

Tap taps and fist bumps: embodied movements in skateboarding sessions

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C. Goodwin (2000) considered the human body as a contextual configuration...A range of structurally different kinds of sign phenomena in both the stream of speech and the body, graphic and socially sedimented structure in the surround, sequential organization, encompassing activity systems, etc. (Mandelbaum & Hopper, 2002: 21-22).

Keep reminding yourself of the way things are connected, of their relatedness. All things are implicated in one another and in sympathy with each other. This event is the consequence of some other one. Things push and pull on each other, and breathe together, and are one. (Marcus Aurelius)

Introduction

Skateboarding is a sport that is drenched in a culture of identity, collaboration, and innovation. Sacks (1992) defines membership categorization as the classifications or social types that may be used to describe persons; for example, athlete. This paper will contribute to membership categorization analysis (MCA). Until now, MCA has focused on how talk contributes to perpetuating social categories yet largely ignores non-speech systems (Ivarsson & Greiffenhagen 2015). This paper will analyze membership enactment through the use of embodied movements and nonverbal elements as the social interaction of skateboarders endlessly develops and evolves. “Setting aside the assumption that context exists a priori and that context unilaterally shapes communication, LSI research has shown how context may be invoked, oriented to, and constituted through social interaction at the same time that context may influence the organization of communication” (Mandelbaum & Hopper, 2002: 17). By reviewing video footage and audio recordings of skateboarders interacting, I will reveal that skaters enact competent membership by using a combination of fist bumps, claps, high fives, and skateboard

taps. I argue that the enactment and reciprocity of these movements constitutes a skater's membership as legitimate.

An indoor skatepark is a percussive symphony of cracks, claps, and slides. The raucous crashing of skateboards on cement or wooden terrain is like the heartbeat of the space. While most of the time these sounds are ignored and treated as white noise, I will show that there are special times when a skateboard clattering against a feature has unique social significance. A skateboarding run is made up of different elements combined, just like a conversation. However, transcribing a skateboarding line is much more difficult than transcribing a conversation. A line

Background

Ethnomethodology is the study of the ways in which ordinary people construct a stable social world through everyday utterances and actions and how social order is produced in and through processes of social interaction (Garfinkel, 1967, and Mullins, 1973). It was developed in the 1960s by Sacks and Garfinkel as a response to structural-functionalism and symbolic interactionism. Garfinkel focused a lot on what he called "breaching experiments", where he would intentionally disrupt social norms to reveal the underlying social order. Ethnomethodology uses the "indexicality" to refer to the idea that meanings are context-dependent; in CA, we call this reflexivity and contextuality. Ethnomethodology is important to our study as we are seeking to examine an ordinary and naturally occurring social phenomena, skateboarding, to reveal how it is socially constructed. Because of that, we will be focusing a lot on membership categorization analysis (MCA).

MCA is way of understanding how the social world operates and how we, as members of that social world, interpret, act upon, and make sense of our everyday worlds (AIEMCA, 2010). It explores how individuals categorize themselves and others in social situations (Psathas, 1999).

In a 2010 interview, Richard Fitzgerald explained that MCA examines our working knowledge about what social categories do and what we expect them to do. Instead of looking at why people do stuff, MCA is looking at the how. For us, instead of looking at why skaters encourage each other, we will be looking at how they do that. MCA assumes that categories are not pre-existing or fixed; instead, they are considered practical achievements that people use in specific situations to make sense of the dynamic social world.

In interaction, we expect to find predicates relevant to the categorizations being made that help us accomplish categorization. Psathas (1999) describes these category predicates as an extension of Sacks's (1972) concept of category boundedness. For example, skateboarders (category) will bring skateboards (relevant predicating element) to the park. With this, we see that category-bound activity is relevant for identifying the person performing the action; that inferences can be made concerning their identity or category incumbency. Category incumbency refers to their legitimacy to hold that identity (Psathas, 1999). When we see a person with a skateboard enter a skatepark and begin skateboarding, we can infer that they qualify as a legitimate skateboarder. Self-categorization begets ratification by co-participants which is also present in our data (Psathas, 1999). Membership categorization is an interactional accomplishment, contingent on the actions of the parties and not a once and for all/settled and done matter (Psathas, 1999: 148). What we find interesting, especially as we consider Ivarsson & Greiffenhagen (2015), is the way membership categorization is sequentially organized.

