Duncan McDuie-Ra

Skateboarding and Urban Landscapes in Asia

Endless Spots

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Skateboarding and Urban Landscapes in Asia

Consumption and Sustainability in Asia

Asia is the primary site of production of a myriad of commodities that circulate the globe. From cars and computer chips to brand clothing, material objects manufactured across Asia have become indispensable to people's lives in most cultural contexts. This mega production generates huge amounts of waste and pollution that threaten the health and lifestyle of many Asians. Yet, Asia is not only a site of production, but also one of the most rapidly growing consumer markets.

This series focuses on consumption – the engine propelling Asia onto the world economic stage – and its implications, from practices and ideologies to environmental sustainability, both globally and on the region itself. The series explores the interplay between the state, market economy, technologies, and everyday life, all of which have become defining facets of contemporary Asian culture. Shifts in consumption that have taken place across Asia since the 1950s onward have had a deep impact on new and emerging informal economies of material care, revealing previously invisible sites of innovation, resistance and co-option.

The series will bring together studies by historians, anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists that systematically document and conceptualize Asia's engagement with consumption and sustainability in the global environment.

Skateboarding and Urban Landscapes in Asia

Endless Spots

Duncan McDuie-Ra

Dedicated to Kimeri.
Who has never pushed mongo.
Since day 1.

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Acknowledgements

'Skateboarding saved my life!' is a common claim. So common that it has almost become cliché. Except that for many people all over the world its true, or at least it feels true. This project didn't save my life, but it feels like it. Skateboarding has been there for me again and again since I was eight years old. For the last four years it has come into my professional life, getting me through disenchantment with my craft, many of the people doing it, and with the state of things in the world after 2016. So, thank you skateboarding.

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1 Urban Asia: Endless Spots

Abstract

Chapter 1, *Urban Asia: Endless Spots*, invites readers to explore skate video as an archive of alternative (but widespread) urban practice and industry. Filming skateboarding needs spots: assemblages of surfaces, objects and obstacles 'naturally' occurring in the urban landscape. As skateboarding has globalized so too has the search for spots, enrolling more and more landscapes in a subcultural knowledge-bank of cities, towns and suburbs. From the early 2000s Asia has become central to skateboarding culture, livelihoods, and consumption as urban landscapes have proliferated and knowledge of these landscapes has circulated rapidly through skate video and other media. With skaters and filmers travelling further and further to find new spots, more patches of urban Asia are enrolled in an alternative cartography of the region.

Keywords: skateboarding, Asia, cities, landscape, cartography, cultural topology

If you have not spent time skateboarding or watching others skateboard (aside from jumping out of the way and cursing under your breath) or watched a skate video, everything that follows will make much more sense if you watch one, or two, or 20 skate videos right now. You don't even have to watch the whole thing; you can start by just watching a few minutes of footage. It's easy. Open a web browser and type in the name of one of the videos listed in the back of this book. Alternatively you could start with *Menikmati* (Mortagne, 2000) discussed in this chapter or Lakai footwear's *Fully Flared* (Evans, Jonze & Wiencheque, 2007), perhaps the most anticipated video of all time (when skate videos were sold and not streamed). You could search one of the countless 'best-ever skate video' lists floating around on the Internet, which might lead you to Blind skateboards' *Video Days* (Jonze, 1991), H-Street's *Shackle Me Not* (Magnusson & Ternasky, 1988), Plan B's *Questionable* (Ternasky 1992), Toy Machine's *Welcome to Hell* (Thomas, 1996),

Zero skateboards' *Misled Youth* (Thomas, 1999), Transworld Skateboarding Magazine's *Modus Operandi* (Evans & Holland, 2000), Alien Workshop's *Photosynthesis* (Castrucci, 2000), Flip skateboards' *Sorry* (Mortagne, 2002). You could try something older from when skateboarding looked and sounded so different, such as Powell Peralta's *Bones Brigade Video Show* (Peralta, 1984), considered the first example of the genre, or *Future Primitive* (Peralta, 1985), the first skate video I ever saw and watched again and again for years in relative isolation, oblivious that the skateboarding had dated. You could also look for something recent, such as Spanish-based Sour skateboards' *The Sour Solution II* (Tonnesen, 2019), DC footwear's European team in *Domino* (Astleford & Ray, 2020), Thomas Campbell's independent *Ye Olde Destruction* (Campbell , 2019) following celebrated skaters from different generations finding and making spots over a seven year period, the all-female Nike footwear video *Gizmo* (Hernandez, 2019) or the all-female Vans footwear video *Credits* (White, 2020) – directed by an Australian skater/filmer Shari White while in her early 20s. You might find videos from skate brands based in Japan, such as Evisen skateboards' *Evisen Video* (Uehara, 2017), or a multi-national skate crew skating entirely in Shanghai in *Head Count* (Camarillo, 2019), and you may also find a group of skaters tearing through the revolutionary architecture of Tehran in the *Persian Version* (Wallner, 2013) or the reconstructed urban wastelands of Mazar-I-Sharif in *Meet the Stans* (Wallner, 2012). Among these 'full-length' videos you might find shorter clips posted daily on skateboard platforms featuring a single skateboarder, or a group of skateboarders travelling to a particular city or country, or even to a particular spot, an iconic plaza or accident of urban planning.

In these videos you will see incredible feats of physical skill, creative reinterpretation of – even claiming of – the built environment. You will see trespassing, vandalism, and maybe a little drug and alcohol consumption. You will see skateboarders become more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, age, and gender. In these skate videos you will see fashion change, skateboarding styles evolve, skills progress, plateau, and progress again. You will witness changes in technologies of image capture, along with steadfast adherence to favoured, if antiquated technologies by some filmers. You will see skateboarders harassed and detained by security guards and police, confronted and threatened by residents, and rejoice with on-lookers after a landed trick, sometimes even offering a high-five or sharing a cold beer.

You will see skateboarding move from California to East Coast USA, to the United Kingdom and Europe, to Brazil and Australia, and to Asia, the focus of this book. You will also see skaters from Asia travelling within

the region and beyond to generate footage. Crucially, you will see urban landscapes. Once skateboarding began to leave the skatepark behind and gain authenticity by being performed in the streets in the late 1980s and early 1990s, skateboarding as a practice, as a career, and as a culture to consume has been associated with urban landscapes: cities, towns, suburbs, connective infrastructure; what skateboarders call 'spots'.

Spots are nestled in urban landscapes all over the world, produced by urban development, decline, and regeneration. Spots are not built for skateboarders; they are accidents of urban planning, municipal land management, property development and commercial folly. Desired spots become sites for the performance of skateboarding, captured as image or video, circulation and consumption by skateboarders around the world. Skate video acts like an ethnographic vignette – a glimpse into a particular creative practice performed without permission or encouragement on otherwise forgettable patches of the city. Consuming these vignettes deepens the desire among skateboarders for the landscapes that produce and host them, even leading to pilgrimage and sacred reverence (O'Connor, 2020: 153). At famous spots that appear again and again in videos over long intervals, skate video archives urban change taking place in the background: new buildings, signs, billboards, paint jobs mark shifts in capital and political flows. Skateboarders are attuned to these changes, making them unexpected carriers of subcultural urban history. There are websites and social media accounts that track these changes: a recent photo of a famous spot is posted alongside a celebrated image from a skateboard magazine, advertisement or video. These comparisons show change over time; a spot disappearing into a new housing development, a wall built to block a skater's roll up, an army of food trucks where there was once an empty lot. Comparisons can also show remarkable longevity; a slab of concrete still covered in wax left by skaters three decades later, a curved handrail in front of an unchanging high school façade, a stoic series of embankments in a city park.

