarder’s performance in the space followed repetitive, circular paths. While skateboarders used the space, they meandered the course of the plaza in groups of two to three. This repetitiveness didn’t stymie creativity. Some skateboarders were fixated on one or two objects as they attempted to land a trick that they were steadfastly practicing. During the weekday afternoon of January 22, 2017, for example, skater #18 would continuously build up speed and attempt to jump onto an upward facing ledge and ascend the ledge by sliding on it (See Figure 9). Depending on skateboarders’ successes or failures, they would loop back around and try new tricks or continually attempt the one they could not land. The most popular objects to skate were the handrails, ledges, and stairs. The hangout space for skaters was on the curved ledge covered by trees.

Figure 8: Lafayette

Skater boardslides down handrail. Photo by Chris Giamarino.
Figure 9: Behavioral Mapping of Lafayette’s Popular Day

Lafayette Skate Plaza (01/02/2017)
Weekday PM

For some reason, this area is covered in un-skate-able cobblestone. Portions of Lafayette are wanting in objects for further appropriation and practice.

Skater 1 films skater 18’s trick.

Skater 18 loops around the park & grinds up a stair’s ledge.

Behavioral Map Legend

- Skateboarder
- Riding Skateboard
- Jump/Ollie/Flip
- Grind/Slide/Manual
- Nonskateboarders
- Walking/Biking/ETC
- Security
- Walk/Confront
- Weed
- Beer
- Food
- Film/Photos
- Skate-stop/Security/Bust
- Confrontation/Bust
- Off-limit/Skate-stop

Map by Chris Giamarino.
Skateboarders also expropriated benches from schools and shopping carts from grocery markets, situating them into the plaza. This reappropriation of objects into the skate plaza implied that Lafayette does not provide enough movable, malleable objects for the skaters to experiment with. During a cool, weekday morning, one pedestrian from the street sat for about an hour and sketched out the skate scene in his sketchbook.

Another occurrence was the harassment of the skateboarders in their designated ‘safe spot, skate spot.’ Although skaters liked the plaza, one skater stated, “Yeah, and it’s like these parks that they give us, they (the City) feel like they’re building and helping us. They put them in fucked-up-ass neighborhoods. We end up getting harassed by like the local gang-bangers and gang-members and local thugs and drug dealers.” The same morning the artist illustrated the lively space, an uncomfortable scene began to materialize. A man with a bloodied face came to the curved ledge (See the center-right of Figure 9 where several skaters are seated) where the skateboarders relaxed and began to challenge some of the skaters to fight before trying to sell them crack. Trying not to laugh, the skaters ignored this man until he left, and the plaza returned to its peaceful state, with skateboarders sinuating through the plaza.

**Hollenbeck Skate Plaza**

Hollenbeck Skate Plaza is a publicly-controlled skate plaza that was funded and constructed through a partnership with the Rob Dyrdek Foundation and the LA Department of Parks. Located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood and dissected by Interstate 5, the 21-acre park is comprised of a man-made lake with spouting fountains, hilly terrain with a gorgeous view of downtown Los Angeles, intrusive geese, and a community center. Hollenbeck is about thirty minutes from Downtown Los Angeles and one mile from the Metro Gold Line Soto stop. The skate plaza is situated in the southeastern corner of the large park. There are three benches for spectators and skaters to rest upon and a locked up, graffiti-covered bathroom.

Hollenbeck was the second-most popular space that I studied. The total numbers of skateboarders present over the four days was twenty-nine (n = 29). Contrasting Lafayette’s chilled-out atmosphere, skateboarders at Hollenbeck were more focused on using the plaza as a skate space, rather than a place to hang out, skate, and relax amongst others. Therefore, I was only able to interview five (n = 5) skateboarders here. The most popular day was the weekday morning on January 2nd, 2017 (n = 12). This plaza replicates a typical urban plaza rather well. There are four levels. The first level has two rectangular ledges that contain naturally-landscaped interiors. On the outside of these landscaped objects, there are metal rails. It also contains two individual ledges on the exteriors of the plaza’s flatground and an embankment in the middle from which skaters launch themselves into the air. To get down to the second level, skaters can either jump
down two large blocks (See Figure 10), a seven-stair, or they can grind or slide down a handrail. The same maneuvers get them down to levels three and four.

Although several skaters on other days utilized all four levels, only the top-most level was used on January 2nd. Skaters would come from the sidewalk or their car, drop their backpacks at the bench, and warm-up on the two individual ledges (See Figure 11). For example, skater #2 picked the northwest corner of the park as a starting point. The skater would push, jump, and slide on a rail, loop back around, skate in the middle of the plaza, and grind the ledge.

Here, skaters came in small groups or as individuals. This contrasted heavily with Lafayette’s familial atmosphere. Skaters said that Hollenbeck was a more realistic plaza to skate and not much of a hangout spot. Hollenbeck’s plaza-realism contributed to its dynamism and movement.

Skater #4: “I usually like spots that are low-key, casual. Like this spot...the plaza like it’s really good. It’s less...it feels more natural. Skater #5: It’s got the street appeal. Skater #4: Yeah, you don’t have to go really crazy. It feels more like a public park that you can skate and chill instead of the crazy vert and shit like that. Skater #5: Even being fenced in…” (Hollenbeck group)

Other than skateboarders and skateboarding, there was a dearth of diverse people and activities at the plaza. During three days, some skateboarders used their phones as video cameras to document the skating. An occasional stoner or homeless person sat upon the benches and watched. Groups of nonskateboarders sat in the skatepark and drank coca-cola in the inlet of the landscaped ledge. Although the spot was further from transit and downtown, skaters enjoyed the realism and rawness of street skateboarding that this plaza afforded. The atmosphere was chill, individualistic, focused, and safe.

Staples Center Ledges/Gilbert Lindsay Plaza
The Staples Center Ledges are situated between the Staples Center and the Los Angeles Convention Center. This plaza is privately-owned and there are signs at entry points that forbid skateboarding, rollerblading, and bicycling. The sporting arena was built in 1999 and this area was redeveloped in 2001 for a master-planned entertainment district by a private
Figure 11: Behavioral Mapping of Hollenbeck’s Popular Day

Skaters 8, 9, 10 hang within landscaped interior while watching other skaters perform tricks and loops around Hollenbeck.

The bathroom and drinking fountain to the right are broken.
developer. As part of the redevelopment project, a community benefits agreement (CBA) was reached between the private developer and a coalition of community-based organizations, environmental groups, and labor unions. The agreement stipulated that the redevelopment must provide local jobs, affordable housing, and funds for nearby recreational facilities (Marantz, 2015).

The key word in the last sentence is nearby. There was a guaranteed $1,000,000 through Quimby for parks and recreational facilities with up to $75,000 available to ensure community input on how to spend these funds, but the Department of Parks still had to find city-owned land in a highly-developed part of Los Angeles (Marantz, 2015).

Across the street from the Metro Pico Street Blue Line stop, this plaza is heavily policed with security from the convention center and sporting arena. Most objects have been skate-stopped. The plaza was frequented by the occasional homeless person seeking shade or a business person eating food. During the four days I observed the space, it was mainly used as a pedestrian-thruway for fans to Staples Center and as an event space for the NHL All Star game.

The differences between the designated skate plazas and privately-owned ‘public’ spaces manifested themselves as I observed Staples Center. Signs prohibiting skateboarding, bicycling, and rollerblading abounded at every egress. Men and women in red blazers patrolled Staples Center and the Convention Center security had a golf cart. Cigarette smoking was allowed, walking and sitting through and in the plaza was permitted, but as soon as the sound of a skateboard hit the ground, security was ready to shoe-away the skaters. Nonetheless, skateboarders expanded the boundaries of my site map where the ledges were located. All ledges within the plaza were skate-stopped, but this didn’t stop skateboarders from using other spaces near the plaza.

Over the four days, there were eleven (n = 11) skateboarders. I conducted the second-most interviews here (n = 8) because skateboarders would sit on the skate-stopped ledges while security was present and then start skating once they left. It was an easy way to start a conversation about “how annoying security was.” All three days that skaters were present, they were kicked out by security even though they mainly skated the ground. In describing this space, skateboarders really enjoyed the smoothness of the concrete (See Figure 12) and the fact that the skate-stoppers provided ways to skate on top of the ledges as opposed to grinding them.

The weekday morning on January 3rd was the most popular day. There was a total of five (n = 5) skateboarders there and four of them were interviewed. Two skateboarders skated two sequential entry ramps to the Staples Center (See top of Figure 13). One skater used the series of entry ramps as launching off points. As he performed tricks,
his friend slowly followed behind, filming each and every move. One skater rolled through the plaza and nothing more. Another used elevated sidewalk islands to practice manuals and then met up with friends at a shaded area north of the plaza. These three skaters used the flatground to play a game of S-K-A-T-E where skaters attempt to copy landed tricks. When one skater doesn’t land the trick, they get a letter. The last remaining who doesn’t spell S-K-A-T-E wins. These skaters enjoyed the fact that Staples provided an escape from publicly-designated skateparks and didn’t mind occasionally getting kicked out by security. To them, it was part of being skateboarder.