Ivarsson & Greiffenhagen's (2015) pool skate sessions article demonstrated that indoor skateparks are rich places of turn organization and embodied work during turn transitions. Turn-taking is a term the way orderly conversation usually takes place based on the notion that participants in conversation take turns in speaking. It focused heavily on Sacks, Schegloff, &

Jefferson's (1974) ground-breaking turn taking article. The article provided a framework for understanding how participants collaboratively manage the structure of interaction by exploring turn-initiation, turn-projection (pre-beginnings and beginnings), and embodied actions therein. Ivarsson & Greiffenhagen (2015) contributed greatly to the discussion of turn organization in pool skateboarding sessions but lacked a discussion of membership categorization, which we will explore.

Membership categorization is accomplished as turns unfold in interaction. Categories are sensitive to and accomplish context; they aren't an identity, rather, they are a description. They are yielded by the setting so that they are always local, situated, and occasioned. As the social interaction occurs, the relationship between the participants is constituted and reconstituted. Essentially, activities are both relevant to and generative of categories (Psathas, 1999). A participant's actions will beget their category, and as they continue to participate in that interaction, their category will shape their actions.

Dumas & Laforest (2008) used generation as an analytical category to understand social inequalities in the skateboarding community, noting that community as having a heterogeneous nature. The article explores the implications of a generational culture and the role of shared forms of activism promoting lifestyle sports. As described in Wacquant's (2004) account of boxing culture, a sport like skateboarding is distinct due to its individual-collective nature.

As individuals, they develop athletic skill, seek high sensations, cultivate personal style, concentrate on their physical prowess, protect themselves from injury, and work on their self-confidence. As a collective, they share an identity, value spectacle, socialize with one another, connect to an anti-establishment culture and share an interest in the rich cultural world of skateboarding. (Dumas & Laforest, 2008:5)

Individually, skateboarders employ predicates of a focus on improving at the sport and interacting with other skaters, thus perpetuating the category of skater. Categorically, skaters share this collective identity and constitute “skater”.

Another example of collective identity constituted through a social practice is when the audience claps in response to a speaker. Bull’s (2016) article colloquially known as “Clap trap” talks about the feedback loop that occurs between speakers and their audiences. “...Talk and nonvocal activities are closely coordinated and oriented to by interactants in the production and monitoring of each other’s actions” (Atkinson, 1985: 225). As the athletes in a collective sport share an identity and establish a culture, so do the members in an audience as they provide precisely timed evaluations of the speaker’s content. All language is a dialogue (Weigand 2010), but moreover, and our data contributes to this idea, dialogue takes place by non-language resources as well (Goodwin, 2000, Mondada, 2013, Richardson, 2014).

Within interaction, social conditions are constantly contingent and shifting as participants construct their social worlds (as cited in Mandelbaum & Hopper, 2002: 17). This article uses video and audio to pause and replay the minutia of interaction in skateboarding to examine the predicates, categories, and types of membership that constitute the social work of skateboarding.

Methods

My interest in embodied actions in skateboarding comes from my 5 years of being a skateboarder personally. My lived experience in this social group allows me context, appreciation, and insider knowledge of some of the behaviors the skaters in our data will exhibit. I visited a local indoor skatepark to collect video and audio recordings. The camera was set up to film the half pipe in the back end of the park and I mic’d up three skaters with Bluetooth microphones.

My transcription system is based in the Jeffersonian but modified to suit the multimodal needs of the transcription of my data. I took screenshots of relevant frames that best captured the actions of the skaters. The screenshots correspond with the transcribed sounds and movements of the line below them.

I created three symbols that don't exist in the original Jeffersonian transcription system. Claps, the sound of two palms colliding, are denoted with «. Wheel taps, the sound of skateboard wheels being rapped against the floor, are denoted with ±. Tail taps, the sound of a skateboard deck tapping the floor, are denoted with ∞. A fist bump offered, someone holding out their fist to another, is denoted with :: and a fist bump reciprocated, that person reciprocating the gesture with their own hand, is denoted with ❖.