This book is about the search for spots in Asia, the performance of skateboarding at and on these spots, the capture and circulation of these performances as video (and image), and its consumption and emulation. As skateboarding has globalized, so too has the search for spots, enrolling more and more urban landscapes in a subcultural knowledge bank of cities, towns and suburbs all over the world. In this book I am primarily concerned with spots in Asia, ranging from maritime Southeast Asia to the post-Soviet Republics on the edge of Europe. So before you read any further, put on a skate video. You can also watch the videos referred to in the book as you come across them. They make a great accompaniment to the words on the

page. Check out the spots as skaters roll by on screen. In some sequences there will be a clear location identifier on screen or in the title of the video. In other cases you might see a familiar splice of landscape, a bridge or plaza or public building. In other sequences you might be able to make a good guess at location based on background signs, architectural styles or licence plates on cars. Sometimes you have to make a wild guess based on the vegetation.

Skateboarding in real time also offers a fascinating experience in ethnographic observation. If you live near a spot where skaters gather, go and watch for a while. You might get lucky and see a skateboarder perform a trick that seems to defy the laws of physics or that animates a tired chunk of concrete. In between these moments you will also see a lot of skateboarders falling down. Someone might even get hurt and have to stop. Other skateboarders might spend the whole time lurking at the edges of the spot. Some might be chatting, laughing, eating, and generally hanging. Someone there will probably be trying to capture what happens with a phone or a video camera. That clip will be posted somewhere before the end of the session and will be consumed by other people at some volume or another, maybe a few friends or maybe millions of followers.

Iain Borden opens his landmark book *Skateboarding, Space and the City* (2001) outlining the 'manifold possibilities' skateboarding opens up for the study of the built environment (he focuses on architecture). It remains one of the best passages of scholarly writing about skateboarding. He writes:

> [S]kateboarding is local, being fundamentally concerned with the microspaces of streets, yet it is also a globally dispersed and proliferous practice, with tens of millions of practitioners worldwide. It addresses the physical architecture of the modern city, yet responds not with another object but with a dynamic presence [...] It produces space, but also time and the self. Skateboarding is constantly repressed and legislated against, but counters not through negative destruction but through creativity and production of desires. It has a history, but is unconscious of that history, preferring the immediacy of the present [...] it has a tool (the skateboard), but absorbs that tool into the body. It involves great effort but produces no commodity ready for exchange. It is highly visual, but refutes the reduction of the activity solely to the spectacle of the image. It began in the suburbs, but has come downtown to the core of urban conflict. It is seen as a child's play activity, but for many practitioners involves nothing less than a complete and alternative way of life. It is, therefore, architecture, not as a thing, but as a production of space, time and social being (2001: 1).

Two decades on, Borden's opening characterization holds up remarkably well. And he has revisited it in more recent work (Borden, 2019). The tens of millions of practitioners has probably grown to four or five times that number, though it is very hard to pin these kinds of figures down. The 'modern city' has remained steadfast in the centre of the ways we understand urbanism and urbanity, though its form, like skateboarding, has travelled and accelerated away from the West, especially in Asia. Harassment and anti-skate legislation – so powerful two decades ago – has not relented, though parallel measures like the construction of skateparks in cities and suburbs all over the world have created designated, legal spaces for skaters; part of what Ocean Howell (2005; 2008) sees as neo-liberal planning practice and John Carr (2010) relates to emerging legal and legislative demands to put skaters somewhere (and by logic take them away from where they are not wanted). By contrast Ty and Vivoni (2020) analyse the ways DIY skateparks challenge top-down processes spatial control and produce adjacent communities. In some cities skateboarding is legal year round, such as Bordeaux and Malmö, and for certain events, such as the Copenhagen Open held in June each year. Though for the most part, growing acceptance of skateboarding has meant a growing expectation that skateboarders stick to allocated space, and don't stray into the urban wilds. As more skaters go to more spots, they encounter a greater array of enforcement, from private security to police to urban vigilantes. Proliferation of surveillance technologies helps to herd skaters to allocated space by policing 'regular' space. There may be more skateparks around the world than two decades ago, and these are important spaces for getting started and honing the craft, but reputations and livelihoods are still made in the streets, and the aesthetic of skate video and photography is bound to spots not skateparks.

Skateboarding was already ethnically and racially diverse when Borden was writing, though there has been limited academic attention to this diversity in fields like ethnic and racial studies. As street skateboarding takes centre stage in skate culture from the late 1980s leaving the skatepark and the beachside further behind, Black, Asian and Latinx skateboarders are prominent in skate culture and skate video in the US[1] and in other

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1   Scholars of race in skate culture have tended to focus on the celebrity turn in the early 2000s and the crossover into youth and lifestyle television in programs on MTV and 'extreme sports' networks made for a broader audience outside skateboarding. Emily Chivers Yochim argues this turn presents skate culture as 'always in the process of developing and respond-ing to critiques of dominant masculinities that never fully challenge the power of straight, white, middle-class America men' (2009: 4). Though such characterizations are well founded in the material analysed at the commercial end of the culture as circulated in the US and the

multicultural settings where skateboarding has flourished such as Australia, Brazil, the UK and France. Gender diversity is a much slower change. Gender diversity in skateboarding does have a long history; however, as Becky Beal and Charlene Wilson note, women have long been marginalized from skate culture and from livelihoods in the industry (Beal and Wilson, 2004; see also Kelly et al. 2005; MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Pomerantz et al., 2004). Outside the contest circuit there have been landmark video parts by female skaters through the 1990s and 2000s, including (among others): Elissa Steamer in Toy Machine's *Welcome to Hell* (Thomas, 1996) Marisa Dal Santo in Zero skateboards' *Strange World* (Thomas & Gilbert, 2009), Leiticia Bufoni in Osiris footwear's *Children of the Revolution* (Magnusson, 2008) and Alexis Sablone in *PJ Ladd's Wonderful, Horrible Life* (Roman & Vagianos, 2002). The past decade has witnessed increased participation of women in skateboarding and increased recognition for female skaters in the core of skate culture at different levels, including professional skateboarding and at the grassroots. In the late 2010s several prominent female pro-skaters have established and maintained a strong public profile, including the ongoing careers of Steamer, Bufoni and Sablone along with Nora Vanconcellos, Lizzie Armato, and Fabiana Delfino among others. As Fok and O'Connor argue, 'women's skateboarding represents the zeitgeist of the sport's current popularity' (2020: 2). It has been noted that in Asia where skateboarding is relatively new, female and male participation in skateboarding is common (see Chapter 6), suggesting that the gender norms are reset, to a degree, when the culture travels (Abdulhawa, 2020; Fok & O'Connor, 2020; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017). This is evident at the grassroots level in Asia and in the visibility of professionals like Mami Tezuka (Japan), Margielyn Arda Didal (Philippines), and Orapan Tongkong (Thailand). LGBTQ+ inclusion has been even slower, though there are signs of growing acceptance in the core of the

Michigan skate community at the centre of Yochim's study, this critique seems an odd fit to the ethnic diversity of skateboarding 'on the ground' in different parts of the world, in the material produced and consumed within skateboarding's smaller and commercially insignificant core (skate video), and in the uptake of skateboarding outside the US. Ethnic and racial diversity in skateboarding tends to reflect the demography of place, and indeed an alternative history of this period and its complex, though rarely addressed, racial dynamics can be found in interviews with skateboarders from ethnic and racial minorities who came of age during the 1990s and early 2000s. See episodes of The Nine Club podcast (Bagley et al. 2017-2019) with Stevie Williams (#44), Sal Barbier (#57), Jovontae Turner (#73), Jerry Hsu (#88), Tommy Guerrero (#97), Brandon Turner (#103), Antwuan Dixon (#107), Gershon Mosley (#111), Don Nuge Nguyen (#117); episodes of Mission Statement Video Interviews (Smith, 2019-2020) with RB Umali (#1), Jahmal Williams (#8), Danny Supa (#16); episodes of The Bunt podcast (Benson & Jones, 2020) with Karl Watson (#10: 8) among many others.

culture as discussed in an episode entitled 'Loveletters to LGBTQ+' in the skateboarding documentary series *Jeff Grosso's Loveletters to Skateboarding* made by the footwear brand Vans (Nichols & Charnoski, 2020).

