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Skateboarding as Discordant: A Rhythmanalysis of Disaster Leisure

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ABSTRACT

Research on skateboarding has sought to define it, place it in a spatial-temporal schema, and analyse its social and cultural dimensions. We expand upon skateboarding's relationship with time using the Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre's temporal science of Rhythmanalysis. With the disruption of urban social production of capital by the Covid-19 pandemic, we find skateboarding renewed in urban disjunction from Capitalism and argue that this separation is central to its performance and culture. We propose that skateboarding is arrhythmic: discordant, out of step, and disruptive of the more predictable rhythms of everyday production of capital. Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of 'arrhythmia', we attempt re-conceive a beat and tempo of skateboarding: offbeat, juxtaposed, tilted, and contradictory. We emphasise that this discordance is not a malady but part of a broader beat ontology in skateboarding. This very discordance also raises questions about the continued incorporation of skateboarding into competitive sports, wellbeing, and prosocial paradigms and reminds theorists that skateboarding continues to be unkempt, subversive and tacitly political.

KEYWORDS

Discordant; rhythmanalysis; Covid-19; skateboarding; beat ontology

Introduction

Responding to the disruption of sport and leisure in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Edgar 2021; Thorpe et al. 2022), we present an alternative reading of sport through the contested activity of skateboarding. Our thesis interrupts the pro-social and positive rhetoric surrounding the sport and reorients the discussion on the contribution of skateboarding to disruption. We present skateboarding as discordant, working with disaster, the overlooked, and the detritus of capitalism to reformulate possibility. In this analysis, alike Thorpe (2014) and Borden (2001, 2019), we turn to the French Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre who devised the phenomenological science of Rhythmanalysis. Lefebvre's central target was the machine-like orderly production of capital in Western societies, observable in the everyday monotonous commute from home to work to home *ad infinitum*. Disaster, whether natural or man-made, provokes a disruption to the mechanical rhythm of capital production, providing an opportunity for its study. We

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argue for an activity, prompted by a simple 'skate' toy, that flourishes in moments of disruption to these everyday rhythms. In our rhythmanalysis of skateboarding we present it as arrhythmic, a form of disaster leisure that resists the more uniform ordering and containment of other sport and recreation.

Borden's (2001) robust exploration of skateboarding operationalises Lefebvre's vast opus, drawing on the revolution of everyday life, the production of space and rhythmanalysis. However, Thorpe (2014) is the first to lay claim to skateboarding's arrhythmic nature based on her investigation of a disastrous earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, which revealed an emergent community of 'quake' skateboarders who thrived in the new terrain and times. So, too, we argue for a similar thriving amongst skateboarders during the 2020 pandemic pause, allowing for a renewed rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre 2004; Lefebvre and Régulier 1999) of skateboarding. We demonstrate that skateboarding is fundamentally discordant, existing within a disruptive beat to ordinary rhythms. This can be observed when in conflict with repetitive processes necessary for a society structured around mass production. Our argument is based on Lefebvre's claim that arrhythmic activities, which are fundamentally disruptive to the rhythm required for efficient modes of production, thrive when these ordinary rhythms are disrupted—thrive in disaster. This argument offers evidence to those who commonly dismiss skateboarding as apolitical, mainstream, or conservative (Kusz 2007, 105–136; O'Connor 2015, 35; Yochim 2010, 55), and is a continuation of Borden's (2001) argument that skateboarders offer a socio-political critique of public space in its very practice and participation.

If skateboarders uniquely benefit from disaster sites and times while other leisure activities languish, that suggests skateboarding has a distinctive 'beat' ontology, one that we find most closely resembles Lefebvre's 'arrhythmic' status in his science of 'Rhythmanalysis'. We then discuss what this arrhythmic category means for skateboarding as a leisure activity, and how it might fulfil a unique social niche in urban social climes.

