

The Skateboard Dérive: A Poststructuralist Performance of Everyday Urban Motility

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Introduction

The landscape of the city possesses the elements of a dialogic psychogeographical production, an environment that is both a product of and producing of, individuals. *The Skateboard Dérive* is a critical exploration of this landscape, which is re/presented to highlight a compositional aesthetic that functions to blur the distinctions between the subject of the city and the object of the practitioner in the form of a video and audio rendering of the experience. Utilizing the tactic of the *dérive*, devised and employed by *The Situationist International*, I locate physical and conceptual forces of power and resistance in the dialog created between the sedentary nature of everyday public spaces and the nomadic practices of a particular drifting practitioner. Combining the critical wander with street skateboarding as a performative exemplar of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theorized nomad, I connect disparate locales of various prescribed uses through fluid movement.

The street skateboard is a tool that when used to its cultural and historical potential produces its own space and becomes a body; to this degree the body/board traverses the urban space creating a localized environment that is directly re/created according to the physical practice within. The subjectivity of this body/board is spatially existential, essence for this practitioner is provided by an immediate and conscious interaction with/in space(s). This critical and creative micro practice is viewed as a shifting method of inquiry, a nomadic interpretation of science.

In distinction to nomadic science, in *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Deleuze and Guattari paint a vision of an orthodox or royal science that I recognize in an urban apparatus that is composed of physical forces that also appropriate forms of thinking, ways of being. Initiating a spatial project or settlement, of striation; striated space is projected sovereignty through constructed inertness, a rigid segmentarity. This can be recognized in the linear and divided places of our urban centers; the places marked by specifically conceived modes of use and non-use. Nomadic movement, fluid conceptions of spatial usage, and ambulatory thought often becomes appropriated in the form of more sedentary practices and thinking. Existing outside of the inertness of

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the settlement, of the place (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 360). Deleuze and Guattari as well as The Situationists, present theoretical and physical tactics that entail a reflexivity of these appropriating levels of stately discourse and offer the outline of and the desire for a minor science as a functional yet suppressed alternative (*Thousand* 361). I present *The Skateboard Dérive* as a smooth example of research of this type that utilizes a practice that is already at work within the core of a royal place, the city.

Dérive

Guy Debord first describes the dérive in 1957 as a movement toward a new way of inhabiting space, which is also a movement from a prescribed way of using conceived places. While the Situationists conducted numerous experiments utilizing this notion, such as wandering through the streets of London according to a map of Paris and exploring the catacombs of underground and out-of-bounds Paris in order to uncover hidden aspects of the city, in general this practice is noted as “a passionate journey out of the ordinary through,” a searching out of quickly “changing of ambiances, as well as a means of study of psychogeography and of situationist psychology” (Debord, “Report” 24). Combining the theoretical and historical practice of the dérive with the physical and cultural practice of the street skateboard, as a qualitative research tool I re/consider the public and semi-private spaces of the everyday.

The movement between places, for the dérivating skateboarder, is what becomes significant rather than the specific place used, a sensibility that drifts, that is nomadic. Geography in this regard, is contingent on its practice. Linking together moments with spaces I attempt to interweave these notions through practice in the quotidian spaces of the city, which create an ideal environment for the practice of “countercultural and counterspatial activities” that are within the in between spaces that are not yet “dominated by the high ideologies and powers of the state” (Borden, “Critique” 183). As opposed to college classrooms, the inside of courthouses, governmental buildings, etc., the utilization of marginally undefined spaces that mostly function to serve these specific locales such as the street, intersection, or alley enable me to consider these sites based on my own movement.

The Skateboard Dérive

The camera pans down toward my chosen form of motility, a form of transportation, a symbol of destruction and vandalism, a means of expression, a tool of qualitative research that is often misunderstood, appropriated, attenuated, and banned. Street skateboarding is a spatial practice that deals with the immediate, which characterizes space, based on traits rather than on projections; it requires endurance and effort, but produces no tangible product. Like the nomad that moves between points as a consequential necessity, the street skateboarding dériviste roams searching for the undefined spaces in between that can only be held temporarily. While I utilize the street skateboard here, and recognized its particular value in the critique of everyday urban space,

I recognize that various types of spatial practices would be appropriate to conduct a similar type of study. I also use and recognize this quotidian piece of equipment along with the rationale of its user as a practice that is already being practiced, already producing of spaces.

Transgressing both its watery origins and its suburban placeness the street skateboard has evolved over 50 years into a standard, simple, yet highly sophisticated piece of equipment designed with unique hyper-modern urban and suburban landscapes in mind. This environment with smooth concrete sidewalks, sharp ledges, wide plazas, and endless asphalt streets often free from traffic have produced the contemporary street skateboard, which has evolved only slightly alongside its environment. Like the *dérives* of the Situationists this practitioner's movement is ambiguous, reconfiguring movement according to a fragmented destination concept. The street, the sidewalk, the directional sign, the rhythms of the cars through traffic lights, and the movement of pedestrians through squares and plazas, become dialogic statements of perceived spatial use that the skateboarding *dériviste* viscerally and theoretically considers, comes into dialog with, through practice.