Skaters at Staples enjoyed the smooth ground and other objects which hadn’t been skate-stopped. Although they were constantly confronted with security, crowds flocking to sporting events, and design barriers, skaters occupied and appropriated unused concrete spots and nearby ledges.

**Jkwon Plaza and Ledges**

Jkwon Plaza is a privately-owned ‘public’ plaza situated at the base of the Radio Korea building near the Wilshire/Western Metro Purple Line stop. The private developer of this building provided a plaza, but was under no obligation to make it public. The plaza and lawn have been used for events in the past including World Cup watch parties. During the four days, the lawn was most frequented by dog walkers, photographers taking pictures, and the occasional homeless person. A planner at the Department of Parks told me that the owners of the building have proposed building a tower on the large lawn and that the announcement has been met with community backlash since this is one of the only open spaces in the area.

This spot is legendary, but it’s hit-and-miss. For example, most of the objects in the main plaza are
Staples Center Plaza (01/03/2017)
Weekday AM

Most of Staples Center Plaza is skate-stopped and areas closer to the Convention Center and Staples Center are patrolled by staffed security. Skater 1 at the top uses sequential entry ramps to launch and flip their board while Skater 2 catches it all on their cell phone. Skater 3 skates over to meet Skater 5 and they engage in a game of S-K-A-T-E.
skate-stopped and heavily patrolled except for one rectangular block. The objects in the main plaza are waxed square ledges. Other skate-able objects are stairs, handrails, and protruding ledges that face Wilshire (See Figure 14). There were only six skaters present over the four days. The day where zero skaters were present, the security patrolled the plaza and stayed outside for well over an hour. Because of the atmosphere of the plaza, it was difficult to interview skaters. Therefore, I did not interview skaters at this space. There were only four skaters (n = 4) present on the most popular day – MLK Jr. Day morning. During this day, there were approximately forty people ‘using’ the space – mainly schoolchildren on a field trip.

While private security patrolled the main plaza and the eleven concrete ledges, skateboarders used the pathways and two advertisement ledges for their enjoyment (See Figure 15). However, their performances were short-lived. Two youth skaters jumped off the five-foot-tall ledge and then skated down Wilshire, staying only for about ten minutes. Another skater was actually approached by the security and asked to leave. That skater and his friend then approached me to ask if I knew of any other spots. Because Lafayette Skate Plaza was only five minutes down Wilshire, I pointed them in that direction. Finally, the last skater, #9 in Figure 15, used the protruding, waxed ledges to slide upon a few times before hopping in his parked car and driving away. Other than the occasional smoker on his lunch break, street vendor on the sidewalk, and dog walker on the lawn, the space was underutilized and heavily securitized.

An Ideal, Hybridized Spot - The West LA Courthouse and its Utopianization

The skateboarder that drove me around in the day-in-the-life vignette also discussed an ideal skate spot that had been reclaimed, refurbished, and revitalized by skateboarders in West LA. On January 4th, he picked me up at Staples Center and we drove to the West LA Courthouse. An iconic spot containing perfect-sized ledges protected with angled iron, an empty fountain (See Figure 16), and a three-and-
Figure 15: Behavioral Mapping of Jkwon's Popular Day

Wilshire Boulevard is located north of this text. As this diagram shows, skateboarders have been pushed to the two protruding ledges on the outside of this development. Those that enter the main plaza are often greeted by security who asks what their business is. Skaters have an easy escape down Wilshire after landing tricks. Dog-walkers, photographers, and people eating/resting in the shade on the stairs and on the lawn are often greeted by security and/or feel a looming presence.
a-half-foot high stage, the courthouse had been shut down by city officials and skate-stoppers were applied to every object. Due to a massive community organizing effort led by pro skateboarder Eric Koston, skateboard advocate Alec Beck, a chair of the West LA neighborhood council, mobilized skateboarders, and Nike, the spot was opened as an organic skate plaza that was transformed from restrictively private to liberatingly public (Altema, 2014). This private-public partnership with Nike and West LA is a five-year contract with Nike responsible for $10,000 annually in maintenance fees.

The public space, which was created by taxpayer dollars, is now open to everyone. A space that was on the verge of being permanently condemned and skate-stopped mobilized a movement like Love Park in Philadelphia. City officials, skateboarders, and private organizations came together to raise voices, occupy public space, appropriate the ledges and drained fountain, and ultimately partner to refurbish and reopen the space. I interviewed four (n = 4) skateboarders at this space. In the focus group interview, skateboarders offered insight into how skateboarders and skateboarding could reappropriate and reimagine a space like a courtyard.

Skater #4: “The idea of repurposing comes to mind. Reappropriating a public space. Like, this place is kind of a perfect backdrop for this kind of a discussion because it used to be an actual skate spot. Now it’s been made into something that is intended for skateboarding, but originally wasn’t intended for skateboarding. You might flex a certain muscle for imagining what it could be. Kind of like a sort of divergent thinking, like, ‘What can I use this paper clip for?’ If you fold it a certain way it’s like a little flat bar and you can skate it.”

Skater #1: “Yeah, I think people that don’t skate kind of…not necessarily take things for granted…but not think about space as much in their everyday life. Going back to what Skater #4 was saying about repurposing things. The idea of repurposing a courtyard. It’s crazy that for this spot particularly, it wasn’t intended for skating, but skaters made it their own way. It goes to this idea that the public should be able to use the space however they wanna use it. Not just for certain designated ways.” (West LA focus group)

The West LA Courthouse and Courtyard offered a glimpse into what public space could (and should) be. Although skaters told me that they felt these types of spaces become skater-dominated, anyone could use the space regardless of their diverse uses, interactions,
and performances. For example, as I interviewed the skaters at this space, we sat upon steps. Two women came out of the Courthouse after 5pm and noticed two skateboarders attempting to slide across a ledge. One woman tapped the other on the shoulder, said something, and both took their phones out and started documenting the two skaters. They weren't bothered by the activity. It wasn't boisterous. The performances appeared to enliven the space and enthrall nonskateboarders as they co-existed in the use of space.

**Lefebvre’s Spatial Trialectic Applied to Skateboarding**

**Lived Performances of Skateboarders**

I analyzed *spatial practices* that allowed me to understand skateboarders’ levels of competence and performance by skateboarders in all four spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). By observing quotes, smells, tastes, aesthetics, materials, objects, intricacies, and actions of skateboarders’ live, embodied experiences with Fulcrum and through my interviews, I began to understand how “human agents reproduce and challenge macrological structures in the everyday of place-bound action” (Herbert, 2000, p. 550). In comparing and contrasting the four spaces, I observed that the spaces were used differentially spatially, temporally, and socially.

By attempting to decipher the four spaces to reveal each’s unique spatial practice, paths were drawn resembling countless repetitive loops of embodied spatial performance and the practice of skateboarders was not always coherent. Some inconsistencies were more apparent than others (See Appendix III – Tables 1 and 2). For instance, whereas skateboarders in Lafayette and Hollenbeck were afforded the whole day to hang out until it got dark, skateboarders at Staples and Jkwon were afforded the amount of time it took them to skate an object like a ledge or until getting kicked out by security. Skateboarders in the skateparks slid, rolled, balanced, jumped and rested over, across, and upon ledges, stairs, handrails, landscaped gaps, shopping carts, embankments, and benches. They practiced their craft, rested, ate food, drank beer, and smoked an occasional joint. Spectating and cheering, skateboarders encouraged continual, repetitive ollies, flips, grinds, and balancing acts. See Figure 17 for a word cloud and picture of what words and actions skateboarders’ attributed their deciphering of space to.

*Skater #12: “People probably see a handrail just for their hands. We see it for like grinding down it. Jumping down stairs? People just don’t wanna do that. They wanna walk down. Skater #13: Yeah, some people use like a bench to sit down or play cards or something. We put it on like a stair set. We do tricks on it. We grind on it. We can do many stuff with it. We don’t just sit around with it.” – (Lafayette focus group)*

Although skaters have been pegged as anti-authority, all six instances when they were kicked out did not result in any sort of confrontation. The only confrontation I noted was at Lafayette when a homeless man attempted to fight some skaters and sell them drugs. The private urban
plazas were patrolled by security as skateboarders attempted to use ledges, flatground, parking lot islands, embankments, and stairs. These plazas were frequented by sports fans, workers, construction materials and machines, security, food vendors, and other users and objects. As skateboarders produced use value, pedestrians would occasionally stop and watch them use the spaces differently (See Figure 18). As skateboarders’ performances menially differed spatially, temporally, and spatially from public to private space, the representations and regulations of the spaces differed greatly.
Spaces of Representation for Skateboarders by Urban Managers

Second, I wanted to conceptualize representations of space by analyzing how skateboarders are tied to relations of production and to ‘order’ in space, which helped me to understand appropriative performances. By interviewing and observing the skateboarders as well as recording their perceptions of the social codes implicit in the spaces studied, I was able to analyze whether or not the public skateparks were appropriately planned to the extent that skateboarders would not want to venture out to other spaces and use them (See Appendix III – Table 3). Representations of space are conceptualized by urban managers and inevitably tend toward a system of fragmented verbal signs (e.g., regulations and cameras) that materialize in physical form (e.g., skate-stoppers and security).

