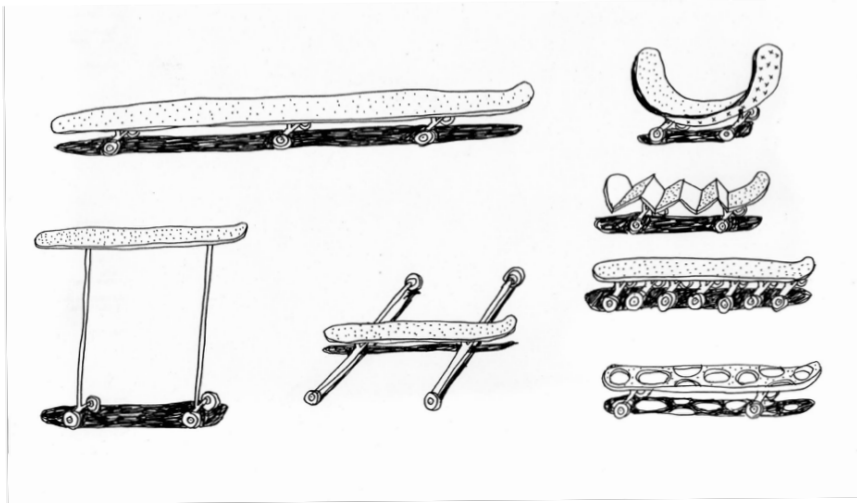


**BAIL OR NO?**  
*IMPOSSIBLE TRICKS? WHY?*  
*ANSWERS? HM.*

*This issue of Thing-Stead made in Conjunction with  
Near\*By's exhibition Bail or No? The Impossible  
Tricks Show August 15, 2015 Cincinnati at Lobiob*



Difficult to skate on skateboards by Lizzy Duquette



Tree board by Joe Castrucci



Immanuel Kant explained best from memory by Andre Alves, DFA candidate Helsinki  
 “i dont think i can write kant. My head is elsewhere”  
 - email to the editor, 8/5/15

MICRO-UTOPIAS & THE SPIRIT OF THE DROP-IN  
 chris reeves

IMPOSSIBLE TRICKS

A facile way to explain the genesis of this exhibition is to return to a photograph of Mark Gonzales I first saw around 1995-97. Th photo shows Gonzales riding his “Circle Board” a “nose to tail chain of boards forming a giant, circular skateboard comprised of nine decks, 18 trucks and 36 wheels.”<sup>1</sup> Its appeal was just how incredible it seemed – this person was so good at skateboarding he could skate on nine at once. Further, that someone would construct such a challenging operation (on top of the already difficult task that is skating well) spoke to me of a spirit truly dedicated to a cause. The idea of perseverance to what appeared to be an impossible task is what I found and still find an admirable quality to skate culture, and to a less micro extent, art and DIY culture in general.

Zaha-Hadid interior quarter pipes and the limits of performativity and skate videos by Maria Seda-Reeder – pg. 6



Unknown bloody skater feet ca. 1965

For a little context let’s consider the time frame of this photograph – ca. 1991. At this moment skateboard culture was hitting its apex in the zeitgeist at large, and held an aura of confidence, creativity, and a sort of cobbled together rebelliousness. Skate videos were revelations: tricks and moments (many of them landmark occasions in showcasing physical pain) documented largely by amateur filmmakers and distributed through word of mouth or little catalogues (not to mention larger avenues such as *Thrasher*). These videos and the resulting emulations (and hospital bills) of those who watched them, made up (and still make up) this zeitgeist/scene whatever you want to call it. Fueled by a want to, with just a deck of wood and four wheels, do something spectacular. Aside from spectacle, which carries its own connotations, what else can we say about how the dedicated spirit of a small community informs this exhibition?