Standing looking ahead of me, down the immediate alley, I barely glimpse a section of the city street as urban traffic moves by. Meanwhile, I also mentally gaze outward toward the various city spaces I would soon connect through my own path. The skateboard rests at my feet awaiting use, while the urban core also waits, resistant, yet ripe for consideration. The camera angle slowly pans downward, briefly fixing on the tool that would provide this consideration, perhaps allowing the viewer along with the practitioner/cameraperson a moment of reflection concerning the value it would bring to the object of study, the city, the individual. Settling in a slowed almost paused zoom the camera begins to pan-upward as I simultaneously stand on top of the board to view the same space from a slightly elevated and floating bipedal perspective. Instantly the perspective is unique, looking out over the concrete contours, just as our ancestors had the tall grass, the board provides an elevated feeling of buoyant fluidity. The board is now a platform, a stage that propels my body and furthers my thinking. It is also a tool that allows the body an altogether different conception of city space at a localized level (Borden, "Creation" 204-205).

The contemporary street skateboarder, seen here as a figure utilizing a set of informed practices, provides a way to explore the contours of everyday concretized space. Immediately the concrete on which I am situated is used/viewed differently, as potentially hazardous, potentially exhilarating, as latent with new options, new considerations. Merely standing on a skateboard without moving is a hazardous activity, as many non-skaters can attest; this is not how a street skateboard should be used. Its function along with that of the corresponding body is to roam, unhindered, but heavily influenced by spatial elements such as roads, street furniture, architectural elements, etc.



Figure 1. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

Recognizing the dialectical roles body and environment play in constructing a spatially informed subjectivity, the object at my feet enables me to explore this identity through multiple spatial interactions. Robert Porter notes that Deleuze and Guattari force us to rethink what we consider political, theorizing the notion that “built form can bring about a shift in our sensibilities regarding the social and political world we inhabit,” providing the means to understand political theory as physical and aesthetic constructions (5). Understanding this physical aesthetic quality of political theory, I aim to add a visceral body to this conception noting that physical form has already put forth a politically subjective agenda that is continually confronted or reaffirmed through the everyday movements of practitioners.

Expanding the realm of political theory to incorporate aesthetic gestures stemming from an interaction with built form enables quotidian practices to be viewed with a renewed sense of social and political purpose. The motility provided by the skateboard offers the means to explore obscured political elements embedded within the structure of urban space through compositional spatial interaction. Despite being continually suppressed, this movement considers city space as more than a canvas or a blank page, but an already politically informed environment that is commented on through individual use. Street skateboarding a political act. It represents an outside approach from within, a different and unique interpretation of city space. For example, the handrail is marked as a barrier provided for safety, but to the street skateboarder it also signals various physical and conceptual possibilities such as a *board-slide*, *nose-slide*, *smith-grind*, or *crooked-grind* down or even up the edge of the rail. Depending on its spatial characteristics a particular handrail can also conjure up various thoughts and emotions: mental projections of possible maneuvers, regret of missed opportunities and failed attempts, or nostalgia for a particular distant or removed place. An example of this is the well-known *Hubba's Hideout* in San Francisco, California. A large

ledged handrail down six steps that is so popular any similar ledge is often referred to as a *Hubba*. This quotidian conception of space is different than the orthodox manner of viewing urban spatial elements, a minor approach to urban use. Recreated ersatz *Hubbas* are commonly found and labeled as such in ghettoized skateboard parks and street contests, such as the spectacle of the 2012 *X-Games* street skateboarding course in Los Angeles, re/appropriating and attenuating a previously nomadic appropriation.

Deleuze and Guattari contend that orthodox science often “retains of nomad science only what it can appropriate; it turns the rest into a set of strictly limited formulas without any real scientific status, or else simply represses and bans it” (*Thousand* 362). Using the skateboard to connect and consider locations allows empty or unitary spaces to become dialogic. For example, my trace moves across the street leading up to the sidewalk using the street as a runway. Cutting quickly across the sidewalk I prepare for another ollie off of a set of stairs, the sidewalk is used as a launch pad and the empty space is filled with interpretation. These various spatial elements also become re/connected to one another in new ways. The street, sidewalk, and stairs are commented on, entering into a nonverbal spatial dialog, creating productive dialectical tension out of a previously one-sided spatial utterance. The drifting practice of street skateboarding for this reason does not mesh well with the environment of urban space and therefore has a long history of censorship and appropriation, only reaffirming the sanctity of conceived spatial constructions.