Publicly-controlled and designated skateparks were planned on city-owned property and came with prescriptive signage eliminating the city from liability due to injury and dictating what activities skateboarders could partake in. The signs required helmets for protection, banned smoking and drinking, and had hours when the space closed. The two plazas were isolated in the park spaces and stood out as islands specifically for skateboarding. Skateboarders experienced different regulations when translocating from public to private space in Los Angeles. Textually, regulations and ordinances banned skateboarding altogether in these spaces. Physically, design barriers and security guards attempted to rule out almost any usage in these spaces (See Figure 19).

The skateboarders believed that Los Angeles planners and developers planned and designed spaces for and also against them. This dichotomy followed logically from the aforementioned regulations. The publicly-designated skate spaces, although replete with inadequacies, were admired by the skateboarders. However, engagement between skateboarders and the City was tenuous at best. A skater at Lafayette describing the park and community engagement stated, “It’s a plaza and it’s not even big and we don’t get love. We’re not even involved in [planning and design].” In contrast, the privately-
owned plazas made the skateboarders feel as though they weren’t welcome outside of the designated parks. Nonetheless, the exploratory, transgressive nature and culture of skateboarding viewed the security and regulations as mere obstacles to avoid while skating the privatized plazas. For example, a skater pondering why they use space like Staples Center quipped, “It’s just a way out of boredom I guess. It’s something we do and it’s not gonna stop.” See Figure 20 for words and a picture that exemplify what types of representations of space were ascribed to the four spaces.

The different representations of space were originally planned and designed by landscape architects, developers, and urban planners. The skateparks were designed by a combination of local skateboarders, landscape architects, skateboard foundations, and LA Parks planners. The skateboarders at Lafayette did not believe that planners and architects had put enough effort into engaging with them – the population who would benefit most from the space. The divergent regulations put into the public skate plazas versus the private spaces dictated the representative spatial layout and temporal performances of skateboarders. At Lafayette, I asked skaters how it made them feel when regulations and design interventions were put in place to stop skateboarding and what they did about it. They brought up Jkwon as an example.
Me: “How does it feel when you go to a spot, but then those in power put grind-blockers on the spot and skate-stop it? Skater #5: Oh like Jkwon? Skater #11: It feels like we have an obligation to skate. It keeps reminding us that we have spots to go to and skate. Skater #4: For me, it kinda makes me feel...when they take everyday spots from us and give us skate plazas and stuff instead to like fill the void, it doesn’t really fill the void. It kinda feels like they just wanna cave our creativity in as opposed to just letting us express ourselves freely.” (Lafayette focus group)

Skateboarders see publicly-controlled skateparks as necessary practice facilities. They also viewed them as contained spaces with inadequate amenities and objects. Skaters enjoyed surfing down streets and sidewalks. They also relished the feeling of being pressured to land tricks in spaces demarcated as off-limits and patrolled by security. Skaters felt like every day urban objects had multiple representative meanings depending on who was deciphering the space. In discussing how skateboarders imagined space compared to a pedestrian, architect, or urban planner, skaters watched skate videos to find new spaces, interpreted and used plaza objects differently, ignored regulations and boundaries, and believed that the city provided infinite possibilities for spatial appropriation. Skateboarders at Lafayette, when discussing representative differences between public spaces and private spaces, paid more attention to the objects they could use in the spaces rather than prescriptive textual and physical regulations attempting to proscribe their activities.

Skater #4: “I think skateboarders just use urban environments different than the average person. We see objects differently. Everything is an object to us. We could have fun on flat. We could have fun on stairs. We could have fun on a rail. We could have fun on a wall. Skater #11: Trees... Skater #4: Trees. Everything. We have fun on everything. We see everything in the world as an opportunity, as opposed to like an obstacle. That’s the difference between skateboarders and the average person.” - Skaters on what urban spaces/objects represent to them (Lafayette focus group)

To summarize, skateboarders believe the city is theirs to explore. The contained public parks were inorganic spaces that sometimes didn’t contain enough adequate amenities (e.g., working bathroom, water fountains). Even the simulacrum of a true plaza at Hollenbeck provided what already organically exists in other parts of the city – concrete, ledges, stairs, handrails, etc. Skaters desired empathy and understanding from urban planners and architects to notice that although they would trespass and use sanctioned spaces, they weren’t hurting anybody. Skateboarders’ knowledge of urban planning and community engagement fell somewhere in between consultation and placation (Arnstein, 1969). This is because out of all thirty interviews I conducted, only four (or 13%) of skateboarders tacitly knew what urban planning and civic participation was and how it could help them in getting better skate spaces. They knew that ‘the City’ planned and designed the skateparks, but weren’t sure how they could attend planning meeting and offer DIY architectural visions at engagement workshops for designated spaces.
Therefore, they believed that better engagement between skateboarders and those designing the skateparks would result in more realistic (i.e., attached to the city’s grid) plazas that contain adequate objects and amenities, are placed in safer neighborhoods, and are designed to be multi-use spaces for diverse publics. Skaters paid more attention to the objects in the space rather than its publicness or privateness, leading to my next analysis.

**Skateboarders’ Representational Spaces of Artistic Appropriation**

Third, I contemplated *representational spaces*, “embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). To better document these complex symbolisms, Fulcrum allowed me to photograph/video the nuances of skateboarders spatial experience and symbolic imagery such as grittiness, graffiti, smoking, drinking, reinterpretations of materials, and subversive activities (See Appendix III – Table 4). My interviews allowed me to understand what these spaces meant to skaters, their importance, and why they came to them. This supplemented my understandings of the observed embodied performances, the design of each space, and how the skaters were contained or not contained. See Figure 21 the symbolic meanings skateboarders’ overlaid on ‘expertly’-planned spaces.

**Figure 21: Symbolic Word Cloud & Image**

Words ascribed to spatial symbolisms. Illustration by Chris Giamarino.

Familial skaters joke around. Photo by Chris Giamarino.
Skater #5: “Besides it being the only skate park in LA, we pretty much created a bond and family over here. It's not only about skating, it's about seeing the homies and seeing if we're all here and okay. It's like a family out here.

Skater #4: Yeah, what I like about Lafayette is like the community. It may look like a lot of strangers and different people here. Clearly, everybody knows everybody here. That's what's dope about it. I don't know, it's always just good energy here, unless it's like outsiders that come and fuck with us.

Skater #6: I come here because it's like we're all family here. If one skater get into it with someone, we all get into it with someone. Whether we know you or not, it's like we know your face – it's like a family at this park.

Skater #7: Why do I come here? It’s local. There are like two or three other parks around here, but I come here because of the environment – it's the best. We're all like bros. We kick it 24/7 so we got that bond. We kick it outside the park, so it's pretty dope.

Skater #8: Why I came here? Just to hang, skate, and everybody’s family. Everybody has the same thing pretty much.” (Lafayette focus group)

Representational spaces are those that are perceived or imagined by skateboarders and other users. It’s space that is changed and appropriated. In addition to phenomenological performance and conceptualized space, skateboarders made symbolic use of everyday urban objects in physical space (Lefebvre, 1991). For example, skaters at Lafayette used a shopping cart to augment the malleable, artistic interactivity of the contained space (See Figure 22).

There were many common themes among all spaces that I observed. Skaters would come to these spaces because they identified with the individual nature of the sport and felt like socially-constructed cultural identities allowed them to meet new, diverse people while building solidarity through the forging of group-identity. The strong group identity resulted in places that skateboarders respected, self-policing, took ownership of, and adopted responsibility in.

In addition, skaters felt that by occupying spaces regardless of regulations, nonskateboarders could enjoy the spectacle. Some even believed that perhaps professionals in the skate industry might notice and sponsor them. One skater joked about the presence of security cameras in private spaces as a chance to be noticed. “They should definitely consider skaters and they should definitely put more cameras so they could film us. It should be more of a collaboration, more unity, rather than separation.” Skaters occupied and appropriated urban objects not just for skating. They would oftentimes perch upon ledges, rest, read books, listen to music, smoke an occasional joint, drink...
beer, and talk about school, relationship problems, new tricks to try, and video games.