Disaster is commonly imagined in impersonal terms. Pertaining to moments of catastrophe that are both unpredictable, and indiscriminate. Modern efforts to avert or contain risk (Beck 2013) are also hampered by the complexity and richly entangled dependencies of settlement and economic life (Clarke 2006, Schneier 2018). The capacity of skateboarders and other risk takers to court danger and invoke disaster has been explored through the calculated risk taking concept of edgework (Lyng 1990, 2005). However, the more nuanced issue of an ontological orientation to the rhythm of disaster and its discord has not, as yet been addressed in skateboarding. Our argument weaves together, while recategorizing previous work on, the temporal aspects of skateboarding that have been discussed: the everyday or 'gradual' disaster of skateboarding space displacement in the city and uncommon or 'punctuated' moments of skateboard displacement in built spaces known as 'DIY parks', specific natural disasters such as earthquakes and rainstorms, and finally the Covid 19 global disaster. These integrate around a common theme of arrhythmic urban play, helping to locate skateboarding's unique spatial *and temporal* niche in the built environment. We thus begin with a brief discussion of Lefebvre's science of time as rhythm and then turn to several cases that show skateboarding's arrhythmic nature due to its responses to disaster and disturbance.

Rhythmanalysis

Henri Lefebvre is renowned for his Marxist critique of everyday life (Lefebvre 1984, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) and his seminal writings on the social production of space (Lefebvre 1991). Rhythmanalysis 2004 was his final work published posthumously in 1991. Despite the late addition to his oeuvre, rhythmanalysis builds on a lifetime of thinking through and exploring the temporal intersections of space and social life. The text has been recognised as the final instalment of his occasional series, *The Critique of Everyday Life* in which a concept of rhythmanalysis is explicitly foregrounded through the second and third volumes.

Rhythmanalysis is introduced to the reader as a new science and field of knowledge' (Lefebvre 2004, 3). Rather than a clearly defined concept, it is a conceptual tool and method for analysis. Lyon (2019, 5) presents it as a 'strategy of inquiry'. This strategy is unencumbered by a linear understanding of time and invites the analyst to engage in the identification of patterns, ruptures, cycles and repetitions. 'Lefebvre portrays the rhythmanalyst as a person who is comfortable with the social world being a product of biological rhythms who recognises that patterns of measurement and order are reproductions, echoes, of this very nature' (O'Connor 2017, 3). Rhythmanalysis also invites conceptual promiscuity, thinking in unison and mixing disciplines and methods. Despite these expansive notions Lefebvre is astute in providing a series of conceptual orientations to rhythmanalysis that aids us in grasping the utility of the strategy.

Rhythm is defined conceptually as a triad in which space, time, and an expenditure of energy all meet. Whenever these elements combine, a rhythm is produced. For Lefebvre the first step to understanding is that rhythm always begins with the body. In this way, his temporal science rests on organic foundations, it is fleshy, grounded, tactile. It occupies space and moves through time. The body is also a repository of rhythms, from heartbeat to sleep patterns and thus we recreate the social world with a panoply of rhythms in the tempo of our walking, talking, play and work. As creatures of rhythm, phenomenologically we experience the world through rhythms. At the heart of Lefebvre's body of work is the importance of the body subsumed in capitalism. His critique of everyday life is concerned with rupturing the hypnosis of the capitalist world and remaking life afresh. The body as organic, the society made up of these bodies, and the economy dependent on the very same bodies all collide as nodes of analysis. This triad is recognisable in all acts of skateboarding, the body rides aloft the space of the board, moving through urban space, at varying tempos and times attuned to various releases and propulsions of energy.

The variety of rhythms that exist in the world is a key element of Lefebvre's thesis. He identified four forms that can guide the analyst, these being multiple *polyrhythmia*, uniform *isorythmia*, ideal *eurhythmia*, and discordant *arrhythmia*. Building on the work of Borden and Lefebvre, we pay particular attention to the rhythm of cataclysm, collapse, and ruin; the arrhythmic. The most common use of the term arrhythmia relates to irregularities in a beating heart. A disastrous type of arrhythmia would be a heart attack, once again demonstrating both the importance of the body in Lefebvre's paradigm and the organic nature of rhythmanalysis. The organic model is also similarly apropos with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the disruption originating from infected and compromised bodies *en masse*.

We might observe these distinctions in operation when we consider the normal isorythmia of a sport season: uniform in play and standards producing winners. Given Wojtowicz and Wolf-Root's (2021) analysis, a pandemic-interrupted sport season may provide eurythmic 'predicted' outcomes for a winnerless hypothetical season where no winners and only 'champions' are produced. But what of the discordant 'arrhythmic' beat and its production? During Covid lockdowns seasonal contests were upended by the pandemic: 'no one can win a game that is not completed' (Wojtowicz and Wolf-Root 2021, 3).