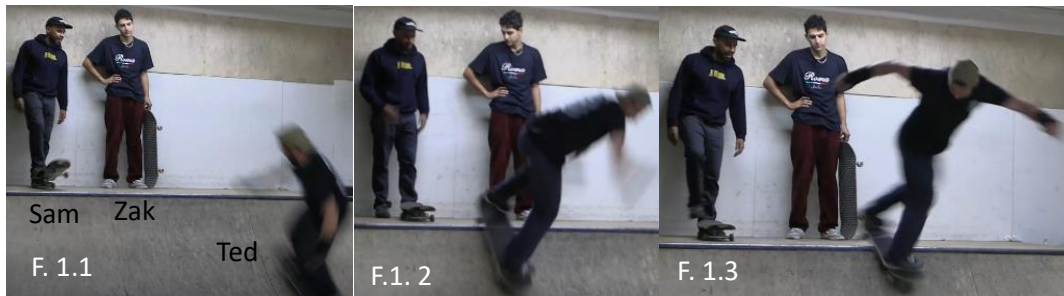
Data

In our first example, “Ted’s Landed Trick”, there are three young men skating in a half pipe. They take turns skating and stand on one side of the pipe in between their turns. Each turn usually lasts approximately less than a minute. These skaters end their turns when they fail to land a trick. Sam is wearing a hoodie and black baseball cap and stands on the left side of the frame. Zak is wearing a navy t-shirt and dark red pants. Ted is wearing a black t-shirt, light baseball cap, and wrist splints. At this point, Ted starts his turn by dropping into the half pipe off-camera while Sam and Zak are standing on the opposite side talking together.

Example 1: Ted’s Landed Advanced Trick

Ramp1.MP4

[4:11 - 4:37]



TED: ((backside lip slide))



SAM: « « ^wo:o? (.) da:ng. I do:o



TED: ((fakie front shuv to switch rock))



SAM: (1.0) « « TED: ((bigspin backside disaster))



SAM: [daa:ng] [± ± ±]

ZAK: [AWHHHH] [∞ ∞ ∞]



TED: ((climbs out of pipe to stand with Zak and Sam))



SAM: da:ang. ::

TED: ❖



ZAK: that was sick. ::

TED: ❖

This first clip is rich with examples of participants employing a combination of resources to increase the strength of their approval and appreciation. Sam immediately reacts with applause to Ted's second trick of his run, the backside lip slide. The backside lip slide is where the skater pops onto the edge of the ramp and slides along it on the center of the board. Sam conveys support and appreciation by clapping twice and exclaiming, "woo!", a cheer, and "dang", an evaluation that expresses stance when used with soft inflection. Before this trick, Zak had had his

gaze fixed on Sam's board while he and Sam conversed. During Ted's trick, Zak moves his gaze to follow Ted (F. 1.3).

Ted then does a fakie front shuvit, i.e. "shove it", a trick where you roll backwards up the ramp to jump and rotate the board 180 degrees, and then he does a switch rock, which is when you get up to the lip of the ramp, turn 180 degrees, and ride away. As Ted rides away, Sam claps twice again and Zak smiles while shaking his head. They convey attentive watchfulness when they both turn their bodies to face Ted gaze steadily at him (in F. 1.7). Ted then lands the bigspin frontside disaster. A bigspin frontside disaster is a combination of tricks. The bigspin is when the board does a 360 rotation while the rider does a 180 body rotation. The frontside disaster involves an additional 180 degree jump with the board. As a skater myself, I can say this trick combo is advanced and I've found to be a mark of a talented skater. Sam and Ted simultaneously react and treat it as advanced verbally and non-verbally (F. 1.10). Zak cries, "oahH!!", while Sam says "daaang!"; Zak picks up his board while Sam pushes his foot into the deck of his board; then Zak taps his board's tail on the ramp three times while Sam rocks the tail of the board up to tap the wheels against the ramp three times. Sam and Zak's predicates constitute precise-timed encouragement and admiration when cheering and creating applause-like sounds with their skateboards.

So in this example, we have a sequence of clap clap accompanied by an encouraging monosyllabic utterance, another clap clap, and then simultaneous monosyllabic, drawn-out encouraging utterances accompanied by three tail taps / three wheel taps. Zak and Sam are doing very similar predicates but they are constructing categories. By frequently vocalizing encouragement and clapping/tapping, Sam's category to Ted is something like a "colleague" and Zak's to Ted is "comrade".

In our second example, “Ted’s attempts another advanced trick”, Sam has just finished his turn. He starts talking to Zak while Ted readies himself and then drops into the half pipe.