Skater #3: “I think just sharing ideas. Like trick ideas. Like, oh so and so did this trick on here. Maybe I can do that, too. It is a gathering place for people to collect their ideas and express them together. Skater #4: I don’t often make friends or anything like that at a skate spot, but when I meet someone else like in another in my life that happens to skate, it’s like an immediate shared identity where I can identify with that person a lot more than someone else. Skater #2: Not to mention there’s like a huge variety of skaters, too. Different ages and skills. Skater #3: And different backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds, too. Skater #2: So, we all get along. Skater #3: Yeah, it’s like the ideal for the rest of the world. “World Peace” quote, un-quote. Skater #1: Benefits to the community... progress comes about. A lot of people progress amongst others. It really pushes forward the art form in terms of... say you were just one painter painting alone and you get in a room with a bunch of other painters, you get a way more diverse community of art being produced:” (West LA Focus group)

The construction of symbolic spaces of diverse performance, interpretation, and appropriation differed spatially, temporally, and socially due to the publicness and privateness of the spaces. For example, Jkwon and Staples Center were patrolled by security which perceived of skaters as threats. During every occasion at the private urban plazas, skaters were kicked out by security. Therefore, the representational, symbolic happenings and value-attributions at these spaces were short-lived. This challenging atmosphere motivated skateboarders to explore and use these spaces, too. Other than hanging out in groups of 3-5 skaters and appropriating urban objects like ledges, skateboarders didn’t pester other users and did not believe that the intrinsic nature of the activity purposefully intended to destroy property. Some skateboarders did acknowledge that as they have aged, they felt they could understand why people might be annoyed of the activity because it was louder than other things like bicycling. Other skaters remarked that simple design interventions could prevent damage to property (i.e., placing of angled iron on ledges to prevent chipping of concrete). Skaters also remarked that they felt the average pedestrian or City official only noticed certain spaces once they saw skateboarders using it. Some even believed that skateboard spots were co-opted by City officials, closed, and used as marketable material with skateboarders in photos to spur gentrification. This was reflected by a skateboarder who summed up how the cultural production of skateboarding produces economic value and marketable imagery. “Clothing, fashion, music. Clothing, fashion, music. That’s what skateboarding is.” Regardless, skateboarders felt that they were stereotyped but also seen as generators of value in certain spaces.

Skater #4: “We’re automatically stereotyped as like hooligans or vandalists; people who are just around vandalizing stuff. Or not seeing that we see the average curb or ledge, while they’re not seeing and just walking by it. They don’t notice it until they see us there, they don’t take it into consideration. They just see it as an obstacle for their scenery and we see it as an opportunity.” (Lafayette skater)
Skater #1: “And then gentrification will come in too. Like, ‘Oh now we love that space, but we want to kick skaters out because it doesn’t look great!’

Skater #3: Yeah, like, ‘It makes our cities look bad.’ But, in reality it’s giving that space life and making people want to go there, which could actually lead to people wanting to go to Staples Center more because they actually see people enjoy it.

Skater #4: Yeah, it’s always a compromise because, like on the one hand we kind of herald skateboarding as like an art, but if we don’t respect the art of landscape architects that are like creating plazas for the aesthetic of the plazas then it’s kind of hypocrisy to not really…

Skater #1: Yeah, there’s gotta be compromise.

Skater #4: I think the Staples Center is hideous enough to where there should be like a statute of limitations thing where it’s like, “Once something inevitably goes out of style you can skate it.”

Skater #1: Haha, yeah. Like, “You guys are not gonna use it! It’s our turn!”—(West LA focus group)

Most skateboarders that I interviewed believed that skateboarding has been legitimized and come into the mainstream of cities, especially due to its incorporation into Olympic competition in 2020. Skateboarders associated spaces with tight-knit friendships, places to practice their craft, sites of confrontation with authority, areas where multiple users should be allowed, spots to hang, drink, and smoke, and as interconnected concrete surfaces and objects to appropriate and perform across, within, and upon. Even though verbal and physical regulations in the spaces affected the spatial and temporal symbolisms constructed across public and private spaces inhabited by skateboarders, they didn’t believe it did. They felt as though negative perceptions were to blame for them being planned against, getting harassed, or kicked out of spaces. In spite of these negative perceptions, skaters believed they produced artistic reinterpretations of these spaces that made people want to watch what was going on.

Concluding Remarks - Meditative Reflection on Ethnographic Study of the Skateboard Subculture, Creative Performance, and Spatial Regulation

Public space for recreation is shrinking while privatization of space is on the rise. Certain populations have regulations imposed on them by State and City ordinances to be confined to designated spaces. For example, skaters can ‘skate-at-their-own-risk’ in skate plazas while public entities are protected from lawsuit. Private developers and commercial plazas use the exact same notion of liability and minimal damage to ban skaters from using their spaces. What is wrong with these contradictory regulations and ordinances is that they discriminate against certain citizens and suppress democratic expression, performance, and inclusivity.

Skateboarders were thankful for the spaces that the city and skateboard foundations have provided for them. Skateboarders construct group-identity and form a close-knit community by skateboarding and hanging out in public and private spaces. Although some have occasionally sat in on city meetings to discuss re-designs of inadequate spaces (e.g., Lafayette skaters), they believe these attempts
are shallow and negative stereotypes still exist that create a barrier to meaningful participation in city planning activities affecting skateboarders. Because skateboarders love using ubiquitous urban objects like handrails, ledges, and stairs differently, their provision in publicly-designated skate spaces may never be enough to suppress further creative transgression in the seemingly endless, concrete playgrounds of cities.

The concept of obduracy materializes when observing skateboarders’ transgressions. Skateboarders cast the built environment “as a heterogeneous sociotechnical ensemble that can provide useful insight into the limits of ethics” (Kirkman, 2009, p. 234) by showing the limits of planning and moral agency in shaping and responding to the built environment and the diverse activities taking place. Skateboarding’s nature involves transcendence of textual regulations, representative plazas, and presence of authority. What motivates skaters is the pressure that private plazas engender, the types of challenging urban objects in these spaces, and the progression and performative spectacle of a skater’s craft to the other publics while being filmed.

Aside from the occasional joint or tall boy, skateboarders produce a mobile art form as they primarily attempt to perform tricks on rails, ledges, and over stairs. Their anti-authority image is slowly dissipating as skateboarding moves into the mainstream as a legitimate sport, which has largely eradicated the idea of skateboarding as a ‘subculture’. They’re acutely aware of other users in space, regulations, liability, noise, and occasional damage. However, they believe that spaces should be inclusive and multi-use (for themselves and others).

By studying a different subcultural population’s lived performances in space, I observed different interpretations and interactions with material objects and watched as functional space became vibrantly reimagined and appropriated with activity. Planners can improve their rational representations of designated spaces by observing and interacting with diverse populations and understanding the complex symbolisms and use-values that skaters attribute to sidewalks, streets, and plazas.

A landscape architect succinctly summed up the legitimation of the activity that is no longer strictly seen as a subculture, future possibilities for better incorporation of skaters into cities by planners, and how skaters might feel about this commodification of their cultural production in space.

“I think it’s very generational, too. I grew up skateboarding when it was a totally punk rock, outlaw kind of a thing. The commodification of skateboarding kind of gives it a legit level. When people see it in that context, they don’t see them as a bunch of criminals tearing up a ledge. As the sport grows, I think it will open up possibilities. Skateboarders, at the same time, like the individual punk – ‘I’m not part of that kind of thing.’”

Sandercock (2004) offered a four-pronged challenge for planners to be more imaginative when planning in 21st-century cities characterized as ‘strange...
multiplicities’. She challenged planners, policymakers, and urban managers to expand planning’s political horizons, become more audacious by daring to break conventional planning rules, grow the practice’s creative capacities, and develop a therapeutic approach to resolving urban conflicts and celebrating multiculturalism in the ‘mongrel city’ (Sandercock, 2004). Following Sandercock’s challenge to planners, I provide one empowering tactic for skateboarders to heed, three policy recommendations to urban managers, and one city branding strategy to avoid that can further planning imagination in cities to cultivate and celebrate “the [possibilities] that [arise] from living alongside others who are different, learning from them, and creating new worlds with them rather than fearing them” (Sandercock, 2004, p. 134). Through the “explicit acknowledgement of the heterogeneity and fluidity of reality” (Beauregard, 2012, p. 9), planners can begin to understand and re-think the ways that formal and informal processes and practices play out in cities in order to enact effective, empathetic policy that understands the ways in which power in the city and its public spaces is socially produced and practiced when diverse flows of desire align and coalesce (Dovey, 2011).
There are steps planners and policymakers in cities can take to better incorporate different users into public space. I recommend one strategic tactic for skateboarders, three policy recommendations for cities, and advise against one specific city-branding strategy regarding the co-optation and marketing of skateboarding, based on my findings that can reduce negative perceptions of skateboarders, allow planners to better engage with skaters in the design and planning of skate parks, and incentivize private developers to provide inclusive space by eliminating liability and damage.

Following my ethno-geographic thesis’ findings, I would like to challenge planners to be more imaginative when considering my policy recommendations. In being more imaginative, planners should adopt a theoretical framework that recognizes that humans and their assembled groupings are always embedded in relationships and thus all action is collective (Beauregard, 2012). Following assemblage thinking, my policy recommendations acknowledge the fact that planners act in alliance with humans (e.g., skateboarders) and non-human things (e.g., ledges, metal, regulations) (Beauregard, 2016). Things have politics and planners have to attach themselves and other influential actors to assemblages that serve their purposes in order to overcome the obduracy of a world that consistently resists change, design hindrances (i.e., skaters unbolting skate-stoppers to skate), or regulations (i.e., skateboarders appropriating spaces that ban them). Planners “have to imagine [the world] with others, both humans and non-humans, which join them as allies” (Beauregard, 2016, p. 23).