Progressing a conducted dialog with urban space, the same concrete environment that has sought to silence its use, from the sea, to its sidewalk surfing origins, to suburban pools of the 1970’s and 1980’s and finally towards urban drifting, the street skateboard is dependent on spatial re/conception. The practice is a form of transgressive movement, a radical behavior that whether applying fluid movement to fixed space, appropriating and otherwise temporarily colonizing particular locales, or moving through urban and suburban spaces as both necessity and desirability, it works against geographical and spatial confines turning an urban conception into a political consideration.

There are myriad formal laws, bans, and even more widely held negative views about this act that make the practice a liminal experience constantly drifting somewhere in between transportation and expression, sanctioned use, and outlawed behavior. Like graffiti it is understood to have its values, but only under certain conditions or it is deemed a crime. The skateboarding nomad stands outside of the essentialized conception of the proper spatial user of city space. Unlike the cyclist, walker, and jogger, there is no prescribed way to use the skateboard in the city except for not-at-all. There are bicycle lanes for bicycles, sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians, roads and parking spaces for cars. As a *dériving* street skateboarder existing somewhere in between these conceptions of my own movement, I constantly shift from spot to spot using the terrain in transit to define my own liminal spatial identity.

Perceived as an extremely dangerous activity in 1965 the *California Medical Association* declared skateboarding a “new medical menace” (Warshaw 218). By the 1990’s skateboarding had largely transcended specific skateboarding locations such as bowls,

ramps, and parks; merging within the fabric of the urban, social, and physical environment to produce counter temporary spaces within the core of the conceived urban environment. Despite Powell Peralta's popular plea that "skateboarding is Not a crime" in 1987 (Borden, "Pavement" 86) a series of skateboarding bans spread across the United States potentially silencing a critically vibrant urban practice; beloved locations such as *EMB* (The Embarcadero in San Francisco), *Love Park* (JFK Plaza in Philadelphia), and *Pulaski Park* in Washington to mention a few (Zarka 65). Borden notes that especially since the 1990's "skateboarding has been ever-increasingly repressed through a pervasive tightening of geographically dispersed localized conventions, laws and reactions" (*Skateboarding* 256). These restrictions reflect a subjectivity that is partially constructed by bans, regulations, and displacements. Interestingly, a perceived victory for the culture of skateboarding would strengthen the restrictions of conceived urban and suburban spaces when the *California State Legislature*, assembly bill 2357, added skateboarding to the state's list of "hazardous recreational activities" (Willard 473). Absolving municipalities of liability for injury this bill allows public and private skateboard parks to be built more frequently and skateboarding bans to be more regularly imposed. Moving the practice elsewhere a distant corporeality is created based on nonuse, leaving the space above the handrail unused and the sidewalk, curb, and staircase as distinctly unconnected locales. This disguised victory would be underscored by the attempted removal of street skating from many public and private urban places. Displacing the practice to ghettoized skateboard parks usually on the outskirts of urban centers, replacing the critical urban practice with numerous "NO SKATEBOARDING" signs further marking space by what is not present.

As a fluid form of rapid movement inspired by the sea and applied to concrete, the practice of skateboarding has, since its inception, seemed out-of-place in the modern realm of physical motility. The practice produces new gestures, new perceptions of place that often result in a placeless practice. By airing over a guardrail as opposed to walking alongside it or sliding along a ledge rather than sitting on it. The practice rebuts the often unitary design of urban and suburban centers, for example, the handrail, a marker of architectural safety is often considered one the most dangerous objects in street skateboarding. Street skateboarders first utilized this spatial element in the 1990's raising the risk of such dialogic considerations. The suppression of the street skateboarder; however, is a response not to its inherent danger, but due its immediate re/appropriation of conceived space for creative use, while producing some unanticipated wear and tear on surfaces this destroys mostly a conception of proper use. Parkour, partially invented by the French military as tactical way to move through urban environments has also been noted for a similar disruption of conceived urban space (Thompson 251).

Rhizome

Deleuze and Guattari present *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as a rhizome, a collection of chapters a series of thought trajectories filled with ideas that

spring up like plateaus yet remain connected along a subterranean network. I approach the city as a street skateboarder in a similar way. Rather than moving from point A to point B, I continue to look for potential spots or sessions that can arise at any point within a trajectory. They note that a rhizome “connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature.” Going on to state that as any point can be connected to any other, and even more importantly, must be, then rhizomatic thought “brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states” (*Thousand* 21). This opening of flows and currents allows me to connect locales with mindsets that seem disconnected and unrelated to one another bringing disparate conceptions of spatial locales into conversation. The language of the city attempts to close itself to outside utterances by restricting or banning practitioners such as the skateboarder, the squatter, the loiterer, the cruiser, the street artist, and myriad others that the pre-conceived places of the city often neglect. The city on one level creates a vibrant, contested, and culturally rich site of various performances where cultural and individual diversity merge together; yet, also attempts to singularize these performances into linear, proper, and sedentary practices. Approaching this space from a rhizomatic approach via the street skateboard allows me to connect non-sign states of movement and gesture to a political theory of individual subjectivity.