Borden's point about skate history has shifted a little, as skateboarders have aged and managed to stick around in a growing industry (see Willing et al., 2019). Digital technologies make old videos, magazines, images, and interviews searchable, and the popularity of podcasts mean skateboarders past and present regale audiences with stories of skate folklore, which often involve 'war stories' about certain spots. Skate trivia is active live and on social media,[2] and knowing the history of the culture has become a litmus tests for younger skateboarders seeking acceptance. The point about 'no ready commodity' has been challenged by others (see Dinces, 2011; Lombard, 2010). Given the various waves in popularity and fluctuating corporate appetite for skateboarding there is some value to the critique. Skateboarding has gone through waves of co-option by actors considered 'outside' the culture, creating events and spectacles (Beal & Eberling, 2019; Lorr, 2005; Rinehart, 2008), peripheral commodities like video games (Martin, 2013), and higher value commodities such as shoes and clothing consumed beyond skateboarding communities, including in Asia where genuine footwear and apparel from trendy skate brands can readily be found, along with fakes. However, for most skateboarders around the world, Borden is right; great effort for no exchange. Except perhaps, these days, a video or photograph that can be posted to social media, shared and exchanged with other skaters, classmates, co-workers, to boost image of self, but with little value *as a commodity.*

However, perhaps most important for me, and the reason behind writing this book, is thinking about how Borden's characterization of skateboarding has travelled. Borden talks about the way skateboarding has moved from the suburbs to the downtown core, and he demonstrates this in examples from the US and UK throughout the book. Twenty years later, skateboarding's mobility as a culture and set of attendant practices and desires has moved

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2   There are various venues for skate trivia in person and online, such as *Skate Nerd* produced by Transworld Skateboarding Magazine, which pits skaters against one another in short video segments. *Useless Wooden Knowledge* is run by industry insiders and former pro-skaters and functions more like pub-trivia from its Los Angeles base, occasionally touring to different venues. It has also expanded to online trivia through social media during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. Useless Wooden Knowledge is a play on the title of a landmark skate video from 1990, New Deal Skateboards' *Useless Wooden Toys* (Douglas, 1990). Perhaps most significantly for avid followers of *Useless Wooden Knowledge*, such as me, their tagline is 'Congratulations, you've wasted your life'.

to downtown cores far from its lands of origin. These are skateboarding's *mobilities* as a practice, an experience, a culture, and as a lens for exploring urban dynamics in Asia and between Asia and the West. These mobilities are 'nested'; mobilities within mobilities that intersect, at certain points, with other mobilities at different volumes and scales.

At a basic level skateboarding is about mobility, usually free mobility through the landscape, movement unbound by rules or laws; provided there is an adequate surface (it is hard to do on sand or mud, for instance) and until a human or object disrupts this movement. Skateboarding as a culture and practice is also mobile, in that it has travelled to different parts of the world, including to Asia, where its adherents take to it *because* of the free mobility it offers; the sense of freedom. Skateboarders of a certain skill level are themselves mobile, and they are sent to other parts of the world to skate, as demonstrations (demos) for local skate communities and to skate in different urban landscapes, different spots, in the hopes of compiling footage for their sponsors, whether skate brands, footwear or clothing brands. In other cases filmers gather groups of skaters together to travel and make skate videos based on journeys, and these will be discussed at length in this book. Indeed, the capacity of sponsors to provide mobility, to send skaters on trips, is an important part of the exchange of sponsorship. So too is the willingness of skaters to go on these trips. Even skateboarders without this level of support still travel, self-funded, to skate different spots around the world. Sometimes they will even shoot videos. Paul O'Connor, discussing the constant transit of skaters through Hong Kong *en route* to China writes: 'many of these are solitary travellers, living a frugal existence propelled by a desire to skate some of the skateboard utopia they have seen reproduced in skateboard media' (2020: 163). Skate trips are captured on video and in photography. Videos and photographs are themselves mobile, circulated rapidly through digital technology and as physical objects – VHS tapes or DVDs – to skaters around the world. These skaters then mimic these mobile performances in their own neighbourhoods, and might themselves embark on a journey to find some of these spots.

There are additional mobilities too; wood from sources around the world, including Southeast Asia, goes to wood shops in China to be made into skateboard decks according to designs imagined and approved in Los Angeles, Portland, Barcelona, Sydney, and these are shipped to the US, Australia and Europe. Sometimes these return to China, or even Indonesia, with the skaters on trips to capture footage. Not all skate production is in China; some brands produce in the West, others in Mexico. Though that is just the wood. The urethane for wheels has complex production origins, while

the same goes for certain brands of steel trucks (the axel), skate footwear, clothing, camera gear; some part of a skater's tools and outfit likely depends upon the mobility of goods across global production chains (see Sedo, 2010). While the profession itself enables and often requires mobilities, there is an additional element at play here. The industry corrals skate talent in the US, drawing skaters trying to 'make it' from South America, Australia, Asia and Europe – though many Europeans can now have thriving careers by staying put, or moving within Europe – and from here these skaters practice their mobile craft and travel searching for spots and producing footage. The best will have their image and name on products assembled from parts around the globe and their footage consumed by aspiring skaters from Busan to Brisbane. Skateboarding's nested mobilities depend on spots. This whole mini-universe depends on the continual production and discovery of patches of urban landscape where tricks can be performed, captured and circulated. Without spots, skateboarding stops. These mobilities grind to a halt.

These nested mobilities go in multiple directions at multiple speeds. My interest in this book is the constant flow of skateboarders, filmmakers and photographers venturing into Asia throughout the year to visit established spots, discover new spots, connect with and foster local skate communities. These performances are captured and circulated as videos, short clips, as images, and arranged into parts – montages of skateboarding amassed over several years.

Skate video is an immense and largely under-utilized archive of (predominantly but not exclusively) urban 'cultural topology', what Roger Shields calls: 'a way of identifying a new "dimensionality" and level of precision regarding spatial and temporal relations, flows and transformations' (2013: 159), accounting for the 'proper and improper, the legitimate and the out-of-place' (2013: 157). For Shields, a cultural topology builds on the work of Arjun Appadurai in the 1990s, identifying 'scapes' to identify and analyse relations and processes at multiple scales and 'understand mobilities in a continuous flux rather than transmission of fixed entities across static space' (2013: 159). Skateboarding gives us starting point for a cartography of dispersed geographies of urban change; sites where spots are created, sought, and enrolled into a form of non-expert knowledge of surface, objects and obstacles gathered in Los Angeles, Barcelona, and Bangkok. Enrolling spots, and the urban landscapes that host them, gives a topological cartography to a fluid global community. If, like Shields, we seek inspiration from Appadurai's paradigmatic explorations of various 'scapes' as ways of accounting for the fluid landscapes shaped by globalization in national and local spaces (1996: 33) – and we take globalization here as the globalization of skate

culture, and more specifically the ways skateboarders see and desire the urban landscape – then the term 'shredscape' is worth considering. 'Shred' in skateboarder terminology refers to the act of skateboarding at a spot. To 'shred the handrail outside the food co-op' means to go and skate it, usually with determination, risk and skill. It is also used to describe a skateboarder and/or a moment: 'Sonam shredded the loading dock last weekend'. Shred also suggests the change to the material surface of a spot; the worn edges of a marble ledge have been 'shredded' by skaters. Shredscape can work as a substitute for landscape when viewed by skateboarders. In other words, through the 'skater gaze' the landscape becomes the shredscape. As this gaze travels throughout Asia, landscapes are reanimated as skate spots, and potential skate spots and connected in a network of spaces, a topological cartography. The shredscape draws this way of seeing the landscape together with modern, yet delinquent, pastimes like skateboarding and the identities, consumerism, and knowledge that goes along with it. The shredscape is useful as an overarching idea that connects skate culture to material assemblages on the ground, and then back into skate culture. I will revisit the idea of the shredscape at different points in the following chapters to refer to the overarching cultural topology of relations and processes in motion.

