

Skateboarding and Urban Landscapes in Asia: Endless Spots, by Duncan McDuie-Ra, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2021, 209 pp., € 98,99 (hardback) € 98,99 (eBook PDF), ISBN 978-94-6372-313-8

Urban sociologist Duncan McDuie-Ra has crafted a remarkable book that is at once a critique of Asian urban development, a nuanced discussion on skateboard videos, and a refreshingly novel exploration of the stubborn and paradoxical sport of skateboarding. This welcome contribution to the growing rank of tomes in skateboard academia attends to some important oversights. Firstly, it addresses the importance of Asia in global skateboarding, an enticing region where new and novel locations can be scouted and mapped. Secondly it places central a discussion on the rich resource of skateboard videos that have documented, in sometimes astonishing detail, the everyday street life of Asian urbanism. McDuie-Ra introduces two conceptual frames to aid us in this journey, he speaks of shredscares as a way to conceive of the way skateboarders imagine and view urban environments. The method of ‘rolling ethnography’, moving through urban spaces as a skateboarder does and utilising video recordings focussed ‘below the knees’ presents Asian cities in a unique and dynamic way. This is in essence the thesis of the book, that discussions on Asian urbanism have overlooked the wealth of material skateboarders have created that critiques Asian cities, indexes development, and presents ethnographic material of everyday and cross-cultural encounter. This is indeed a book on Asian urbanism but it is also a honest and frank discussion about the contours of skateboarding as a sport that rarely conforms to people’s expectations.

Chapter one establishes the conceptual frames of shredscares and ethnography below the knees and argues that skateboarders are cartographers invested in making maps of cities that defy other logics. This opening discussion and the subsequent chapter are the only ones that discuss skateboarding beyond Asia in any real depth. The author decides to forgoe a detailed explanation of skateboarding and its culture, signalling that this is already well covered and established, that research on skateboarding has come of age. An important claim made in this

chapter is that despite the investment in skateboarding as a sport, and the vast array of new skateparks that have been built across the globe, discovering new urban locations to explore and document remains a central driving force in skateboarding culture.

The second chapter includes some detailed observations from skateboarding in Singapore and explains the ways skateboarders re-imagine the urban environment and utilise media to document and communicate their interactions, developing a narrative about cities and specific locations. In chapter three McDuie-Ra presents a provocative discussion on skateboarding in China detailing the way in which skateboarders flocked to Chinese cities in the early 2000s to record tricks in the unending terrain provided by China's rapacious urban development. The permissive ways in which security guards and crowds respond to skateboarders is explored through the notion of 'white mischief' where foreign skateboarders are generously forgiven for their trespassing in allowances that would not be extended to locals. These encounters provide an engaging contrast between street life and the dramatic scale of China's urban project. But the experience of visiting skaters in China is sometimes described as mundane, even monastic in Shenzhen as they focus purely on recording footage for their promotional videos which are key to their careers. We also learn of skateboarders exploring China's ghost cities such as Ordos in Inner Mongolia where they are free to explore and roll around the city without the constraints of security guards or the less invasive curious pedestrians.

Chapter four showcases spectacle cities such as Baku in Azerbaijan, Astana (Nur-Sultan) in Kazakhstan, and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. A key focus is the Ty Evans video *We Are Blood* (2015) which secured elite privileges for skateboarders to film in the city gaining access to locations of dramatic proportions, filmed with cutting edge technologies, helicopters and drones. Here McDuie-Ra's argument of below the knee ethnography is juxtaposed with a down to earth video from the skateboard brand Baker and the surreal Dubai shredscape is revealed to be a lie. Chapter 5 focuses on post-soviet cities and again shows how

skateboarders are adept at indexing development in the ways they read the urban environment and map it. A touching element of this exploration is the description of haunted spots, locations in Abkhazia where locals urge skateboarders not to skate out of respect for a tragic history.

In the final two chapters we explore new frontiers in India, Iran, and Palestine. Each location with its own nascent skateboard culture and constraints upon its local skateboarding populace, be that patchy development, sanctions, or occupation. The concluding chapter focuses on the 'next China' and highlights poignantly that skateboarders are an innately searching species. In an evocative insight the author notes how skateparks invert the sport relationship observable in other activities. Skateboarders practice in the skatepark and take their skills to the street whilst a footballer might practice in the street and apply their practice at the pitch.

There is much to celebrate in this book and skateboard academia has been lacking a voice on these Asian locations and the central importance of video. However, this is also a fragmented version of Asian skateboarding as the author notes, there is intentionally an omission of Japan and Korea, both important Asian nodes in skateboarding. Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and arguably Australia are all also overlooked. Perhaps most importantly McDuié-Ra leans heavily on the view beneath the knees constructed by skateboarding's most influential Asian travellers, the videographers Anthony Claravall and Patrik Wallner. In fact, we learn shockingly little of how local skaters in these environs relate to the cultural imperialism of touring foreign skaters and the colonisation of their skateboarding spots. What we do learn of the locals is often captured through the gaze of those very filmmakers. This however is not the focus of the text and remains a call for future researchers to answer. What is key is that this is an important book on skateboarding and one that reaffirms the ways in which the sport fits uncomfortably with constraints about its meanings and objectives.

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