Figure 2. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

Performing skateboarder I desire to use space differently, to see a wall not as a barrier but as an element open to creative and visceral reuse producing new trajectories along paths made up of heterogeneous elements. Emerging out of the alley, quickly across the sidewalk and street, through a parking lot, and over the parking barrier, my body/board cuts across the urban landscape creating a unique trace. The path is direct, haphazard, sporadic, and shifting. Every crack, bump, obstacle, and surface changes my speed and orientation, like the nomad, the *dériviste* remains in

transit creating a smooth circuitry out of striated spaces. Passing rows of parked cars, merging within slowed and stalled traffic I fill in between spaces of non-use, even when being used properly, in this case by nearby cars. As the cars momentarily clear the road, the middle of the street becomes an empty space, a demilitarized zone of restricted expression, that I reuse momentarily through rapid and creative movement that as an experienced practitioner feels every bit as safe as crossing the street within the painted barriers of a crosswalk during a red light. Iain Borden notes that skateboarding critiques “the emptiness of meaning” contained in urban spaces (“Critique” 187). Parking lots void of cars have no functionality, empty plazas remain latent with potential while semi-private civic, commercial centers after business hours lie idle, awaiting meaning and the street connects them all in a rhizomatic void that often divides places as much as they do to connect them.

Cutting back and forth to generate speed, laying-back as I careen down the smooth pavement of the middle of the city street, I transgress the conceived order of movement through urban space. The middle of the road is a beautiful empty space coated with fine gravel, enabling me to go fast, picking up speed creating a noise that grows more and more intense the faster I go. Like a performer on stage, I sense the orchestrated gaze of the other actors in cars, vans, and motorcycles. I also notice the audience watching from windows, stoops, and sidewalks as I fly by, turning eager to see what is creating such a racket, twitching anxious to have me pass by, visibly nervous because my chosen form of motility does not match their macro conception of the space they also inhabit.

Because the middle of the road is a space reserved for rational use that can be potentially dangerous it should not be used for pleasure. Using this space for pleasure, as toy-like, is a misunderstanding and should be restricted. Therefore, as I careen down the street I feel the rational behind the gaze, some view the street skateboard as a dangerous object used by a reckless individual that has not yet learned how to conform to the subjectivity of urban reality, a child playing in the street. Instead, my movement is a commentary on the very space I move through. People become implicated in my path: observing, recognizing my passing in fascination, interest, disgust, anger, or fear, but rarely indifferent or ambivalent, as the small act so familiar to the urban landscape, because of the dictates of conceived space, also seems out-of-place.

The video still above depicts my left front foot, front truck, and right front wheel as the body/board rolls across the pavement. The road is a blur, the wheel rotating rapidly around the bearings and hidden axle, on top of the deck the front foot, left leg, torso, and an extended arm holding the camera, calm, almost sedentary in a relaxed state of symbiotic movement. People and spaces of the city go by, the landscape becomes a multiplicity of ambiances, states of minds, and people. This skateboarding trajectory like the rhizome “has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezze*” constantly forming an alliance through connecting movement (*Thousand* 25). The video re/performs, interprets, and re/considers the original gestures connected by a constantly moving *dériviste* along a rhizomatic network.



Figure 3. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

Radical

Combining speed with the ollie, theory with practice, the parallel ground is denied in favor for the desire to move vertically in figure 4, to use space to momentarily suspend its influences. The ground layered on top of earth generates the spatial environment conceptually conceived with a specific yet generalized user in mind. As the *dériving* street skateboarder, I tap into a primal yet highly evolved desire to win back elemental considerations of space. Interests for Deleuze and Guattari “can be deceived, unrecognized, or betrayed, but not desire” (*Anti-Oedipus* 257). A unique productive desire, rather than material production, social recognition, or monetary reward more often than not is what propels the street skateboarder through the air, leaving the ground bringing him or her closer to earth. This desire is the response.

A symbol of accumulated capital, political agenda making, and fixed urban space, the *Trump Tower*, looms in the background of figure 4 like a giant modern wave. Designed by architects and engineers, organized by urban planners, and inhabited by corporate tenets. It is constructed of concrete and steel, producing an environment that for the sidewalk surfer is the new wind and sea, swell and shore. The urban center, the contemporary contested space of sidewalk surfing. The security guard and sign prohibiting this practice lie off camera. My movements are quicker than that of the guard who slowly approaches and the dictates of the sign, which will soon be actualized through non-use as I continue on past the plaza. I do not fit the proper conception of an essentialized user of this space. Born from the destruction of one object, the recreation of anew, and the transferring of the fluid form of motility practiced in the waves to suburban land, the street skateboarder is a surfer of concrete. Underneath the concrete, indeed, for the contemporary sidewalk surfer lays the beach.