Example 2: Ted’s Failed Advanced Trick

Ramp1.MP4

[8:11 – 8:47]



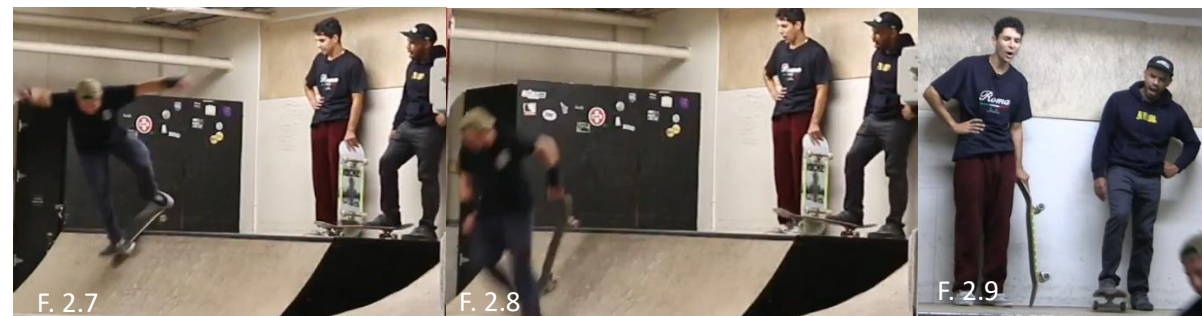
TED: ((nollie shuv to 5-o))

SAM: [ohhhhhh] « « ZAK: [((shakes head, blows cheeks))] £nice£.



TED: ((frontside pop shuv to rock to fakie))

SAM: daa:ng_ [« «] ZAK: [∞ ∞]



TED: ((frontside bigspin, doesn’t land the frontside disaster))

ZAK: ʌuh hhh ohhʌ SAM: daang.



ZAK: :: TED: ❖

Ted does a nollie shuv to 5-o, a trick combination where you jump and spin the board to land back on it and grind the back trucks along the coping of the ramp. Sam says, “ohhh” and claps twice. Zak smiles, shakes his head, blows out his cheeks (F. 2.3), and says, “niice.” When he puffs out his cheeks, Zak conveys surprise – it’s his preceding smile that connotes the gesture as surprise *and* awe. Ted does a frontside pop shuv to rock to fakie. A frontside pop shuv is where the board turns 180 degrees but the body remains in the same position, and rock to fakie is where you ride up to the lip of the ramp, push your front truck over it, stall, then reenter the transition in the opposite stance. Sam says, “daaaang” while clapping twice and Zak taps the tail of his board against the ramp twice. Ted then tries to do a frontside bigspin into a frontside disaster, but he doesn’t land it. Zak laughs in admiration while Sam says “daang”. This “daang” has a different message than Sam’s previous daang. Sam is deploying predicates of directing his attention and participating in appreciating Ted’s effort and commitment while conveying respect and support. This bolsters their relationship as friends and as skaters skating together. As Ted gets out of the half pipe, Zak’s predicate of offering him a fist bump (and Ted reciprocates), which is a sign of triumph, acceptance, respect, and support, works to constitute the category of “comrade”. Zak and Sam’s reactions also exemplify their understanding of advanced skate tricks because they are showing that they appreciate even an unlanded trick.

So in example 2, we have a sequence of two monosyllabic encouraging utterances accompanied by a clap clap, another clap clap and tail tap tap with a monosyllabic utterance, and two monosyllabic encouraging utterances. The evaluation of the run is enacted in the two fist bumps given by Sam and Zak to Ted.

In this third, final example, there is a new skater in the interaction. Green Hoodie Guy (GHG) joins about halfway through Sam and Ted's session after Zak leaves. Ted has already dropped in and started skating when GHG quickly climbs up onto the opposite ramp into the shot.

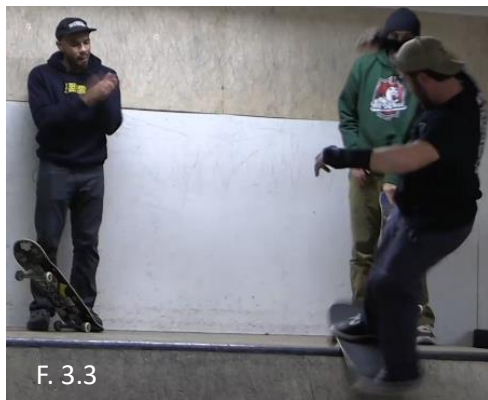
Example 3: Green Hoodie Guy Tap Taps

Ramp1.MP4
 [32:10 - 32:44]



TED: ((rock to fakie))

SAM: OHH << HHH << << << << GHG: ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞



TED: ((rock to fakie))

SAM: hhahah « « «



SAM: hahhah « « «



F.3.5



F.3.6

SAM: OHH « « « «

GHG: yuhh ± ± ± ±



F.3.7

TED: ((backside bigspin))

SAM: ^wooo



F.3.8

GHG: [::] SAM: [daaa][ang]

TED: ✨



SAM: :: TED: ✦ =that back spin,-

Within the split second of the first frame, GHG is calling into existence he and Sam's relationship of friend and similarly skilled skater in two ways. First, he mounts the ramp to stand beside Sam (friend). Second, he contributes to Sam's evaluation of Ted's trick as Sam claps five times and GHG wheel taps five times (skilled skater). It's hard to see in the first few frames because of the angle of the camera.