For Lefebvre, arrhythmia can be pathological, it represents the breaking of healthy ordered rhythm, disruption and malady (Lefebvre 2004, 68). But arrhythmia can also be escaped, and act as a critique of everyday life in the modern world which has become an onerous obtund repetition. We adopt this perspective and argue that skateboarding, unlike other lifestyle sports, provides an alternative tempo of leisure to subvert the temporal order of capitalist rhythms of late modernity. Indeed, capitalism is no stranger to utilising disaster and catastrophe to further its reach and control as Klein (2007) suggests in her thesis of the *Shock Doctrine*. Politicians have been adept in manipulating tragedy to further ambitions, social control, and to limit liberties. Such tactics actively work against leisure, and we frame the discordant nature of skateboarding as a means to tacitly resist such stifling limits on human potential.

Borden's (2001) pays particular attention to this arrhythmia several times throughout his seminal text on skateboarding and argues that skateboarders provide a 'lived utterance, a symbolic *parole* to the univalent *langue* of the city as technical object' (Borden 2001, 192). He sees that skateboarders create their own rhythms which challenge and contradict the purpose of the city. 'Alternatively, skaters construct a different temporal rhythm by staying longer in an urban plaza as others hurry through ...' (Borden 2001, 198). He goes on to make some nascent ontological connections noting how the relevance of rhythmanalysis is apparent in the remaking of the city by skateboarders in terms of alternative rhythms of time, social interaction, and sound. In his revised text Borden (2019, 203–211) provides five ways in which skateboarders can be understood through rhythm. **Firstly** by acting on urban space for new patterns of use; **secondly** by introducing new speeds into the urban landscape; **thirdly** by recognising that skateboarders have a different sensory repertoire than other city users, acutely aware of the texture of surfaces, movement of traffic and pedestrians; **fourthly** by acting on the temporal rhythm of the city for new rhythms; **fifthly** by acquiring a new kinaesthetic register of the city akin to a form of urban-transcendence i.e. skateboarders know the city in a way others simply cannot. This broad appraisal of rhythmanalysis in skateboarding is potent and builds on but does not directly address the way Lefebvre also recognised various manifestations of rhythm. We extend Borden's discussion in a way that further demonstrates how skateboarders act on urban rhythms in their natural urban environment.

A Beat Ontology

To elaborate on Borden's notion that skateboarders act on and create new urban rhythms, we must address why it is that skateboarders are able to activate creatively in the midst of a city. The answer we provide is ontological, that skateboarding facilitates an orientation to reality that is rhythmic. As Borden's second and fourth points note, skateboarding

introduces new speeds and acts on urban temporal rhythms to transform and create new ones. Thus, skateboarders participate in a form of temporal embodiment sensitised to temporal disruption, adaptation, and discord. We argue for a beat ontology underpinning these findings, showing that skateboarding is itself socially and symbolically discordant, satisfying each of Borden's five examples of rhythm. This beat ontology is particularly evocative in street skateboarding that works amidst an array of rhythms, abrupt transformations, and interruptions. But we also see that it resonates in the construction, use, and destruction of various forms of skateparks. We highlight that arrhythmia is a norm for the skateboarder, descriptive of their encounter with skateboarding spots and their efforts to utilise various forms of space. It is also this arrhythmia that despite skateboarding's incorporation into lucrative business models, institutionalised sport regimes, and skatepark spatial containment, preserves its unkempt iconoclast status.

Firstly, the beat is apparent in the way skateboarders move through the city in a temporal way. Aware of the limited opportunities to skate the various architectural spaces designed specifically for use by pedestrians and workers, all play is temporary and poised for interruption. These limits are due not only to shared uses of these spaces, but the consistent concern of untimely appearances of security guards (Jenson et al. 2012). This is because skateboarding terrain is contested space, shared with pedestrians, vehicles, and other capitalist detritus involved in the daily commute of what Lefebvre called, 'everyday life'.