For these recommendations to become a reality, planners and policymakers should expand their political horizons to reflect values, notions of justice, and what matters. Second, planners should be audacious and take risks to “surrender their [obsessions] with control and certainty and [develop] the ability to listen to the voices of multiple publics” (Sandercock, 2004, p. 36). Third, by being more audacious, planners must also increase their creative capacities by studying difference, adopting ethnographic methodologies, and incorporating local storytelling and voices into planning processes. Fourth, planners should develop a therapeutic approach to resolving urban conflicts in the multicultural city by treating different populations as knowledgeable subjects who can develop visions of a better world and act coherently to achieve it.
'Go NO Skateboarding and Invert Perceptions'–
Occupation and Appropriation as Tactic

I first recommend a strategic spatial tactic that can provoke planners to heed the three policy recommendations I provide for them as well as the one I advise them not to adopt. Skateboarders should claim their right to the city by continuing to occupy and appropriate urban space as a strategy for inclusion, to make urban conflicts and problems public, and to reverse negative perceptions associated with ‘different’ populations. “To occupy is to mobilize a site simultaneously as a space for formation/withdrawal and a space for representation” (Iveson, 2017, p. 552).

I am not advocating for serious forms of resistance (i.e., destruction of property, physical confrontation). Rather, I am recommending “playfulness … in the face of official censure [to] ensure that attempts to forcibly curtail these activities will ultimately recast authority as an ill-tempered curmudgeon, entailing a loss of face and a corollary degradation of legitimacy” (Flusty, 2000, p. 156). Even in the face of shrinking public space and censure, blindspots exist in the flatground areas of Staples Center and the protruding ledges at Jkwon – panopticism fails.

Following similar tactics like the #Occupy movement, skateboarders should occupy and appropriate spaces that have been co-opted by urban managers through the imposition of exclusionary regulations that prioritize mass surveillance and privatization of public space. This will help excluded populations reclaim that which is public – democratic spaces “where citizens can gather to learn, discuss, and confront issues of public concern” (Lubin, 2012, p. 189). By occupying public (or privately-owned public) spaces, populations can force city governments and the media to acknowledge their presence which in turn can challenge status quo planning and result in urban policy reform. Therefore, skateboarders should continue to transgress regulatory boundaries in co-opted spaces to call attention to the underlying, antagonistic social relations that permeate throughout city life. If cities indeed allow for defensible spaces to proliferate through the subsidization of processes like gentrification and privatization of public space, populations that face the reality of shrinking public space must continue to prioritize the use value of true public space in order to squash any attempt to eliminate democratic mixtures and performances (Davis, 2012).

Because conventional urban planning ascribes functional semantics to spaces and objects, and tends to respond to conflicts and problems that arise, skateboarders should use this aspect of planning to their advantage. Making an issue public can potentially motivate planning and policy solutions, whether it be providing a nicer skatepark or developing innovative regulatory tools and programming to create more vibrant, multi-use spaces. If skateboarders continually appropriate exclusionary spaces, reinterpret the space through
their inventive performances on objects, transgress the representations and regulations of these spaces, and ascribe new symbolic meanings to underused, shrinking spaces, cities may have an impetus to plan for solutions. As skateboarders interact with diverse publics in these spaces, perceptions may be reversed and support for the activity could be fostered (e.g., Love Park, West LA Courthouse).

‘Tweak the Wheel-bitten, Radically Zoned Out Other’ – Leveraging State and City Ordinances and Planning Tools to Incentivize and Create Multi-Use, Ubiquitous Spaces

Second, zoning and land use planners could leverage the newly passed Quimby regulations to lobby for State and City ordinances like Section 831.4 to overlay easements in privately-owned plazas, thus incentivizing private developers by eliminating liability. This policy recommendation is the most technical and difficult. It also requires the City of LA to possess the political will to plan for the citizens of LA, stop adopting exclusionary ordinance like 2012’s 182389, and solve its shrinking public space problem by standing up to powerful development interests. I am not concerned with urban planning practice that is risk-averse. I am also not concerned with nuances of planning law and the potential legal conflicts that may arise (and have arose stirring controversy) surrounding the takings clauses regarding easements for recreation in California (See Nollan vs. California Coastal Commission, 1987).

Section 831.4 was buttressed by California court precedent regarding liability, recreation, and urban space. It currently covers sidewalks, streets, and urban nature trails on public and private property. If public space is shrinking in Los Angeles and populations make this shrinkage crisis public following the strategic occupation of space, it could generate support to extend Section 831.4 to cover leftover private spaces like plazas. Even a planner for LA who was skeptical of how the takings clause would play out wasn’t averse to the idea of extending Section 831.4’s coverage to increase multi-use recreation space in cities. “Conceptually, I don’t see why it couldn’t work.”

In addition, when planning and designing urban plazas, another common deterrence to celebrating difference and including skateboarders is skate-stoppers. At both Staples Center and Jkwon, these little knobs were present. Cities cite minimal damage to urban objects as the motivation behind their presence. One skateboarder told me of a solution that is a feasible way to mitigate against chipped concrete in order to reduce maintenance costs and make spaces more aesthetically pleasing. The placing of angled iron on concrete ledges has been a solution long-advocated for by the skateboarding community as this design intervention conforms to most cities’ Uniform Building Codes – now the International Building Code (Long & Jensen, 2006).
Skater #3: “An easy one for the city to accommodate skating so they could have less of an argument that we destroy property, is to put metal coping on every single ledge so that when skaters use it, it isn’t like cement and won’t just chip away. Yeah, that’d be like the easiest thing...” (West LA)

By reducing liability to injury through adopting State and City ordinances and curbing menial damage to urban objects through design interventions, a city may be able to reverse the trends of its shrinking public spaces and better incorporate diverse populations into multi-use spaces. I recommend this specific policy because I deduced a common sense idea that I believe most would agree with. Making some spaces illegal for particular populations will likely inspire these excluded populations to use them more. This makes the contradictory imposition of regulations and spending of taxpayer money on skate-stoppers pointless. There is something enticing about transgression without serious repercussion. Engaging discourse and meaningful engagement should also be established between users of this reclaimed space, merchants, property owners, and the City in order to establish ground rules regarding how to program the space with populations who love to appropriate them in order to avoid physical collisions.

‘Gnarly Engagement Session with the Locals’ – Increasing Efficacious, Bottom-up Engagement to Provide Adequate, High-Quality Skate Facilities

Third, parks planners and landscape architects should meaningfully engage with the skateboard community at every skate park and plaza that is going to be built under the jurisdiction of the City. Following Arnstein’s Citizen Ladder of Participation (1969), skateboarders’ levels of participation fell somewhere in between consultation and placation during my research. Only 13% of those interviewed had tacit knowledge of what urban planning, public hearings, design charrettes, and civic participation were. If planners and architects want to plan and design high-quality, publicly-controlled skate spaces, the ones that will use the space or the “have-not citizens [must] obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). This also comes with the caveat that skateboarding can never truly be contained within these designated spaces, no matter how perfect they may appear to be. Therefore, I recommend that planners in cities grant delegated power and citizen control to affected populations of open space plans or redesigns, particularly through their incorporation in community participation workshops.

A discursive democracy, meaningful community engagement, and public storytelling are essential planning ingredients for success as they enable people of all backgrounds and abilities to frame and make sense of what is, reflect on what needs to be done, and engage with others about the sensibility of their stories (Beauregard, 2003). Engagement through storytelling, iterative design workshops, and giving skateboarders a platform to voice their
opinions must be representative, participatory, and discursive. Democratic planning and community engagement without storytelling is one in which technocrats rule and bureaucracy is unaccountable to citizens (Beauregard, 2003). Therefore, deliberative and discursive democracy should be fostered in a wide array of public spaces that are inhabited by the population who will be affected by a skate facility or private plaza so that planners can take myriad disparate, individualized stories and mold them into bases for community-based, sensible, and just collective action.

Many skateboarders, particularly at Lafayette Skate Plaza, felt as though the City of Los Angeles and those planning and designing their skate spaces were not adequately engaging them and incorporating their voices and visions into planning and design processes and plans. Planners should conduct research to identify where skateboarders congregate in order to study these spaces, introduce themselves to this population, and delegate information concerning public meetings and design charrettes involving future skate parks and plazas. Following PPS’ (2000) *How to turn a place around*, planning agencies should adopt the eleven principles proffered in this seminal book to develop visions of what a place should be so that places are always articulated by the people who use the space (PPS, 2000). Key among the eleven principles are: the community is the expert and should always contribute to the planning and design process; the creation of a maintained, safe, and accessible programmed space is what’s important (not the design); planners should observe a space (e.g., how this thesis was conducted) to learn how it is actually used; the community should develop the vision rather than the professionals through an iterative process; triangulation should be adopted in order to increase diverse types of activities; money should never be seen as the issue (the concept is the issue); and planning is never finished completing a successful public space – spaces must be cared for and constantly checked in on with users providing updates (PPS, 2000).

