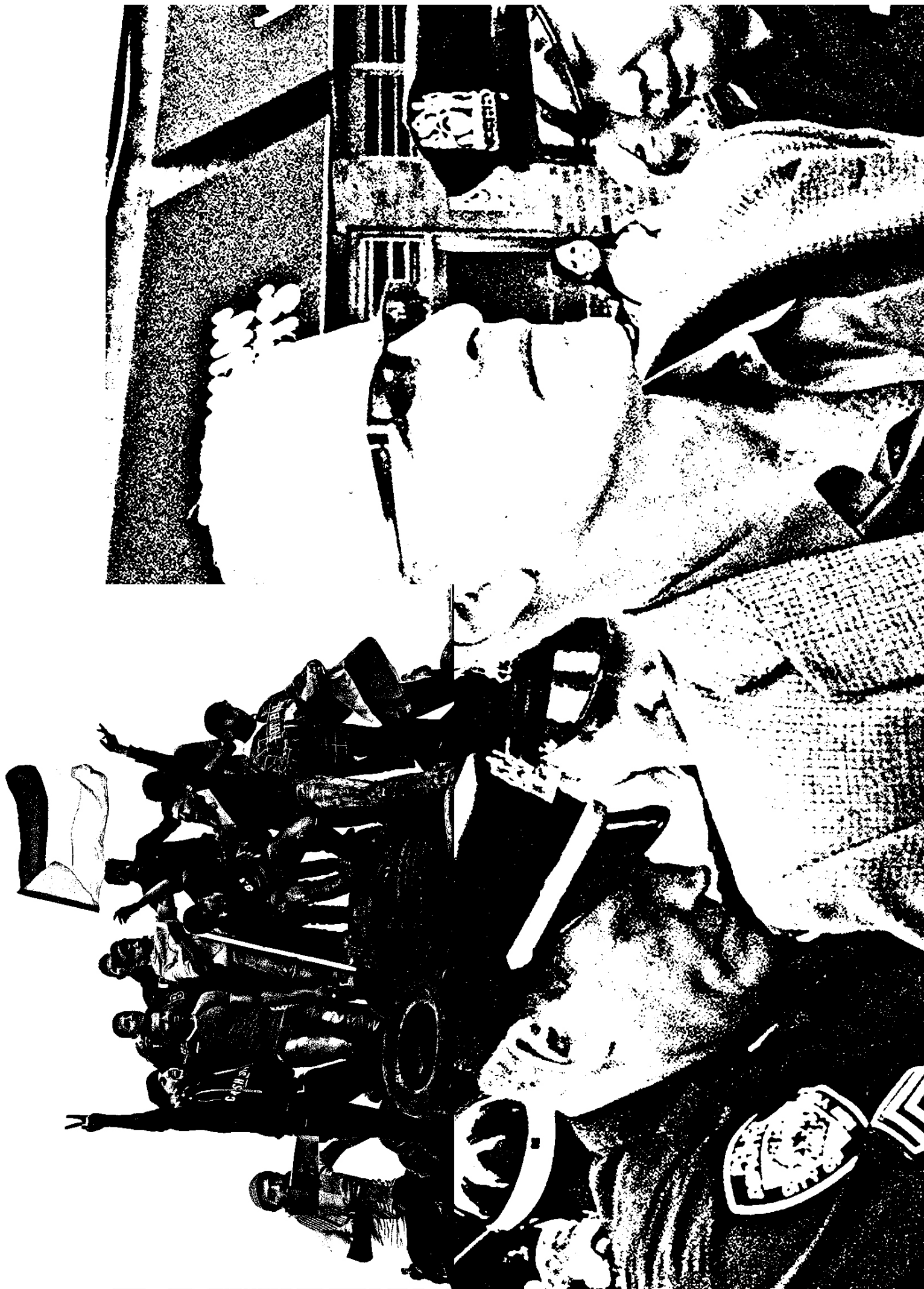


Thoughts and Images about Skateboarding II



Make Skateboarding Radical Again



This is a radically unfair place, and it requires a radical change.



Everything is escalating with each moment.
The implosion of capitalism
is reaching a breaking point.
People are scared.

Some cling to the fantasy,
insulating themselves from the riots and storms,
waiting for new technology to save them,
convinced they can wait it out.

Some double down
and side with the fascists,
the vapid vestiges of power
for those who feel so powerless and alone.

But the illusion of their superiority,
of their imposed “modernity,”
of the empire,
is slowly shattering.

The ones holding the hammers
are tired of feeling tired.
The ones taking to the streets are angry
and thirsty for change—
for destruction.

It is not easy.
The power-holders do not go down without a fight.
It will not be easy.

The changing environments and climate
on our planet will force us to create new ways of
organizing, resisting, working, and living.

It is happening.
To escape the self-imposed ignorance,
all one has to do is look around and listen.
The music of resistance and revolutionary love is calling—
can you hear it?

And now for us,
the self-identifying “skateboarders,”
forgive me for proselytizing,
but it’s time to emphatically choose sides.
To make skateboarding radical again.

Why?
Because we have something to offer,
a perspective on living that emphasizes autonomy;
a culture that eschews authority
and values both community and freedom.

Why?
Because our schizophrenic-tendency
to boast of independence and counter-culturalism
while sleeping with the corporations is trite
and we need some honest self-examination.

Why?
Because we are everywhere—
on YouTube, television, the Olympics,
in million-dollar training facilities,
illegally trespassing on private property—
yet nowhere; impotent as a whole,
too isolated in our own worlds to be a movement.

Why?
Because the so-called skate industry
deserves to be torn down;
despite our self-proclaimed proclivities
towards inclusivity and equality,
the industry perpetuates a system of
patriarchy, racism, and greed
while consistently elevating white, male
north americans and europeans.

Why?
Because the corporations do not give a shit
about anything besides our wallets
and while they stand there, laughing, milking us,
we pretend we’re still the ones in charge.
Because we’ve yet to have challenge
the plump conceited bastards.

Why?
Because it doesn’t really matter
if it was ever truly radical;
the roots of skateboarding were sown
in contradiction to “business-as-usual.”

Why?
Because skateboarding is about more
than our immediate and selfish pleasures;
the things we do in and around it
have far-reaching consequences.
The very fact that it changed our lives
continually proves its importance,
plus the capacity to change and empower
the lives it has yet to touch.

Why?
To find you, comrade. Hello,



A light of possible intelligence and openness seems to come not from philosophy, but from art. I am not actually sure of what I am talking about when I say the word art. You aren't either—nobody is exactly. Yet it seems that in a recent poll, twenty-four to twenty-five percent of young German people interviewed by journalists answered the question “what do you want to do when you're an adult” by stating that they wanted to be artists. What are they picturing? What do they think being an artist means, exactly? Are they thinking about the rich possibilities that the art market offers? Well, maybe, but I don't think so. I think that they are saying they want to be artists because they feel that being an artist means to escape a future of sadness, to escape a future of precariousness as sadness. They are thinking, well, precariousness and sadness can become something different, if they withdraw their faith, if they withdraw from any expectations a capitalist future can offer. I don't want to expect anything from the future, so I start my future as an artist.

I don't really know how to define Art in an objective way. Is it about making desirable things to be bought? Displaying them in galleries and museums? Knowing the right people to be come famous? Along those lines, is Art just a popularity contest? Is it Art if no one ever sees it? Or is it only Art if other people take pleasure in it? Is it possible for Art to be a way of living?

The truth is, anyone who tries tell you what counts as Art and what doesn't has their own notions and threshold for what Art is in the first place. Since opinions on the latter vary wildly, arguments about Art tend to get wildly abstract and subjective. So, before going further, I'll try to relate what I think Art is, or at least, what I talk about when I talk about Art.

For one, the Bifo quote on the previous page leans towards the political. I also think it's an awfully optimistic perspective of my generation. But I believe in the context of our epoch today, it's a useful starting point for talking about art in a symbolic way that doesn't necessarily involve material things. So for now, let's continue under the assumption that art that can be anything—anything that aspires for change, for difference, for gestures towards new ways of thinking, being, and living. If this still seems a bit vague and silly perhaps another more explicit way I'd like to put it is: art is opposition to the status quo.

In early 2019, Ted Barrow asserted his position* that skateboarding is not Art in a short piece for Jenkem. Ted is a skateboarder living in New York city; in recent years he's created a wildly popular Instagram page among skateboarders in which he critiques and makes fun of (and occasionally draws oblique Art history connections to) clips submitted to him. A lot of it is tounge-in-cheek. He's well aware of the effects trolling and irony tend to have on this generation and he uses them to elicit laughs and (sometimes) controversy.

The only reason I mention this is because at a certain point, the line between authenticity and sarcasm or cynicism becomes blurred with public characters. I'm not entirely sure if the Ted Barrow that wrote the Jenkem piece was Ted Barrow or @Feedback_TS. For what it's worth, taking into account Ted is pursuing a PhD in Art History, I'm going to assume the views put forth are genuine.

Ted contends that (1) Art is defined "as a language that functions on a purely symbolic level" and that (2) because the skateboard is a "tool," and any performative action with that tool is isolated to our small community, its symbolic meaning is lost on a wide audience and therefore (3) skateboarding is not Art. The argument is a bit clunky and while I disagree with the conclusion, I think his reasoning is worthwhile to examine.

First of all, the fact Ted has a background and interest in Art History is not cursory, it informs his definition of Art to begin with. To him, artists "[make] something that goes out into the world and is supposed to be seen, understood, and consumed by a wide audience." While Ted is a little less clear on what that "something" is, (whether it is defined by its functionality as he implies with the stone/tool metaphor or by something more abstract like eliciting "slow, contemplative immersion") I'm more interested in how he believes skateboarding relates to the larger world around it.

He claims that Art is "designed to communicate to the outside world" while "skateboarding is actually inward-looking," and that our actions as skateboarders are essentially for ourselves. While I think this is true in a superficial sense, it's ignoring the fact that outside perspectives on our culture do exist. Even if we are unhappy with the way a New York Times photographer "misses the shot," or the way skateboarding is written about in the Sports section of the news, or how Michael J. Fox is portrayed in Back to the Future, our culture is continually projected towards the outside, even if it's (more often than not) subsequently altered and/or appropriated.