This temporal dimension is expressed in recent research by Jenson et al. (2012) whose young skateboarders in Northern England appraise their favourite skatespots through a map drawing methodology. Four common elements were used to analyse these maps of skateable spaces: accessibility, trickability (potential for tricks), sociability, and compatibility (does it interfere with other users). The findings showed that one location 'Five Bridges' was a prime space for skateboarding as it hit all four criteria. A key part of the preference being that it afforded least disruption. This might initially seem to challenge our thesis of discordance. But in arguing that skateboarding is discordant, we assert that it is discordant with other rhythms and interacts when disruption and disaster occurs. Arguably permanent discordance would become a rhythm in itself. As Borden argues, rhythms are replete in skateboarding and it need not be arrhythmic all the time and in all guises. What we are seeking to demonstrate is the way skateboarding attunes itself to fissures and breaks. More provocatively efforts of skateboarders to create idylls of play in skateparks and DIY spots like Five Bridges are themselves precarious. Skateparks are by no means void of interruption and disturbance open to a whole host of users with competing interests (Hater 2022). At the same time the trickability and sociality issue of skateparks is frequently contested, no two skateparks are the same in a deliberate effort to sate the appetite of skateboarders for novelty and new experiences. Similarly, these 'skater-built' or 'DIY' spaces include a constant, possible destructive threat from the city that these places could be bulldozed and/or repurposed for residential or commercial space at will. Let us now turn to the example of DIY park that resonates with discordance at multiple levels.

The notion of scale and key is developed in Hollett and Vivoni (2020) whose discussion of DIY skateparks features distinguish its 'minor' contribution in parallel to major and minor chords in the western music scale. Following Manning (2016), they see the building of DIY skateparks as an 'imperceptible' contribution that 'acts as a cipher that

unmoors [the major contribution 'of skateboarding's] structural integrity (p. 2)'. There is something discordant in a minor key or chord, a flattening that provides a creative diversion. Perhaps a more helpful example is that of disharmony. It is consonant notes and chords that build harmony, and demonstrate resolution. Kamien (2018, 306) writes that traditionally a 'dissonant chord was unstable; its tension demanded onward motion, or resolution to a stable, consonant chord'. Kamien adds that in modern western music discordance is used more commonly to add complexity and tease out feelings of anticipation, disorder, and unease. Thus, discordance is about the interruption of predicted outcomes, denied or delayed futures; disaster. The skateboarder is frequently disrupted in their attempt to enact new uses, a disruption that is part and parcel to their work and beat ontology.

This disruption of skateboarder activity is exemplified in Hollett & Vivoni's discussion, of a DIY skatepark in Worcester, MA named 'Worcide' that was destroyed by governing officials soon after local skateboarders marked its completion. We suggest that skateboarders, in being discordant, are able to work amidst ruptured arrhythmic-time, to recast doubt and ambiguity into hopeful and creative play. Utilising the notion of harmony once more, the skateboarder can be read as transformative, working with the dread of discordance to build hopeful acts of resolution. Additional examples provide further plausibility of our claim to skateboarding's ability to work best amongst ambiguous arrhythmic times. The policing of city centres and office plazas by security guards and disturbed residents calling the police regularly interfere with the ability of skateboarders to pursue their goal, and yet becomes the preferred space and time for filming conveying an authenticity to the fight for space. Ultimately their only recourse is to alter their rhythm, pick up and move on to somewhere else. Snyder (2017) notes that this is not simply an issue of leisure but also a constant blight on the ability of professional skateboarders to perform their job, but one that equalizes, in starts and fits, all street skaters. However, as our analysis suggests, disruption is so crucial to the character of skateboarding, that without it, it would lose its unique arrhythmic property that makes it resilient in destructive moments of time and space. This points once more to the notion of an innate beat ontology.

Prior work by Vivoni (2013) helps illustrate skateboarding's tenuous nature within the urban clime, one that makes skateparks both a necessity and a danger to its unique arrhythmic contribution.

Everyday struggles for public space frame both variations of skateboarding terrains. Skateboard spaces encompass a wide variety of spatial experiments that range from collective creativity through playful spatial tactics to social control through top-down urban design. The ebb and flow between purpose-built and found spaces ... mimics skateboarders' mobility as they negotiate between sanctioned and unsanctioned spots of spatial desire (Vivoni 2013, 131).