Urban Asia has become central to the desire, performance, production, circulation, and consumption of skateboarding. Skateboarding, that once quintessentially Californian pastime, has enrolled urban landscapes throughout Asia in its cartography of spots; in the shredscape. And there is no better example of the early period of this shift than the classic video *Menikmati.*

Escaping the California Gridlock

Menikmati (Mortagne, 2000), a full-length skateboarding video (61 minutes) from the shoe brand éS features some of the biggest names in skateboarding from the early 2000s. In an era before instantaneous digital access to unlimited content, major skate videos like *Menikmati* had a long viewing life; watched, re-watched, shared, pirated, screened in skate shops and home VCRs for years. In the last decade *Menikmati* has been uploaded to video sharing platforms in its entirety and as individual parts viewed hundreds of thousands of times giving it a second life, a digital life. *Menikmati* features an hour of the most innovative skateboarding of the era by professionals from Finland, Brazil, England, Canada and the US. It also uses short narrations as voice-overs by these skateboarders to introduce their 'parts'

or sections. And two of these stand out – the first part featuring Finnish pro-skater Arto Saari and the last part featuring Thai/American pro-skater Eric Koston – exemplifying the themes discussed in this book.

The opening titles feature a black screen with red dots arranged seemingly haphazardly. The names of the featured skateboarders appear alongside these dots followed by the title '*Menikmati*', at which point a map fades in and the dots are revealed as points on a map of the world. This seems banal but for a culture that had been so rooted in the US up to this time, the idea of an elite global crew of skateboarders and a global map of desirable spots was a revelation. These dots become features at the start of each part; they serve as a way to introduce each skateboarder with a reference to their nationality or heritage. Directed by Fred Montagne, a French filmmaker known for his innovative filming style and unique camera angles, *Menikmati* is not the first video to identify skateboarding as a globalizing culture or to celebrate the diverse origins of famous skateboarders; however, it is significant for this book for two reasons. First, *Menikmati* presents global spots as on par with spots in the US. Spots in Asia are spliced in with spots from the US and Europe, enrolling them in a global cartography of urban landscapes worth skating. Secondly, the video provides commentary on spots in ways that express disappointment with the urban landscapes of the US, especially California's famous spots, and surprise at the abundance of spots elsewhere; a theme that accelerates through the 2000s to the present.

At the beginning of Finnish skateboarder Arto Saari's part – the opening part in the video – the screen zooms into the map and stops at Finland. Saari's voiceover begins and he discusses what it was like growing up in Finland over shots of Helsinki, snow, skiing, and ice swimming. Over a background of violin music, Saari speaks in Finnish during this montage with subtitles on the screen. At one point he discusses the challenge of skateboarding in an historic city in lines translated in English as: 'Skateboarding in Finland is not always easy because the architecture is very old, the seasons are very long'. He ends his Finnish narration with a line translated as: 'I didn't see myself going anywhere with skateboarding by staying in Finland, that's why I decided to move to Huntington Beach, California'. The scene shifts to California, surf music plays, waves lap the Huntington Beach Pier. Saari begins speaking in English about the warm and sunny weather. There is sunshine in every shot. Saari, a talented skateboarder, leaves his grey and cold homeland for the sunshine and freedom of California. It's the American Dream.

But *Menikmati* is not that predictable. The montage cuts to images of anti-skateboarding signage on walls, Saari driving a car stuck in heavy traffic

(wearing a t-shirt that reads 'CRAP'), security guards accosting skateboarders, and the ubiquitous skate-stopper or skate-knobs, metal objects added to make the surface of a concrete ledge or steel handrail uneven and dangerous. Saari continues in English over the top of this montage:

> People all around the world come to California thinking they can skate all the famous spots they see in all the videos. But they don't know you have to stay in traffic an hour and a half every day to go to a spot. And most of the time you get kicked-out, you get hassled by cops, you get tickets, or the place is already knobbed. More and more spots get ruined everyday by skate-stoppers or some stuff they put in front of the stairs […] everything is getting skate-proofed but that's not going to stop skateboarding because there's always new spots to be found. Or you can just hack the knobs off, or whatever. You can make spots skate-able again; it just takes a little effort. I came to California to live the life that I dreamed of, even though it's not the same as I thought it was [going to be], it's still great.

Menikmati foreshadows the shift in the culture. Saari's voice-over shatters any illusions of California as a skateboarding paradise. This theme runs through contemporary skateboarding; spots are disappearing from US cities and new spots are not emerging with the same speed as elsewhere in the world. The spots that are still skate-able are monitored by overzealous security guards, police, and a hostile public. When *Menikmati* was being shot two decades ago, Asia was not yet central to the global cartography of spots, but it was beginning to show up. And in the same video Eric Koston describes the appeal of Bangkok.

Koston is a singular figure in skateboarding, then and now. He has been highly influential in the culture from the 1990s to the present for his skateboarding and his personality: affable, goofy and yet incredibly gifted, and later his role in the industry. At the time of *Menikmati*'s release he was perhaps the most recognizable street skater in the world. It is safe to say his part in the video has been viewed hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of times making his opening narration about Bangkok worthy of detailed attention.

Koston's part begins with the dots and the map zeroing in on Thailand. Over classical Thai music the montage of images commences: temples, street food vendors, images of King Bomibol, urban waterways, and Buddha statues. Koston's voiceover begins by mentioning that he was born in Bangkok but didn't grow up there having moved to 'California' (not the US or America) when he was very young. He admits, 'I always had this image of Bangkok

being this sort of traditional Thai city, which is the case when you walk through the historic district where all the old temples are that are strictly dedicated to Buddha'. Then the scenery changes and cuts to long distances shots of tall buildings including the Baiyoke Tower (II), the skytrain, and close-ups of traffic and traffic police in their distinctive brown uniforms. Koston's voice over continues over these images:

> But if you go to the east-side of the city there is a huge contrast. You've got big skyscrapers, skytrains, insane traffic – which causes so much pollution that people wear surgical masks so they don't have to breathe in that garbage.

Koston is pictured standing with his skateboard on a grass patch by a busy roadway covering his nose and mouth with a t-shirt before swatting away fumes with his hand. The montage shifts to images of skate spots: cement, stairways, handrails, and ledges. Koston continues:

> With every modern city you can usually find skate-spots and the ones we found were really good. But of course there were security guards there. All we did was told them we were there to do work and gave them a little bit of money – which barely equalled two US dollars – and they let us skate. Even for beer and cigarettes.

At this point the montage cuts to a group of Thai security guards, in uniform, sitting on a staircase drinking beer from bottles and smoking cigarettes as Koston rides past and performs a backside 50-50 (grinding the right angle of two surfaces with the trucks or axel of the skateboard) down the 'hubba' (the ledge angled downward at a consistent angle to a staircase). He adds: 'It's, it's crazy cause that would never happen in the US'.

There are shots of him doing some tricks on a roadside with heavy traffic in the background. He says:

> Even with all the good spots we found I didn't see that many skaters. And it makes me think that if I would have grown up in Thailand chances are I would probably have never skated. So I could have ended up doing other things like training to be a champion Thai kick-boxer or maybe even a Buddhist monk, who knows? [pause] But, nah I don't think so.

