

5.5. In the flow, in the city: music and skateboarding

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A b s t r a c t

This study aims to shed light on the relation between music and skating, particularly on how certain genres of music relate to skateboarders' urban daily practices. The premise of this paper is that skateboarding, a type of youth subculture, is a lifestyle that transforms the urban order first, and subverts it later, creating alternative obstacles and shortcuts. Above all, skateboarding imposes its own rhythm, immersed into a subjectivity that moves in and out of chaos through the help of music. Hence, music in general and more specifically genres of music skateboarders prefer can be considered forms of communication that establish subcultural identity bonds and exchanges amongst skaters, while simultaneously preserving unique personality traits and subjectivities. For this paper's theoretical framework, we consulted primarily — not exclusively — Bourdieu (1989), Certeau (1994) and Haenfler (2014). In addition to the literature review, we also use conducted in-depth interviews and a survey with 296 skateboarders.

Keywords: subcultures; skateboard; music; city; space and place.



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1. Introduction

The present paper is an excerpt of a larger article that we have adapted in order to present specifically the empirical study that was conducted. By observing the urban and the city, we can find a huge typology of inhabitants. Among these types is the skater, which we chose to analyze. Not so much for its belonging to a youth and leisure culture that is typical of contemporary cities, or the subcultural traces that are left through the paths that it travels, but mainly due to its role as a mediator between the urban and the city. The skater is therefore a mediator through movement and displacement, evidencing possibilities, which were, at first, unpredictable for the architect. The urban is the city in movement and the skater is one of its most remarkable actors.

The movement of skateboarding is almost unpredictable: there are continuities, discontinuities, accidents, and falls. There are also rhythms, which are marked by the presence of music in the practice of the skater. The aim of this work is to discuss the relationship between music and skateboarding, particularly how certain music genres relate to daily practices of urban skaters. The premise is that skateboarding is a “lifestyle” which comes first to modify the urban order and to subvert it then creating alternative ways, obstacles and shortcuts, imposing its own rhythm to urban movement, a rhythm sometimes immersed at subjectivity of those who practice it, other times synchronized with the chaos, through music. Thus, music is, in this context, considered a form of communication between the urban subject and the city.

What is presented here is a part of the results of an investigation realized in two phases between years of 2016 and 2018, among the activities of the Research Group JuX – Carioca youth, their cultures and media representations, from the Graduate Program in Communication Studies of PUC-Rio. In the first phase, we walked by Rio de Janeiro streets, in order to take notes from a direct observation in the skate lanes and squares, also interviewing some practitioners. The corpus that supports this discussion consists in the second phase of the research, with the application of 296 questionnaires answered by skaters by online social networks and seven semi depth interviews between November 2017 and March 2018.

We consider that the streets, slopes and obstacles of the city are key to the skater’s course. The music, always intrinsic to their daily practice, gives rhythm to the transgressor mobility in the city. The skater performs subjectively his “topological” (according to Michel de Certeau (1994), “deforming the figures”) and “delinquent” route (“dismantling and displacing codes”) through the “flow.” “Flow” is a slang used mainly by rap singers, designating the way by which they fit their verses in the beat of the music, but also the way they sing them (faster or slower). In skateboarding, the word is quite the same: flow can have two senses, the first refers to the ability - has flow the skater who makes seem easy a complicated maneuver; and the second is related to a stream of events, o a context, an environment, a lifestyle, a daily life, ultimately leading our actions and decisions - a singer is in rap’s flow and a teacher, in the flow of academic life.

The song, for the skaters, is a kind of narrative that provides not only concentration and rhythm to their performance, but also a specific spatiality, perhaps of subjectivity, through which the city is in-bodied or is culturally absorbed by the body.

Sometimes I wake up and I want to give a quiet spin, then I put a rap, I put a reggae to give a spin like this only to enjoy the day (Nuno, 21, of Nova Iguaçu - RJ).