This means that what we do as skateboarders is not always entirely contained to our small community; they can have significant effects on the society it's part of. For an easy example, think of the recent actions from skateboarders to fight for South Bank in London and Love Park in Philadelphia. While these gestures began from a desire to simply keep skating in certain areas, (and even failing, in the case of Love Park) the following struggles opened a discourse in new ways of thinking about public space, gentrification, and what our role as skateboarders can be in this context, both within our community and outside of it.

The other mistake I believe Ted makes is ultimately equating Art with some physical material. He makes a good point that skateboard graphics, which despite the countless gallery walls and exhibitions they've been a part of, are not necessarily Art nor made by Artists. But by this logic, how exactly is a 15th century Italian painting any different? Yes a skateboard has a clear function, and in this sense can be likened to a "craft," but the graphic on the bottom much less so. If it's all going to get scratched off anyway, why do we care at all? Why do we nail certain boards to the wall to look at instead of skate? What an Art History scholar may find moving and meaningful in a Botticelli, a skater might find the same in the graphics of Marc McKee. Who is to say which is correct, especially if we are led to the impossible realm of personal subjectivity?

This argument tends to get unfair, and regardless, it's a bit besides the point I want to make. When thinking in these terms, we're still reduced to a certain materiality at the end of the day. Of course, there are some obvious contradictions that need mention; after all, there is a whole genre we refer to as "Performance Art" in the contemporary Art World that doesn't have to produce any physical objects at all. Regardless, whether it's performative or not, skateboarding, like Ted wrote, "is about the immediacy of the moment." The act of skating itself is the essence of our culture; while graphics, videos and photographs (to name a few) certainly play a part, skateboarding is not dependent on producing these physical manifestations.

I'd go further and say that this act of skating is also an incredibly potent symbolic gesture, especially in the context of street skating. Think about the meanings one can draw from grinding away at marble benches owned by a corporate company. Or the significance of skate-stoppers for that matter (devices that are installed to dissuade skaters and other marginalized groups like the homeless from using those objects) and skating through them anyway! It doesn't always have to be so blatant either; think of a skateboarder weaving her way between people and cars on a busy and crowded street, ignoring the crossing signals and bike lanes and prohibiting signs—think of the freedom this implies.

What I want to emphasize is, this freedom is not always lost on outsiders to our community. There's a reason stereotypes about skateboarders exist; that we're dangerous, rule-breaking, free-spirited and against authority. These commonalities are tied up in every action we make as skaters, whether it's ignoring a No Skateboarding sign, fighting for the right to use public space, or simply riding down the sidewalk nosily, to the annoyance of pedestrians. Skateboarding exists in the public consciousness as being opposed to much of what constructs the status quo—this is why I believe it's meaningful and why I believe it's art.

Ted writes: "Wanting to extract some larger sentimental, cultural, or political significance from the act of skateboarding often leads to a lot of hot air (see above) or a dead end. Over-thinking the thing drains it of the joy of doing it."

It is this last point above all that I want to resist. We cannot continue to pretend that we exist in a vacuum and that our actions have no relevance to the outside world. If we

haven't been able to contribute anything worthwhile to the world yet, it's only because we consciously decided not to. But as countless examples on the ground show, skateboarding has every potential to be "symbolic" and more—a powerful and crucial tool towards making positive change. Think of how skateboarding is still done on the streets today and how the connections and friendships created last lifetimes. How skateboarding provides a much-needed outlet for the youth raised in extremely poor and dangerous environments. Or how parks built by non-profits like Make Life Skate Life have fostered communities in places as far from the States like Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Bolivia. Think about how Skateistan, now 10 years on, has become an inspiration for educational initiatives across the world. Think about how in Palestine, one of the most difficult places to live in the world, skateboarding is creating a culture and community of learning, safety, and fun.

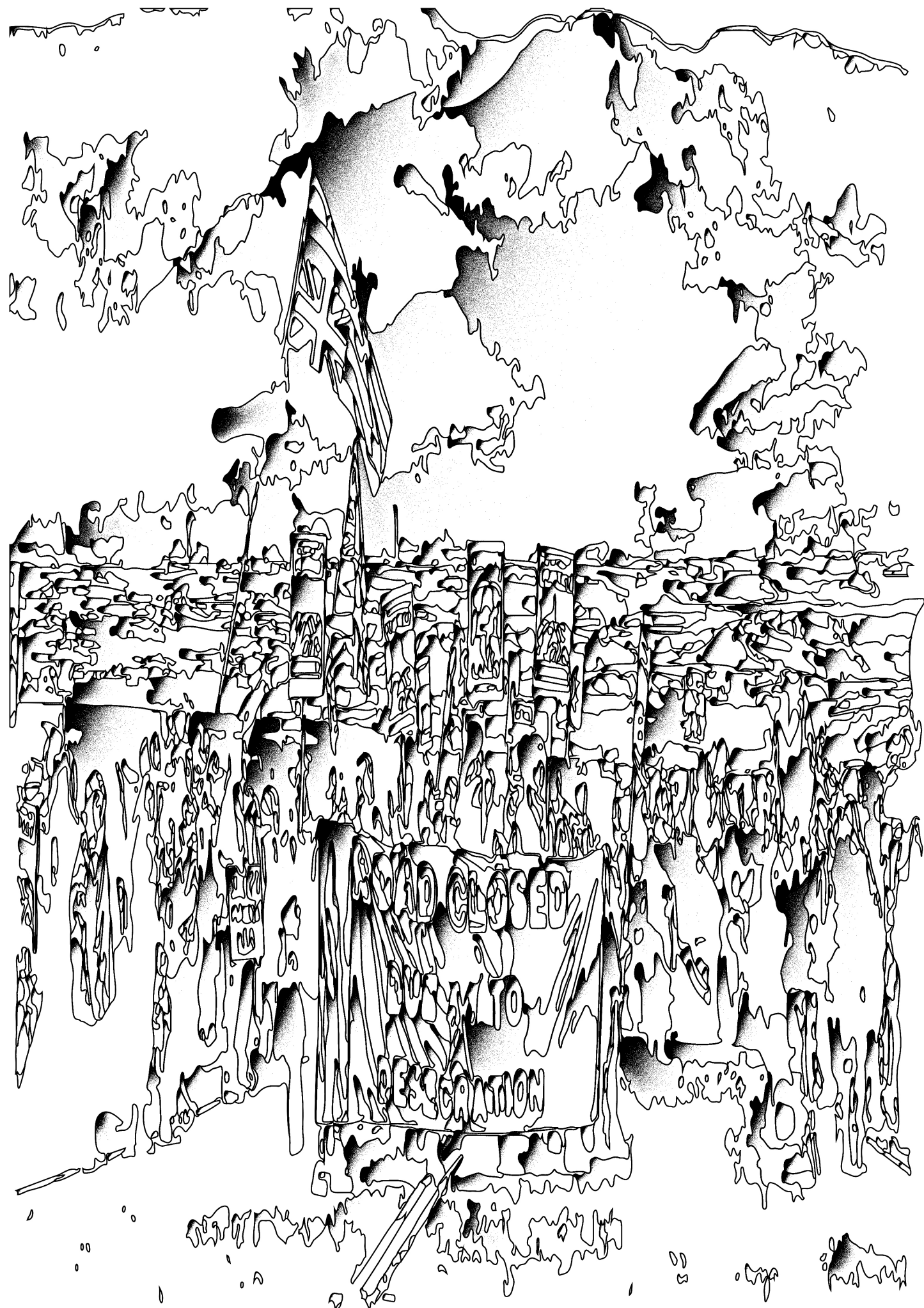
Why shouldn't we extract the significance of our acts? Why not talk and write about them in our own communities? Over-thinking in this case is no burden—indeed, if this is something we remotely care about, it should be our responsibility to be more vocal. Our actions as skateboarders and the way we project ourselves to the public are connected to a much larger world than we would like to assume.

To be honest, I don't think Ted would disagree with these last points. Our differences in opinion stem from the fact we simply have conflicting ideas of what Art is. While Ted may view Art through a more institutionalized and historical lens, I prefer to see art as political gestures in our contemporary realm. Neither of us are totally correct. I can understand, for example, Ted wanting to distance skateboarding from things like institutions and the Market—on this level I whole-heartedly agree. So perhaps the larger problem is how Art is perceived in general and the negative connotations that often ensue.

If a stranger came up to you and asked if skateboarding is art, would you feel embarrassed? Why?

This is why I like to bring up the Bifo quote. If we fool ourselves into thinking that Art is mutually consistent with material things, the Art Market, greed and wealth, we hold much to lose. Instead, we can start with the language and reclaim the word. Let's call it art. art because what we do affects the world around us. art because skateboarding inherits a potential for real change that other organized sports do not. art because through skateboarding, we can imagine this world as something else—something better.





They do what they please. They enslave those who are not of their color, although created by the same Great Spirit who created us. They would make slaves of us if they could, but as they cannot do it, they kill us. There is no faith to be placed in their words. They are not like the Indians, who are only enemies while at war, and are friends in peace. They will say to an Indian: "My friend, my brother." They will take him by the hand, and at the same moment destroy him. And so you will also be treated by them before long. Remember that this day I have warned you to beware of such friends as these. I know the long knives; they are not to be trusted.

A group of boys, probably around ten of them, are skating at the Makiki skatepark in O’ahu, Hawai’i. It’s one of those awkwardly constructed parks, situated next to a noisy highway and under an overpass ramp that seems destined to collect garbage and dust. The whole park is on a subtle hill and the obstacles are all slightly too small and/or too close to each other, making it frustrating to get accustomed to. A metal fence surrounds the perimeter, at places bent in violent shapes from years of skateboarders running into it. Across the highway, on the other side of the overpass a few plastic sheets are pitched as tents, occupied by the homeless.

The boys range in age from around 13 to 17 it seems and they appear to be friends, though standoffish to newcomers. They take turns doing their lines across the park and three of the older boys, who are obviously better, command respect from the younger ones. Every ten minutes or so the whole group will regroup and rest on the ledge near the road, directly across from a white skateboarder in a tie-dye shirt occupying the ledge on the opposite side of the park.