The final few moments feature Koston attempting *Muay Thai* with a local trainer and then pretending to meditate in a Buddhist *Kashaya* (robes).

With his closely shaved head and the dim lighting Koston looks the part, until he raises his head and smiles at the camera, shaking it gently in sync with the 'I don't think so' in the voiceover. From here Koston's part begins including footage from spots in Bangkok.

Koston marvels at Bangkok's modernity. As he notes, wherever there is a modern city there are spots. The assemblages of concrete, marble, steel and wide, open space are new, untouched, and barely policed. Revisiting his part two decades later, one can't help asking, what exactly is being globalized here? What is travelling? Koston is travelling, along with Mortagne and other skaters and filmers. The performance of skateboarding is travelling; the skill, the flair, the creativity, the repurposing of the urban landscape. However, it is also the gaze that travels; the aesthetics, the particular 'codes of appearance', as Ghertner puts it, that promote a common vision of space shared by skaters (and filmers) delinked from 'calculative instruments of map, census and survey' (2015: 4). Furthermore, the gaze largely eschews the showpiece infrastructure of the city, which is usually crowded and policed. Koston is not in Bangkok to perform in front of legions of fans. He is not there to skate in front of famous temples or palaces, malls or Skytrain stations. He is there to scour the urban backstage for spots, perform tricks displaying skill and creativity, and crucially, have these captured as video or image and circulated and consumed worldwide; his livelihood depends on this. In spreading Koston's skateboarding, videos like *Menikmati* spread the skater gaze. Bangkok too has a shredscape.

Though it is not just the shredscapes that are a surprise; the lax attitude of security guards is a revelation, something that would 'never happen' in the US. In one brief flash of footage in his part, Koston is seated with the aforementioned security guards on the staircase and they all raise a toast to the camera (though Koston raises a water bottle). Koston has found spots, he has supplied the security guards with beer, and yet he has one more marvel to share; the city is almost empty of skaters. And while this may have been scripted for dramatic effect so Koston could pontificate over how his life may have turned out had he been raised in Bangkok (and so that we as viewers can breathe a sigh of relief. Phew! Lucky for us Koston is a skater and not a kickboxer!), Bangkok is certainly not empty of skaters. Though in the early 2000s they may have been hard to find given the absence of the digital tools we now take for granted.

Thailand has a thriving local skate community concentrated in Bangkok. Thailand's preeminent skate brand Preduce has released six full-length skate videos since 2005's *Smooth* (James & Pannikul, 2005).

Image 1.1   Jasper Dohrs in Chengdu, China in Preduce skateboard's *Supermix*

Montrelerdrasme, 2018; screenshot; used with permission

Like the Bangkok sequences in *Menikmati*, these videos capture a different perspective on the city to what might be found in tourist advertisements or travel documentaries (exotic, transgressive and timeless), and to promotional material from the Bangkok Municipal Authority (orderly, hygienic and modern). Watching Preduce's catalogue of videos is to witness Bangkok's landscapes stripped of exotic allure; it's all ledges, stairs and handrails; cement, asphalt, tiles and steel – the contrast between the Bangkok of the imagination and 'Bangkok as it is' (Batreau & Bonnet, 2019: 30). New infrastructure creates new space in Bangkok, often at great cost to residents (see Boonjubun, 2017; Moore, 2015), but desired by skateboarders. For instance, the construction of the Rama VIII suspension bridge across the Chao Phraya River completed in 2002 has created a near perfect spot underneath the bridge on the western bank of the river. This spot features in almost all skate videos from Bangkok and hosts visiting skaters and filmers, skate demos (demonstrations) and local contests. Preduce released a short video shot entirely under the Rama VIII bridge in 2016, *Rama 8 Team Session* (Montrelerdrasme & Rattanamanoch, 2016). This way of seeing the urban landscape carries to other parts of Thailand featured in Preduce videos, and in their travels to other parts of Asia such as to Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore for *Selamat* (Montrelerdrasme, 2016) and China, mostly Chengdu, for *Supermix* (Montrelerdrasme, 2018, Image 1.1). As Koston once travelled to Bangkok chasing modern urban

Image 1.2   The Preduce 'Skate Park' Map of Bangkok

Preduce, 2019; used with permission

infrastructure in search of spots, Thai skaters search for spots in other parts of Asia.

Preduce publish and distribute a map of Bangkok's skate spots in English and Thai available online and as a physical map from their shop in Bangkok. The map includes official skate parks, DIY skate parks and popular street spots with cross references to landmarks and public transport. This is Bangkok's shredscape.

A noted contrast to both the surprising modernity of *Menikmati* and the everyday modernity of the Preduce videos, Fallen footwear's 2013 video *Road Less Travelled* (Gilbert, 2013) features Bangkok as a city of struggle and adversity for the skateboarders – a physical and cultural gulf that tests the visitors. While there are standard place-based images of the mostly American and Australian skateboarders visiting temples, riding elephants, drinking coconuts, eating street food and playing around on motorbikes, the stories of the city told through a mixture of skateboard footage and on-camera anecdotes focus on rough surfaces, heat, heavy rainfall, long-distances, and – in contrast to Koston's Bangkok a decade and half earlier – moments of hostility.

In one sequence the Australian pro-skater Dane Burman recounts an incident at a spot where he was attempting a trick on a steel railing on top

of a low concrete wall. The building appears to be abandoned or undergoing extensive renovations. On his first few attempts to 50-50 the rail his skateboard flies out into traffic or drops down over the wall into a driveway. He is accosted suddenly by a man (a watchman) brandishing what appears to be a *daab* – a long single-edged sword.

Burman recalls:

> I remember looking up and there was this little old dude with a samurai sword coming up to me and pulling it out of its sheath. How did this get to a dude pulling a sword on me in like, 30 seconds? I didn't even see the dude coming!

As footage of the incident is replayed Burman talks about another member of the crew, Thai-based skater Levi Adams, who came to his aid and stood between the sword-wielding watchman and Burman. Soon a plain-clothed man arrives and yells at Burman and Adams (inaudible), and gestures for them to leave, pointing away from the building. When Adams waves a hand in his face the second man assumes a boxing stance while the skateboarders taunt him. While the footage of the encounter rolls, Burman talks about the friendships made on the journey, the camaraderie forged at sword-point. In *Road Less Travelled*, Bangkok residents are reduced to sword-wielding threats, hapless security guards, local fixers, and gawking on-lookers. There's little room for affection, little room for people outside the skate crew. The city is a backdrop for stories of bonding and perseverance, one stop on a long road of encounters between skateboarders and those who stand in their way. In this way, the different brands project their own image, and those of their featured skaters, onto Bangkok's landscape: éS as elite, global and pioneering; Preduce as local, creative, and comprised of world-class Thai skateboarders; and Fallen as outcasts at war with society wherever they go.

For Koston in the early 2000s Bangkok seemed relatively untouched: a city to explore, to seek out spots, to seek out skaters, and most importantly to capture content on video – the currency of the industry, the substance of skateboarding livelihoods. The idea of exploration, of seeking out spots in the urban landscape that can be skated and tracking down local skate communities, takes skateboarders and content creators (filmmakers, photographers) to new frontiers. While in retrospect the idea of Bangkok being untouched by skateboarding in the early 2000s seems dubious, the act of travelling to new frontiers has become a standard aspect of a globalizing skate culture and industry. Delhi, Tehran, and Astana are the Bangkok of the 2010s and 2020s.

In both Saari and Koston's parts in *Menikmati,* California is still what matters in the end. It may no longer be a paradise, but for Saari it's 'still great' and for Koston it is growing up in California that gave him his skate career. And while it is easy to be critical of the ways Bangkok and Thailand are portrayed in this brief section of *Menikmati*, Koston's narration emphasizes the modern landscape, the rapidly developing city, and the culture of tolerance and acceptance he felt, even when breaking the law. It's dissonant to the standard exoticization of Thailand that circulates outside specialist knowledge or domestic discourse. For Koston, Bangkok is about handrails, stairs and ledges. And there is a final point too. Thousands of skateboarders saw Bangkok either for the first time or entirely differently through this short segment and watched it over and over again – me included.

