DIY / Underground Skateparks

Richard Gilligan

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"The last clear definite function of man–muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need–this is man. To build a wall, to build a house, a dam, and in the wall and house and dam to put something of Manself, and to Manself take back something of the wall, the house, the dam; to take hard muscles from the lifting, to take the clear lines and form from conceiving."

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

For Petria & Robyn

11 Texts

23 Plates

157 Acknowledgements

A World Apart

by Iain Borden

Iain Borden is Professor of Architecture & Urban Culture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, and author of *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (2001).

The thing about skateboarding, when you come to write about it as I have often done, is that it is just not amenable to words. Skateboarding is such a dynamic practice – full of speeds and trajectories, twists and turns, shapes and slashes, muscles and limbs – that it is almost impossible to conjure up with the means of the static codes of texts, alphabets and grammar. This is particularly so with the immaterial qualities of skateboarding – and especially with its extraordinary sonic extensions that resonate outwards in a staccato rhythm of swishes, smashes and screeches, grinds, rasps and rumbles, silences, shouts and suspensions – all of which elude the capacity of words to reproduce this truly bodily and fleshy explosion of energy.

Nor do photographs or even videos often fare much better. Certainly photographs can record some of the miraculous body moves and juxtapositions of limbs against stone, while motor-drive sequences, double-exposures, stroboscopic lighting and other advanced techniques can help render the movement of skateboarding more visually apparent. Video and film footage can similarly record what is happening, and describe the vectors being followed and the intricacies of the skater's manoeuvres. But can they show us what it is like to actually skate? Can they help us enter directly into the fantastical space of body, skateboard and terrain that the skateboarder produces when they travel over the ground? Not really, no. They can excite us, stimulate us and even allude to these experiences of skateboarding, but in the end they leave us outside of the experience of movement itself.

Another way, then, to enter into the world of skateboarding is to leave this mobile space to one side, and to move instead into another world apart – the world of skateboarders' attitudes, actions and productions beyond the act of skateboarding itself. Here, in contrast to dynamism and spatial vectors, we find a world of materials, people, objects, contexts and times – a world apart which Richard Gilligan enters into through this collection of photographs of do-it-yourself skatepark construction, and which so transports us into a kind of parallel world.

Occasionally, of course, we do see here a kind of energy, in the occasional photograph of a skatepark facility actually undergoing construction. And I particularly fascinate in the photograph of a pool undergoing fabrication in Oxford, partly because this is the city where I myself learned to skate in the seventies, and I cannot help but wonder about its exact location. But what we really see here is the oft-overlooked process of actually building somewhere to skate, and here is revealed not the shimmering white and picture-perfect

UNVERKÄUFLICHE LESEPROBE

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Prestel

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Aus der kalifornischen Surfer-Szene der 1960er-Jahre stammend, hat sich das Skaten, der virtuose Umgang mit dem Holzbrett auf vier Rollen, weltweit verbreitet und die Mixtur aus Sport, Mode, Musik und Lifestyle ist inzwischen wieder absolut im Kommen. Der irische Fotograf Richard Gilligan hat vier Jahre lang Hotspots der Skater-Szene in Europa und den USA bereist und legt eine beeindruckende Fotodokumentation vor. Sein Interesse galt ausschließlich den von den Skatern selbst gebauten Anlagen. An den Rändern der großen Städte wie London, Liverpool, New York, Berlin oder Hamburg haben sich die Skater in vernachlässigten öffentlichen Räumen, unter Brücken, im Niemandsland zwischen Autobahnkreuzen und Gewerbegebieten, zum Teil fantastische Landschaften für ihre Bewegung geschaffen. Die meisten dieser Anlagen sind illegal und temporär, viele existieren bei Erscheinen des Bandes nicht mehr oder entstehen an anderer Stelle neu.

Der Titel im Katalog