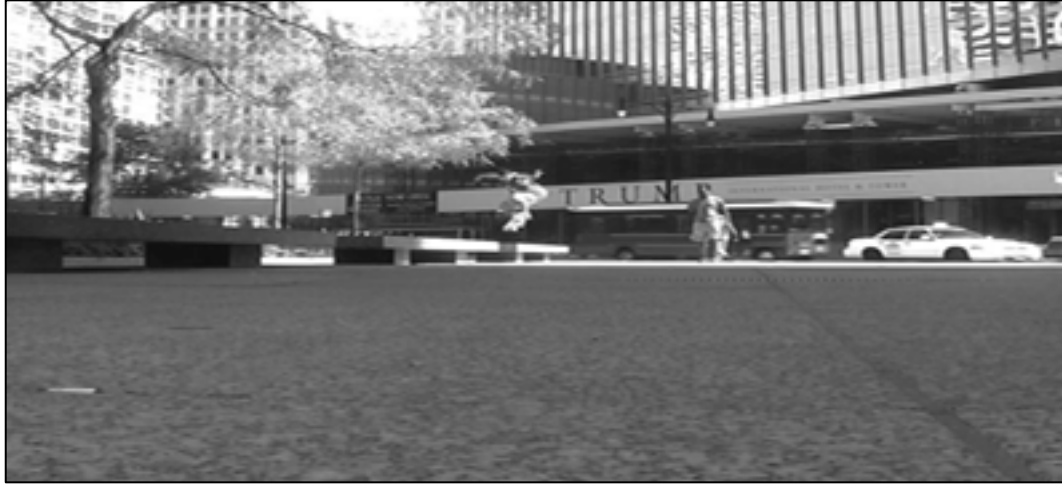


Figure 4. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

The concrete arena that allowed this transformation, like the natural environment of the sea, defines the drifting ontology of the act. Deleuze and Guattari state that “the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth space as a means of communication in the service of striated space” at which point they turn the direction of their nomadic science towards the sea as it represents a smooth space and “the hydraulic model par excellence” (*Thousand* 385-87). However, they continue, the smooth space of the sea is the first to be striated through gravitational verticals and horizontals “to transform into a dependency of the land, with its fixed routes, constant directions, relative movements, a whole counter hydraulic of channels and conduits” (*Thousand* 387). Conceived space, predicted and held by the sovereign state, according to Deleuze and Guattari, envisions the sea as a problematic smooth space reducible to the state only through temporary appropriation. The smooth trajectory of the street skater taps into these elusive characteristics of the sea and transfers it to the concrete of the city.

In figure 4, my arms are outstretched, knees bent, toes in precious contact with the deck of the board, air is all around as my head is down, eyeing the potential landing area. I have been in this position before and familiarized myself with this performative gesture both mentally and physically. The ollie is one of the foundational maneuvers of street skateboarding, making rapid and transgressive movement through the barrier and obstacle filled landscape of the city possible and is typically one of the first things a street skateboarder learns. Without this maneuver the dictates of the city must be followed, paths of least resistance must be pre-determined. The initially learned, ollie-up-a-curb makes the unique form of street skateboarding possible because without this basic maneuver one would have to get off the board and step up a curb, thus hindering fluid movement. After an initial ollie onto the top of the

bench in figure 4 I perform another standard, yet always individually stylized one off the other side, adding meaning and style to the empty spaces in between the benches before the security guard arrives to reinforce the space suggested by the sign prohibiting skateboarding in this particular plaza.

Entering the air over, a now precisely considered gap in terms of length, depth, and orientation to my particular path, I am involved in a dialectical re/interpretation of space. Like the skateboard itself the ollie is “born from the level horizontality of the pavement and, simultaneously, aimed at a denial of that horizontality” (Borden, *Skateboarding* 124). This enables skateboarders to deny the pavement that they rely upon without the dependence of a specific slanted, slopped, or ledged surface, thus denying the spatial subjectivity imposed on their own practice through skateboard specific environments such as ramps, banks, and pools.

Slamming the tail of the skateboard on the ground with the back foot in figure 5 while the front foot slides up the deck of the board and towards the nose, the board is A) propelled up into the air by the back foot and B) leveled in the air at the apex by the front foot. The act is a unique blend of physics that utilizes the entire body in conjunction with a mindset that is attuned primarily to the physical body in relation to the geographical and architectural environment. As a critical practice I deny the rationality of the street through creative interpretation that goes against its conceived use an aspect offered by street skateboarding motility that is especially apparent in the *wall-ride*. In order to complete this maneuver I perform a half ollie, the A of the aforementioned sequence and slam the wheels of the board onto the vertical surface of the wall at the apex instead of leveling the board out as in the B of the previous sequence. Briefly riding perpendicular to the ground before dropping back in another irrational transition from vertical to horizontal surface this maneuver goes against the rationality of the city completely and looks out-of-place even within the culture of street skateboarding.