The man in the tie-dye shirt is older, has dirty blonde hair and holds a skateboard he fiddles with endlessly yet never steps on. He smokes a lot of weed and drinks a mystery liquid out of a brown paper bag. I talk to him briefly and he tells me the kids stole his backpack the other day motioning to the group across from him. He goes into a long rant about how they missed a certain tool that you can buy cheap from a Korean store down the street and I suddenly understand why everyone seems to have been fastidiously avoiding this person the whole time.

A little while later, another older skateboarder shows up. He’s also white, wearing a big backpack and a Wu-Tang Clan hat. He immediately goes into some rock-to-fakies on the quarter-pipes, skating in a direct line across the park I find a little obnoxious. After a while he reaches into his backpack and takes out a handful of stickers, distributing two or three to each of the younger boys sitting down. The boys take them but seem unsure what to do next. Despite the expecting look from Wu-Tang, none of them place the stickers on their boards.

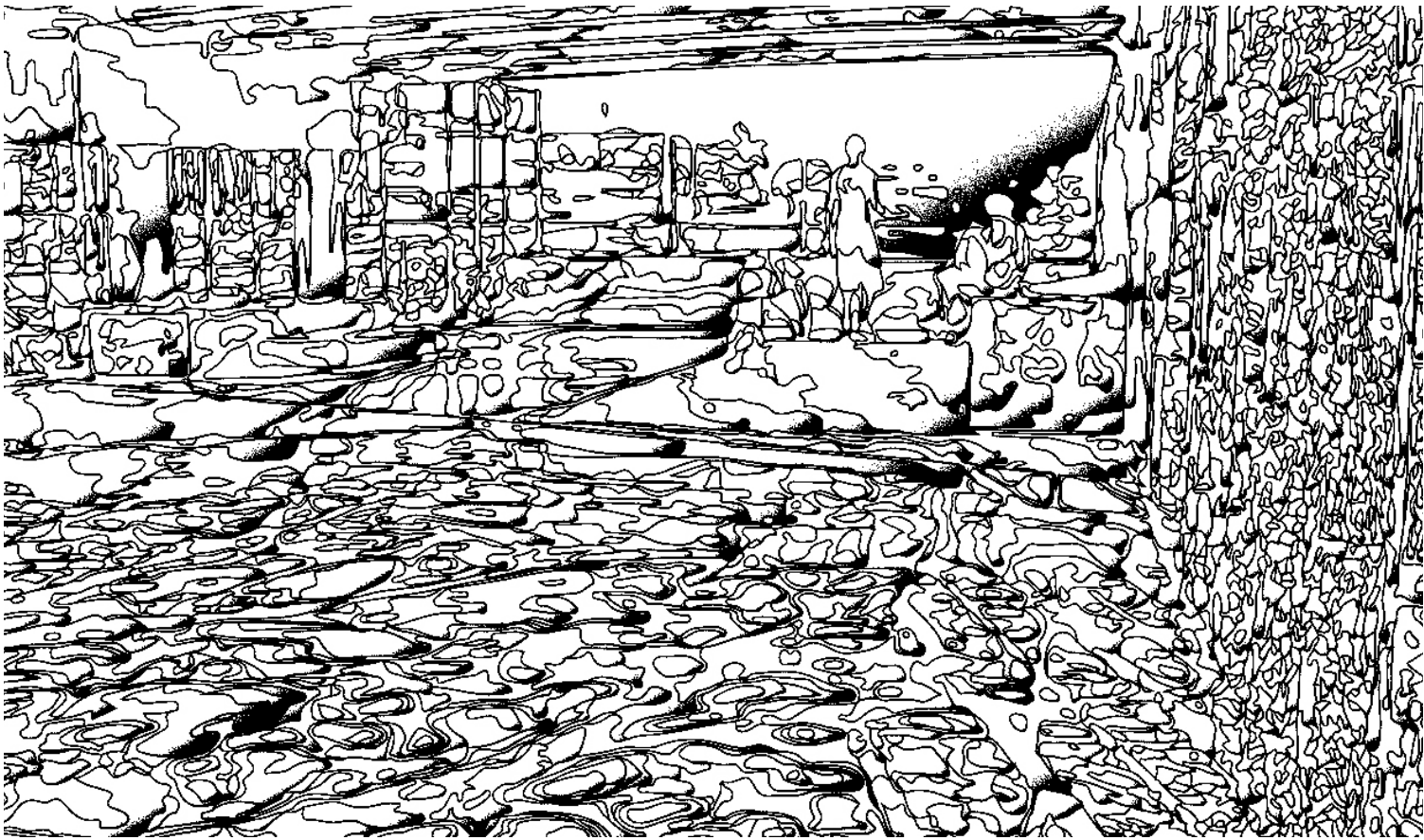
Wu-Tang goes back to his quaterpipe, now doing some clean blunt-fakies and front tailslides which earns some cautionary looks from the boys. Sensing an opportunity, he goes back to the group, this time brandishing an iphone. I overhear parts of his pitch. He owns some company (whose name is undoubtedly on the stickers) and is looking to advertise on social media so he’s wondering if he could maybe film some of the boys do tricks. He will then of course tag them on Instagram (and link it to his company). Sort of speaking their language, the boys take off to try tricks on the hip, while Wu-Tang films gleefully off to the side.

Not wanting to get in the way, I sit down to watch. Tie-dye is smoking another joint and is laughing though no one is around him. Another older skater enters the park, seems intimidated by the scene, and leaves to go skate flat in the parking lot. One of the boys is trying a bigspin flip on the hip, but he’s rotating extra fast so the trick turns into

a bigger-spin flip. He lands one and the group cheers. He rolls away towards me and I give him a high five. He smiles and looks back to the boys, but they’re all grouped around Wu-Tang, watching the replay. A second boy is trying a 360 but after a few tries Wu-Tang gets bored and asks another kid to film him and his tailslide instead. Wu-Tang (seriously) turns his hat so it’s backwards, and proceeds to do a few tailslides shaking his head after each one as if to say, no good, need to film again. Wu-Tang has become irritating by now, simultaneously trying to direct the kid filming him while also telling the others skating in the background to go somewhere else. He’s done probably 15 to 20 decent tailslides at this point but still appears unsatisfied.

I notice some of the older boys whispering to each other and I can see the plan hatching before my eyes. A few of them take off to do some laps around the park, much to the dismay of Wu-Tang. He pleads with one of them to wait until he can finish filming but they ignore him and more of the younger boys join in. Laughing and yelling, they follow each other like a train which is quite remarkable given how cramped the space is. In the confusion, Wu-Tang’s backpack has disappeared. So has the boy that was filming Wu-Tang, along with his iphone. As he starts to notice this, the entire group bolts for the exit and skates away, breaking into different groups, their laughter fading in the distance. Wu-Tang takes off after them but pretty quickly realizes the whole thing is hopeless.

Unfazed by the whole thing, Tie-dye is now, without a doubt, still talking to himself. Wu-Tang comes back to the park and asks me if I saw anything. Trying not to laugh, I shrug my shoulders. Perhaps seeing something unkind in my face, he gives me the finger and skates off, defeated and sad. With the park to myself I continue skating and I smile, thinking the future of skateboarding may not be so bad after all.



The search for the true meaning of brands - or the “brand essence,” as it is often called - gradually took the agencies away from individual products and their attributes and toward a psychological/anthropological examination of what brands mean to the culture and to people’s lives. This was seen to be of crucial importance, since corporations may manufacture products, but what consumers buy are brands.



Nike Idolatry (1)

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color.”

So began the legacy of Colin Kaepernick. I won’t pretend to care much about the NFL, its athletes, or football in general, but if there’s ever a chance to dissect the intersection between race, activism and corporate politics in the arena of professional athleticism, Kaepernick’s symbolic “knee,” (an act of protest against racial injustice and the recent, highly publicized murders of unarmed black men by police) and subsequent Nike collaboration says quite a lot.

In early September 2018, two years after the first anthem protest, it was announced Kaepernick will be the face of Nike’s advertising campaign for the 30th anniversary of its infamous “Just Do It” slogan. The campaign consists of a black and white close up of Kaepernick’s face; the words read, “Believe in something. Even if it means Sacrificing Everything” in white serif over his portrait, the obligatory swoosh and aforementioned “Just Do It” lie on the bottom frame.

The reaction is predictable and loud; conservatives and nationalists take to their preferred media outlets, burning or cutting off logos from their Nike products. They lament the lack of patriotism and pride in the U.S. and what they feel is the ultimate display of disrespect. On the other side, liberals embrace what they perceive to be a corporation’s brave support for the modern day Rosa Parks.

Articles with rhetorical titles like “On Colin Kaepernick’s Nike Ad: Will the Revolution Be Branded?” and “Is Colin Kaepernick’s Nike deal activism—or just capitalism?” are published but give no clear answers. Young people, (i.e., under 30) who make up the majority of Nike’s consumer base, are in the majority favorable to Kaepernick’s cause even if they don’t fully understand the complexities of power and systematic oppression that foster and perpetuate police violence, racism, and incarceration, especially among black males in the U.S.

The fact that protest and rebellion are co-opted and rebranded by corporations like Nike is nothing new—it’s business as usual. In fact, I would go as far to say that most people know this and are aware that Nike’s preliminary and sole interest in Kaepernick is profit. Controversy sells. At the very least it gets people talking about the company which is a win-win from their point of view. So my question is, despite knowing this, why do we, on the whole, continue to support Colin Kaepernick?

It’s okay to focus, protest, and draw attention to certain issues—especially the ones that hit close to home—but to expect systematic change in doing so is also naïve and irresponsible. In Kaepernick’s case, we have to trace the lines from his actions. On one hand he is a role model, or at least an inspiration for those wishing to speak out about racism in the U.S. On the other he’s (literally) sold this image of inspiration to one of the biggest perpetrators of greed, inequality, and worldwide destruction. We cannot pretend this contradiction does not exist.

“Believe in something. Even if it means Sacrificing Everything.” Like any well-crafted advertising slogan, the catchy phrase rings hollow once you say it enough. Believe in what? Opposition to police violence? Profit over everything? And sacrifice what, a multi-million dollar sports contract or the well being of millions of human beings and the planet?