These contradictions are manifest in purpose-built skateparks, which fulfil the spatial desires of skateboarders but conflict with their temporal asynchrony and disharmonious nature. With the increased presence of skateparks, skateboarders' spatial and temporal desires are more conflicted, desiring a space of their own while resisting its sometimes-dominating control: fenced in spaces, required safety gear, and business hours profoundly frustrate the satisfaction of their spatial desires. Vivoni's exploration of this double-mindedness is captured in the following quote:

Purpose-built spaces such as public skateparks both marginalize skateboarders from city centers and serve as training grounds for appropriating urban spaces. While in the streets, skateboarders are both criminalized for defacement of property and commodified as urban guerrilla performance artistry. These contradictions disable straightforward claims founded on mutually exclusive processes of contestation and cooptation. While weaving in and out of found and purpose-built terrains, skateboarders elude fixed categorizations. Instead, their spatial desires unfold somewhere in between domination and resistance (Vivoni 2013, 145).

This is an unsustainable complexity, a mixed beat that prevents urban harmony. In a word, the city-built skatepark is a wolf in sheep's wool, well disguised for control and cooptation of this leisure activity. All that makes skateboarding unique urges escape, not unlike David Wagoner's poem expressing his imagining of Thoreau upon seeing a cow escape its enclosed pen:

He watched her break a fence and leave her pasture. He watched her cross a bridge and a muddy meadow ahead of a farmer yelling and switching at her. He heard himself urging her to go on escaping, to vanish and stay escaped somewhere and not come back to her farm and the cow path and the cow shed and the rusty, empty milk pail, to lead a larger life (David Wagoner (2013) *Thoreau and the Loose Cow*).

Wagoner's sympathetic expressions of Thoreau's own spatial desires of the loose cow present a loss as a gain: the cow's protection, food source, and care forsaken for its liberty where it must face the wilds of predation, food insecurity, and disease, a life 'nasty, brutish, and short'. So too is that of the unsanctioned spaces that fulfill the spatial desires of skateboarding, free but fraught with failure.

It's this intrinsic susceptibility, even invitation, for change that makes for skateboarding's unique status in the urban clime, maintaining its arrhythmic founding in spite of its forays into city-built parks. This expectation for change is crucial for an evolving culture, one whose own established ethos can and should, like sand, shift with the social tides. Hence, we find stark cultural shifts occurring, making its nature more like a flux than a foundation. Indeed, amongst all sports, skateboarding has been remarkable in its racial, ethnic, class, age, physical and mental disability inclusion. Even disparities and exclusions premised on gender and sexuality have been debated and redressed with openness and self-reflection quite unlike any other sport. This once more resonates with the beat ontology but is one of a host of tangents that we do not have the space to fully explore.

Skateboarding's arrhythmic relationship with the city best explains its success in otherwise disastrous conditions. We frame skateboarding as a type of disaster leisure by considering alternating examples of discord. As Lefebvre's conceptual triad invokes the rhythmanalyst to begin with the body, we retain this focus combined with time and place throughout. In arguing for the discordant nature of skateboarding we harness the idea of disaster. In the skateboarding vernacular disaster refers to a special manoeuvre in which the board is intentionally propelled into the air and brought down upon an object. The board balances precariously, ultimately in rest, but potentially obstructed by the object. The skateboarder tips the board to release the jarring pause carefully moving their axles and wheels over the object to resume their movement and rhythm. This demonstrates both an orientation to disaster, and an invitation to harness and play with it.

Natural Disaster

Natural disasters unfolding through organic processes demonstrate a distinct example of punctuated discord. Largely unpredictable, hurricanes, tremors, viruses and floods take us by surprise and rupture our routines in unforeseen ways. We may not know when they are coming, but we recognise historically that these moments punctuate the more predictable rhythms of daily life as moments of distinct transformation and upheaval. Here, we explore how skateboarding works with the punctuated moments of natural disaster harnessing it in a unique style that recast varying forms of calamity in creative ways. Indeed, the ascent of skateboarding as both a rebellious and vertical form of leisure was propelled by the drought of 1976–77 in which California imposed a hosepipe ban and legion of backyard pools were emptied and seized upon by skateboarders (Borden 2019, 116). The vectors of time, place, and the discordant energy of the drought coalesced as a rhythm in the body of skateboarders, seizing the disruption as an opportunity for play. This moment of arrhythmia in everyday life is greeted with creative verve by the skateboarding mind, from crisis comes opportunity. In the following section we explore this dynamic through the lens of an earthquake in New Zealand, and the Covid-19 pandemic, both showcasing skateboarding as discordant and a means to translate disaster into leisure.