The *wall-ride* is old school, difficult, and has a sense of aggression that keeps it fashionable, yet also largely unpracticed in contemporary technically specific street skateboarding. The aging body of this particular skateboarding *dériviste*, unlike the grinding and sliding of handrails, can still perform this trick, further marking my unique age and particular approach to the environment even within the culture. Similar transgressive tricks within the culture such as the *wallie*, a slightly altered *wall-ride*, and the *dark-slide*, an inverted *board-slide* reinterpret rationality within the practice of street skateboarding, which often attempts to deny its own logic by constantly coming up with new ways of moving through spaces while abandoning old ones. The *dériviste* in this video is shown performing old school and unpopular maneuvers, failing in unspectacular fashion, and subtle gestures that usually are left unnoted within skateboarding culture. The goal is to highlight the motility provided by the skateboard in relation to the practitioner, an experienced, but by no means, exceptional figure.

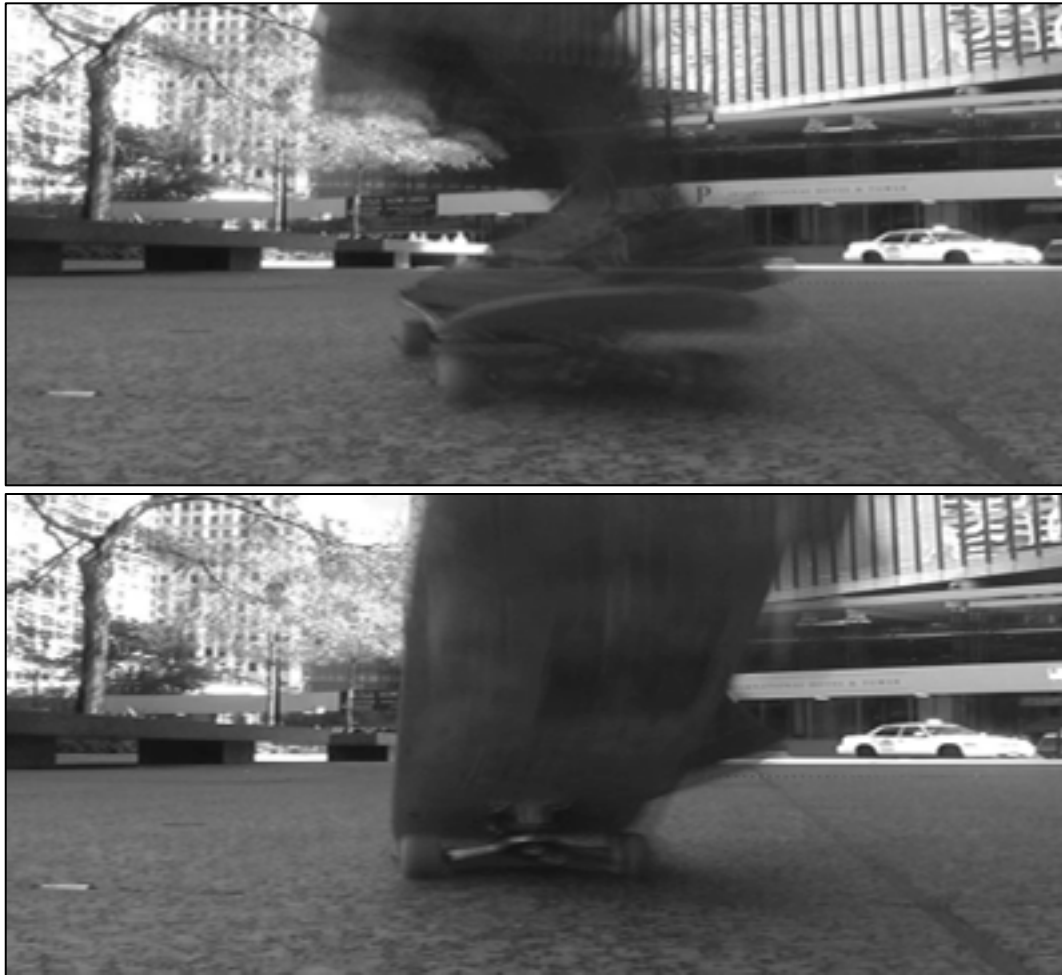


Figure 5. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

Rhythm

Bringing together differing conceptions of spatial usage within one line-of-flight enables me to view *the* city as a series *of* cities becoming actualized and re/considered through a visceral multiplication of itself. While pedestrians and motorists wait for traffic lights to change, parking meters and parking lots tick off available minutes. Regulations of time, treated as linear, are everywhere; dictating signs prohibit loitering, cruising, and even standing. Public benches inform users that are aware and even partially constructed by these laws of time. Benches often have uncomfortable dividers and rotating seats impossible to sit on, making one perform a half-standing-leaning-sitting gesture in order to wait for a minimal period before moving on, not reclining

or resting for long. The sound, the rhythm of the city, is a result of these spatial elements that further divides users between appropriate uses determined by locations. The uncomfortable looking bus stops are designed this way, they are functional, like the many metal blocks (and other unsightly micro barriers) that hinder skateboarders, they signal a period of use that is brief or not-at-all.