When Colin Kaepernick, his symbolic knee, and Nike enter the news cycle we fall into the same sound bites and echo the tired sentiments of us vs. them (or if you prefer, them vs. us). All the while corporations watch from a distance, hoarding their profits and destroying anything left in their wake. It’s the same strategy politicians have used ad nauseam; distract the mass public with controversy and entertainment (and shopping) and drive us away from the issues that actually matter and affect our lives daily. Ignorance is manufactured.

If there's a significance to extract here it may start with why we seem so incapable of making coherent actions against any real forms of power and status quo. Perhaps part of the answer is because we feel impotent; that any individual action against a giant, international, faceless entity is useless. Another part may be psychologically, we've come to the point where as one theorist put it, "It's easy to imagine the end of the world—an asteroid destroying all of life, and so on—but we cannot imagine the end of capitalism."

Regardless, alternatives and different worlds do exist. They are being carved out today all around us and they all begin with the smallest actions. Kaepernick deciding not to stand for the anthem was a particularly powerful action, but his ties to Nike are even more so, even if it's not as visible. Refusing to buy a pair of Nike shoes seems minuscule in comparison but it can be every bit as meaningful—especially if you understand why.

Nike Idolatry (2)

The truth is I could care less about football or any professional sport. I mean both in the physical sense and the entertainment aspect. To me, modern sports maintain too many rules and enforce far too much authority. In the professional realm, at best, it's just part of the cash-guzzling, mass-amusement-spectacle. In the relatively much smaller world of skateboarding, Nike's consolidation of sponsorships, contracts, and of course its omnipresence in the skateboarding shoe market itself, is a reality we must contend with on a daily basis. The next question I want to put forward is: are the skateboarders that ride for corporations like Nike (i.e. are paid to advertise their products) exempt from critique simply because they're good at it?

The easy answer is that it doesn't matter. The skateboarding industry is incomparably smaller to something like the N.F.L. and grumbling about a few skateboarders who occasionally get checks from Nike is pointless and unnecessary. Most of these skateboarders don't sign multi-year-multi-million dollar contracts, or even have health insurance for that matter, so who are we to complain if some of our skate-idols get paid to travel and film while they still can?

In a video published by the Berrics* announcing the U.S.A. Olympic team, women's park rider Brighton Zeuner gives us a truthful insight to the other side. She says: "... I know there's a lot of people talking about it, but I think for me it's just skateboarding and that's that. I don't pay attention to the whole politics and stuff, for me it's skateboarding, and I get to travel the world for skateboarding, like that's pretty sick, so I mean, I'm not complaining."

Brighton, (14, always enshrined with a Red Bull hat) doesn't have a lot to complain about. She literally grew up with a vert ramp in her backyard. But she's also a teenager—to her, the politics of skateboarding, whether it be cultural or corporate, are probably as distant and uninteresting as the sweatshop manufacturing her Vans shoes halfway around the world. There's an evident disconnect here that goes beyond privilege and ignorance, it's something that regular, non-Olympic-competing skateboarders are also guilty of: using skateboarding itself, (and our pleasure from it) as an end that justifies all the means.

To be blunt, I believe all of this matters. Skateboarding cannot be an end in itself. Its very impact on our own lives continuously proves how important and far reaching its consequences can be. The seriousness of opposing corporate power on any platform, big or small, cannot be overstated enough in our epoch today. The choice between supporting a skateboarder we admire by buying their corporate product, or supporting a company that comes from and is for skateboarders first and foremost is a meaningful decision and we should always lean towards the latter. It's not enough to silently boycott the corpora-

tions either, we have to be vocal and public in our opposition to anything that attempts to appropriate our culture for profit and perpetuate the state of inequality and injustice in the world.

All of this, however, assumes that our culture is worth fighting for in the first place. That skateboarding, like the clichés, is still about autonomy and DIY ethics. That it is less a sub-culture than it is counter-culture. That it was and still is a subversive tool to undermine authority. That the universal feeling of freedom we all share is a freedom we stand to lose as we willingly give up more and more of our independence to outside agencies.

I believe in these things not necessarily because it's theoretically opposed to capitalism but because of my own experiences as a skateboarder. And I think that other skaters who feel apprehensions about seeing Nike, Adidas, New Balances or Vans shoes on every pair of feet, or energy drink logos embroidered on everyone's hats, may also share some of these beliefs, even if it's not always explicit.

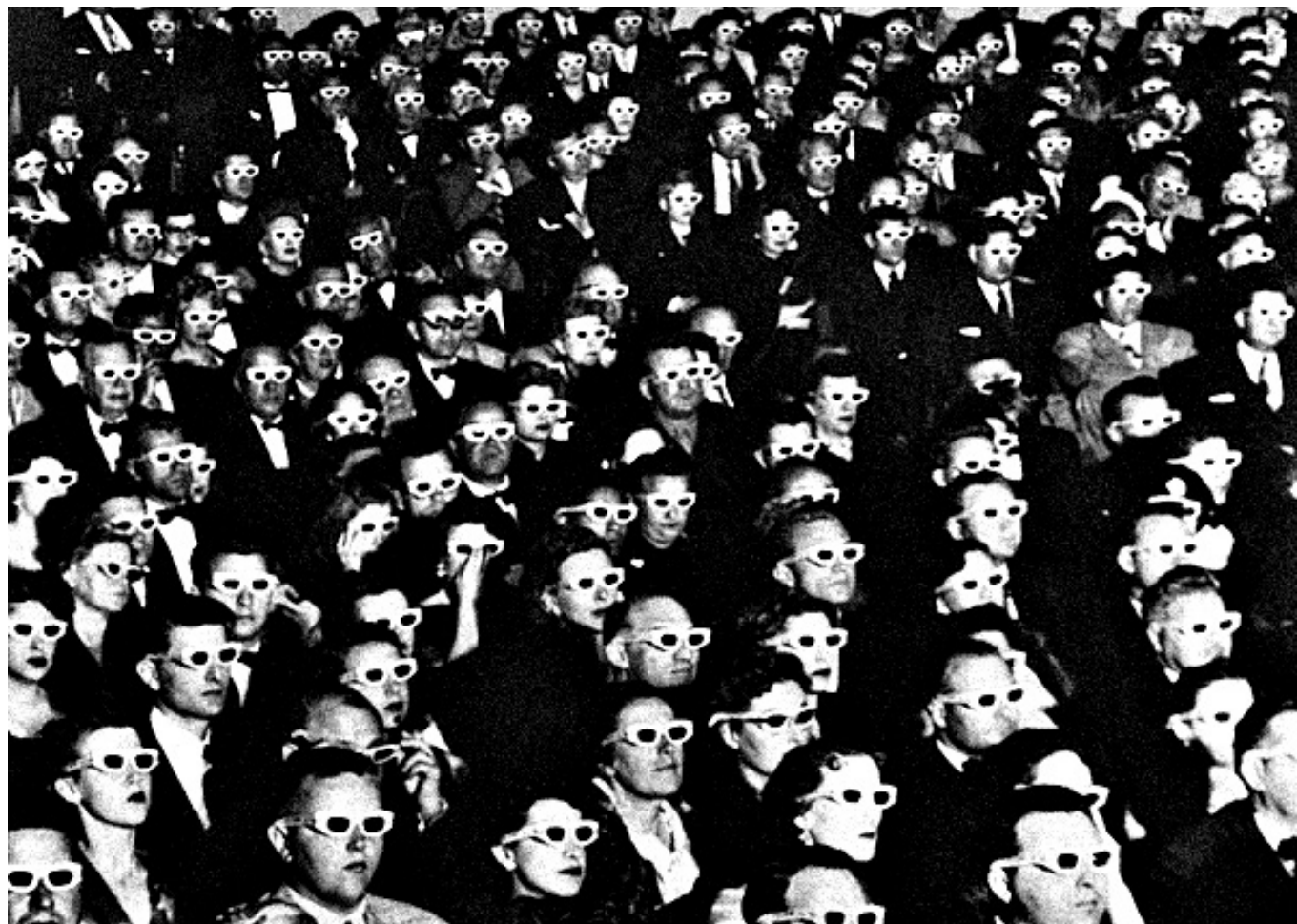
The time has come, and is indeed long overdue, for a unified and vocal movement within skateboarding that clearly opposes all corporate businesses and destructive entities that seek to use us. Truthfully, this may mean opposing the "Industry" as it stands and we should not shy away from the task. In these times of unprecedented inequality, misery, and environmental devastation, it's the least we can do.

As skaters we're insular. It's a strength and a weakness. We're selective over who we allow into our world; at the same time we think the world revolves around us. There's the fashion industry that rips off our style, the Hollywood movies that never get our lives right, and there's the stories, gossip, and deaths that bring us together like a strange extended family. But it's much harder to step back and try to perceive what our role is and can be as part of culture on this planet today. We all agree (presumably) that skateboarding had the power to change our own lives so shouldn't we be concerned, or at the very least interested for the lives it has yet to touch?

When I found skateboarding it was a relief—I no longer felt like I had to be part of some team or organization, much less take orders from some overweight and over-serious coach. But what about the kids that pick up a skateboard now? It's easier than ever to encounter skateboarding nowadays through mainstream television, YouTube, and Instagram. It's through these channels that it's even more likely some commercial aspect is being exploited. The usual corporate players are at work here; the Big Shoe Companies, the energy drinks, the car manufactures, tech-giants, even the army and air force have lent their support and influence. For me, from the start, skateboarding stood for everything that opposed these structures, even though I couldn't articulate it at eleven-years old. It was an escape from the life everyone was trying to impose on me as a child. It was a tool for empowerment, giving me the confidence to become independent and free-thinking.

Not everybody has to experience skating the same way I did but at the very least, the option should be available. As skaters edge closer to the realm of professional sports and athleticism, these alternative approaches to skateboarding are in real danger of being erased in favor of concepts that are easier to swallow for the mainstream. For those of us who started in a different era, we can initiate projects, voices, and ideas that protect this freedom. Or we can keep skating in our little world and pretend everything is fine while the earth crumbles around us. Before we know it, any remnant of our genuine identity will be gone, absorbed and re-manufactured for the masses, and skateboarding will be just another activity.