Thus, the skater, now immersed at music, and modified by it, however fully articulated with the paths and traces of the city, is a reflective subject, or the result of a subjective reflexivity driven by the beating at rhythm and the lyrics touching in his headset. The music, in words, establishes for the skater a “third” city: not the planned one, not the transgressed one, but the subjectivized one - an endogenous city.

*I do think we see the city in a different way.
The other people look at the city, they don't see anything, so they only see objects but for us it is like a playground* (Rodrigo, 41, of São Paulo - SP).

It's like an amusement park, right? (Paulo, 21, Bauru - SP).

By the time we write this text, there are 8.5 million people interacting with Brazilian cities through board and wheels, a number which is more than twice of eight years ago. It is a worldwide market that is about 3 billion dollars, \$300 million of it is in Brazil. There were 296 questionnaires applied between November 2017 and March 2018. Ninety eight percent of respondents were male and 2% female, all aged between 12 and 52 years old.

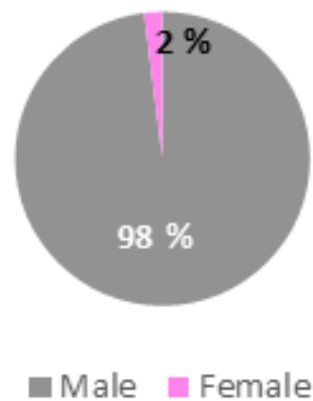


Figure 5.5.1 –Gender

Forty seven percent stated that they practice at least three times a week, 22% skate everyday, 20% practice once a week, 7% every 15 days and 4% once a month.

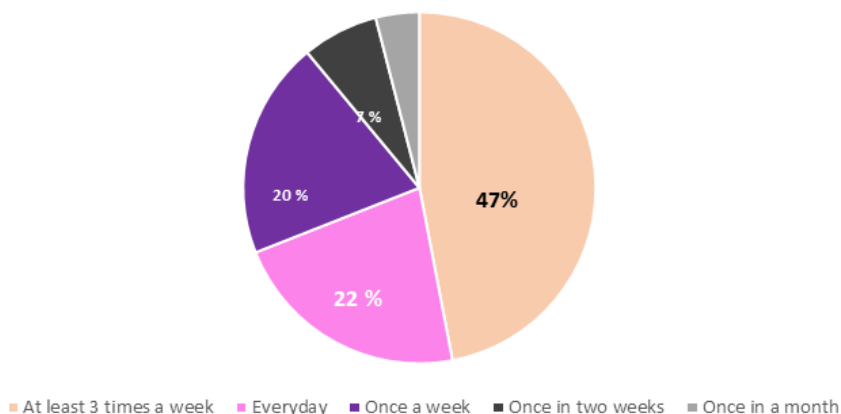


Figure 5.5.2 - How often do you practice skateboarding

Ninety percent practice street category, 25% mini ramp, 21% park, 16% bowl, 11% banks, 8% vertical, 7% freestyle, 6% downhill slide, 2% downhill speed. Less than 1% concentrates in categories such as freestyle dancing, mega ramp, push race, slalom, overall, mountain boards / mountain skateboard and carver / surf simulator.