Connecting the rhythms of locales in relation to my own, I am able to alter the overall concerto of the city. Speeding in between and around slower, often linear, foot traffic, my path is discordant, slightly disrupting of the tempo of the street. For Henri Lefebvre “where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” (15); and like his proposed agent of exploration, the rhythm-analyst, I notice these rhythms as they become producing of, and in tune with, my own. My heartbeat, my pulse, my turns, maneuvers, and strides are both a product of the urban contours and a commentary on them.

The importance of the various discursive places encountered through this performance recedes in favor of the invisible trace that connects them, the subtle disruptions that challenges their singularity. Like performance, this trace is actual, it is real, yet also in dialog with the fixed conception of an ideal character. The city is a vision of completeness, a system of efficient spatial organization, which paints a narrative and picture of a practitioner that becomes ordinary, essential. At one point during this *dérive*, a perceived homeless man smiles and waves at the passing practitioner/camera. This small yet directed acknowledgment is noted as significant as no one else during the performance does this. Despite occupying far different cultural locations street skateboarders and the perceived homeless often become momentarily aligned within public space as many skateboarders can attest, and many skateboard videos confirm (Borden, *Skateboarding* 33). Skateboarding videos, videos within the culture of skateboarding, mostly filmed in everyday spaces, often depict chance encounters between practitioners and skateboarders. These encounters are indicative of the experiences of everyday street skateboarders. Two of the most frequent types of encounters are A) harassment and persecution by police, security, and people and B) interest, encouragement, and appreciation by perceived homeless people.

The two groups, perceived homeless and street skateboarders, share a common re/interpretation of public space and use this space differently although radically different from each other. These two groups also share a common figure of resistance, the security guard, persistent and convinced pedestrian, police officer, and essentialism. The perceived homeless occupy or settle space in a manner that is critical of conceived spatial use and interaction by disrupting the notion that the place is there only to be used temporarily and at certain times (Lindeman 44; Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak and Brokaw 307-8); while skateboarders occupy a momentary geography, denying the perceived spatial durability to which the homeless attach themselves also disrupting orthodox spatial interactions. Embraced by the squatter, the notion that the architectural environment is durable is typically shattered by their eventual repression or removal (Lloyd and McGovern 702). The environment is not fixed despite spatial codes and regulations that dictate repetitive use and disseminate

distant performances along a network that totalize an overall conception of the city experience. Neither is the notion that subjectivity is durable or fixed despite ideal conceptions that adhere our performances to distinctly external models. To change the nature of a conceived space, to go against the dictates of spatial elements and norms through individual and dialogic gesturing is risky. As I skate by, camera in hand, the perceived homeless person sitting on the sidewalk against a ledged wall might be recognizing this risk, from the standpoint of his own, as he acknowledges my transgressive behavior in the face of a mutual spatial subjugation.

Flowing past repetitious blocks of streets, intersections filled with waiting automobiles and pedestrians, uniformed sidewalks, predictable plazas, and enclosed parks create a multiplicity, a rhythm. The repetition that occurs from block to block and intersection to intersection encourages me to increase my speed, slow my pace and explore the nuance of a particular architectural element, or attempt to somehow momentarily fly off the grid, anything to disrupt the generalized spatial pattern and monotonous rhythm that is produced. While there is no rhythm without repetition, repetition does not have to exclude differences, rather it should produce them, eventually encountering the event that “arises in relation to the sequence or series produced repetitively” (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* 7). The haphazard rapidity of my rhythmic performance speaks to the linear conception of movement produced by the urban core in a dialogic manner, as does the adjourning durational performance of the perceived homeless man.

Intersections are approached in a similar way, each plaza available for a particular use, and each street serving a specific function. As a result our view of these sites often becomes singular, homogenous, lacking in individual consideration. This singular visualization inhabits our bodies and separates us from the city we attempt to experience viscerally. The object is separated from the subject by distinguishing between internal and external rhythms. Ordinary practitioners such as pedestrians are situated here, while motorists are positioned there. In opposition to each other they view space as singular totalities from differing visualized perspectives based on appropriate motility.

Covering more ground, the multiplicities increase; however, this repetition searches for an event to alter the sequence. The pedestrian experiencing these patterns is often paralyzed by the monotony, and blind to the hegemonizing construction of a spatially informed subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari state, “it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, ‘multiplicity,’ that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object” (*Thousand* 8). By listening to the audible rhythmic differences and associating them with physically symbolic nuances I can exchange the singular external visualization dominated by most urban experiences for an internal tempo. The heavy breathing of my breath becoming nomadic is briefly connected to the relaxed nodding smile of the perceived homeless man; the sedentary and the nomadic enter into dialog in relation to a mutually constructed rhythmic space.