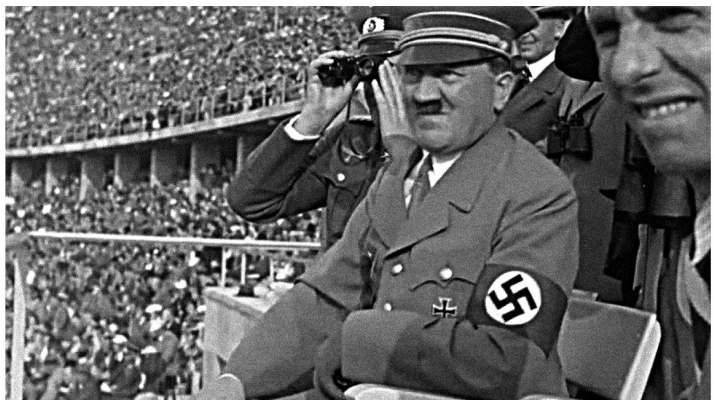
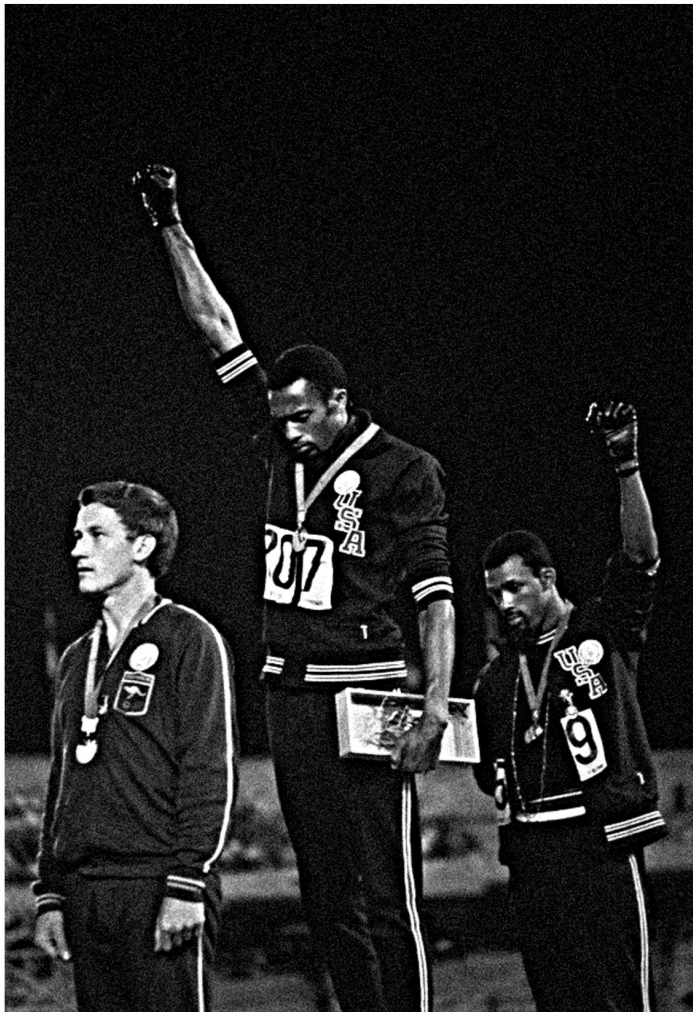
- (1) The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life.
- (2) When culture becomes nothing more than a commodity, it must also become the star commodity of the spectacular society.



SKATE and
DESTROY



The OLYMPICS



The Olympics is a symbol
of never-ending greed,
of distraction in the name of entertainment,
of surveillance in the name of security,
of capitalism in the name of development,
of violence in the name of unity,
of destruction in the name of peace.

The Olympics is a symbol,
Hitler understood this.
The Olympics is a symbol,
Tommie Smith and John Carlos understood this.
The Olympics is a symbol,
Black September understood this.
The Olympics is a symbol,
the poor and the homeless understand this.
The Olympics is a symbol,
the indigenous people understand this.
The Olympics is a symbol,
the victims of the
Fukushima Nuclear disaster understand this.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics
will include skateboarding for the first time—
this is besides the point.
The egotistic nonsense skateboarders
dribble amongst themselves
of whether the Olympics will affect skateboarding culture
positively or not is also besides the point.

The point is, Tokyo 2020 Olympics,
just like all past games,
incite real, physical harm
and violence on innocent victims.

On the homeless and rough-sleepers
being evicted in Shibuya and the greater Tokyo area
in the name of development.
On the victims of the earthquake
who had funding for temporary housing stolen from them.
On the evacuees who lost their homes,
history, and livelihoods and are now having their own
existence forcibly erased.
On the residents who live in and around Fukushima
and the Daiichi plant who are consistently lied
to as the government and TEPCO let the ongoing situation
continue to pollute the environment,
the water, and the children.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympics: “Recovery Games.”
The Tokyo 2020 Olympics: “Disaster cover-up.”

To the “progressive” skaters;
the ones excited about diversity,
about outreach and visibility,
about gender “recognition and equality,”
your hypocrisy in supporting
the games is loathsome.

To the “indifferent” skaters;
your ignorance is manufactured.
Buying tickets to attend supports this system;
watching it on television supports it too.
So become educated,
understand that opposing the Olympics has nothing
to do with skateboarding and everything
to do with the state of our wretched system.

To the “other” skaters;
if we feel in any way moved to oppose the spectacle,
what do we have to offer?
Are there ways in which our shared community can
generate meaningful discourses or actions against the machine?
Can we reach out to those chosen to represent
and organize for us and explicitly say, you don’t speak for us?
Can we create a movement strong enough
that makes the inclusion of skateboarding a dire mistake?

The Olympics is a symbol and so is its inverse.

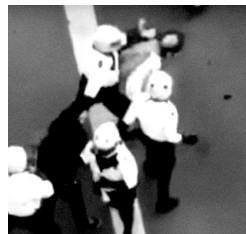
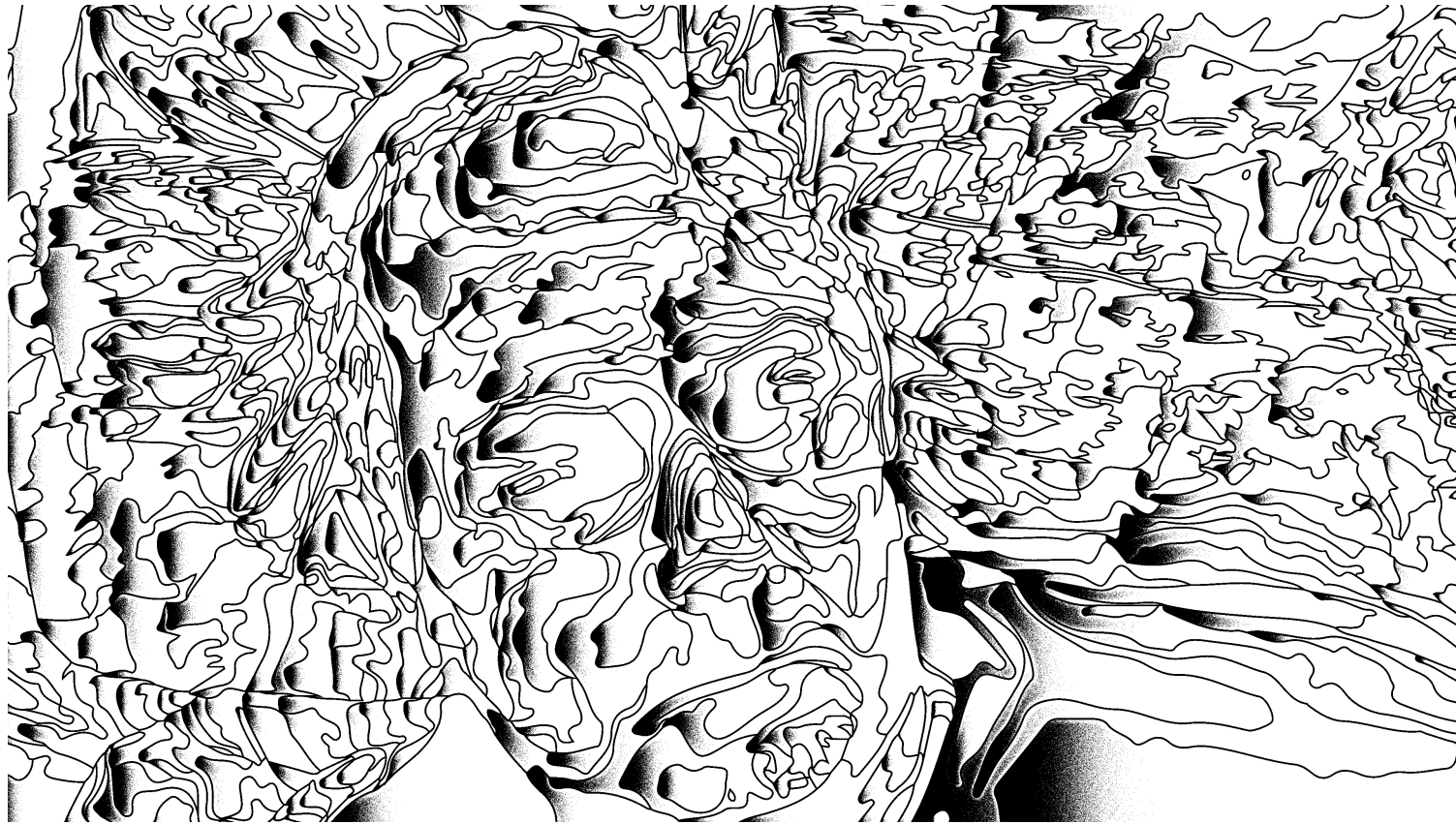
Opposing, resisting, and fighting the Olympics is a symbol,
the indigenous fighters in the
Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and beyond
in so-called Canada understand this.

Opposing, resisting, and fighting the Olympics is a symbol,
the protesters fighting on the streets of Rio understand this.

Opposing, resisting, and fighting the Olympics is a symbol,
the activists in Japan, Pyeongchang, Los Angeles, Paris and
beyond all understand this.

Skateboarders
opposing, resisting, and fighting the Olympics is a symbol too,
one that desperately needs to organize and commence.

Compared with the wholesale violence of capital and government, political acts of violence are but a drop in the ocean.