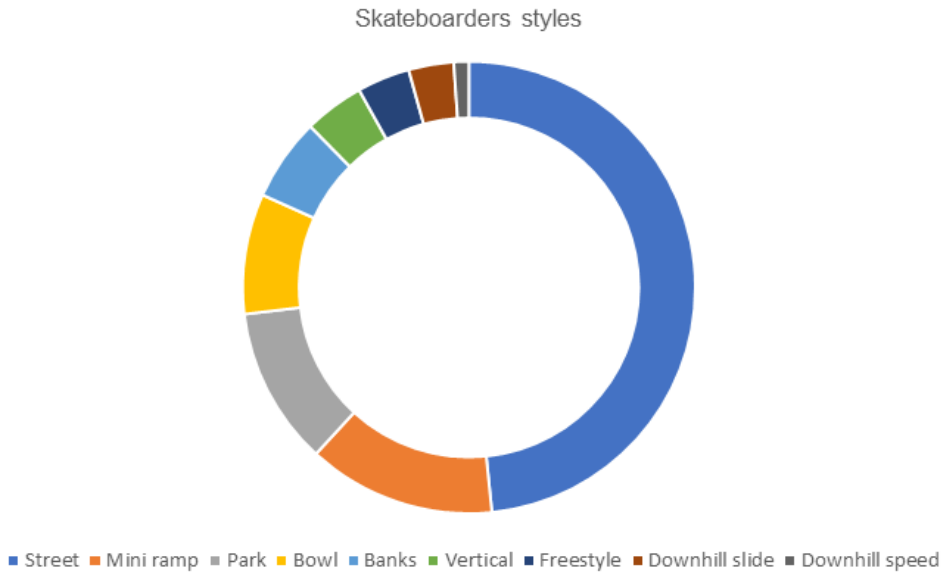


Figure 5.5.3 - Skateboarding styles

Ninety five percent stated that they usually listen to music while skating. The 5% who answered not to listen to music while practicing were then discarded.

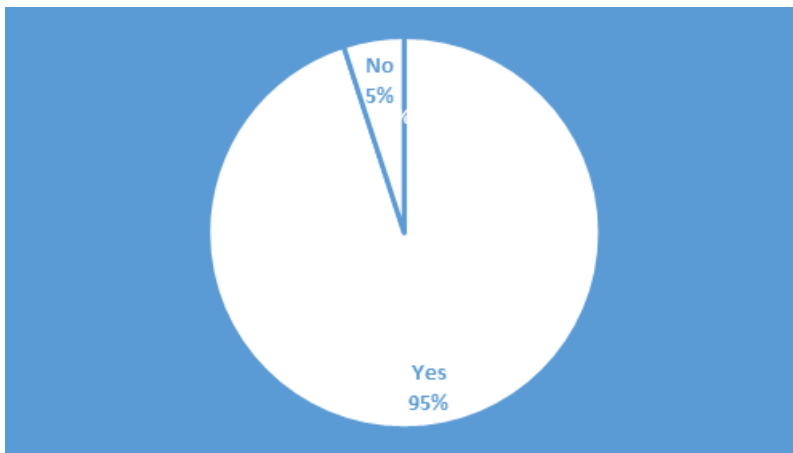


Figure 5.5.4 - Do you listen to music while skating?

Regarding the frequency with which they listen to music, 40% said that they do it whenever they go skating, 35% that almost always and 24% that it only happens sometimes.

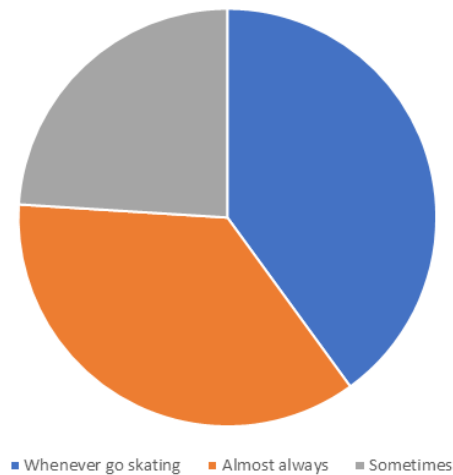


Figure 5.5.5 - If positive, how often?

Eighty six percent stated that they listen to rap, 68% hip hop, 55% rock, 22% punk, 15% pop, 12% hippie, 7% funk, 2% reggae, 1% MPB, 1% trap. The other music styles registered less than 1% of the answers. When questioned about their style as skaters, we had: 60% rap, 36% hip hop, 18% rock, 9% punk, 5% hippie and 2% pop. Others registered less than 1% of the answers.

