



Tena Koe, no Ngati Skateboarder Ahau: Understanding this unique urban culture in any CBD

David Patterson

David is an urban planning student at Auckland University with interests in urban design, sustainability, social inclusion, and Maori planning issues. He has Maori heritage and has skateboarded for many years. This has given him insights into the subjects of this article with much time to ponder and consider his personal situation and that of other Maori skateboarders.

Keywords: *Maori; skateboarding; urban design*

Introduction: Skateboarding and Exclusion

Skateboarding is the sixth most popular sport amongst adolescent boys aged 12-17, with about 20% participating in it (based on a study of 1704 participants by Richards, Reeder and Darling (2004)). From personal experience, the author knows that the act of skateboarding gives meaning and three dimensional membership of a city to the skateboarder. It creates a sense of being here and a sense of being part of the environment the person finds themselves in. Skateboarders, however, have gradually been excluded from the city and relegated to suburban parks. As a consequence, the urban skateboarder is feeling excluded from their city. For Maori skateboarders this is a double dose of exclusion, as many Maori feel they have largely lost their membership of place through the process of colonisation. Planners and urban designers would benefit from a better understanding of this unique urban cultural grouping to facilitate the reconnection of youth with the city.

Cultural Similarities

Maori culture and Skateboarding culture, share essential characteristics. The cultures are non-mainstream, both championing bravery and achievement. Skateboards connect the entire urban environment through the rolling of wheels, grinding of trucks and sliding of noses, tails and centres of boards over every attainable surface. If the skateboard or the truck has a colour to it, the skater paints the city. The beauty of skateboard graphics are indelibly linked to times and places and tricks that went down where and when. This means the day, the trick and the board used place the skateboarder in context with their urban environment. The author remembers using his own skateboard, a Drake Jones Pro Model, at his local skatepark, Birkenhead Skateboard Park (BSP) on the North Shore in Auckland. Completing skilled noseslides and having immense fun back in the day. The people who were there then, were BSP locals Damian and John and they added to the whanau context and good feeling surrounding the meaning of the memory. The placement of the memory with the skateboard graphic, the art on the underside of the board, and with members of the local skateboarding community is a beautiful, enlivening, youthful, and health promoting summer-time memory.

Whakawhanaungatanga

The whakawhanaungatanga or family affinity extends throughout the skateboard brotherhood. The “totara” achievement, the majesty of a person likened to a long straight trunk carvable into a waka, only tempered by an extended root system or humility at earth level of the personality. To be called a totara is a massive and rare compliment. In skateboarding culture if a skater is a “dick” it does not matter how good he is. Whereas if a skater is “cool” then that person carries mana within the skateboarding community. To be humble, willing to offer tips to younger skaters, willing to offer advice if asked and to be a solid person is highly prized in the skateboard world. To offer help if needed, to be an urban skateboard warrior is similar to a spiritual path; something the Maori warrior has as his aspiration.

The Skateboarder as Martial Artist

The skateboarder as martial artist links mastery of skateboard to the mastery of taiaha. Despite a diminutive frame, the sixteen year old skateboarder at Ngataringa skateboard park in Devonport can show you how underestimating the heart within him is not wise. The boy in question destroyed a big quarter-pipe wall with trick after trick of difficult and dangerous manoeuvres. To have this type of opportunity in the centre of a city, is, to quote hip hop pioneer KRS ONE from the song 'Hip Hop Lives', to allow the reality that “an ancient civilisation has been born again” (Parker, L.K., 2007). The mastery of the skateboard is akin to the mastery of oneself. To choose to move past drugs and/or alcohol, to be disciplined and fulfil ones potential is an ideal to strive for. This is exemplified in skateboarding influenced Muslim African American rapper Lupe Fiasco and his first album Food & Liquor. Named after the corner stores in his native Chicago, the food part represents the good things, the growth, the development, as you need it to live, and the liquor, which is unnecessary to live, represents all bad things, and as a Muslim, Fiasco doesn't drink it (Fiasco, L., 2006). To achieve a standing within a real living culture full of people who strive beyond fear and past personal boundaries is something to be applauded. Like one of the most prominent and respected skateboarders (not to mention successful entrepreneurs) Chey Ataria, a Buddhist, you are what you can perceive yourself to be. To be open to changes and to make good choices is paramount.

Achieving Mau te Rongo (A State of Peace)

In Maori culture to achieve balance is ultimate and necessary. To have mau te rongo or a state of peace supplanted within your eyes. In skateboarding the act is balancing on a skateboard and thereby integrating that skateboard with the concrete and glass city you find yourself in. It is adaptation, change proficiency and personal fulfillment through skill development. The skateboarder is in essence seeking to perfect the art of skateboarding. The Maori is in essence seeking to live from a buddha heart, a Maori heart, a down to earth understanding of the interplay of universal energies and dynamic relationships creating our world.

Te ao marama the world of light, the positive path, the path of self discovery and growth tempered by daily tasks and the necessities of life. Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water, after enlightenment, chop wood and carry water. The principles of sustainability and

kaitiakitanga require we look after papatuanuku and all her children and; the principles of the Resource Management Act 1991 seeks to achieve this. The presence of skaters in town centres, and places such as Aotea Square, in Auckland, is forward looking and provides for the spiritual challenges that create strong internal controlled and calibrated young people. To say hello to skateboarding, is to say hello to day to day growth.

Tena koe, no Ngati Skateboarder

To say tena koe, no ngati skateboarder in central city spaces is to allow a dynamic culture to be present and breathe, and live in a space that never thought, realised or accepted that this culture existed. As his fourth year research project (from which this is drawn) supervisor Dory Reeves, indicated to the author "The issue here seems to be that everyone lives in their own city; experiences places in their own way." To say the city that capitalism built, is just a place, on the earth who is our mother, to see the sky who is our father, to be happy, and have fun where many people walk with graven faces as we open our hearts through the board and allow ourselves to be human beings not just human doings. We are all free to live our lives the way we see fit. To have positivity and positive influences in a way that centres on self-control and not the ways of the consumerist robot, to skate is to be free, and practical. Many Maori fit trades like a glove and speak practical sense, a skater always has tools, though they may study at university. It is obvious to me that mutual respect fosters community and skateboarders and Maori culture both have these things in spades.

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