ACAB ≠ ASGAB

Security guard Dan Jensen is beaten unconscious, suffering permanent brain damage after an altercation with skaters at 555 California street in San Francisco. The New York Times publishes an article chronicling the incident, calling attention to apparently new fact that skateboarding “now largely exists in a legally hazy space where amateur and professional skateboarders use existing infrastructure for their own purposes.”

Professionals and Industry-people are quick to condemn the actions and distance themselves from the “bad” behavior of a few rotten apples. Follow up pieces like “The War Against Skateboarding’s Unnecessary Violence” implore skaters to act “civil,” lamenting that the incident “is a stain on the sport and only galvanizes the negative connotation that is oftentimes attributed to skaters and the culture.” Josh Stewart, of Static fame, even recommends we do our own enforcing: “When I see it in videos it confirms to me or confirms to the rest of the world that it’s something that needs to be more policed.”

Let me be clear; skateboarding is not and can not be associated with pacifism. Nor can any culture or movement that seeks to oppose the forces that be. The myth of non-violent resistance is a fiction woven by those who understand what they hold to lose, rewritten in history books by the holders of power and wealth. When resistance comes from below—from protesters resisting riot police and batons, from Black Panthers arming themselves and organizing into citizen patrols, or from children throwing stones at Israeli tanks, it is dismissed as “violence.” When it comes from above in the form of a choke-hold on Eric Garner, the imprisonment of families and children in concentration camps on the border, or in the genocide of an entire indigenous population, it is called the “law.”

Let me be clear; the violence against Dan Jensen was not a political act. Skateboarding should oppose all forms of authority—while Dan the security guard may have been over-zealous, he is not the instigator nor the perpetrator of violence—he is the (under) paid and inconsequential person hired to protect it. For the most part, these security guards are coerced into their situation by the holders of private property, wealth and capital. Many of them are working-class, having to spend their entire days watching the rich shuffle in and out of their insulated cocoons, occasionally having to deal with some privileged and self-absorbed skaters intent on starting a fight so long as it can be documented for their social media purposes. At the same time there are plenty of security guards who imagine themselves as cops, always conniving for more power, for a fight, for some way to assert their feeble dominance. We must be able to distinguish between these entities.

Sometimes, it is easy. The reaction from skateboarders in Colombia responding to the extreme police brutality* on 2019’s Go Skateboarding Day points to an intrinsic capacity for focused and powerful violence in the face of the State and its repression. Motorcycles, helmets, and batons can be matched by a skateboard, when wielded by the fierce determination of mutual resistance and anger.

I didn’t personally witness the incident at 555 so I cast no judgment on either side. Regardless, we should skate where we want, when we want. Property is theft, so why not steal it back? Tenants of 555 California Street include Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, UBS, Bank of America and Microsoft among others—the true forces of evil, repression, and systematic violence in our world. The protectors of this property can be challenged when engaging our freedom to skate, but we must recognize when we’re encountering victims of the same system. There are plenty of corporate marble ledges and private parks to infiltrate. There are plenty of cops that are way more deserving of a skateboard to the head.

There is a violent nature inherent in skateboarding. Most of the time, it seems to emerge when exercising our freedom to skate against antagonistic forms of authority. A lot of it also happens to be the sort of unfocused, patriarchal expressions of juvenile anger that needs no reproducing. But there’s something else too—our disdain for rules and structure consistently pits us against advocates of the law. Why not use this position to align ourselves with allies that feel similar? Why not focus that rage and frustration against the specific forms of power that curtail our freedom, expression, and right to use public space?

At the end of the day, I said, violence was the only weapon that would destroy apartheid and we must be prepared, in the near future, to use that weapon. The crowd was excited; the youth in particular were clapping and cheering. They were ready to act on what I said right then and there. At that point I began to sing a freedom song, the lyrics of which say, ‘There are enemies, let us take our weapons and attack them.’ I sang this song and the crowd joined in, and when the song was finished, I pointed to the police and said, ‘There, there are our enemies!’

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8XWbyti85U>

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.



∞ Jerusalem skate park's shining concrete is sparkling on my arrival under the setting sun. I take a few runs around the park enjoying the breeze before I am approached by a few locals. A boy with blonde hair tied back in a short ponytail gives me a fist bump and asks where I'm from, in American-sounding English. I say Japan (my stock answer for the next month though technically not true). His friend in a RVCA tanktop and baseball hat that says New York is impressed and follows up with, "Why are you in Israel?" He has an Israeli accent.

I'm here because I'm on my way to Palestine. Short ponytail gives RVCA a look and then suggests I go skate spots in Tel Aviv instead. After a short silence, almost in unison, they ask me if I love Israel. I say not really and they skate off, most likely offended. It's a strange question, one I will be asked numerous times in Jerusalem.

A little while later I am taking a rest and a younger boy with a French accent starts to ask about my love for Israel. When I turn it back on him he gives me a resounding yes and stares intensely into my eyes. I don't know how to reply. While we are talking he starts to break a few empty glass bottles a ledge between us. He throws the pieces under the fence where they land precariously on a pedestrian pathway next to the basketball courts. He's doing all of this casually and there's no particular malice I can detect in his actions. I tell him to please stop he looks confused. This place was made for people like me, and I can do as I please. Half an hour later, a woman pushing her baby in a carriage starts down the pathway and I tell her to be careful about the glass. She shoots me a dirty look.

I wanted to believe that skateboarding could be an equalizer among cultures and different people. That it could somehow make things okay, even if just for a short while. It takes me only a moment at a place like JSP to realize how naive and dangerous this sentiment can be. In the case of Israel/Palestine, one of the biggest dangers is efforts to "normalize" the situation. To proclaim some sort of peace or progress can be reached simply through areas of intersection creates a damaging false equivalence.

Actually, this is the essential problem of Rick McCrank's Viceland episode* and with any other media piece that inevitably tries to portray "both sides of the issue." The very formation of the state of Israel has established a system where any sort of real equality is impossible. Palestinians inherently understand this but we, as outsiders, have a much harder time comprehending this essential condition. A thing like skateboarding, while able to be enjoyed by both, is laughably inept at "bridging gaps" or making any meaningful connections between the two.

This doesn't mean that it's useless either. The reason why I believe skateboarding continues to be important for Palestinians is precisely because it needs no equalization or connection. They don't need help from the Israeli skateboarding scene or Israeli skaters to exist. They don't have to imitate Western skate culture or fulfill any requirements to

be recognized. The focus of skateboarding in Palestine is first and foremost on Palestinians themselves, on making an autonomous culture that thrives in spite of its neighbors, or really, without caring about them.

And that's exactly what they're creating now.



*Post-radical, Season 1 Episode 2, "The Neighbors." McCrank visits skaters and organizations in the West Bank and in Israel, eventually concluding they're basically the same thing.

In the first episode of the Viceland television series *Post Radical*, Rick McCrank visits Bryggeriet Gymnasium, the “first of its kind” skateboarding-high school in Malmö, Sweden. Founder and “Skateboard Educator” John Dahlquist pontificates on the importance of education and “solving most of the world’s problems.” The high school is centered around the act of / culture of skateboarding, offering special studies in photo/film, cartooning, and fine arts along with compulsory math and social science classes to fulfill Swedish secondary school requirements. Skateboarding is a graded subject—seriously—and it weighs on student’s university applications.

If this whole concept of a school designed around skateboarding sounds strange and kind of like a fantasy, that’s because well, it is. There’s an entitlement at play here, a disconnect from reality that reeks of vanity and elitism. Among the students portrayed, only a single boy is non-white; there are no girls present at all. The ones interviewed all give the same story—they were unhappy at their “traditional” schools because they couldn’t focus, “do math,” or simply didn’t like it. When they heard about a school with skateboarding in the curriculum they immediately said sign me up!

And to be honest, who wouldn’t? Though it may come as a surprise for students of Bryggeriet, nearly everyone has problems with their schools during their teenage years. We’ve all dreamed of sleeping in, watching TV, or doing whatever we thought was more fun than school at the time. Despite this, most of us begin to understand one of life’s valuable lessons: you can’t always get what you want.

Unless you live in Sweden, skateboard, and have little desire to do anything else. While Dahlquist insists that the purpose of Bryggeriet is to prepare students for university, (and the accompanying adult life) the sort of infantile environment of instant gratification and incessant fun (their idea of a field trip is to visit another skatepark, as if having a perfectly constructed one in the school [which, funnily enough is described as another classroom] is not enough) seems to direct the students elsewhere, particularly away from self-reliance independent thought.

For those of us who stuck it out in “traditional” high schools, and especially for those of us lucky enough to have found skateboarding, those years often happened to be the time when our best friends and communities were discovered precisely because we shared something that exists *outside* the system. When skateboarding is absorbed into this system, when it becomes institutionalized, what do we risk to lose?

While Dahlquist would deny any institutionalization is happening, (he would say it’s an exploration instead, whatever this means—your guess here is as good as mine—but really, what else would you call it when schedules are assigned and “grades” are awarded?) the simple fact is that skateboarding is being restructured and organized in a way to fit the parameters of the Bryggeriet program. Whatever semantic language one wishes to use, skateboarding is being forced into a standard, Western education system. In some ways, this runs parallel to the sport-ification of skateboarding itself—e.g. how does one assign points and ratings to an activity that is essentially unquantifiable? Most of the time, as will be the case with the Olympics, arbitrary criterion will be erected and judged within a framework that makes sense to the public. Standards are constructed, actions supervised, regulations declared and enforced; suddenly there’s a right way to skateboard. Suddenly there’s a wrong way to skateboard.

McCrank phrases this as the “normalization” of skateboarding; a somewhat problematic term since normal itself is a subjective threshold. Instead we should look to what changes these ideas in skateboarding will have for younger and future generations. Within this framework of rules, the freedom, creativity, and spontaneity of skateboarding will become limited. Anything that ventures to oppose these rules will be viewed as a threat as the plurality of voices that make up the culture are overshadowed by one authority.

There is no lack of education initiatives incorporating skateboarding into their programs across the globe today. What set most of these apart from the Bryggeriet model is the emphasis on foregrounding the unique qualities skateboarding already embodies; creativity, free thinking, independence. Skateboarding is simply a means to an end—an outlet providing certain opportunities for a child’s development that are lacking in traditional and hierarchical school structures.