When I first saw *Menikmati*, I had never been to Bangkok. A year or so after its release I was in Bangkok *en route* from Myanmar and I spent my time searching for Koston's spots. I sought the modern city, the marble, concrete and steel. I hoped to see the brown-uniformed security guards sitting on staircases having a beer watching skateboarders. In later years I researched the relationships between the enforcement of intellectual property rights and control of street space in Bangkok (Robinson & McDuie-Ra 2018); work that took my colleague and I all over the city from its capitalist core to peripheral urban hubs around transport interchanges. Even during that project I couldn't help myself. I stole away to see if Koston's spots were still there, despite the city having grown dramatically, perhaps unrecognizably, and despite the challenges of reading its surfaces and juxtapositions (see King, 2010). To be clear about this, fifteen years after *Menikmati* came out I was still wandering around different parts of Bangkok sniffing out clues, cross referencing with online maps, showing screen shots from the video to bemused urban researchers. It is not simply that Koston opened a classic video part in Bangkok, it is that the images and moments of footage of the city, of the urban landscape, of the spots that he skated, travelled to skaters all over the world, and I/we watched again and again and again.

Even for Saari, his knowledge of California's urban landscapes, its spots, came from skate video he saw in Finland. Only upon arriving in California did he realise that these landscapes were compromised, the spots were at risk. As skateboarders spend more and more time generating footage in Asia and as these images circulate further and faster through digital platforms and social media, a form of knowledge about urban landscapes is created, shared, and consumed by hundreds of thousands – possibly millions – of people, to skate and non-skate audiences. Also created is non-expert

knowledge generated about the places that produce these urban landscapes, the people that experience them, and the cultures entangled in them.

(Re)Mapping Asia Through Spots

Amin and Thrift task us with thinking of the 'overlapping socio-technical systems' that undergird cities. Socio-technical systems are not just the material backdrop to a city, the infrastructure upon which life is performed, but the ways these systems 'insatiate and sustain life' by: 'allocating resource and reward, enabling collective action, shaping social dispositions and affects, marking time, space and map, maintaining order and discipline, sustaining transactions, moulding the environmental footprint' (2017: 3). This is an invitation to think beyond the urban landscape as simply an arena or stage, but, as they argue, a machine. Skaters generate a unique form of system knowledge and circulate this, re-mapping urban space (within cities) and regional space (putting entire cities 'on the map' because of their spots). Further, there is something magical in their 'dispositions and affects', and this magic draws people across the world to the activity as participants, consumers, and spectators, what Paul O'Connor has called the 'spectacular urban festivity' of skateboarding (2020: 194). Skateboarding taunts these sociotechnical systems by searching for glitches – the spots that pop up without intention – and the machine responds to these taunts through electronic surveillance, policing, skate-stoppers, and spot demolition and desecration. The game is to beat the machine; to get to the glitches before the machine responds. Spots demonstrate the 'plasticity' of publicness, an 'expressive machine and construct of social engagement with material and immaterial components of the world' (Buser, 2018: 781).

Asia's urban landscapes are central to the global practice and industry of skateboarding, and Asia has become a crucial market for skate brands. This centrality, I claim, offers an alternative lens to explore urbanization in Asia, within Asia, and between the Global North and Global South. In *New Urban Worlds* (2017) Simone and Pieterse advance a research agenda for urbanization in Asia and Africa that pays little heed to established approaches imported from the Global North. One of their key arguments is that urban knowledge and practice needs to be considered as 'a permanent site of experimentation' (2017: 154). They identify initiatives by artists, writers and non-academics to capture urban worlds and urge scholars to 'remain committed to an epistemological adventurism that can take in numerous forms of representation, critique, proposition and, especially, provocation'

(2017: 174). Skaters, filmers, and consumers of skate video capture urban worlds in unique but widely understood forms, engaging in 'epistemological adventurism' that experiments in ways of engaging and knowing urban landscapes free of established approaches.

To embark on this journey, and for readers to come along, depends upon accepting that a particular group, an urban subculture can – in the words of Gordon Douglas in his study of DIY urbanism – 'open bright windows of insight into larger questions of social behaviour, systems, and processes' (2018: 5). Skateboarders and filmers access different urban worlds to other actors and actants. There are interactions, but overall skateboarding offers a different form of place attachment, banding people from across the world together in space, but also through networks of capture, consumption and replication (Shields, 2013: 153). All of this depends on spots. This book analyses skate spots – and the urban landscapes that produce, host, and threaten them – as they are captured and consumed in film/video, image, online and 'on the ground' in Asia and makes four inter-linked arguments.

First, *spots produce an alternative cartography of urban Asia*. This cartography has multiple representations at varied scales. These representations can be conceived with conventional terminology of scale: (i) local – such as Preduce's map of Bangkok's spots above; (ii) regional – such as ways of mapping Asia and routes through it according to the kinds of spots desired; (iii) global – the parts of the world where the best and most varied spots are and where the performance of skateboarding, especially for livelihoods, can be done with ease and minimal surveillance. They can also be conceived with more critical and relational logics of scale that flatten, though not completely, different cities into networks of spots with similar attributes according to the shared gaze of skateboarders and filmers. In this cartography, scale can be re-built as tiers based on (perceived) volume of spots or skaters, suggesting rapid fluctuations as new spots get discovered, known spots draw more skaters, and others drop out suddenly following new laws or crackdowns, or fade gradually as the urban landscape hosting the spots ages or is remodelled, altering or destroying the assemblage that drew skaters in the first place. Thus the skaters cartography does not simply 'jump' scale (Smith, 1992; 1996) over set scalar divides, the 'oft-critiqued but still-convenient tiers of macro, meso, and micro' (Carr & Lempert, 2016: 8), but re-sets relational and comparative hierarchies of urbanization in Asia and between Asia and the West. To confess, the skater's approach to scale is rarely consistent or sophisticated. The 'local' seems firmly pegged as a distinct space of activity and people, including urban dwellers, authorities and local skaters communities. The nation-state is paramount at times.

China, for instance, is more commonly used in the skate cartography than Shenzhen or Shanghai, as will be seen in Chapter 3. Sometimes it's the city that contains the spots, and at others it is a vague regional term such as 'the 'Stans' or the 'Silk Road' (Central Asia). The cartography is, however, reliant on the existence of spots for these other units to show up, to be 'on the map'. Thus a city like Nanjing shows up on the map because of 20-30 spots, assemblages in the urban landscapes that can be extracted and compared to one another but also to spots in Shanghai and to say, Bangkok or Seoul, or even Los Angeles. In other words, Nanjing's spots can be enrolled in the shredscape regardless of any other attributes of place. It is the presence of spots that puts the city on the map.

Desimi and Waldheim argue that the trajectory of representation in mapping has 'moved from the material and physical description of the ground towards the depiction of unseen and often immaterial fields, forces and flows' (2009: 9). Such an approach 'merges spatial precision and cultural imagination' and sits between the 'purely geographic and the freely abstract' (2009: 9). Skateboarding's cartography of Asia sits somewhere in this gap. Locating spots within a city is crucial but rarely precise. It is topological by 'mapping out how such objects change and how they relate, in this process, to other changing objects in multiple, relational spaces […]' while also providing 'the mental hand-holds for working with situations where relationships are changed, distanciated, collapsed or distorted, reshaping the "diagram" one might draw of the situation' (Shields, 2013: 140-141). Crucial to this kind of mapping is detailing the particular three-dimensional assemblage beyond a two-dimensional depiction of a street or plaza by gathering information about the surface, the arrangement of obstacles, the foot traffic, the best time of the day and year to skate the spot, and the prospects of being harassed or evicted. Cartographic and topologic knowledge of spots and the urban landscapes that host them is circulated, rapidly, to *millions* of people through personal and digital exchanges, while also being amended, improved, and sometimes withheld to protect spots from becoming over-used.