Adopting a replicable, therapeutic planning engagement and design process (*i.e.*, PPS’ 11 principles) will help to plan with different populations to show that they are ultimately the users of a place. In doing so, perceptions can be reversed when planning work involves dialogue, negotiation, and storytelling with different voices. The APA states that meaningful community engagement with specific users of space is the quickest, most effective way to build a sense of community and improve quality of life (APA, 2002). Well-planned spaces provide places for diverse populations to connect and interact in a shared environment. In addition, engagement can channel positive community participation by mobilizing different people to work together toward a shared vision. Future planning and design endeavors involving skateboarders can be celebrated
as processes of bringing people together to share experiences and work towards solutions in solidarity. When planners engage with diverse subcultures and grant them delegated power and citizen control, the benefits of a well-planned, programmed space will also benefit the overall community.

‘Transfer from Park Skating to Demo Street Skating’ – Mobilize Skateboards to Identify City Initiatives for Programming Opportunities

Fourth, skateboarders and other ‘subcultural’ populations should seek citywide initiatives that allow them to produce new spaces on city-owned property. For example, the People Street Initiative in Los Angeles, sponsored by the Department of Transportation, allows communities to transform underused areas of LA’s largest public asset – 7,500 miles of city streets – into active, vibrant, and accessible public space through partnering with community partners (i.e., local merchants, BIDs) to develop programming in parklets and plazas. This program (and the people behind it) has started to plan equitable spaces in order to celebrate multicultural populations and activities in the city, humanize streets, and reverse notions that public space in the city is ‘hostile.’ A transit planner told me that they envision programs like People Street becoming more ubiquitous and celebrating cultural activity in LA’s streets.

“The way I see it is there’s so much cultural activity going on in LA and sometimes it’s really hard for them to find or keep venues or places to gather. LA always has this baggage that people attach to it when they look at it afar from the city. What I see is like a surviving and thriving in spite of how hostile our public realm is. I see those glimmers of people using space differently and feeling comfortable as we slowly chip away at these things little by little.”

Because city-owned, land-based ordinances eliminate liability from injury and because skateboarders haven’t been found to sue if injured, this initiative can serve as an opportunity for skateboarders to program their activities with DIY urban objects, create spectacles for nonskateboarders, and include their voices into pre-existing city planning processes and programs.

Two of the challenges for initiatives like this are raising money and programming to keep these spaces teeming with activity.

“The challenge has really been figuring out ways for the community partner to program the space. It’s one thing to put ... an underutilized roadway space. You also need something interesting to draw people there.”

I was told that a break-dancing group collaborated with a community partner through the initiative to take advantage of LA’s sunny weather and People Street’s provision of accessible outdoor space. Having break-dancers visible in the streets celebrates multiculturalism and diverse activities. It also takes advantage of a city’s largest public asset – its streets.

“I think people are catching on and our demographic shifts are changing and our mindsets are shifting to where we will start to see more activities in our public space.”
The People Street Initiative can serve as an exemplar for taking creative risks to plan spaces for multicultural populations and diverse activities. Planners should continue to formulate and implement similar creative programs to incorporate diverse performances, celebrate multiculturalism and difference, and allow true public space to materialize and be used by people for people.

‘Don’t Stoke the City as Entertainment Machine’ – Celebrating Cultural Production and the Social Production of Space

My fifth and final recommendation advises planners to not follow Howell’s (2005) call for an extension of contemporary consumption practice to the consumption of space to promote reclamation of failing urban space so that cities can brand themselves as ‘entertainment machines.’ From the Love Park case study in Philadelphia to the success of Belvedere Skatepark in Los Angeles, urban managers should reverse perceptions of subcultural populations like skateboarders to laud them as an ‘organic’ street culture, but not because they produce marketable imagery that reclaims dead space, attracts employers, and begins potentially negative processes of downtown reinvestment and gentrification. I am advocating only for the cultivation and celebration of creative publics in urban space because oftentimes planners, when rebranding city centers, use these populations to spur gentrification and eventually ban them in spaces they were formerly allowed to use (See Howell, 2005; Nemeth, 2006). Without continuous occupation of co-opted spaces and the implementation of ordinances to reduce liability and damage, simply branding the ‘City as Entertainment Machine’ will result in a shallow planning endeavor that further excludes populations like skateboarders, while undermining the very nature of this particular activity (e.g., anti-capitalist, using spaces for their use value).

For example, at the beginning of 2016, the City of Philadelphia co-opted Love Park, a space that was transgressively yet creatively appropriated by skateboarders, as a space to commodify this marketable street imagery, culture, and social space being produced. As urban managers procured this particular space, skateboarders have been indefinitely banned as the space is undergoing a major face-lift (i.e., construction of a modernist-landscaped garden with strategic anti-skate designs) to accommodate the gentry and formally ban the activity. Repercussions, like the permanent exclusion of skateboarding from ‘public’ plazas, will surely become the norm if cities attempt to exploit the organic street culture for city branding strategies.

Urban managers should just allow different counterpublics to make the city their own by imagining “the existence of a social space in which we can address others, and in which we can be addressed by others, as strangers … such a social space can only exist through the particular acts of public address and
interaction that take its existence for granted” (Iveson, 2017, p. 540). Planners should avoid commodifying this cultural consumption, social production of space, and provocative imagery to use as tools for investment and revitalization. Rather, planners should purely celebrate their cities’ diverse, inclusive, multi-use spaces. Without regulatory tools and ordinances that reduce liability and get rid of design interventions that allow activities like skateboarding to take place, cities could potentially use the marketable imagery for full-scale gentrification and eventually ban skateboarders.

Whilst more meaningful community engagement with ‘subcultural’ populations can increase the quality of publicly-controlled skate spaces, planners should also apply similar engagement strategies to the planning, design, and programming of urban plazas (privatized) in order to cultivate this cultural consumption and spectacular activity. They should use ideas from skateboarders to transform underutilized spaces into spaces of artistic expression, creativity, exploration, and spontaneous encounters with those maintaining diverse viewpoints of the world. Denying one population’s access to a space turns into a denial of citizenship and representation in the public forum (Nemeth, 2006). Cities can easily program spontaneous place-making encounters by establishing times (i.e., the weekend or at night) where performances can take place and events such as live music, breakdancing, or skateboarding can attract and engender diverse co-existence and spectacular sites in urban spaces.

The skateboarding industry is a more than $5 billion-dollar venture and skateboarders should be seen as an organic street culture that is “a kind of individualized labor, producing surplus [use] value by leading the reclamation of … space” (Howell, 2005, p. 33). Cities should acknowledge the cases of Philadelphia’s Love Park, East LA’s Belvedere Skatepark, and West LA’s Courthouse to understand that skateboarding produces a culture industry with no class consciousness that can inject small flows of capital to maintain these alternatively, diversely used spaces. Cities can look to partner with giant corporations (e.g., Nike at the West LA Courthouse) who support these activities and can inject the small capital flows necessary to maintain heavily-used spaces. Ultimately, planners should allow a subculture’s cultural performances, which can socially-revitalize a space without co-opting the activities that led to a particular space’s reclamation. By celebrating the cultural creativity of populations in space, cities can engender spontaneous encounters with diverse publics, receive small capital flows and revenues through programmed events to maintain minor wear-and-tear (i.e., X-games), and sustain universal access to public space while combating avoidable displacement.
Conclusions

Thesis’ Implications for Urban Planning

As public spaces are appropriated by commercial real estate interests in cities, space for diverse publics is shrinking. Skateboarders use their boards and performances as a form of resistance to spatial and representative regulation, thus signifying a “stark refusal to disappear beneath the imperatives of spatial regulation that favors select target markets. In this refusal to disappear is an insistence on a right to claim, and remake, portions of the city” (Flusty, 2000, p. 156). Skateparks provide a unique urban population with functional, ubiquitous urban objects that one might find in a privatized urban plaza. Skateboarders love to interpret and use these objects differently, transgress regulatory boundaries to challenge themselves in public and private spaces, and forge familial group-identity to celebrate difference in cities. Skateparks are appreciated, but are lacking in providing the organicism that skaters enjoy when exploring different spaces and interacting with diverse populations throughout the city. Skateboarders take advantage of a seemingly endless, concrete recreational playground as the board helps to mitigate against the disappearance of public space by reimagining all spaces as valuable and usable.