Dahlquist believes education systems to “reflect society and the world the way you want it to be.” In this statement he betrays his true intentions; an idealized version of skateboarding that embodies achievement and winning, a stasis of capitalistic fun, and a culture that submits to authority—unable to develop without being told which trick to do, how to do it, and what to think.

The Cartesian ‘I’ will lay the philosophical ground for whiteness. It will secularize God’s attributes and confer them to the Western God, who is, in fact, none other than a parable of the white man. This is how you were born.

I have never been able to say ‘we’ and include you. You don’t deserve it. And even it, to force the hand of fate, I did include you in this ‘we,’ you wouldn’t recognize me within it. I am not one of you and because I am not a beggar, I will not ask you for anything. And yet, I cannot quite bring myself to exclude you. I have neither the power nor the will to do so. Exclusion is your prerogative. I am not you and refuse to become you. All I want is to escape you as much as I can.

*

Something feels off—
a lingering taste in the back of my mouth.
A taste of privilege and exclusion
with a healthy dose of egotism and delusion.

I am guilty of sectarianism.
The word “progressive” means nothing to me
so long as fundamental systems go unchallenged.
The word “inclusive” means nothing to me
so long as the marginalized continue
to go unheard and ignored.

I am not impressed by the idea
of an “academic skateboarding conference.”
I am not impressed by its claims
of forging connections, of establishing spaces, of spreading ideas.

I am definitely not impressed with “panels” touting names like:
Rage Against the Gaze: Prejudice and Allyship in Skateboarding,
Sacred Spots: Defining Heritage in Skate Culture,
Bad Design is a Crime: Skate Friendly Cities,
Tech Will Save Us,
Stay Core Stay Poor.

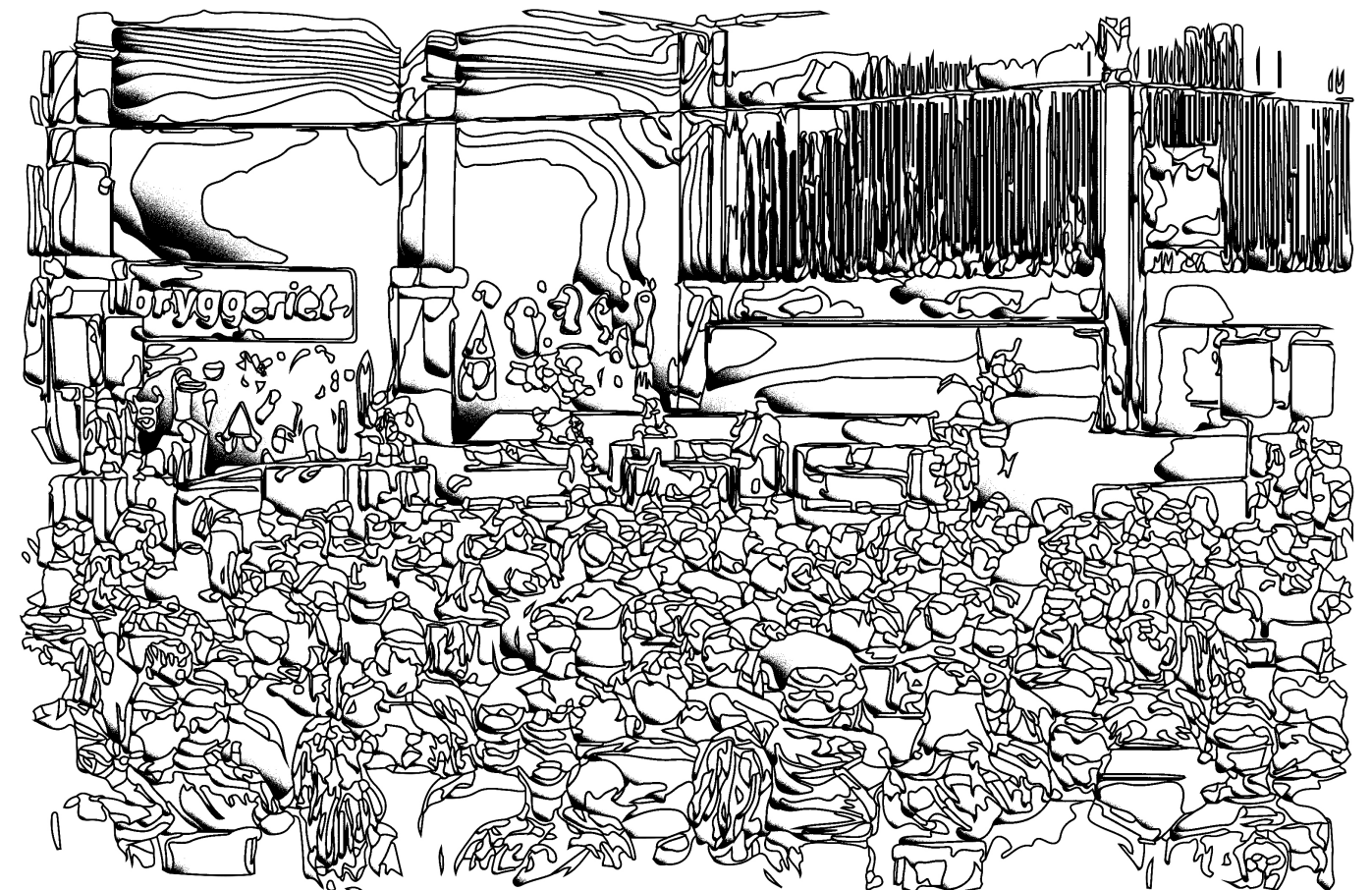
I am sick of academia—
of watching the entitled endlessly congratulate each other.
I am sick of Malmö, Copenhagen,
the “skater-friendly” cities,
the “skate-friendly” architecture,
skateboarding high schools—
as if these centers of extreme wealth
that exploit the Third world
somehow deserve their utopias.
I’m sick of the celebration—
and what is it exactly we are celebrating?

Academic conferences, Ted Talks, award ceremonies—
these are for the elite and the easily distracted.
Why must skateboarding imitate these worthless diversions?
Why is the time and energy
put into a gathering like this even necessary?
When push comes to shove, who exactly is it for?
Ourselves, no?
A perpetual feedback loop of high-fives and smiles.

Meanwhile, the Amazon burns.
Trump and Netanyahu giggle
as they whisper to each other on the phone.
Cops in Colombia run over skateboarders
with their motorcycles—
one of them head-butts a defenseless girl
in the head with his helmet, knocking her to the ground.
Irradiated water from the
Daiichi nuclear power plant
is pumped into the ocean.

Meanwhile, many have decided
the time for talks and politics are over.
They are rising in Sudan, Lebanon, Haiti,
Ecuador, Honduras, Chile,
Catalunya, Iraq, Bolivia,
Hong Kong, Rojava and beyond.

Meanwhile, we are...



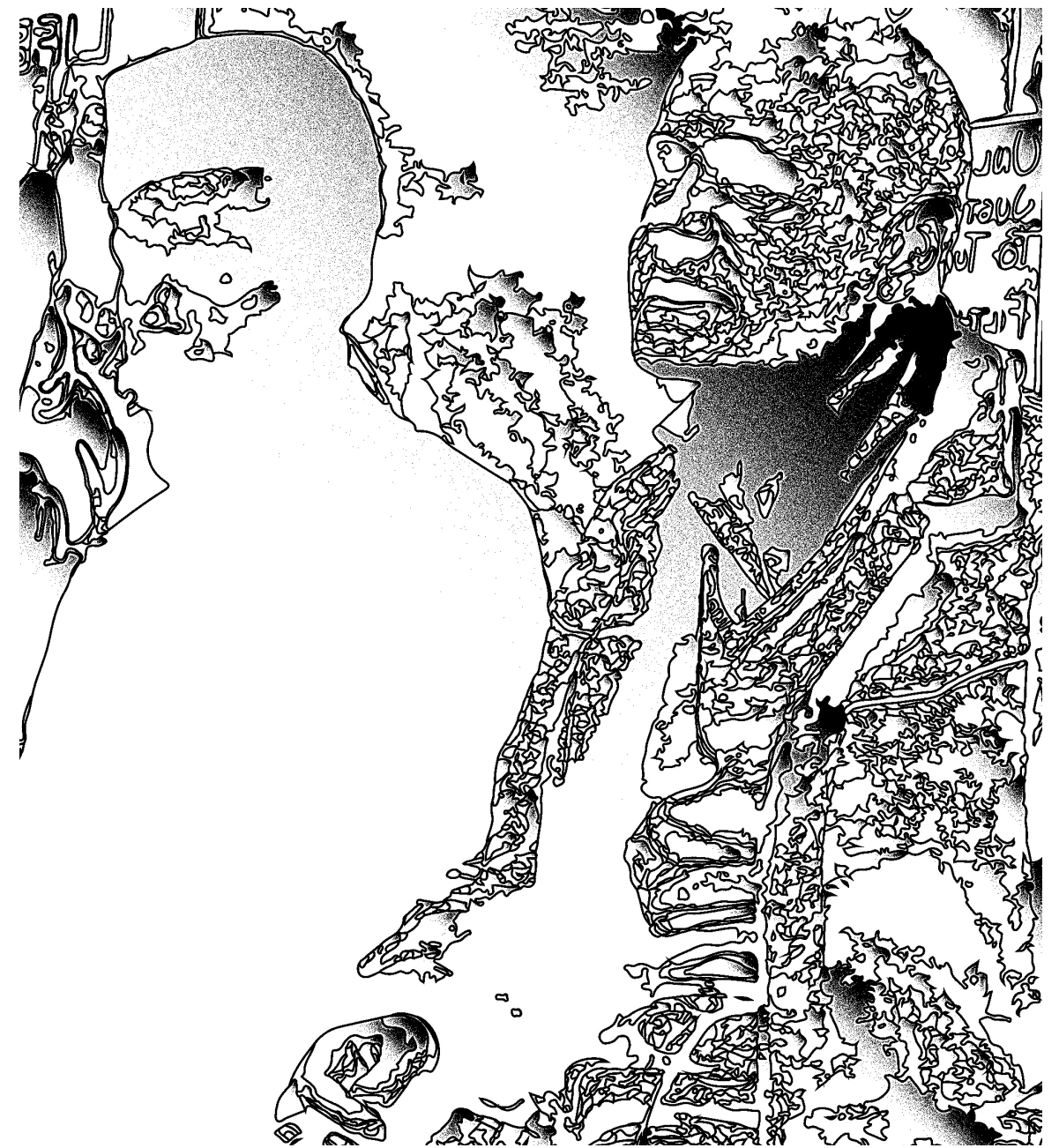
But [Genet] knows how to discern the invisible proposition made to white people by radical activists of the black cause, the Palestinian cause, and the Third World cause. He knows that any indigenous person who rises up against the white man grants him, in the same movement, the chance to save himself. He intimates that behind Malcolm X's radical resistance is his own salvation. Genet knows this, and every time an indigenous person have him this opportunity, he took it. This is why Malcom X loved Genet from beyond the grave. It is only between these two men that the word 'peace' has a meaning. It has a meaning because it is irrigated by revolutionary love. But Malcolm X cannot love Genet without loving his own people above all else.