Earthquake Skate Study

The 2011 earthquake was a direct hit upon New Zealand's second largest city, incurring massive damage, killing 185 and injuring over 2000. Fifteen billion dollars of infrastructure were destroyed, from crucial sewer and water systems to sporting facilities, disrupting people of all ways of life for years to come. From the perspective of its inhabitants, the harmony of daily life and work were upended in a single instant, a double shock that is both physical and psychological.

For skateboarders, the psychological shock was responded to not solely by frustration, like other urban dwellers, but also possibility. Firstly, new spots were created by ruptured roads, and access became possible to locations previously unskateable as the parts of the city were closed and emergency services were directed towards more urgent concerns than skateboarders (Thorpe 2014, 224, 226–229). The creative reimagining of this new quakescape, captured on video and uploaded to YouTube (stundubs 2011) caught the attention of local and international media who publicized the media on their website (Herald Online 2011) and in turn presented an opportunity for non-skateboarders to see beauty and potential in their ravaged city.

Thorpe provided additional evidence for linking skateboarding to disaster, a link which suggests its arrhythmic nature: qualitative interviews of skateboarding participants. For instance, we find one interviewee stating, '... the period straight after the quake, it was quite good, all these new spots appeared and the cops had other things to be worrying about than getting us. So everyone was out skating all these new, crazy spots. (Trent)' (309). With these opportunities came standard responses from the city, one familiar to skateboarders' arrhythmic status: 'But they [the council] got pretty onto just blocking sections or started ripping up concrete ... So as quickly as it came, it began disappearing, so you had to make the most of those first few weeks. (Trent)' (309). This comment is

telling of a deeper and more profound orientation to disruption that skateboarder encounter in their attempts to use found urban space for play. Skateboarders are registered as discordant by 'others', architects, business owners, engineers, security guards and police, some of which even continue to disturb the skateboarders in the 'Quaked' video (stuntdubs 2011, 2 m:10s mark).

Thorpe's additional study of individual leisure sports like surfing and biking suggested skateboarding's unique arrhythmic status. Surfing, climbing, and biking activities were put on pause due to the disruption of beach, climbing gym, and mountain-bike track closures. In addition, sewage discharge polluted beaches, making them unusable. The rhythms of these sport participants were upended by these closures, and many participants noticed 'increased anxiety and tension', 'loss of motivation', and 'increased partying (310)', though a few managed to duck the rules trading their leisure activity for risk, surfing in the polluted waters. Yet, for skateboarders this disruption had the opposite effect, there was an increased motivation to search for new opportunities among the rubble. In a local paper, one skateboarder stated that even their common skateboarding locales were looked at with renewed vigor, "All our historical town spots are gone, there's dust everywhere ... its kinda cool that every street can be reexplored. (stuntdubs 2011, YouTube comment).

In a similar vein, in March of 2022, torrential rain in the South West of England twisted and mangled a country road into similar contortions utilised by Christchurch skateboarders, adding diverse evidence to Thorpe's (2014) analysis. Groups of British skateboarders descended on the location to skate the ruptured terrain. Residents and the police allowed and even welcomed the skateboarders and their capacity to make good of a bad situation (The Skateboarder's Companion vol. 6, 2022, p 8). The disrupted social rhythms in both England and New Zealand seemed to act as an invitation for explicit arrhythmic play, providing a break from daily rhythm to momentarily reassess the seeming monotony of repetition.

Pandemic Skate Study

Most topically, arrhythmia is relevant in the disruption caused by the COVID-19 virus that has posed an existential threat to skateboarding and also a remarkable opportunity to embrace a much-coveted urban freedom. During the early months of the pandemic throughout 2020, skateboarding faced challenges like other sport activities (Thorpe et al. 2022), it benefited from surrendered surveillance and interruption due to a result of reduced pedestrian and security activity. Not unlike the earthquake in Thorpe's analysis, numerous skateboarders took advantage of the unpatrolled spaces of the city, performing manoeuvres in areas previously deemed too 'hot' to skate (Hill 2020; Houghten 2020). Also, like Thorpe's analysis the public has noticed this increased activity, with passers-by commenting and deriving pleasure from this new skate-friendly ecology. 'It's paradise for skateboarders right now, isn't it? No pedestrians. No cars'.¹ In some ways this punctuated disaster operates as a festival, an opportunity for catharsis. Just as O'Connor (2020, 198) notes that skateboarders in Israel during Yom Kippur seize the opportunity of empty streets to engage in their own festival of skate, the Covid pandemic brought similar opportunities. The distinct difference being the temporal disjuncture between calendrical festival of measured and predicted rhythm, and the unforeseen opportunity for festivity

afforded by crisis. In a complimentary way, research on the Covid-19 pandemic has been framed by a temporal understanding, the recognition of disruption, break, and transformation with more standard predictable and capitalist time (Bear 2014; Harvey 2020; Thrift 1990).

