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Review of Iain Borden, *Skateboarding and the City: A Complete History* (London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2019)

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Review of Iain Borden, *Skateboarding and the City: A Complete History* (London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2019).

Alexandros Daniilidis

Skateboarding has arguably become one of the most famous and engaging youth cultures. However, it is only recently that a growing scholarship has put skateboarding under academic scrutiny in the context of urban and social studies.¹ Being a dedicated skater as well as a passionate urbanist, academic and architect, Iain Borden's contribution to the field must be considered a milestone since he started writing about skateboarding as an urban (cultural) practice at a time when relevant scholarship was still nascent. The publication reviewed here builds upon aspects of skateboarding as disseminated in his previous work *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, the final version of which was based upon academic work that commenced in the early 1990s.²

Skateboarding is an urban practice that has a global impact, and is not limited to a certain age, ethnic or social group. It was born in the late 1950s and early 1960s in California as an alternative to surfing and, since then, has evolved into a worldwide urban phenomenon as well as an official Olympic sport. As its subtitle indicates, Borden's book offers 'a complete history' of this evolution, which unfolds across the book's three sections and fourteen chapters. Each section discusses different attributes of skateboarding's culture in an efficient and skilful fashion, enhanced with an impressive volume of visual material that demonstrates the author's long engagement with skateboarding as a field of research. *Skateboarding and the City* (SATC) is thus not merely a skateboarding anthology but an updated and rigorous reflection on aspects of skateboarding as a sociocultural and urban practice. It renders skateboarding as a medium that challenges and renegotiates our understanding and perception of the urban environment, while also acting as an unbiased tool that may address several social issues on a global scale.

Section One ('Skateboard Scenes') explores issues of equipment, cultural and social dimensions, associated industries and skateboarding's portrayal through contemporary media. In this section, Borden provides a highly inclusive insight into skateboarding's mainstream profile through branding, regulations, events and the role of media (magazines, social media, movies and photography), thus engaging with the idea that skateboarding 'is not just an activity but also a potential career' (p. 50). However, what is particularly interesting here is the author's attempt to touch upon issues of gender/

¹ John Carr, 'Legal Geographies—Skating Around the Edges of the Law: Urban Skateboarding and the Role of Law in Determining Young People's Place in the City', *Urban Geography*, 31.7 (2010), 988–1003 <<https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.31.7.988>>; Chihsin Chiu, 'Contestation and Conformity: Street and Park Skateboarding in New York City Public Space', *Space and Culture*, 12.1 (2009), 25–42 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331208325598>>; Ocean Howell, 'The "Creative Class" and the Gentrifying City: Skateboarding in Philadelphia's Love Park', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 59.2 (2005), 32–42 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1531-314X.2005.00014.x>>; Mohd. Shahrudin Abd. Manan and Chris Smith, 'Skateboarding with Roland Barthes: Architecture, Myth and Evidence', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 18.3 (2014), 203–215 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2013.826445>>; Jeremy Németh, 'Conflict, Exclusion, Relocation: Skateboarding and Public Space', *Journal of Urban Design*, 11.3 (2006), 297–318 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800600888343>>; Sophie Taysom and Simon Irvine, 'Skateboarding, Disrupting the City', *Social Alternatives*, 17.4 (1998), 23–26; Katherine Elisabeth White, "'We Out Here": Skateboarding, Segregation and Resistance in the Bronx' (unpublished MA dissertation, Fordham University, 2015).

² Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

cultural representations by employing skateboarding as an emancipatory tool for underprivileged or suppressed individuals around the world, detached from a mere (North) American commodity and western perspective.

Section Two ('Skateboarding') is a rich documentation of all the spaces that skateboarding utilizes. From skateboarding's early spatial appropriations of pools, pipes and schoolyards, to the introduction of designated skateboarding spaces of the late 1970s, and then to the onset of designated skateparks in later decades (2000s and onwards), the author highlights skateboarding's association with aspects of innovative design, DIY ethics and social integration. Moreover, by employing theories of spatial production as introduced by prominent urban theorist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, Borden emphasises skateboarding as a process where body, skateboard and architecture interact and renegotiate space as a 'skateable' terrain.

Section Three ('Skate and Create') is a response to skateboarding's early 'destructive' nature, as communicated by the iconic – although highly commercialised – motto 'Skate and Destroy'. Here, Borden approaches skateboarding as a creative force by providing a thorough documentation of skateboarding's contribution to visual arts (notably graphic design and architecture), whilst exploring and communicating skateboarding's critical role in society, education, and the empowerment of local communities, as well as its contribution to cultural capital and the appreciation of public space.

Throughout *SATC*, the author demonstrates how skateboarding challenges and redefines several norms and traditions, whilst highlighting the practice's contribution to popular culture (arts, media), the economy, and the appreciation of the urban (public) space. Borden's capacity as an architect and academic makes *SATC* a rich account that introduces the reader to new perspectives on urban space, exploring the various approaches to space appropriation and understanding. Along with prescient insights on cultural/gender/social issues, this publication has an interdisciplinary scope, and this is arguably what makes it an intriguing and interesting read, despite its size. *SATC*'s great volume of references, spanning from academic scholarship to influential skate videos, movies and documentaries make it highly useful for researchers. However, there is no mention of music's contribution to skateboard culture and, particularly, the role that (skate) punk played as a cohesive element between youth cultures and skateboarding in the early 1980s West Coast scene (check, for instance, the skate punk pioneers The Faction and their 'Skate and Destroy' song).

Overall, *SATC* is probably one of the most exhaustive works on the multifaceted nature of skateboarding to date. It incorporates a great volume of visual and textual material (from promotional campaigns on boards to iconic skateboard magazines) that act as essential supplementary data. This renders *SATC* an interesting account that will attract both passionate skateboarders and academics who seek to broaden their understanding and appreciation of this small but remarkably influential wooden board.

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