Figure 6. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

The rhythm of this drift turns the striated into the smooth, producing the sound that defines my identity at a particular yet lasting moment in space. The smooth grumbling sound of the skateboard's small hard urethane wheels along the pavement are followed by the rapid click, click as I roll over concrete slabs indicative of sidewalks. The rolling sound in-between clicks grows shorter while the internal and externally rhythmic tempo of the click of the front wheels immediately followed by the click of the back wheels, rolling over punctuating lines, increases. The speed of the rhythm hastens as a multiplicity of spatial encounters heightens. The potential and consequences of error are a physical characteristic at this point of an expenditure of energy and desire. Click, click. Click, click. Click, click. Clack!

The rolling sound disappears altogether as the tail of the board is slammed on the concrete. The board/body leaves the ground completely in a performed ollie generating a rare silence as the surface is momentarily denied. Crack! The skateboard returns to the concrete ground as the rhythm resumes. Click, click. Click, click.

The practitioner here embraces movement despite uncertainty of direction or destination, embraces the potential to lose ground, to fail. The shift in direction depicted in figure 7 is incorporated into a rapid progression out of and toward new ambiances (as opposed to places), regardless of a destination concept. In commentating contrast to the conceived urban environment where movement and gestures are codified towards efficiency, rationality, and safety, error, chance, and rupture play a large part in street skateboarding and this *dérive*. Depicted in figure 8, my path leads me out of an alley and directly into a barrier between places. Intuitively, as if responding to the barrier's statement with my own gesture, I immediately, in a single fluid motion, flip the board up to my hand and plant one foot onto the metal ledge and let my own inertia send me flying over and across the rough surface of the adjacent side of the barrier. As I perform a *boneless* over the obstruction used as a launch pad, I am eager to keep moving, keeping the rhythm despite the directing elements of the environment. Ra-

ther than stopping, continuing down the alley, turning around altogether, or stopping the flow by picking up my board and safely stepping over the barrier, I desire to turn this obstacle into a bridge between disparate places, a foundational trait of this dérive, this dialog, turning walls into bridges.



Figure 7. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

Rupture

The result of this particular creative spatial use and bridge-making gesture; however, is failure. Landing on the opposite side of the barrier the small wheels hit an even smaller rock stopping the progress of my board instantly, but continuing to send my body forward out and onto the rough surface of the parking lot. The board/body bond is temporarily broken further indicating just how tenuous, how temporary, any heterogeneous assemblage, any becoming is, as my body/board becomes body/ground. The safe, seemingly inert space of the parking lot with parked cars resting in their appropriate demarcated slots is turned into a playfully dangerous surface. In street skateboarding accidents are part of the flow, rupture is part of the rhythm and there is no foretelling what space this common occurrence might happen; there is no proper place to fall as there is to park, sit, eat, walk, etc. In relation to the rate of conceived spaces' appropriate movement, collisions and accidents are noted as relatively rare, which might be false; however, they become framed as out-of-the-ordinary events and are usually attributed to human error that exists outside of the conceived spatial design. The practice of skateboarding, on the other hand, embraces error and matches the desire to succeed with the willingness to fail and is often banned from spaces designed to eliminate accidents. Challenging the perceived safety and rationality of certain places, playful error induces a contested spatiality, a rupture.

The Skateboarding Dérive is quotidian yet out-of-place, a waste of time to the city, an unscientific study, incoherent in route, and destined to fail. In the second video still of figure 8, I am shown performing a rolling fall, a graceful failed attempt to bridge places, next to the ollie this is the second most vital maneuver in street skateboarding. Extending my arms while heightening my senses, I reach out, almost longingly, for the hot concrete and the respite I will soon accept from the physical exertion of propelling myself through space, by falling to the ground. Ducking my head down, bending my arm over my face while tucking my shoulder, I swiftly roll over my body in a skewed somersault bringing me full circle and onto my feet. I am relieved momentarily to not be on the board, if there were no falling in street skateboarding there would be no break, no rupture only exit, no chorus, no intermission only beginning and end. There is always movement, this *dérive* does not stop completely; the performance merely stalls, breaks in rupture and keeps going towards the consideration of new spaces.

Toward/From Conclusion

Ultimately, I use street skateboarding as a practice, a series of gestures that along with the *dérive* create a continuous line or trace through the city connecting various locations of differing use to one performing identity. Errors, dismounts, pauses, and unpopular or unaesthetic utterances are as much a part of this performance as a critique of city space as they are to the culture of street skateboarding in general. Viewing identity as partially constructed by this movement, which is itself producing of

new spatial conceptions I have utilized a cultural practice already at work within the urban environment and the *dérive* as a guiding tactic in recognizing this practice as a reinterpretation of urban motility. Attempting to enter into a spatial dialog by following a nomadic trajectory I have shed insight into a spatially informed notion of subjectivity and construct a vision of a constitutively generated landscape full of potential risks and rewards that always informs *who* in relation to *where* we are.



Figure 8. *The Skateboard Dérive*, Video Still (2011)

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