The early months of the pandemic coincided with a dearth in skateboarding equipment as many China made products could not be delivered to skate shops and retailers through the world. This disruption became even more acute as the lockdown proceeded and individuals sought skateboards with increasing passion and interest (Browning 2021). While skateboarding was always destined to be topical in 2020 with its debut as a sport in the Olympics, remarkably the cancelling of the games was a further unpredicted boon to skateboarding as a sport and industry. The sport boomed in popularity during the pandemic (Bramley 2020, Skateboard Great Britain 2021,) just as slowness and slow sports with meditative and sensory qualities began to rise in popularity (Martíková, Andrieu, and Parry 2022). Skateboarding, seldom framed as slow or quiet, thrived in the slow times and quiet places quarried by the pandemic. Many people picked up a skateboard for the first time recognising the potential it held for play and exercise in small and informal spaces. Yet, efforts to limit and control skateboarders persisted with many public skateparks locked, or made unusable with skatestoppers and dumped sand (Barnsley 2020; Castrodale 2020)

In reflection on natural disaster we have both the micro example of skateboarders responding to destroyed roads and infrastructure in New Zealand and England. Here time, space, and energy collide and afford skateboarders new ludic opportunities. In the case of the Covid pandemic we can pull focus to the macro where the global disruption grew skateboarding and highlighted it as an opportune form of 'disaster' leisure. Drawing on Lefebvre's (2004, 77) comment that our rhythms tend only to become apparent once they are disturbed and interrupted, we believe that arrhythmia can best address how the restoration of familiar rhythms is both desired and problematic in the face of natural disasters.

Conclusion

This discussion was spurred by the response of skateboarders to the natural disaster of the Covid pandemic. It takes seriously the effort to describe and explore how skateboarding, as a contested practice not neatly sport or culture (Glenney and Mull 2018) can be articulated through Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. We focussed on the notion of discordance and disaster leisure and built an argument toward beat ontology in skateboarding. Drawing on a wealth of existing research the rhythmic nature of skateboarding is apparent, as is its ability to recast misfortune and interruption. Our most salient finding in our analysis is that disruption is an intrinsic element of how we practice, and later understand skateboarding. We also find that there is something revolutionary in skateboarding, a latent political orientation that is tacit. It becomes evocative in bodily action, in bursts of energy exacted in urban space. Skateboarding is discordant, working with natural disaster, navigating unpredictability, and unpicking and critiquing the linear imaginings of urban space resolved purely for the accumulation of capital. Skateboarding is thus a remarkable element of sport philosophy, one that offers a beat ontology and an array of discordance.

Further explorations of this beat ontology could look toward issues of gender and sexuality (Abulhawa 2020; Geckle and Shaw 2020), age (Willing et al. 2019), race (Williams 2022) social progression, polluted leisure (Evers 2019). Indeed, if skateboarding truly holds the potential for a critique on everyday life, what does it offer the slow disaster of the Anthropocene?

This transformation of disaster into leisure strikes at the heart of Lefebvre's radicalism, and as Borden (2019, 282–285) argues, provides a demonstration of the possibility of a 'magnificent life'. In being discordant skateboarding simply echoes natural rhythms of disruption and provides a means to slip out of the banal hypnosis of routine. A skateboarder nosily pushing through a business district, crafting concrete transitions in a derelict parking lot, or kickflipping on roads mangled by an earthquake are all moments of challenge to the almost invisible elegance of the way capitalism suffocates our creativity and steals our labour.

Note

1. Spoken by a stranger to co-author 1 in Burlington, VT, Church Street on April 4th, 2020, a location that bans skateboarding with threat of a \$75 fine, a ban that local skateboarders ignored during various state-wide lockdowns.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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