By undertaking Sandercock’s (2004) challenge for urban planning to be more imaginative in 21st-century cities and reading and responding to Lefebvre’s (1991) call to critique everyday life by immersing one’s self in different urban spaces, I adopted an ethnographic research methodology. It allowed me to compare and contrast public and private space as well as analyze spatial and temporal forms of performance, resistance, exclusion, representation, and symbolism. My findings were interpreted through ethnographic techniques (i.e., text coding of interviews), reading of regulations, analysis of videos and photographs, physically being in and understanding the spaces, and mapping skateboarders’ movements, paths, and flows. I analyzed these findings systematically by putting them into Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad – lived, represented, representational. This helped me to formulate my policy recommendations as well as show that planners must expand their politics, increase their audacity, cultivate creativity, and develop therapeutic approaches to celebrate difference and understand and resolve urban conflicts.
“We need to develop better tools for conviviality. We will go from acknowledging diversity to celebrating diversity. If we all lose opportunities to meet each other face-to-face, we will continue to fear each other. We are all wired to fear people we don’t know. The opportunities to meet socially in urban spaces is a necessary, although insufficient factor that needs to be there to get from mere tolerance of diversity to a celebration as an asset of it in society.” – Planning Professor, interview, 2017

I recommended the strategic tactic for skateboarders to make themselves more public based on my ethnographic field data and interviews with planners. As was the case with Love Park in Philadelphia and the West LA Courthouse in Santa Monica, the occupation and creative appropriation of urban plazas and objects built a sense of ownership, responsibility, and community in these spaces. When they were shutdown, the large community of skateboarders who ascribed symbolic and physical meanings and interpretations to these spaces mobilized and engaged with planners, open space advocates, city council members, and private organizations to reclaim and refurbish these spaces. They also made it known to urban managers that banning certain populations was not okay and simply providing publicly-controlled skateparks did not remedy the closure of another space.

“I think it comes down to a sense of urgency. We’re just generally lower density here and there’s never been made to be a crisis. If it got enough people to notice the fact that these facilities were lacking in a community, there might be some sort of compromise. Be it a skatepark being constructed or a compromise between businesses and skateboarders on when they could use the space.” – Parks Planner in LA, interview, 2017

My policy recommendations are meant to generate new planning imaginations that can lead to better urban space policy, design, and programming in order to produce more inclusive, multi-use spaces. Although applied to the skateboarding, this thesis’ methodologies, findings, and recommendations can have broad applications to other subcultural, multicultural, and ethnic groups in cities. Planners can innovate upon conventional planning tools like zoning to reduce liability and damage. They can advocate for pluralism by engaging different urban factions and utilizing ethnographic techniques to produce grassroots-planning solutions that form a sense of civic ownership, responsibility, and pride in city spaces. In planning for populations, city spaces can start to celebrate multiculturalism in the 21st-century city and produce equitable, vibrant urban spaces to showcase this difference.

“We need to think about what is happening around us, within us, each and everyday. We live on familiar terms with people in our own family, our own milieu, our own class. This constant impression of familiarity makes us think that we know them, that their outlines are defined for us, and that they see themselves as having those same outlines. We define them. and we judge them. We can identify with them or exclude them from our world. But the familiar is not the necessarily known.” – Henri Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 14 – 15

Limitations with Ethno-geographic Study of Skateboarders

Ethnographic research can be frustrating “due to the widespread perception and experience that fieldwork is chaotic” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 24). Postmodern critiques often cite ethnographic research, analysis,
and subsequent findings as overly subjective, ‘unscientific’, generalized, and non-representative of the actual culture being studied (Herbert, 2000). However, since these frustrations and critiques are part of any social science methodology, ethnography turned out to be a highly-sophisticated research tool for understanding skateboarders, presenting their social meanings, and documenting their extraordinary activities in space and society (Spradley, 1979; Spradley, 1980; Emerson et al., 1995; Brewer, 2000; Blommaert & Jie, 2010).

It is important, as a social science researcher, to disclose other limitations with my research. First, I only focused on one specific subcultural population that is treated differently in urban space. Future inquiries would benefit from taking my mixed methods research and studying other disproportionately regulated populations in public space. Second, I had originally thought I would study space in New York City or possess a car to study four completely different skate spaces in Los Angeles. However, my field city, sites of observation, and analysis were confined by public transportation and time. Third, with more time and less constraint due to inclement weather, a cross-city analysis (i.e., between Los Angeles and New York or Los Angeles and a non-American city) would surely produce interesting data and findings.

In order to bypass the normative limitations of my ethnographic research on skateboarders, I reflected on certain contingencies which bore upon and helped to create my analytical data findings as a partial account, producing a tale of the field in which I studied skateboarders. Technologies I used allowed me to systematically observe nuances of skateboarders’ cultural processes, performances, and meanings in public space (Emerson et al., 1995). In addition, the technologies used further immersed myself in public space without disrupting organic performances and social cohesion. It appeared as though I was just taking pictures or texting which are normal things to see people doing in public spaces in the 21st century. Finally, by following Spradley and other experts when conducting my ethno-geographic research, I was able to move from chaotic data collection to codification of themes and cultural scenes of skateboarders in space. Regardless of my research's limitations, my findings helped in understanding one subculture's usage of urban space and how “in [studying] the everyday reality of social movements, networking practices create multiple and overlapping geographies and spaces of action and meaning” (Barassi, 2013, p. 49).

Next Steps, Further Pathways of Inquiry

When planners adopt an ethnographic methodology, they should have one basic research question in mind. I discovered that more research questions materialized the more I conducted field observations, took notes, and conversed with skateboarders. This is important to note for planners when conducting future ethnographic research or trying it for the first
time like I did. When conducting interviews in the field, focus less on a structured questionnaire and more on meaningful, organic conversation with the population being studied. I came to realize that reading off a piece of paper made skateboarders suspicious of my presence. As the questions became more ingrained in my memory, skateboarders were more responsive to my inquiries since they took them as everyday conversation even though I had a recording device.

Behavioral mapping and imagery turned out to be an effective way to describe the spaces I systematically studied by mapping paths taken by skateboarders and illustrating these actions with photographs. For GIS savants, if granted years to work on this project in multiple cities, it would be fascinating to map planned and found spaces, creating an interactive web-based map of intriguing global skate spaces.

For the literary-minded, it would be interesting to generate a compilation of short essays written by the subject being studied on a certain planning theme (See Long & Jensen’s (2006) no comply: skateboarding speaks on authority). A book could be published by asking 20-30 skateboarders to write short essays on a broached subject like skateboarding and exclusion. One would surely gain previously hidden insight from these essays. This would be an interesting methodology and planning experiment to see how populations experiencing spatial exclusion discuss this issue and possibly present local knowledge and solutions to the problem being studied.

Lastly, for planners interested in planning law, it would be compelling to perform an analysis of the ordinances imposed in public and private spaces and figure out how to blur the legal boundaries that currently exclude misunderstood populations. For advocacy planners, it would be ideal to bridge the engagement gap between planners and subcultural populations by putting them into contact and potentially redesigning a skate plaza like Lafayette following the skaters’ suggestions.

This thesis was meant to reflectively study a previously subcultural population that has come into the mainstream of city life and their performances in differentially-regulated space in Los Angeles. It is my hope that this research encourages further pathways of inquiry as well as newfangled planning imaginations for 21st-century cities.
References


References


References


Appendices

Appendix I: Fulcrum data and excel example

Example of Excel Output from Fulcrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>time</th>
<th>weekend, pm</th>
<th>weekday, weekday, weekend, am</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>name_of_space</td>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>Lafayette Lafayette Lafayette Skate Plaza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count_of_skateb</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23 23 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public_space_type</td>
<td>Skate Space Type</td>
<td>Publicly Skate Spat Skate Spat Skate Space Type, Publicly-Controlled Skate Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public_space_type_other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location_of_space</td>
<td>Location, Outside</td>
<td>Location, Location, Location, Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performances_act</td>
<td>Skateboarding, Conversation, Skateboarding, Conversation, Drinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performances_actFilming</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects_skated</td>
<td>Stairs, Ledge, Embankment Bench, Led Bench, Led Bench, Ledge, Handrail, Stairs, Street, Sidewalk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects_skated_other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others_in_space</td>
<td>Filmmers, spectators, etc</td>
<td>Filmmers Pedestrian Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived_performance</td>
<td>Skating, Filming, Jumping, Fake flight, Concrete</td>
<td>Sitting on steps, Skating on steps, Jumping down on steps, Practicing tricks, Grind representations, Space used by boarders, All spots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of Carto Map of Fulcrum Data
## Appendix II: Interview Schedules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Space Professionals</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Skateboarders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When a public space is successful, what types of activities are taking place and who is using it? Is this space a place where diverse populations and activities can come and play? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Could you describe an ideal public space? Who's using it and what activities are taking place?</td>
<td>How long have you been skateboarding? Why did you pick up skateboarding, and what do you think you'd be doing if you never had started?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your experiences with planning public space and understanding the outcomes of a space, what obstacles and challenges have you encountered? This can be in regards to funding, regulations, populations, damages, etc.</td>
<td>Are there populations that are usually planned against in public space? Who are they?</td>
<td>Do you come here often? Do you live in the area or did you come from far away to this space? How do you get from space to space when skateboarding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you familiar with the act of skateboarding in cities? (If yes, continue to b; if no, continue to conclusory statement)</td>
<td>Would you categorize skateboarders as a population planned against?</td>
<td>What motivates you to use one type of space over another? For instance, why don't you always use skateparks that are designated for skateboarders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you plan for public space, are skateboarders ever considered? Why or why not?</td>
<td>With the increasing privatization of public space, are these types of populations achieving their right to the city?</td>
<td>Can you discuss why you believe skateboarders use space differently than nonskateboarders? What sorts of creative activities do you believe skateboarders do that others couldn't in a public space?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your experience, what types of activities are public spaces typically designed to afford and control? Does this have to do with concern for damage?</td>
<td>Why do you feel planners tend to plan spaces that are exclusionary in cities?</td>
<td>Do you think skateboarding is an activity that should be allowed to persist with other activities in spaces? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In projects you’ve worked on, has your company considered skateboarders’ wants/needs in public space?</td>
<td>If you’re familiar with skateboarding, why would planners regulate this out of public space?</td>
<td>Other than skateboarding, what other types of activities are you engaging in while skateboarding? Also, when not skateboarding, what do you do in your free time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you believe that skateboarders add or detract from a public space?</td>
<td>What benefits do you believe subcultures have in space?</td>
<td>What are the social and communal benefits of being a skateboarder?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have regulations been put in place that might deter skateboarders in these spaces? If so, why do you think that is?</td>
<td>Why do or don’t planners consider all populations’ needs and desires when regulating and designing public space?</td>
<td>How do you believe others, like cops and politicians, perceive skateboarding as an activity? Have you ever been involved in an altercation with authority or nonskateboarders? Can you describe what happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do you think skateboarding could become a more, universally-accepted and appropriate act in public space? Is it a lack of understanding by city officials and the public or something else?</td>
<td>What is wrong with policing populations in public space? What sorts of negative externalities arise because of this?</td>
<td>Do you believe skateboarding is an inherently destructive activity, or do you attribute this to misunderstanding by others? If you had to tell someone else the ways in which skateboarders perform creatively in public space, how would you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you see anything inherently wrong with planning spaces that might deter populations like skateboarders? Why or why not?</td>
<td>In what ways do you think planners and policymakers can start to see activities such as skateboarding as positive contribution to vibrant public space?</td>
<td>What sorts of meanings do you attach to certain spaces? Have you ever been attached to a space that was either shut down or skate-proofed? If you had to describe your ideal space, what would it be? Does it exist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do feel welcome in certain spaces? Do you believe skateboarders are a population that is considered when cities plan and design public space? What would you like to see change?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III: Miscellaneous Tables of Lefebvre’s Triple Dialectic