This is of because GHG just got here – he doesn't skate with Sam and Ted for very long, but he does participate actively when he is there (whereas it would be technically fine for him to just watch without reacting because he hasn't been Ted's skate partner since the beginning of the session). Noteworthy background includes the fact that GHG was there with a team of young riders and GHG has a preexisting relationship with the owners of the park (Sam being one of them). So GHG is enacting this relationship as he is reacting in harmony (claps and taps) with Sam. GHG's activities as participating in Ted's skating constitute him as having a high and legitimate level of membership in this category of skilled skater. GHG's talent as a skater is constituted in his ability to evaluate Ted's tricks. Willemsen, Cromdal, & Broth (2023) discuss what it means to be established as a legitimate member in a category by describing the journey of drivers to becoming experienced, otherwise known as "competent members."

Becoming a competent member-driver thus means to learn to see the road with suspicion predicting other road users' next actions (cf. Sacks, 1972), and to gain access to and act

on some of the taken-for-granted assumptions, or background expectations (Garfinkel, 1967), that motorists overwhelmingly share. (Willemsen, Cromdal, & Broth, 2023: 824). Becoming a competent member in a category means gaining access to and acting on some of the taken-for-granted assumptions or background expectations shared by members of that category. Becoming a competent member in skateboarding will mean having access to and demonstrating assumptions and expectations like watching skaters skate, fist bumps, and wheel taps. In the device *skating*, we have subcategories such as competent member. We see, as with most hobbies, subcategories of amateur, newcomer, and even poser (someone who employs the predicates of the hobby without the follow-through of accomplishing the hobby).

Category-bound activity is relevant for identifying the person performing the action; inferences regarding their identity can be made using knowledge of the device's subcategories. GHG's reactions to Ted's skating are more dialed back when compared to Sam's. Sam is quick to react both verbally and percussively – he often says “daang” while clapping. In contrast, GHG first tail taps, then wheel taps, then fist bumps Ted. He is participating in a relationship with Ted but because he doesn't clap and/or make verbal utterances, he is constituting a low-accountability skating friendship with Ted. Sam, having started the session with Ted and due to the character and consistency of his participation, continues to constitute a skating accountability partnership where encouragement, feedback, and attention are expected.

Discussion

In an indoor skatepark bursting with indistinguishable noises, some members enact movements that constitute their identity as competent and encouraging for other members. Non-members of skating can clap, and clapping is accessible for different levels of membership within other categories. Wheel and board taps are skate-member only. To even encourage a good

trick requires membership because it is a manifestation of the level sufficient of competent membership. To tap instead of clap demonstrates the high level of membership achieved by the member.

A gestalt, from German, is a form, shape, configuration, pattern, a combination of mind and behavior, or of organization and perception (Gestalt - APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018). Mondada (2018: 89) says, “In CA, the issue is to show how gestures feature in the organization of social treatment (not only in the speaker’s conduct) but how they are not alone but alongside a range of other embodied resources.” We have examined the gestalts, or embodied movements, harnessed by skateboarders that constitute a range of relationships evolving betwixt them.

In Peter Bull’s (2016) article analyzing clapping as speaker-audience interaction, he compared American audience participation with Japanese audience participation. In Japanese, the word *aizuchi* refers to signals used to indicate continued listener attention and interest in the context of a speaker and audience. *Aizuchi* are considered reassuring to the speaker, more than just binary audience participation of applause or booing. It’s interesting to consider these skaters’ responses, despite being non-language, as also constituting *aizuchi*. We saw in the data that tap taps and claps provide a rich loop of feedback between the skaters that we don’t have a word for in English.

Conclusion

Skateboarders do not determine authenticity by a successful performance for non-members (non-skaters). Rather, authenticity is through public display of the norms and values of the skateboard culture which can only be recognized and affirmed by other established, competent members. In this paper, I have demonstrated that skaters use predicates of wheel and board taps, fist bumps, and claps to constitute friend and comrade categories within the

skateboarding social world. My data showed examples of clapping, fist bumping, and tapping as embodied movements of interaction. This contributes both to the literature on membership categorization analysis and to the literature on embodied movements in individual-collective sports. We have seen that nonvocal units, specifically percussive body movements, are rich resources for constructing our social worlds.

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