Skate spots re-map Asia through the skater gaze. I label this way of looking at the landscape as a 'gaze' because it 'orders, shapes and classifies, rather than reflects' through 'a particular filter of ideas, skills and expectations' (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 1). The skater gaze is not aimed at the usual trappings of place: people, wilderness, cultural artefacts, landmark buildings, sanctioned performances or spectacles. The skater gaze is directed downwards, focused on the urban backstage, scouring the landscape for good skate spots. It evokes desire, creativity and intimacy. And while intimacy may be a strange way to describe a cultural activity built on phrases like 'skate and destroy',

'shredding' and 'grinding', skaters spend hours, sometimes days at spots attempting tricks. They imagine the motions, they calculate the timing, they fall, they leave behind skin, teeth, and blood.

It is difficult to sketch this imaginary cartography of spots in Asia. I have tried. I began like this: imagine in front of us a two-dimensional map of Asia, printed out on a large sheet of A1-sized white paper, or something even bigger, with towns and cities marked and named. We introduce volume of skateboarding activity and video/image capture to this cartography with a marker pen. Cities like Bangkok, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Osaka, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Seoul, Taipei, Tokyo would show up as enormous blobs of ink the size of a ping-pong ball. Cities like Busan (South Korea), Chengdu, Beijing, Nanjing, Ordos (China), Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Batu Pahat (Malaysia), Jakarta, Serembang, Yogyakarta, Makassar (Indonesia), Singapore would be smaller blobs, half to a quarter of the size of the first ones. These cities have local skate scenes and host visiting skaters, which ensures progression, plenty of footage, and constant searching for spots. Then there are cities with small local scenes and only occasional visitors, but the visitors who have come have captured landmark footage, and sometimes helped spur the local scene, as in Yangon, Mandalay (Myanmar), Ulan Bator (Mongolia), Bangalore (India), Kabul and Mazir-i-Sharif (Afghanistan), Tehran (Iran), Kathmandu (Nepal) and Ramallah (Palestine). These would be smaller marks again. And then there would be small ink dots in cities where skaters have been sighted, like rare species here and there, or where there is a small skate shop or networks of skaters using social media, such as Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan or Gangtok in India (see Chapters 5 and 6). And finally there would be barely legible specs of ink for places where there is footage in the archive of skate video, but no local skaters to speak of such as Sana'a in Yemen. In these last places, spots have been enrolled, but not revisited.

I can imagine this map in my head. And I am sure many others can too. Digital mapping tools would make it even easier. Take the basic two-dimensional map and then imagine adding volume; three-dimensional images of the spots themselves, or images detailing the obstacles: marble ledges, kinked handrails, painted concrete hubbas, and their size, length, and the quality of the roll up and roll away. Spots can be linked by their similarities: the curved hubba outside the Thai National Bank building is similar but a little longer than the curved hubba outside the unnamed government building in Putrajaya. Information on how busy the spot gets, how wet, how hot, how polluted. Add in directions, local names and transport routes. Information on security and surveillance is also needed. The data needs to be continually updated as new spots appear from a new housing

development, a municipal project to widen pavements, a new mall. Long-term tenants may have left. A spot might just have become abandoned. Spots also disappear, they are demolished, concreted over, rendered un-skateable by defensive architecture. Some spots get worn down, weathered. They might not be as desirable as before, though for some skaters this might make them more desirable. New surveillance regimes come into force. Governments change policies about what is and isn't permissible and where. Details on encounters with hostile people, crime or robbery, the affective properties of a spot; feelings of danger, trepidation, calm. Add this in too. Link spots to local skate shops, the contacts of local skate crews, accommodation, places to eat, costs.

The difficulty with categorizing these tiers is data. There are so many videos ranging from big budget productions with millions of views to small edits or Instagram posts by skaters. Add images, decades of magazine photos, social media posts, and private collections to track, identify, and analyse. All of these feature spots, but tracking them down, taming this popular archive, is almost impossible. The map exists. Just not in one place, not in one form. It is scattered in different corners of the internet, on social media accounts, in the memories of skaters, in the knowledge of filmers, and fixers, and translators. There are smaller maps that provide almost all of this for a single city, such as Shanghai featured in Chapter 3. On a pan-Asia scale the map is still in fragments. Maybe a 'total archive' is not necessary, or even desirable. Yet the knowledge that underpins it, that opens the spaces of possibility for its materialization, is in the public domain, if you know where to look and are willing to stitch together some of the fragments.

Second, *the search for new spots is constant*. As a mobile assemblage, the particular configurations that make up spots are fluid and change as the urban landscape transforms and as the public, property owners and authorities claim or re-claim control over spots. Spots disappear from one landscape and are produced and/or discovered in another. Asia is the most productive region for spots as urban landscapes proliferate so rapidly. Along with the 'ludic' aspects of skateboarding, the playfulness (see Woodyer, 2012), livelihoods for skateboarders and filmmakers – as well as the brands that profit from their labour – depend upon footage captured at spots. Footage captured and compiled is circulated to promote individual skateboarders and the brands they represent. More and more skateboarders, both professional and aspiring to be professional, require more and more spots. Skateboarders travel further and further to enrol new spots in global and regional cartographies. Some spots become well known and are almost constantly utilized such as famed spots in Shenzhen (China),

while in other cases the search continues into new frontiers – lands both 'in relation to' and 'at a distance from' heartlands (Cons & Eilenberg, 2019: 13) – into lands previously untouched by skateboarding such as in Delhi (India) or Tehran (Iran) or Ramallah (Palestine) discussed in Chapter 6. The search and enrolment of spots generates a trail, or set of trails, across Asia, connecting those hypothetical blobs discussed above. This is back-roads globalization, what Christine Knowles terms an 'alternative set of routes' that depart from the 'main roads' of hegemonic globalization (2014: 191). She adds that journeys along these backroads, these trails, 'expose the missing urban geographies of globalization' (2014: 193). These trails across Asia enmesh spots; the urban landscapes they are nestled within; the cities that provide the airports, train/bus stations and hotels to host skaters; the bodies in motion on skateboards as well as watching them, policing them and getting out of their way; the objects that make skateboarding possible like wooden decks, urethane wheels, steel trucks and bearings, clothes and shoes (some of which are manufactured in Asia before returning via the US or Europe). The trail also leads to local skate communities. These communities act as hosts for visiting skaters; they provide fixers, translators and interlocutors, and share knowledge of spots. They are also, gradually, becoming a market for skate goods. Some of these communities feature in skateboarding media produced in Asia, some produce media of their own, and some remain completely out of the frame. These communities animate a shared perspective on urban landscapes, the so-called skater gaze.

Third, the search for spots, their production and their enrolment in regional and global cartographies *index urban development*. The urban landscapes that make Asian cities attractive for skateboarders are produced through conventional drivers of economic development and the associated pull factors drawing capital, migrants, and necessitating planning, infrastructure, and showpiece architecture. At the top of the index is China, discussed in Chapter 3, a land of apparently infinite urban growth, a factory for spots constantly being created as urban landscapes are remodelled, appear from nowhere, are recalibrated by new infrastructure, and are abandoned or bypassed leaving them empty to be claimed by skaters. Spectacle cities – the lavish displays of state power through showpiece urban landscapes – offer dreamlike spots, but can come with their own limitations, especially without connections to authorities that govern them, as discussed in Chapter 4. Past eras of highly planned urban development also appeal, as in the grids and expansive public spaces of post-Soviet Asia, discussed in Chapter 5. In between are new frontiers, spots nestled in urban landscapes in emerging cities, emerging economies, polities emerging from

isolation and/or armed conflict, or simply places uncharted by skaters, as explored in Chapter 6.