In our epoch of darkness, Houria Bouteldja writes of Revolutionary Love. Her voice is loud, unwavering, livid, and clear—she is immediately denounced and ridiculed. Her opponents recognize themselves in her words; they recognize the futility of the Left, of progressives—of their whiteness.

Bouteldja attacks them because she can envision a world beyond the limits of their imagination. A world that is truly decolonial, anti-zionist, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal. A world constructed by the people from below, not reformed by those in power. A world rooted not in love or peace, but revolutionary love. A world that is radical.

I think skateboarders can and should participate in this world. I think in many ways, we stand at a crossroads for what is to become of our culture; on the one side, complete and utter incorporation into the capitalist regime and on the other, a radical break that recognizes the political potential in skateboarding and puts them in action.

The myriad of problems within skateboarding are not going to change via a single action, just as our climate crisis is not going to be solved by skipping school, and racism is not going to end with the impeachment of Trump. We need to recognize the totality of the system we are dealing with—an out-of-control, savage economic ideology coupled with a history of imperialism and colonialization by a certain group of humans that embodies racism and hatred.



We need to recognize that dismantling this system will mean fighting together on all fronts; understanding where struggles can intersect and strengthen each other. We need to recognize that the warriors leading many of these fights will not be white, nor will they be led by men.

These voices within skateboarding must be amplified. The ones holding power must be challenged, as should our ingrained habits as consumers. Skateboarders must look beyond being progressive, inclusive, unifying—they must look beyond being benign. Skateboarders must Skate and Destroy *and* Create—create a new world in the “shell of the old.” Above all else, let skateboarding be radical.



On Sunday, July 28th, I accompany Aram, a group of kids from the Sareyyet club in Ramallah, and a few SkatePal volunteers on a “field trip” to the skatepark in Asira Al-Shamalyia. The park was constructed by SkatePal in 2015 and currently hosts a different set of international volunteers that help the locals on a weekly program. Most of the kids from the Sareyyet club (a small space in Ramallah that SkatePal hosts skateboard-ing classes in) haven’t been skating for more than a year, but clearly some of them are already obsessed. Both boys and girls are taking part in equal numbers, their ages ranging from around 10 to 17. The group we decided to take to Asira had never been there, nor had they ever set foot in a real skatepark before.

Most of us can remember the first time we went to a skatepark—if you weren’t fortunate enough to grow up within reasonable distance to one, it’s a pretty big deal. The privilege of being able to witness and skate with the Ramallah kids as they experienced this for themselves fills me with indescribable happiness. I look back on it now and it feels surreal—it was an absolutely incredible and perfect day. The Sareyyet group endured the blazing sun, some painful falls, plus a bit of jealousy as they watched the local Asira girls cruise around them with ease and drop-in on the highest walls. By the end though, after almost 7 hours of non-stop skateboarding, everyone is elated, exhausted, and asking when they can come back.

The truth is, the idea for this trip was hatched less than a week before over drinks after street skating in Ramallah one night. We talked together about how great it would be to bring a group of kids from skate class in Ramallah to Asira. We assumed it would be shelved with the other ideas for now, to save for sometime in the future after we properly plan it and get the okay from SkatePal and the parents. Most likely, I thought, it would fall to the next group of volunteers to handle.

When Aram simply suggested we just do it next week I suddenly had a revelation about skateboarding in Palestine. It was so clear and obvious—there’s no need to wait for anyone or anything if we’re all in agreement and we can just coordinate it ourselves. During the next week*—in the true form of direct action and self-organization, a bus was rented, the group of kids from Sareyyet were invited, their parents consulted and OK’d, and by Sunday we were munching on falafel sandwiches, giggling and singing together on our way to Asira.

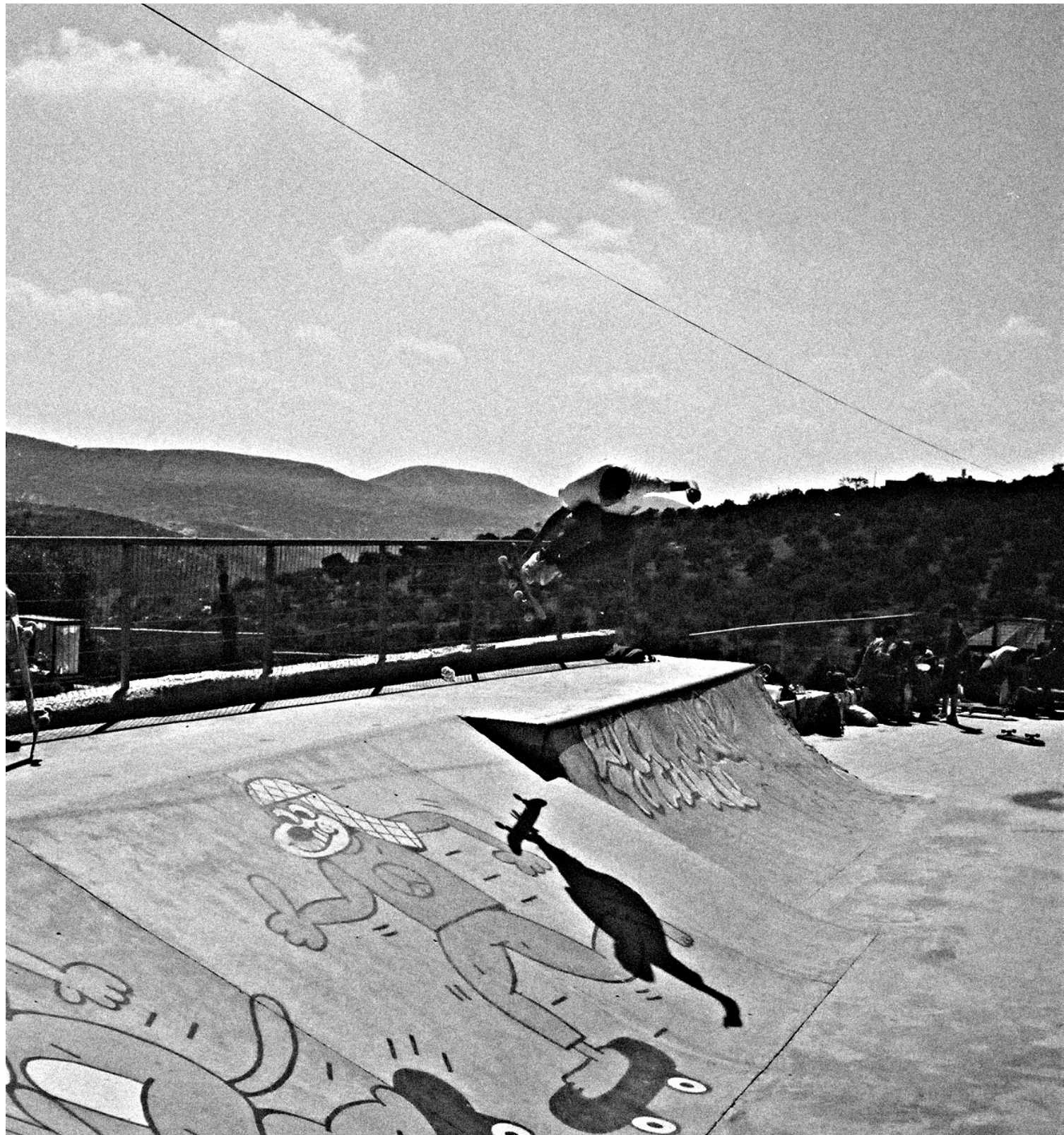
I believe this kind of autonomy is rare. The more I think about it, I realize that maybe skateboarding in Palestine can be a model for other places to follow and not the other way around. Throughout the short time I spent skating with the kids, volunteers, and locals, I experienced being part of a community that did not exist where I grew up in the U.S. The support, passion, openness and trust from the children to their parents was amazing to witness. The willingness for Palestinians to teach me and other foreigners about their lives and the situation, sometimes within the context of skateboarding proved at once how

large their hearts are and how much I have to learn. The small moments—the laughter, joy, and new friendships I made while skating together is a memory I will cherish forever. We were all brought together by our love of skateboarding, but it’s the love for each other that will continue to nurture and grow this radical culture in Palestine.



**All credit for the real organizing to Aram Sabba. I also want to commend SkatePal for all its support and basically being as hands-off as possible, entrusting a lot of responsibility to coordinators like Aram and volunteers on the ground.*

The zombie is made to eat without salt: salt is dangerous, it could awaken him. For that reason it accords ill with the history of humankind, because that is always changing. And because in the history of humankind every act of destruction meets its response, sooner or later, in an act of creation.





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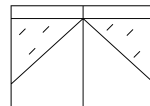
Quotes in order of appearance:

Norman Finkelstein
Franco Berardi
Buckongeahelas
Naomi Klein
Guy Debord
Frantz Fanon
Nelson Mandela
Frantz Fanon
Houria Bouteldja
Houria Bouteldja
Eduardo Galeano



Make Skateboarding Radical Again is a platform for outreach; a place to try and trace the lines between radical politics, the act of skateboarding, and the people between. It's always open for contributions, comments, critiques and proposals.

Please get in touch here:
willalexshum@protonmail.com



MakeSkateboardingRadicalAgain.tumblr.com