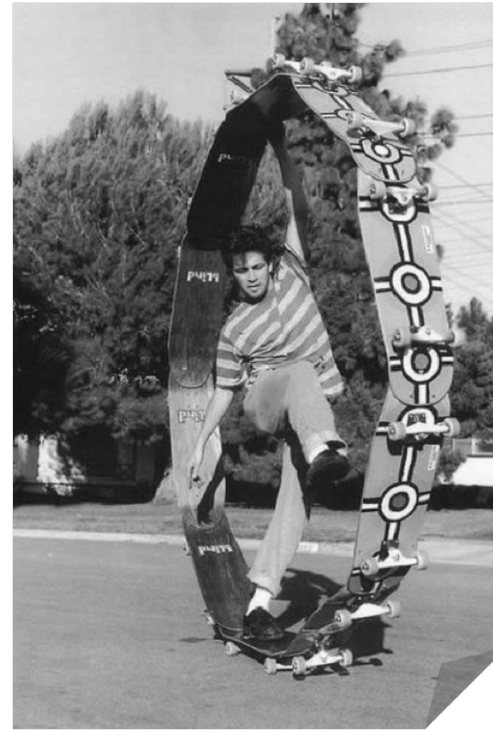
The emphasis of *Bail or No? The Impossible Trick Show* can be the line in the sand between the spirit and the “trick” that Gonzales’ Circle Board represents - seemingly impossible but with a spirit that literally and figuratively moves it – and something dusty like Kant’s idea of unsocial sociability:

*The means employed by Nature to bring about the development of all the capacities of men is their antagonism in society, so far as this is, in the end, the cause of a lawful order among men.*<sup>1</sup>

In short, “their propensity to enter society, bound together with a mutual opposition that constantly threatens to break up the society.”<sup>2</sup> To avoid dragging this essay too deep into college philosophy course credit, we can think of something like pockets of cultures whose identities are predicated on minor resistance to power – skate culture, punk, taggers, etc. – fitting tidily into this notion. These are the failed but nonetheless potent salvations over pockets of authority – in the case of skateboarding, what else can be said of a sport that destroys public property simply by the virtue of its finding its arena there.

#### BAIL OR NO?

Skateboard culture today is something of a DIY punctum – but so are a lot of things in our current 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rebellion, especially micro-rebellion, is easily swallowed up, but its spirit is residual. And this is where the idea of asking skateboarders to skate on a board made of plexi-glass or lead or nails – dysfunctional attempted as functional – steps in as our maybe overwrought but nonetheless upright metaphor, and also return us to Gonzales and his circle board: steadfastness in the face of probable failure (perhaps, something that the “trick” in skateboarding always attested to anyway). The questions that rise out of this gesture is how do we take this spirit of ingenuity – in skateboard culture one that sees a world of opportunities in a stairway railing (which is an attribute of some of the most promising art) – and let it permeate into our everyday without it being co-opted, without having an eye open to our implicitness to the problems of globalization, without being cynical. Which is a big question for an exhibition about placing restraints on skateboarders. This publication, in tandem with the exhibition, acts to kind of fill-in-the-blanks of this question, while asking other questions: what does skate culture mean to those in it? How does art and maker culture speak to the unsocial sociability that is the restlessness of progress of our time? How is this fun or funny or absurd? To bail is, of course, okay, but to move without risk or chance, safety be damned, is to never get anywhere either.



Notes: <sup>1</sup><http://bluefingers.ie/mark-gonzales-moma/>

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Fourth Thesis” in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784). Translation by Lewis White Beck. From Immanuel Kant, “On History,” The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

**VIDEO DAYS**  
**maria**  
**seda - reeder**

Skateboarding is akin to improvisational performance art. It involves using one’s body as an instrument, applying muscle memory across an ever-changing surface. Less choreographed than dance but more gestural than jazz, the street skateboarder employs a rudimentary vehicle to draw a line across the landscape—a spectacle of skill and risk, even when done poorly.



Robert Morris  
& the  
temptation of  
'66 by Curt  
Miller at the  
end of the  
book

**“Keep a  
Helmet on  
your head.  
Stay out of  
hospital beds.  
Slip of the  
Grinder –  
Life-time  
reminder.”**  
- *Thrasher  
Magazine*,  
Jan.1981

Mark Poblano  
& Chris Little  
“Sport  
Peppers”  
featured on  
the *Bail or No*  
Skate vid  
AVAILABLE

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When the Contemporary Art Center moved into their current Zaha Hadid-designed building in downtown Cincinnati in 2003, the infamous “urban carpet”—essentially a concrete quarter pipe the architect envisioned as a sidewalk that would enter the building from the outside and become the back interior wall—originally did not include any of the small benches on the Walnut Street side that currently occupy the space.