Fourth, *spots create encounters* between skaters and authority, skaters and the public and skaters with each other. Helen Liggett describes urban encounters as 'encounters [...] based in urban experience without pretending to tell the truth or even to construct a narrative about the city' (2003: ix). She adds, '[r]ather than assessing the city as a site of economic production or as an object of governance' encounters present 'cities as places of life', of 'irony and beauty' (2003: xi). The city produces constant encounters, and these are 'moments that sidestep the dominance of the abstract spaces of late capitalism' (2003: xiii). Skateboarding produces unintended and unorganized encounters in urban space bringing the city to life. In Asia these relationships are noted for their relative tolerance, curiosity and nonchalance, especially when compared to the US (which they always are). Encounters are also moments of inter-cultural exchange, and these produce a vernacular cosmopolitanism enveloping skaters who travel to Asia from elsewhere, skaters who travel within Asia and local skaters too; the latter drawing elements of their own identity and even livelihoods from a (hegemonic) global skate culture. This vernacular cosmopolitanism may be replete with cultural stereotypes, inappropriate behaviour (most skaters are engaging in trespassing and property damage through their primary activity to begin with), and misunderstanding, yet at the same time it can be open, curious, and even reflective. And because skateboarding is captured and circulated over and over through digital media this cosmopolitanism is viewed, consumed, absorbed and even re-enacted by thousands of skateboarders the world over. For many skateboarders the bulk of their knowledge of Asia is transmitted through these digital circulations.

Structure of the Book

The book has five substantive chapters and a concluding chapter. The chapters are organized thematically. The following chapter, *Shredding the Urban Fabric* discusses ways of conceptualizing skate spots. I advocate for Francisco Vivoni's 'below the knees' method (2009) to understand the ways skaters, filmers and consumers of skate footage see the landscape – the skater gaze. I use the skater gaze to discuss the relationships between spots and infrastructure using observations from 2018 Go Skate Day in Singapore. I argue that skaters are adjacent publics for infrastructure, they are invested in its provision and maintenance, but are never its intended

beneficiaries. A flyover doesn't get built with skaters in mind, yet they find a spot underneath. I introduce rolling ethnography, an extension of walking ethnography, as both a way of engaging the landscape for the researcher and as way of understanding the ways skaters engage the landscape *in situ* and in skate video. The chapter closes by explaining the value of skate video within skate culture; as the main cultural artefact and as an underutilized archive of urban dynamics spanning four decades. From here the next four chapters spread from the thick blobs of ink on the imaginary map discussed above outwards to the small dots of ink in skateboarding's new frontiers.

Chapter 3, *Chasing the Concrete Dragon*, focuses on the centrality of China's cities in skate culture. China's rapid urban growth has produced 'endless spots', and its urban landscapes are desired by skaters and filmers from all over the world. Many of its spots are iconic, and skaters travel from near and far to attempt particular tricks at these spots. Like many other ways of understanding contemporary China, China's cities are sites of miraculous productivity for skaters. Part of this desire is also the perceived tolerance of street skateboarding by authorities and the public. Thus China's cities are places for concentrated skateboarding activity, amassing or 'stacking' footage to be edited into skate videos and consumed worldwide. China has emerged as an important market for skate goods, footwear and apparel, bringing skate teams to different cities in a constant cycle and creating opportunities for Chinese nationals to have skate careers.

While China's endless spots are a routine part of skate culture, less routine are the opportunities to skate the 'perfect spots' assembled in Asia's spectacle cities, discussed in Chapter 4, *Spectacle Cities: The Luxury of Emptiness*. Spectacular urbanization refers to the convergence of hyper-modern landscapes in different parts of the region in attempts to project authoritarian power (Koch, 2018). Cities such as Astana, Baku, and Dubai produce beautiful spots to skate nestled around, between, and underneath the futuristic architecture. The chapter begins with analysis of skate video from Astana and Baku, before an in-depth analysis of skate video shot in Dubai focusing on the epic *We Are Blood* (Evans, 2015). Skaters and filmers work with the narratives of spectacle, revelling in the fantastic landscapes on the urban frontstage (Mohammad & Sidaway, 2012). Working with the narratives of spectacle is also tactical, giving skaters and filmers privileged access to these cities. There is something askew about this; spots are supposed to be hard fought, not gifted. Privileged access to a city grates with the ethos of skate culture, and some skaters end up seeking out the more mundane backstage of the spectacle city in response.

China's urban growth of the late 20th and early 21st centuries produces endless spots, but the remnants of the Soviet Union's extraordinary urbanization in the early to mid-20th century is a reliable source of spots in post-Soviet Asia. In Chapter 5, *For the Love of Soviet Planning*, I discuss the search for spots in post-Soviet Asia, landscapes of surprising, if dated, modernity. Even in sites where post-Soviet symbols and objects have assumed the frontstage, the undergirding infrastructure of Soviet modernity ensures spots. Skate videos from post-Soviet Asia emphasize a shift from performance to place, from simply capturing skateboarding to narrating a journey to lands untouched by skateboarding. The chapter focuses on the large scale public squares and monuments of Tashkent and Bishkek and their replicants in smaller towns and cities. In some cases, as in an ill-fated trip by a group of skaters to Abkhazia, the post-Soviet landscapes are not machinic but repositories of fresh and traumatic memory, and the haunted landscape of recent conflict forces skaters to reconsider the limits of the shredscape.

The journey narrative continues in skate videos shot in new frontiers, the focus of Chapter 6, *Skateboarding's New Frontiers*. The chapter analyses skate video shot in Iran, India and Palestine, and categorizes these as frontiers within the skate cartography of the region. In the cultural vocabulary of skateboarding, lands with no known spots, few skaters, and slim prospects of capturing footage are frontiers. This does not mean these cities and polities are frontiers in other aspects of their social-cultural, political, or economic existence. Far from it. They are simply frontiers for skateboarding. Frontiers promise discovery, challenge, and, ultimately, a prize. The prize is new spots and the capacity to find more. To find spots in these landscapes makes it possible to find them anywhere. Once spots can be found in any landscape, anywhere, there is no limit to the trail, to the spaces of possibility discoverable on the backroads.

The final Chapter, *Conclusion: Another 'Next China'*, explores the 'next China' label. The label is thrown around regularly and there are many 'next Chinas' in the regional skate cartography. I use a brief discussion of Taiwan in skate video and in real-time to revisit some of the main arguments of the book, namely: the ways urban landscapes are enrolled into the cartography of spots, the different ways in which place is configured in skate video, and the value of skate video as an archive. I close by revisiting the arguments of the book and consider what these might suggest for the study of skateboarding, mobilities, consumption and cities in the future.

This is not a comprehensive or even definitive account of skate spots in Asia, but it's a starting point. Plenty of room exists for additions and improvements. There are places that are underdone, especially Japan and

Korea, which have iconic spots, are captured in footage, have diverse skate communities and are major consumers of skate video, goods, and associated commodities. Japan and Korea have long-established skate communities analysed in existing literature on skate culture (Cho & Son, 2016; Dinces, 2011; Dixon, 2011; 2015; Hölsgens, 2018; 2019; Park, 2011), which is some consolation for their minor presence in the following chapters for limitations of space. There are places I visited for ethnographic research for this book that for whatever reason, didn't fit the structure of the final version, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Seoul, Tokyo and Osaka. However, these sites informed the ideas of the book and the skaters in these cities were welcoming in taking me to their spots. As fragments on the map, pieces of the archive, hopefully they can be part of future projects.