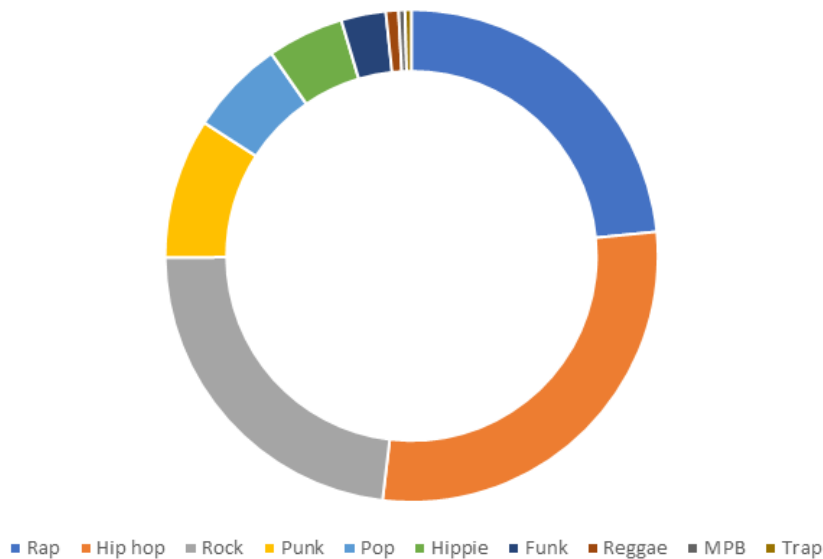


Figure 5.5.6 - Music styles

Bringing those numbers for Brazilian culture, we observed that local rhythms such as funk carioca and MPB (Brazilian Popular Music) do not circulate in a representative way inside skating subculture (HAENFLER, 2014). On the other hand, it indicates that rap, hip hop and rock are representative of the strong influence of black and American music among skaters.

About the role of music for them, 62.9% answered that music plays the role of giving the rhythm, 60% entertainment, 45% concentration, 40% acceleration / deceleration, 1% inspiration. The other answers counted less than 1%.

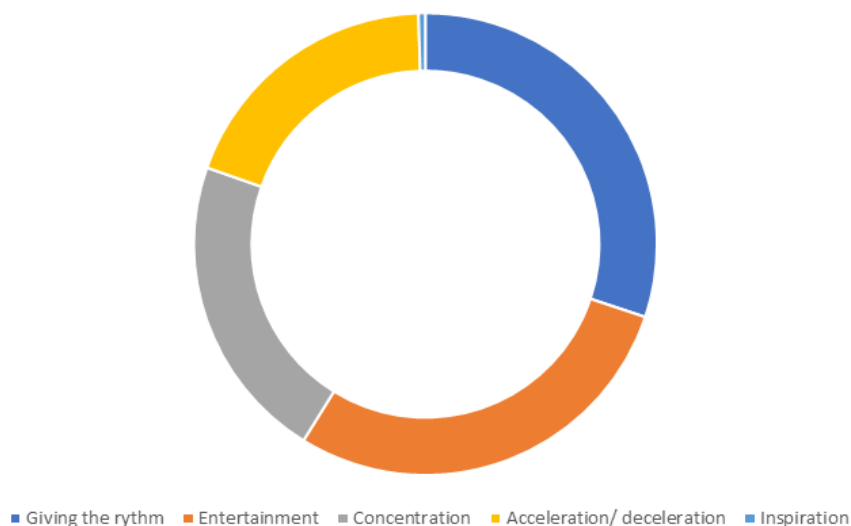


Figure 5.5.7 - About the role of music

As we saw before, flow is more than a rap and skating subculture slang, the term reveals a way of doing things. It is in the rhythm of music that the maneuver takes shape. The rhythm marks the symbiosis between the body, the skateboard and the asphalt of the city. It's the music that *communicates* the intentionality and thus establishes the relationship between the city and the people of the city.

We concluded that music is a mediator between the subject skater and the city, establishing a communication between his or her world and the outside world. In addition, it contributes, through the rhythm (predominantly of rap and hip hop), both to the configuration of a city designed as obstacle to a practitioner's view, as for his own identity configuration, such as subject and also as part of a group. The paper aims to contribute to the cultural studies in the field of communication, at first level and in the field of Social Sciences in a second moment, assuming that music, as an "object objectified" (Bourdieu, 1989), establishes a dialogue between people and things, between subject and lived world. And that skateboarding is a subculture rich in symbolic aspects which therefore deserves to be exploited, due to their growing presence at urban areas landscape of Brazil.

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