On account of the near constant onslaught of skaters to the spot in the days and weeks after the building’s unveiling, site managers parked a large cherry picker for several months on the Walnut Street side of the building, blocking the space while the museum’s staff and architect considered what to do about their predicament.

As an expression of protest and disappointment, someone affixed a small sign to the cherry picker that read “SKATEBOARDING IS ART TOO” alongside several magazine photos demonstrating the point.

The sign was gone within 24 hours, and eventually concrete block chairs installed in the cherry picker’s place. But the irony of the CAC hosting “The Beautiful Losers” exhibition—a celebration of skateboarding, graffiti, and other innately rebellious forms of artistic expression—only a few years later, was not lost on those who knew the history of the location and building.

This is not to say that the museum should have allowed or even encouraged anyone to skate or bike the concrete quarterpipe, (n.b.: the ramp also just happened to be perilously close to a large wall of glass) as much as to point out the ways that institutions and artists are inevitably & precariously linked together in locked horns opposition, despite their mutual covetousness.

Art is political. Particularly when it involves elements of lawlessness in the ways that skateboarding does. [Let us not forget that skateboarding literally is a crime in many spaces, public and private alike, so trespassing, and other transgressions come along with the territory.] But also institutions—regardless of any lofty missions—are often too large and burdened with internal politics, and defensive legal teams to be concerned with anything beyond blind self-preservation.

So where does this leave the skater in terms of access to art-making sites? Much like graffiti (something skateboarding is culturally connected to), one may argue that to place such a revolutionary act within the confines of an institution is to domesticate the work and strip it of its intrinsically radical quality. So the physical act itself perhaps shouldn’t happen within the confines of a building.

But photography—and by extension video—have long been the formal vehicles for skateboarding’s expression. So it is difficult to underestimate the importance of the person behind the camera’s abilities on two trucks and four wheels.

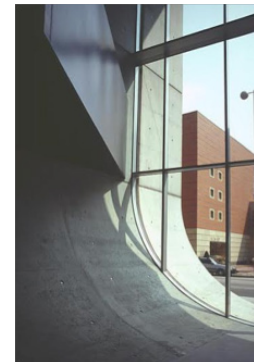
Just physically keeping up with the performer enough to frame the shot and not hurt oneself, is an art form in and of itself. When put to a soundtrack and edited well, skateboarding videos are a veritable time capsule of music, fashion, and youth culture—a spectacle of physical dexterity and raw nerve.

Before anyone with an iPhone and internet connection could post their stuff online for free, those videos also had a long established tradition of “bail footage”: shots of skateboarders falling down. And even though good skaters learn how to fall well, the clips that often make the cut are the biggest bombs, tickling our Schadenfreude nerve and demonstrating to the viewer just how wide the chasm between success and failure can be.

Because as any artist knows: it takes a lot of risky experimentation before actually getting things right sometimes. That one miraculously impossible trick caught on film was most likely the exceptional moment in dozens of earlier flops. And skateboarding perhaps more than many other kinds of art, embraces those early “failures” with this embrace of bail footage.

There is a spirit of risk without fear of failure that allows for skateboarding to be so improvisational in nature. It is this quality that imbues the performative act with its artistry. One must keep going (something naturally assisted by momentum) in the face of peril; always trying to ride the precarious balance of skill and risk, grace and physical prowess.

*L to R: Zaha Hadid’s “Urban Carpet” interior design for the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati & CAC exterior with skate-proof outdoor furniture to sit on said carpet.*





Tim McMillan,  
*Houdini Swagger*  
skateboard, nails



Erica Wine,  
lead casted  
skateboard



Abby  
Cornelius,  
*Crush*  
skimboard  
juice, tape

Lauren C.  
Sudbrink,  
*Nothing Flat*  
liquid adhesive  
plexiglass,  
latex,  
artist's breath,  
skin residue



Jordan Tate & Rick Silva, *Longtail*, skateboard, grip tape



John Auer  
skateboard with  
wheel bearings



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