Table 1: Count of Skater in Space by Time of Week and Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Week and Day</th>
<th>Lafayette*</th>
<th>Hollenbeck*</th>
<th>Staples**</th>
<th>Jkwon**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekday AM</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekday PM</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend AM</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend PM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes public-controlled park; **denotes privately-controlled spot

Table 2: Activities Taking Place in the Spaces (days activity present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skate Spot</th>
<th>Lafayette</th>
<th>Hollenbeck</th>
<th>Staples</th>
<th>Jkwon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skateboarding</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrians</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting/Resting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filming</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Observations Entered from Fulcrum by Author
### Table 3: Urban Objects Skated (days object skated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skate Spot</th>
<th>Lafayette</th>
<th>Hollenbeck</th>
<th>Staples</th>
<th>Jkwon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handrails</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ledge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Stairs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embankment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Observations Entered into Fulcrum by Author*

### Table 4: Other Users in Spaces (days activity present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skate Spot</th>
<th>Lafayette</th>
<th>Hollenbeck</th>
<th>Staples</th>
<th>Jkwon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filmers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrians/Spectators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF/GF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-users</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bikers</td>
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*Source: Observations Entered into Fulcrum by Author*
Appendix IV: Skate Lexicon

123

180 ½ rotation of deck or skater
360 full rotation of deck or skater
5-0 grind with front trucks lifted off object
50/50 grind with both trucks on object

A

air aerial with all four wheels lifted off the ground
acid drop jumping straight off object, oftentimes into a bank

B

backside when a turn or trick is executed in direction that the back of the body is facing the arc of the trick
bail when a trick isn’t executed, causing the skater to fall or kick away the board
bank any sloped area, usually concrete, under 90 degrees
bearing inner and outer part, which balls ride on, allowing wheels to turn
blunt a sliding grind where the back tail or front nose is in contact with a ledge or rail with back wheels touching
board the wooden platform also known as a deck
boardslide to slide on an obstacle with the contact point being the middle of the board
bust when a spot is staffed with security resulting skaters being kicked out quickly

C

cab while riding fake and performing a 360-aerial
carve to make a long, curving arc while skateboarding – resembling surfing
concrete wave slang term for old-school and alternative skateboarding
crooked grind a nose grind with the nose of the board/deck touching the object while sliding
d

deck the wooden, concaved platform of the skateboard
drop-in to enter a ramp or obstacle from the top by rolling in or dropping from the tail of the board
e

embrankment another term for a bank
f

fakie to ride goofy with your front foot positioned on the nose of the board
frontside when a turn or trick is executed in direction that the front of the body is facing toward outside of the arc of a trick

g

goofy (lefty) or to ride with your right foot forward and left foot on the tail
gnar shorter way to say gnarly – awesome or cool
grab when an aerial is performed and a hand grabs the deck
grind a sliding maneuver whereby one or both trucks slide on an urban object (i.e., rail, ledge)

H

halfpipe a u-shaped ramp with a flat section in the middle
handrail what skateboarders slide and grind on and others use to maintain balance walking down stairs
heelflip while performing an ollie, the heel pushes
down on the edge of the board causing it to do a one-
rotation flip

hit to grind an object or jump down it

inverted a hand plant where the skater does a hand
stand while grabbing the board on a halfpipe or
quarter pipe

inward heel a heelflip that does a 180 away from the
body of the skater

judo a grab aerial whereby the skater grabs near the
front trucks and kicks out their front foot

jump ramp a mobile, banked ramp that skaters use
to jump off of

kickflip while performing an ollie, the toe pushes
outward on the edge of the board causing it to do a
one-rotation flip

kickturn when pressure is applied to the tail of the
board, lifting the front and turning it in another
direction

kingpin the bolt that holds the hanger and base
plate of the truck together, allowing the board to turn
without becoming uncontrollably wobbly

laserflip a frontside 360 heelflip

launch another term for jump or ollie

ledge a concrete or marble oftentimes rectangular
object that skaters apply wax to in order to grind or
slide on it

line a route that a skater chooses while performing
various tricks, grinds, and flips

manual a wheelie – performed over as long a distance
as possible where the front or back trucks are lifted
while disallowing the tail or nose to touch the ground

mongo a method of pushing where the front foot is
taken off to touch the ground and generate speed
(DON’T PUSH THIS WAY)

no-comply an aerial trick where pressure is applied
to the front foot before sliding it off while the back
foot pushes the board into the air before putting the
front foot back on the board

nollie a reverse ollie where the front foot is pushed
down to generate an aerial from pressure

nose the front portion of the board above the trucks

noseslide a slide where the nose is the only part of
the board sliding along an urban object

ollie a no-handed air by performed by tapping the
tail of the board on the ground and launching it into
the air (basic trick one must know)

pop shuv-it an ollie where the board leaves the feet
and does a backside 180 rotation

poser someone who acts better than they are or
pretends to be a skateboarder when they really aren’t

push when a skater wants to generate speed by
taking the back foot off of the board, placing it toward
the front of the board and pushing backwards on the
ground

quarterpipe half a half-pipe
**R**

regular a stance where the left foot is at the front of the board and right foot at the back

**S**

session a period of non-stop skateboarding

skate-stop a series of metal brackets purposefully bolted upon objects to deter skateboarding

smith a grind where the back truck is grinding, while the rail of the board is also grinding the urban object

stairset any number of stairs that skateboarders jump down

stalled when a skateboarder jumps onto an object and stops the board from moving by applying pressure

stoked describes a skater’s state-of-mind when they are pumped up and confident

street skating a popular style of skateboarding that uses everyday urban objects, sidewalks, and streets to practice the activity

switch when a skateboarder that is goofy rides regular or vice versa

**T**

tailslide a sliding grind where the back of the board below the trucks is the only part of the board sliding on an object

technical a tricky, obstacle-laden section of a line; or a skateboarder who performs finesse-laden tricks with ease

transition the curved part of a terrain between 0 and 90 degrees

trucks the front and rear axle assemblies that connect the wheels to the deck and provide turning capabilities bolstered by the kingpin

**V**

varial an aerial where the board is spun backwards to forwards beneath the feet

vert ramp a half-pipe, at least 8-feet-tall, with steep sides that are perfectly vertical near the top

vert skating a skateboard style that predominantly involves skating on ramps and other vertical structures specifically designed for skating

wallride a trick whereby the skater forces the wheels of a skateboard to ride on a vertical wall

wax a bar of candle wax used to make objects in plazas more slippery to afford slides and grinds

wheels rolling devices made of urethane attached to the truck

wipeout a crash or bail

X-games annual extreme sports event involving skateboarding that is controlled, produced and broadcast by ESPN

yeah-right a manual involving two boards whereby the skater balances their front foot on the tail of one board and back foot on the nose of the other board

Z-boys the legendary group of 70s skateboarders that innovated on earlier forms of concrete surfing to involve and invent aerial and sliding skate moves

Z-flex one of the earliest designs of skateboards pioneered by the Z-boys